

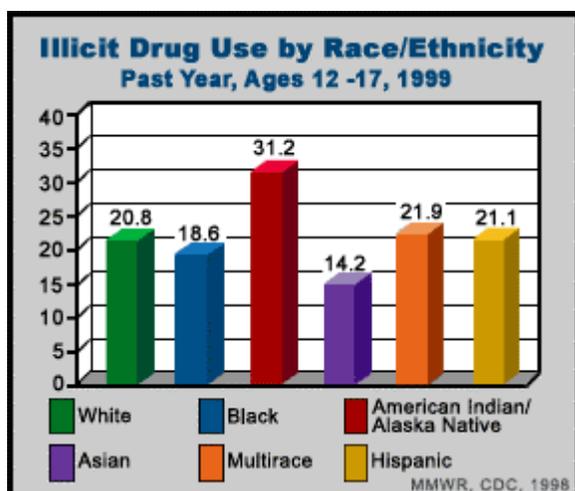
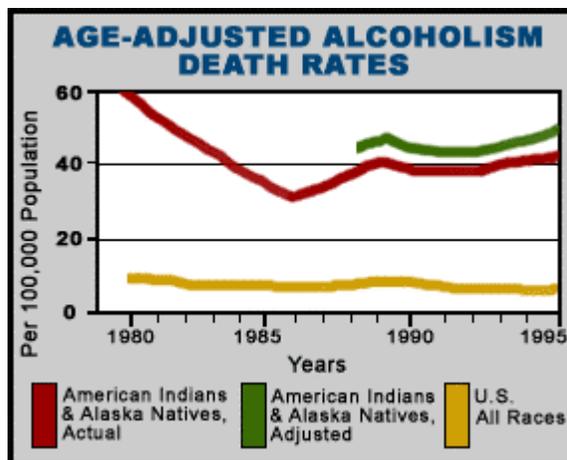
# ALCOHOLISM AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

## ISSUE

Death rates among American Indians and Alaska Natives due to alcoholism are 7 times higher than in the general population.

## BACKGROUND

The blight of alcoholism and other substance abuse behavior affects American Indians and Alaska Natives disproportionately. The primary manifestation is in mortality associated with liver disease and other direct effects of chronic alcohol abuse. It also increases the number of deaths associated with injuries due to automobile crashes and other intentional injuries (e.g., suicide and homicide). The adverse economic factors that prevail in many Indian communities are frequently associated with alcohol abuse patterns, educational deficits, and a general sense of hopelessness. In general, individuals diagnosed with chemical abuse illness also have an associated mental health diagnosis such as depression. In recent years, high use of methamphetamine is being experienced in many Indian communities. This extremely dangerous behavior is primarily being identified in youth and contributes significantly to many violent events.



## SITUATION

Indian Health Service (IHS) appropriations include approximately \$100 million to respond to the need for substance abuse prevention and treatment at the community level. More than 90% of the \$100 million is managed by individual tribes under provisions specified in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. The agency has developed collaborative approaches with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Justice for prevention efforts targeting youth, with an emphasis on at-risk and incarcerated juvenile detainees. Additional options for treatment in the ambulatory setting and a more robust continuum of care (e.g., follow-up care) have been identified as early intervention opportunities and as a means to decrease relapse rates. Information systems that accurately identify

the extent of substance abuse, treatment, and follow-through need to be improved.

## OPTIONS/PLANS

The proposed Indian Health Care Improvement Act reauthorization language includes significant proposals for improving program efforts. Tribal leaders have demonstrated increasing attention and willingness to address this difficult and pervasive issue, offering promise for sound community efforts. As resources allow, comprehensive community development of economic and positive social opportunities to promote healthy lifestyles and alcohol avoidance will be undertaken in collaboration with tribal programs and other programs serving American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For referral to the appropriate spokesperson, contact the IHS Public Affairs Staff at 301-443-3593.

*This issue summary should be used in conjunction with the IHS "Heritage and Health" and "IHS Profile" documents, available at <http://info.ihs.gov>*

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