



## Substance Abuse Among Indigenous Peoples: The Facts

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### What is Substance Abuse? [1]

Substance abuse, or substance use disorder (SUD) is a complex condition in which there is uncontrolled use of a substance despite harmful consequences. People with SUD have an intense focus on using a certain substance(s) such as alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs, to the point where the person's ability to function in day-to-day life becomes impaired.

### Who are Indigenous Peoples and How are They Affected? [2, 3, 4, 5]

According to a common definition, Indigenous peoples are the descendants of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. Indigenous peoples in the United States are mainly Native American or Alaska Native peoples. Although Indigenous peoples do not generally consume alcohol and drugs in greater quantities than the general population, they experience disproportionately higher rates of SUD. These problems are situated in a context of individual and intergenerational trauma from colonization, systematic violence, residential schools, and racist and discriminatory practices and policies. Intergenerational or historical trauma has been linked to the development of problematic substance use and related problems. For example, substance use can increase vulnerability to physical and sexual attacks and can be exacerbated by trauma resulting from victimization. In fact, 83% of Indigenous peoples in the U.S. have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime.

### Have you Heard? [6, 7, 8]

- The age-adjusted death rate from alcoholism is 740% higher among Indigenous peoples than the general population in the U.S.
- In 2019, roughly 350,000 Indigenous peoples had a mental illness and/or SUD.
- From 2015-2019, the estimate of past year SUD among people aged 12 or older was higher for Indigenous peoples (11.2%) than the estimates for people in all other racial/ethnic groups.

### How to Support Indigenous Survivors [3,6]

Panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, and SUD are more prevalent among Indigenous peoples compared with the general population in the U.S., yet lifetime help-seeking for patients meeting the criteria for a diagnosis is low. To support survivors, it is necessary to:

- Implement multi-faceted, trauma-informed, and culturally safe interventions for use with Indigenous peoples.
- Educate yourself and others about the intergenerational and historical trauma experienced by many Indigenous peoples and the related risks.
- Raise awareness of services by disseminating information within Indigenous communities and making resources easily available and accessible.
- Get involved with Indigenous organizations that provide support for Indigenous peoples, by donating or volunteering.

### Resources

#### Texas

- American Indian Center of Houston -- 346-374-8516  
<https://aichouston.org/resources/>
- Urban Inter-Tribal Center of Texas -- 214-941-1050  
<https://uitct.org/>
- AIT-SCM -- 210-227-4940  
<https://aitsem.org/>

#### National

- Native American Rights Fund -- 303-447-8760  
<https://narf.org/>
- National Indian Justice Center -- 707-579-5507  
<https://www.nijc.org/>
- U.S. Department of Justice Resource Basket --  
<https://www.justice.gov/tribal/mmip/resources/service-providers>

### References

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- [2]United Nations. (2023). *Who are indigenous peoples?* [https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/5session\\_factsheet1.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf)
- [3]Pride, T., Lam, A., Swansburg, J., Seno, M., Lowe, M. B., Bomfim, E., ... & Wendt, D. C. (2021). Trauma-informed approaches to substance use interventions with indigenous peoples: A scoping review. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 53(5), 460-473.
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- [5]National Institute of Justice. (2016). Five things about violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women and men. NIJ. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249815.pdf>
- [6]Jackson Pulver, L., Haswell, M. R., Ring, L., Waldon, J., Clark, W., Whetung, V., ... & Sadana, R. (2010). Indigenous health: Australia, Canada, Aotearoa, New Zealand and the United States: laying claim to a future that embraces health for us all. WHO.
- [7]SAMHSA. (2020). 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt31098/2019NSDUH-AIAN/AIAN%202019%20NSDUH.pdf>
- [8]Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2021). Racial/ethnic differences in substance use, substance use disorders, and substance use treatment utilization among people aged 12 or older (2015-2019) (Publication No. PEP21-07-01-001). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

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## Resources

- Texas Abuse Hotline (suspicions of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children, adults with disabilities, or people 65 +) <https://www.txabusehotline.org/Login/>  
800-252-5400
- Texas Council on Family Violence <https://tcfv.org/survivor-resources/>
- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault <https://taasa.org/get-help/>
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-4673
- National Human Trafficking Hotline 888-373-7888
- Aging and Disability Resource Center 855-937-2372
- Victim Connect Resource Center 855-484-2846
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988