

Native Cultures Awareness: It is important to note that there are 566ⁱ federally recognized American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Tribes in the United States. Four resident Tribes in Kansas have reservations, those being the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, the Sac & Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska, the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska and the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas. Enrolled members from a number of other Tribes also reside in Kansas, including Citizen Band Potawatomi Tribe in Oklahoma, Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Osage Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, etc.

It is well recognized that, historically, AI/AN persons have the highest record of service per capita when compared to other ethnic groups. The reasons behind this disproportionate contribution are complex and deeply rooted in traditional AI/AN cultures. In many respects, Native Americans are no different from others who volunteer for military service. They do, however, have distinctive cultural values which drive them to serve their country. One such value is a proud warrior tradition. ⁱⁱNative Americans serve at a high rate and have a higher concentration of female Service members than all other Service members. ⁱⁱⁱ

In matters of cultural competency, understanding AI/AN cultures can be complex and at times, daunting. It normally takes years of experience and relationship building, but agencies and therapists should work to both become more culturally responsive to consumer needs and to develop a resource list of contacts in your regions of the state for assistance when needed. The need to be culturally responsive to behavioral health needs of AI/AN Veterans may mean that, with the permission of the Veteran being treated, appropriate resources be contacted and invited to participate in treatment planning, treatment provision, providing spiritual guidance relevant to the Veteran's cultural beliefs. Keep in mind that each agency should objectively assess whether its own staff members and the agency itself are culturally responsive and able to serve the consumer from within; or for the good of the consumer, should refer him or her to an agency or other resource that is culturally responsive. Ensuring sound clinical practices in your own organization, including clearly identifying when the need exists to refer to another agency due to lack of internal cultural resources, is an ethical issue and should be taken very seriously. NOT referring a consumer when it is warranted simply to keep the reimbursement within the agency is unacceptable and a prime example of how financial factors can impact ethics in treatment.

Native cultures recognize the importance of ceremony around entering and leaving the military, along with the individual's service and reintegration into community and tribal life. We have connected with one of the VA's Native Outreach coordinators and will be in contact with them as soon as possible to identify ways to work together, share information across the state, and maybe discuss with tribal leaders how to best accomplish informing policy makers and providers about tribal traditions regarding reintegration of returning Veterans. This information will be added to the list of Provider Military Culture, Peer Support and other trainings. More to come soon on this topic.

*We honor our veterans for their bravery and because by seeing death on the battlefield,
they truly know the greatness of life. --Winnebago Elder*

VA Efforts to Outreach to Natives: The VA has access to Cultural Awareness Cards that can serve as foldable pocket guides to share with providers to help them gain an understanding of AI/AN Veteran cultures. These were developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Indian Health Service (IHS) staff in 2009 to assist Public Health Service Commissioned Corps Officers on temporary deployments to provide mental health services in tribal communities that were experiencing increased numbers of completed suicides among youth. The cards can be ordered at:

<http://store.samhsa.gov/product/American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-Culture-Card/SMA08-4354>

A digital version is available for download at: <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA08-4354/SMA08-4354.pdf>

In order to better serve AI/AN Veterans in the communities they live in, the VA has entered into sharing agreements with the Haskell Indian Health Service (IHS), Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Health Center, and is working on a sharing agreement with the Kickapoo Nation Health Center.

If a Veteran is an inpatient at a VA facility, has identified him/herself as an AI/AN Veteran and has requested a holy man, the VA reaches out to local Tribal contacts or with the Native American Church to accommodate the request. The Veteran's spiritual needs are paramount in this decision and work effort.

The VA in East Central Kansas has entered into an Interagency Personnel Agreement (IPA) with the Indian Health Service (IHS) to bring an expert on board for a one year detail beginning in September to assist with data integration of the AI/AN Veterans that uses the VA and IHS systems. However, veterans must "self-identify" as a veteran in the VA system and to be eligible for IHS services must prove tribal enrollment through a tribally-authorized Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) or other legislatively allowed means.

Among the goals for this data integration are to be able to identify and accurately account for the AI/AN Veteran population, especially those who can be served at IHS or tribal facilities; measure the need for "contracted" traditional healers and other ceremonial rites to be held on a regular basis in the VA system; facilitate Veteran access to timely quality care; and assist the Tribes and IHS with sustainable reimbursements.

AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE CULTURE RESPONSIVENESS TRAINING. There is no training course for military culture around American Indian/Alaska Natives. This is because there is no one course of action or awareness that can be trained around AI/AN cultures. Each Tribe or Band has its own customs, rituals and healing practices. Native Americans have a warrior culture, meaning that it is an honor to serve in the military and to be a warrior, protecting lands and people. So, when Natives enlist or become officers and go into military service, they are highly acclaimed and honored in their cultures. Upon return from service, they are revered as warriors and accorded all the benefits and honors appropriate to that status.

Each Tribe or Band typically has its own rituals, but in most cases reintegration and return from military service are completed for each military member by his/her own people.

Kansas has four federally recognized AI/AN Tribes and Natives from other Tribes who live, play and work as Kansas residents. Mental health and substance abuse providers who serve Natives are encouraged to reach out to tribal leaders and Veteran leaders within those Tribes. To "reach out" in a culturally appropriate manner means at a minimum that providers will need to be prepared to not send an invitation email once or leave a single voicemail invitation (not good form and not respectful) and then expect tribal leaders to jump on the phone to respond – but that providers (and their agencies) will need to be prepared to spend some time establishing and developing good relationships that are built on foundations of mutual trust and respect. Working together with tribal and Veteran leaders, mental health and substance abuse providers should gain awareness of and be informed by the experiences, practices and traditions that are culturally meaningful and acceptable in order to best serve American Indian/Alaska Native persons when they are clients.

ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_federally_recognized_tribes Native American Registered Tribes (BIA)

ⁱⁱ <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq61-1.htm> History on Natives and Military Service

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/AIAN_Report_FINAL_v2_7.pdf Statistics on Native American Military Service, VA