

## ISSUE

Cancer is the second leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives, and rates appear to be increasing.

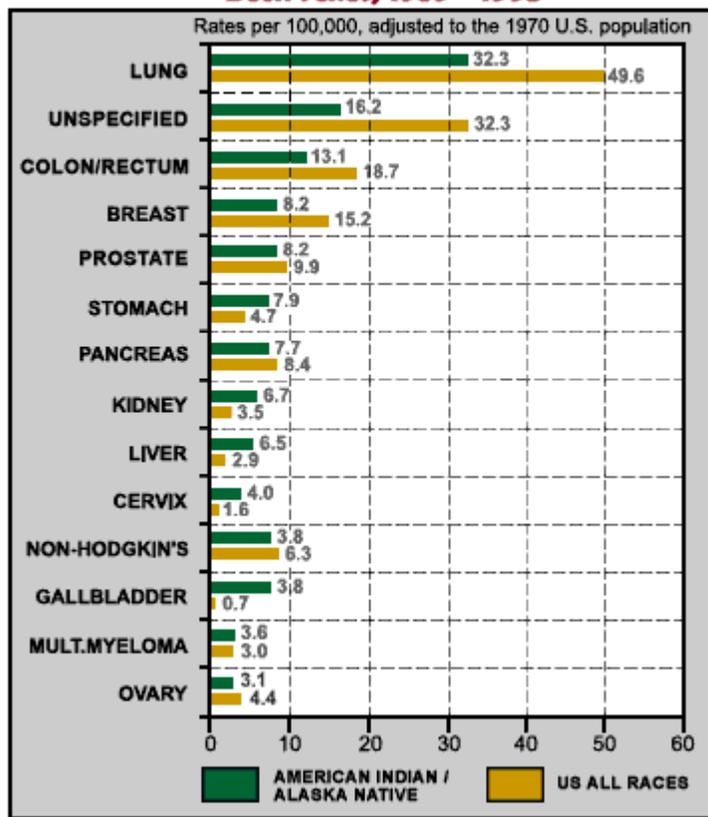
## BACKGROUND

Since the Indian Health Service (IHS) has succeeded in reducing infant mortality, injuries, and infectious diseases, the population is now living long enough to experience the entire range of age-related chronic disease. Indian communities are also very concerned about the impact of environmental pollution on their health. American Indians and Alaska Natives have historically had very low rates of cancer, due in part to competing causes of death (infectious diseases like TB) but possibly also related to diet, physical activity patterns, and limited tobacco use. We are now seeing a rapid increase in rates of tobacco-related cancers, breast cancer, prostate cancer, and colon cancer. Indian communities are concerned about this change and many are requesting IHS assistance to respond to the problem.

## SITUATION

- Although ceremonial tobacco use is traditional for many Indian cultures, habitual smoking is a relatively recent development, and its practice is reflected in rising lung cancer rates. Smoking rates among Indian people nationwide are about twice as high as in the general population.
- Indian people have the poorest survival from cancer of any racial or ethnic group, due to lack of access to specialist care and to socio-economic issues.

**Leading Causes of Cancer Mortality  
Native Americans and Alaska Natives  
Both Sexes, 1989 - 1993**



## OPTIONS/PLANS

In partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and tribal health organizations, the IHS Cancer Prevention and Control Program is working to address these issues through directed Cooperative Agreements, cancer screening programs, health data analysis, and community-based interventions.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

