

# Health Equity

Carrie Field, MPH, Policy Analyst  
Rochelle Ruffer, PhD, Director of Tribal Health Data  
National Indian Health Board  
Board of Trustees Meeting  
May 3, 2022

# Presentation Overview



Why focus on health equity?

What have we learned from NIHB's work the last few years?

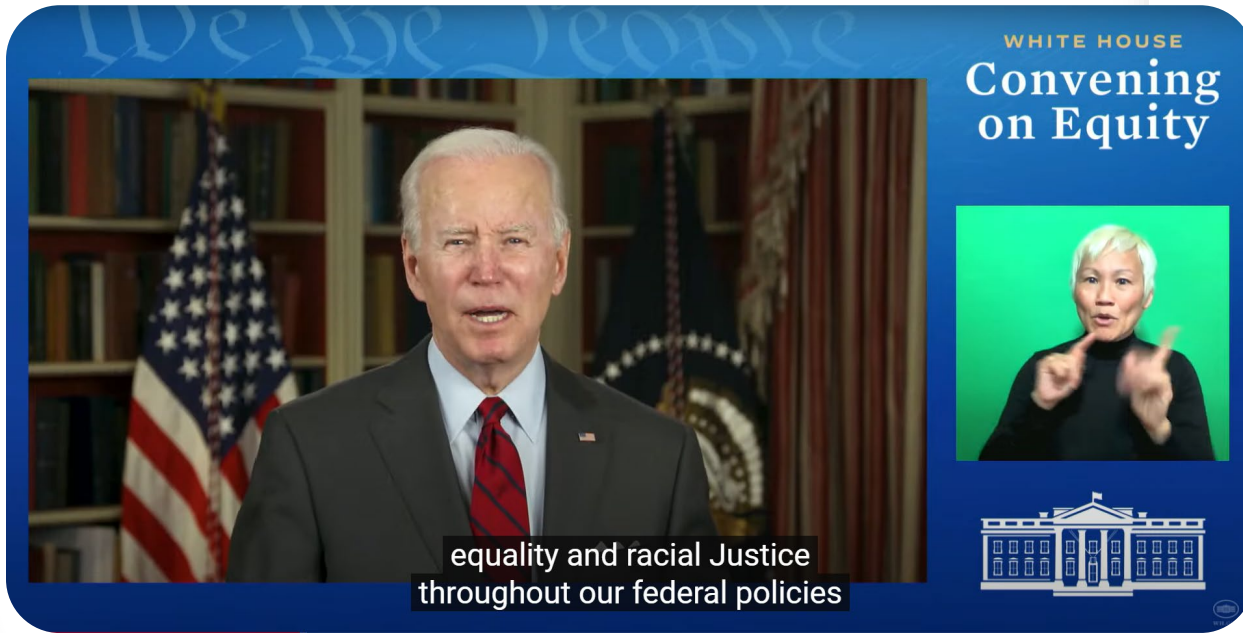
Health Equity in the AI/AN context: Traditional Values, Federal Trust Responsibility, and Tribal Sovereignty

Plan for Health Equity Focus at NIHB – Health Equity World Café, Health Equity Summit and NTHC conference

Questions



# A moment for action



equality and racial justice  
throughout our federal policies



Administration

BRIEFING ROOM

## Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government

JANUARY 20, 2021 • PRESIDENTIAL ACTIONS

WHITE HOUSE

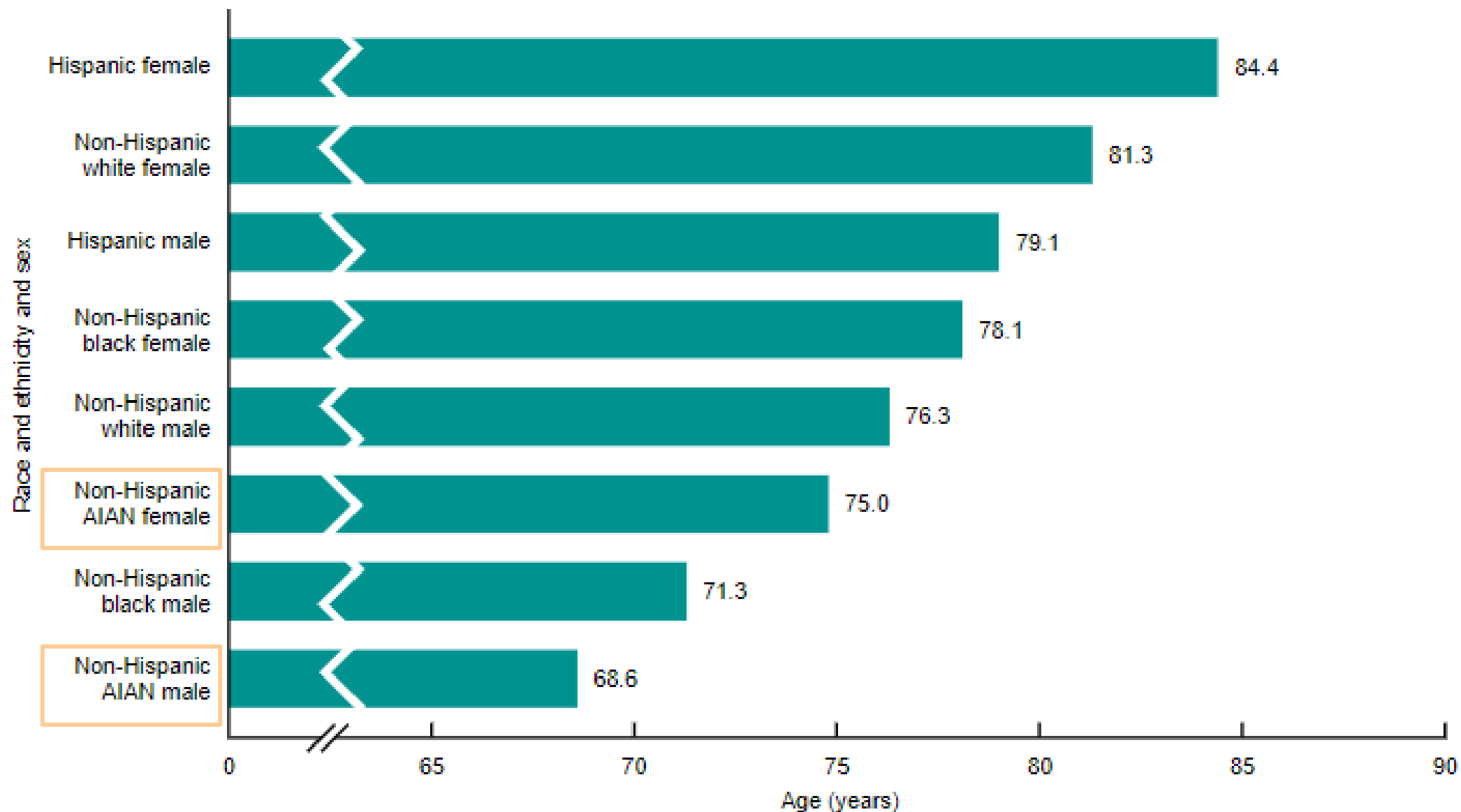


## ADVANCING EQUITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE THROUGH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT





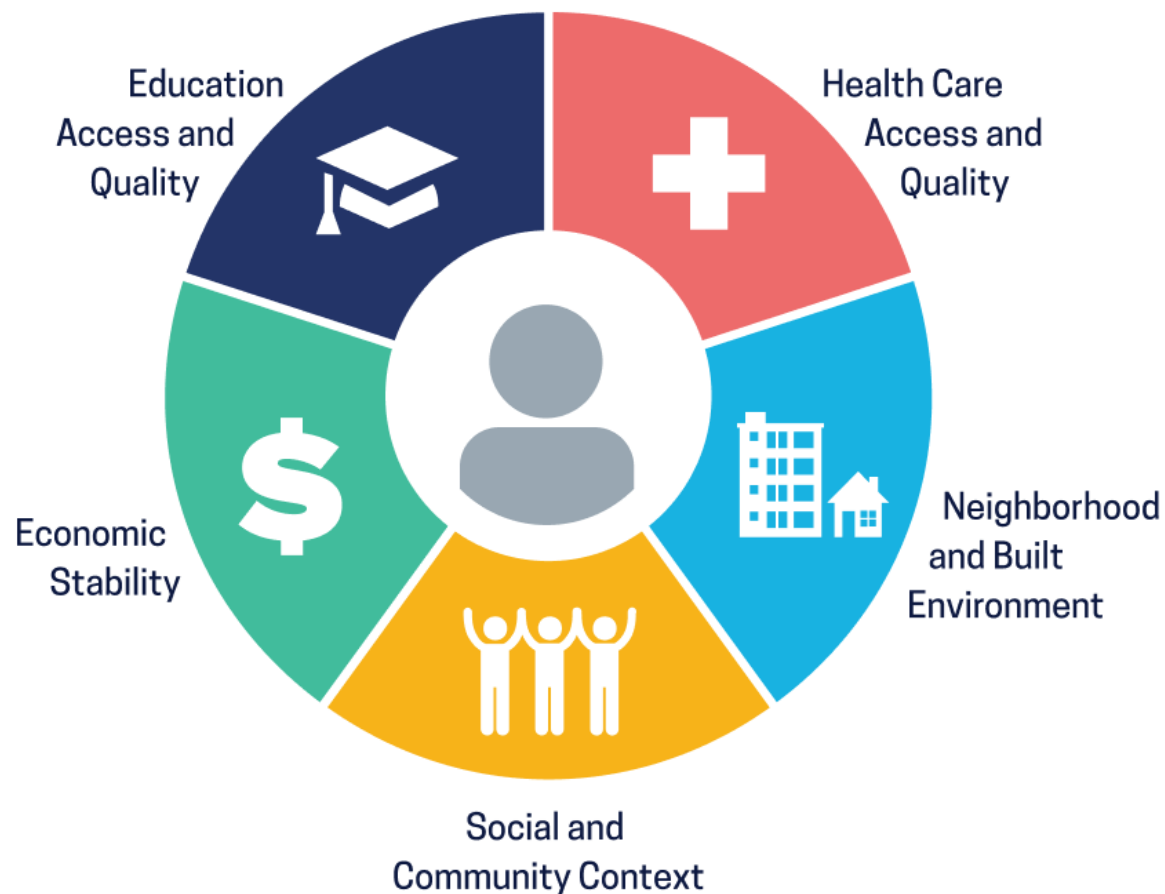
**Figure 6. Life expectancy at birth, by race and Hispanic origin and sex: United States, 2019**



NOTES: AIAN is American Indian or Alaska Native. Life expectancy estimates based on death rates adjusted for race and Hispanic-origin misclassification on death certificates.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality.

# Social Determinants of Health



Good health begins in the places where we live, learn, work and play.

Safe housing, transportation, and neighborhoods


Racism, discrimination, and violence

Education, job opportunities, and income

Access to nutritious foods and physical activity opportunities

Polluted air and water

Language and literacy skills



# What about uniquely Tribal determinants of health?

---

Federal Indian Policy

Unique political status  
as Tribal citizens

Forced relocation  
from ancestral lands

Spiritual & faith-based  
practices

Tribal justice systems

Involuntary  
assimilation

Traditional values

Boarding schools

Persecution of  
traditional ways of life,  
spiritual practices, and  
language

Indigenous knowledge  
& culture

Physical and cultural  
genocide

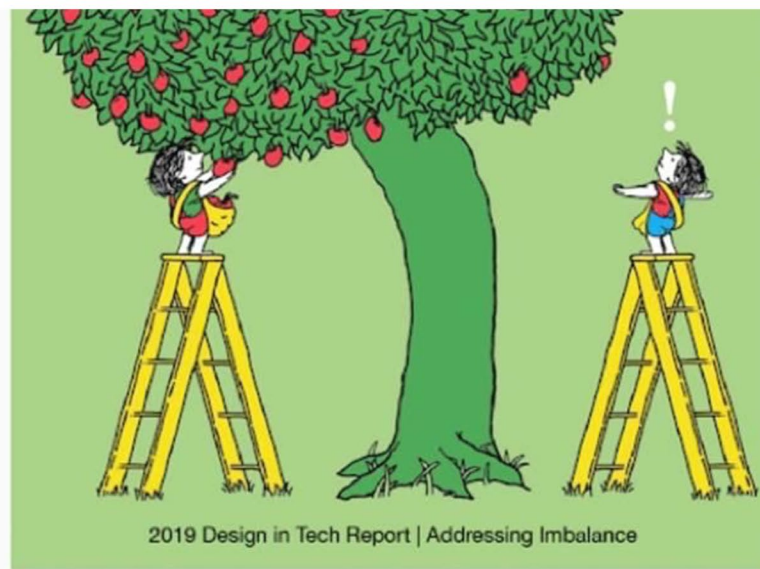
Indigenous languages

---





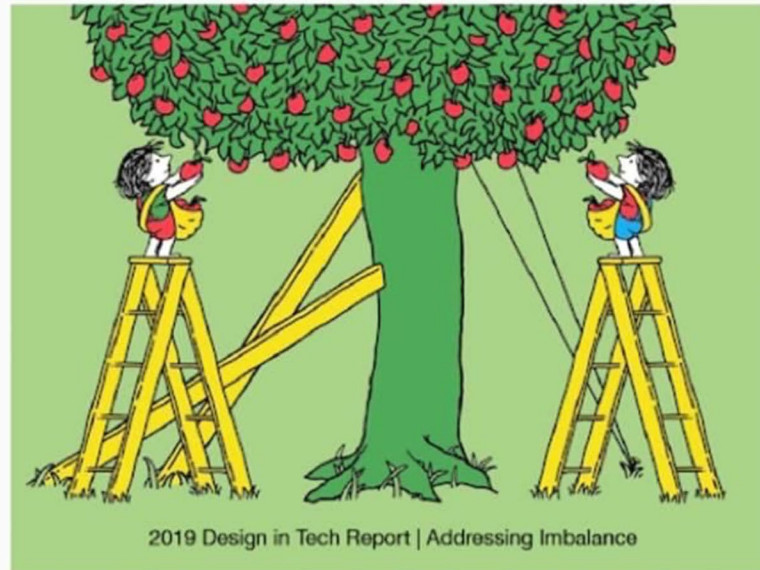
**INEQUALITY**



**EQUALITY**



**EQUITY**



**JUSTICE**

# What does health equity look like?

Image courtesy of Pennsylvania Department of Public Health






# Defining health equity:

## Finding the Tribal perspective

CMS:

“Health equity means the attainment of the highest level of health for all people, where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their optimal health regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, preferred language, or other factors that affect access to care and health outcomes.”



# Defining health equity:

## Finding the Tribal perspective

CMS:

“Health equity means the attainment of the highest level of health for all **people**, where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their optimal health regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, preferred language, or other factors that affect access to care and health outcomes.”

Robert Wood Johnson  
Foundation:

“**Health equity** means that everyone has a **fair and just** opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires **removing obstacles** to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences - including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.”



# Frame the national conversation around health equity for Indian Country

- *NIHB Mission Statement:*

Established by the Tribes to advocate as the united voice of federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes, NIHB seeks to reinforce Tribal sovereignty, strengthen Tribal health systems, secure resources, and build capacity to **achieve the highest level of health and well-being for our People.**

# Guiding Questions

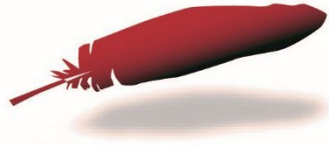
---







# National Indian Health Board



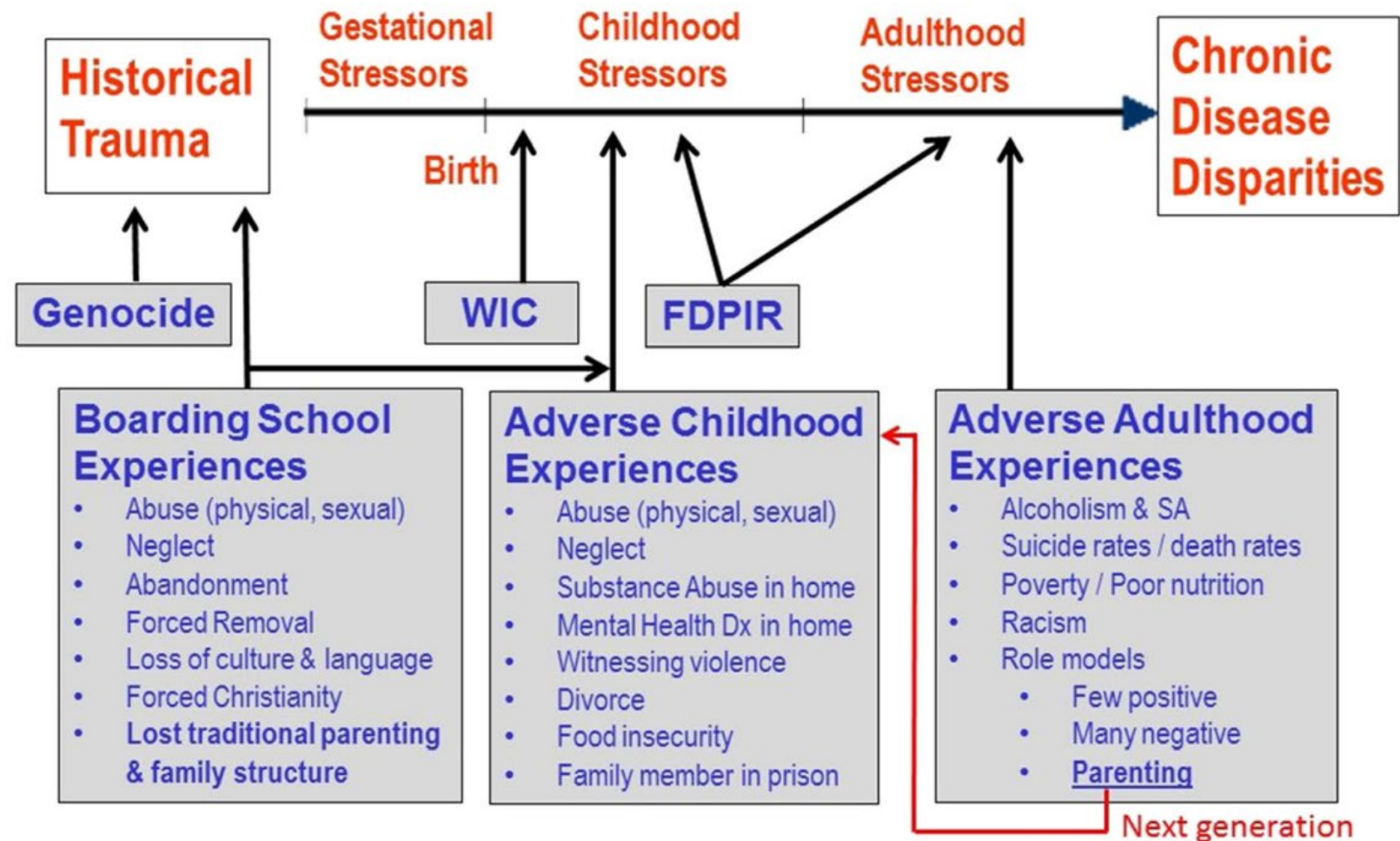
Environmental Scan

ACADEMIC LITERATURE

# American Indian health disparities: psychosocial influences

Donald Warne\* and Denise Lajimodiere  
North Dakota State University

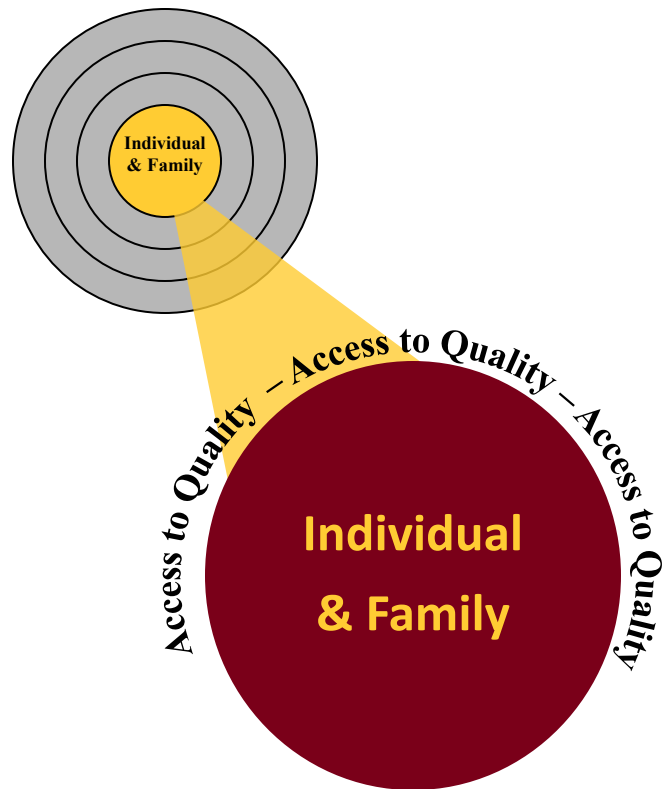
## Inter-Generational Basis for Chronic Disease Disparities Among American Indians and Alaska Natives



# American Indian and Alaska Native Health & Wellness Equity Model



# AI/AN Health and Wellness Equity – Individual & Family



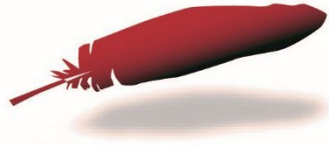
- **Accurate historical information**
- **Affordable, safe housing**
- **Broadband and communication**
- **Cultural activities and traditions**
- **Disability services**
- **Early childhood development services**
- **Economic development**
- **Education (Tribal)**
- **Equitable law and justice (Tribal)**
- **Extended family culture**
- **Financial services**
- **Health, affordable and nutritious food**
- **Healthy built and natural environments**
- **Health services (Tribal)**
- **Job training**
- **Livable job wages**
- **Parks, green spaces, and nature**
- **Safe, efficient transportation**
- **Subsistence traditional food/shelter/materials**
- **Spiritual/faith practices**
- **Water, air, land**



# American Indian and Alaska Native Health & Wellness Equity Model







Environmental Scan

# LESSONS FROM NIHB'S PREVIOUS WORK



# TPHS 2016: Strategic Planning to Achieve Health Equity in Tribal Communities

---

## Goals of the Institute

Define the role of **social determinants of health** in shaping the health of Tribal populations.

---

Use and incorporate the social determinants of health and health equity into **Tribal health department strategic planning**.

---





# TPHS 2016:

## Strategic Planning for Health Equity

---

### Results of Strategic Planning Work

To support capacity at the Tribal health department level, NIHB developed a **strategic planning framework** with emphasis on achieving health equity.

---

NIHB has conducted learning institutes, webinars, and one-on-one capacity building trainings to support Tribal and non-Tribal health departments to achieve health equity through strategic planning.

---





# July 2016: NIHB and Office of Minority Health (OMH) Environmental Scan

## Question:

- Can **public health accreditation** be a vehicle to achieve health equity in Tribal communities?

## Methods:

- **Focus groups and surveys** with Tribes, Area Indian Health Boards, and Tribal Epidemiology Centers to provide input on health equity and social determinants of health in Tribes.



# Results of NIHB/OMH Scan

## Challenges

Insufficient **resources** (staff, training, facilities, culturally relevant resources, TA etc)

Lack of understanding of role of **social determinants of health**

Largest barrier: lack of access to quality **data**

## Opportunities

Cross-jurisdictional relationships

Capacity building for Tribes

Direct, flexible funding to Tribes





# 2017 –Building Public Health Capacity to Advance Equity (Denver Summit)

---

**Goals** To explore how Tribal nations conceptualize and engage in health equity work

---

To outline the opportunities and barriers for Tribal public health agencies to play a more elevated role in advancing health equity.

---



# 2017 –Building Public Health Capacity to Advance Equity (Denver Summit)

---

## Findings

Need for **community specific strategies** to advance health equity in Tribal communities

---

Need for each Tribal **community to define** what health equity means for them

---

Current work was found to be aimed at improving health and wellness in Tribal communities more generally rather than a health equity focus.

---

**Three aspects unique to Tribal communities** that can serve to advance health equity: **traditional values, the federal trust responsibility, and Tribal sovereignty.**

---





# 2021 NTHC Health Equity Listening Session

- Lessons from four groups:

History Leads to  
Health Disparities

Cultural  
competence and  
Holistic Approach  
Necessary

Role of Social  
Determinants

Funding and Data  
needs



# 2021 NTHC Health Equity Listening Session

“Recapture, reinvigorate, reflower our  
**indigenous identities** to create an  
equitable future.”





# Key Themes

Address injustices

Commitment to broad spectrum action

Traditional values

Federal trust responsibility

Tribal Sovereignty





# What's next?

Centering Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous identity: the path to achieving health equity

## May 13: World Café

- Drivers of health inequities in Indian Country
- What are the key questions?

## Summer: Key Informant Interviews

- What does an AI/AN framing of health equity look like?

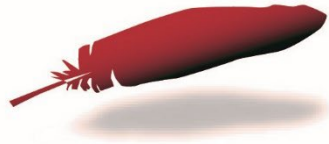
## August 16: Summit

- Role of data in understanding and addressing health inequities
- How federal agencies can address barriers to AI/AN health equity

## Sept: NTHC

- Innovative Tribal approaches to addressing health equity





# Thank you!

Carrie Field and Rochelle Ruffer

[cfield@nihb.org](mailto:cfield@nihb.org)

[rruffer@nihb.org](mailto:rruffer@nihb.org)

