



Learning from the Community: Improving Oral Health in American Indian and Alaska Native Nations

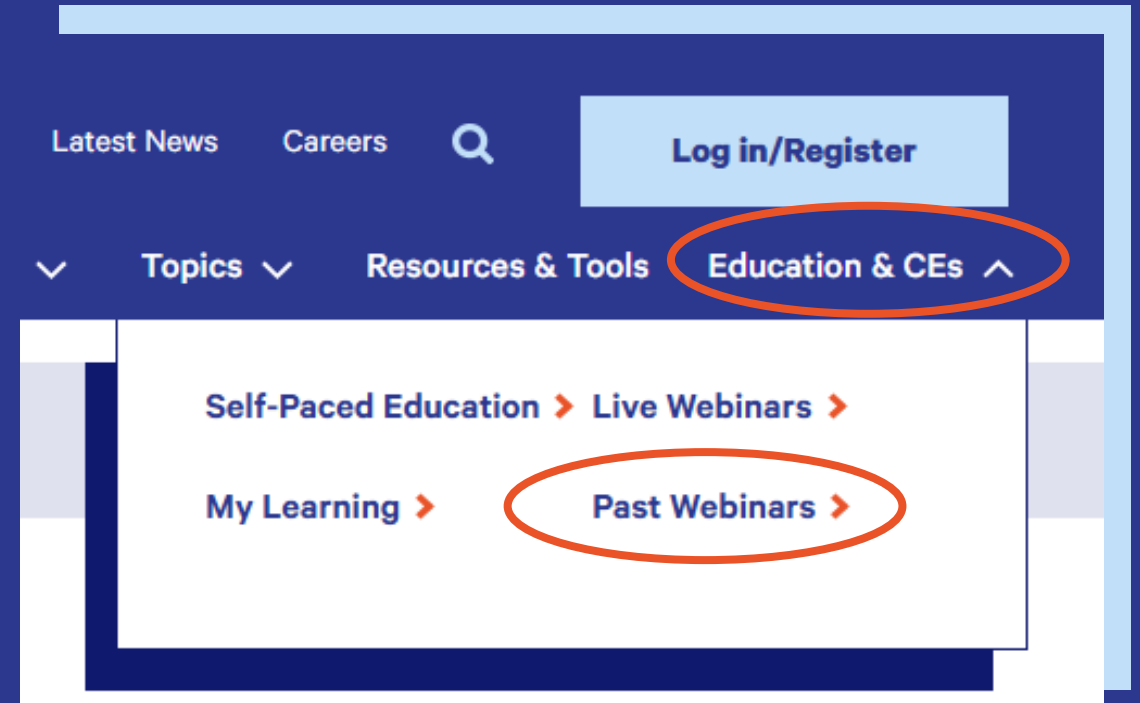
November 20, 2025

Webinar Notes



All lines will be muted to avoid background noise.

Today's presentation and slides will be available on our website at carequest.org under the “**Education**” tab and “**Past Webinars**,” within the next two business days.



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4/1/2025 to 3/31/2027.
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Q&A and Closed Captioning



- Feel free to enter your questions into the **Question & Answer box** throughout the presentations.
- We will turn to your questions and comments toward the end of the hour.

If you would like **closed captioning** for this program, please go to the bottom right-hand corner of your screen, then select “captions” to enable this function.



Thank You



Moderator Bio

Adrian Sandoval

Diné

President – The Society of
American Indian Dentists

Doctor of Dental Surgery:
Creighton University

Undergraduate:
Creighton University



Learning Objectives

- **Discuss** the history of oral health for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities and its influence.
- **Describe** the personal journeys of AI/AN dental professionals and how community identity shaped those journeys.
- **Explain** the inherent sovereignty of tribal nations and how sovereignty, reservations, and community structures influence health systems and oral health care.
- **Identify** culturally responsive and trauma-informed approaches to patient communication and care that honor AI/AN traditions and community priorities.

Polling Question

How often do you work with patients from American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities?

- a) Very often
- b) Occasionally
- c) Rarely
- d) I have never worked with AI/AN patients
- e) I don't know

Polling Question

How familiar are you with the cultural nuances, traditions, or community structures that may influence oral health care for AI/AN patients?

- a) Very familiar – I'm confident in my ability to navigate AI/AN cultural contexts when caring for patients
- b) Somewhat familiar – I have some awareness but need a refresher or would like to learn more
- c) Somewhat unfamiliar – I only know a little bit
- d) Unfamiliar – This is all new to me

Learning from the Community: Improving Oral Health in American Indian and Alaska Native Nations

Chance Salway, DMD
Adrian Sandoval, DDS
Anna Robertson



Speaker Bios

Chance Salway

Lak̓hóta

Member – The Society of
American Indian Dentists

Doctor of Dental Medicine:
Boston University, Magna
Cum Laude

Master of Science: Boston
University

Undergraduate:
Fort Lewis College



Anna Robertson

Sugpiaq/Aluet

Member – The Society of
American Indian Dentists

Member/CDA – Dental
Assistant National Board

Committee member – DANB
Candidate and Certificate
Services

Undergraduate:
Salish Kootenai College

Honoring Dr. George Blue Spruce



Image: ADA

Discovering the Native Land You Are On

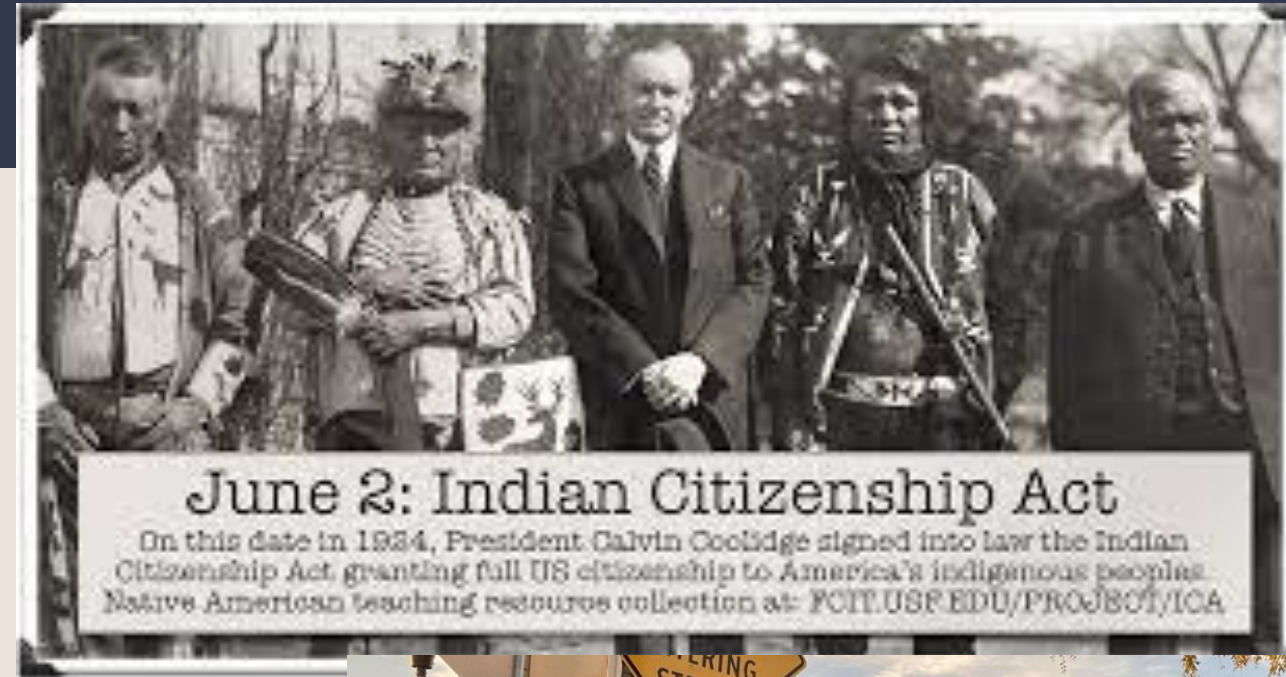
1. Open a Web Browser on your computer or mobile device
2. Go to website: <https://native-land.ca/>
3. Use the search bar or allow the site to access your location to identify the Native American land you are on
4. Once you find the name of the land, please type it into the chat box to share to the group!

Learning Objective

Discuss the history of oral health for American Indian and Alaska Native communities and its influence.

Historical Context

- Doctrine of Discovery, 1493
- Manifest Destiny, 1845
- Treaty of Fort Laramie, 1868
- Snyder Act, 1924
- Indian Healthcare Improvement Act, 1948
- Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, 1971
- Access to health care affirmed as a treaty right, 2021



History of Oral Health Care

Alaska

- IHS began service in the 1940s
- Statehood Jan 3, 1959
- Alaska Native Service hospital, 1953
 - Replaced by Alaska Native Medical Center, 1997



Image: nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices

Residential Boarding Schools and Oral Health Care

Carlisle Indian Industrial School
October 6, 1879
“Kill the Indian, save the man”

- 526 boarding schools
- 1,000+ institutions
 - Day schools
 - Orphanages
 - Asylums



Quotes from The Road to Healing Participants

"When they go away to school,' he said, 'they get haircuts.' He said our hair is very sacred. Culturally, our hair is sacred. 'We do not cut our hair, but they're going to do that to you. You get there, your black braids are not going to come home.'" –

Montana Participant

"I mean you're put in there, treated like you was some type of a hired hand. I stayed in the summers, worked in the heat, hauled brush...If we got poison ivy, we still had to go back the next day." – **Oklahoma Participant**

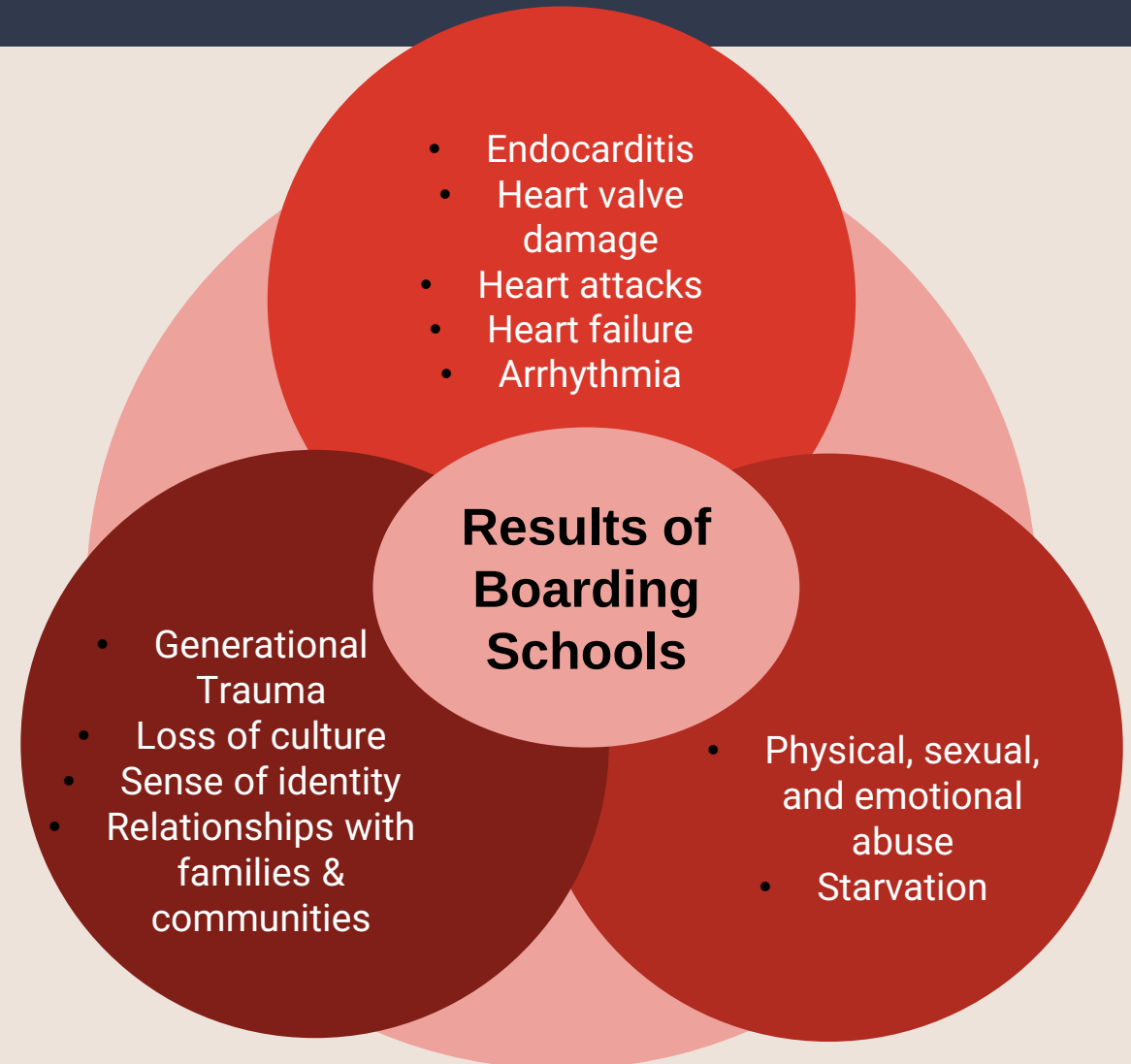
"And I remember one girl was a bedwetter, and they made her scrub the entire bathroom on her hands and knees with her toothbrush." – **Michigan Participant**

"We couldn't bring any of our traditional foods. We ate industrial Western processed foods and these huge industrials cans of salted meats and salted vegetables. There was powdered juice, powdered milk, powdered eggs. We were forced to eat all those kind of foods [sic], and of course, we all got violently ill because our bodies couldn't process changing our diet." – **Alaska Participant**

"But, you know, the sad part about it is a lot of us had to watch the priest sodomize our -- so, had to watch our classmates become sexually assaulted. So that's -- nobody wants to share things like that. I've learned how to be tough because you couldn't cry. Couldn't do that." – **South Dakota Participant**

Residential Boarding Schools and Oral Health Care

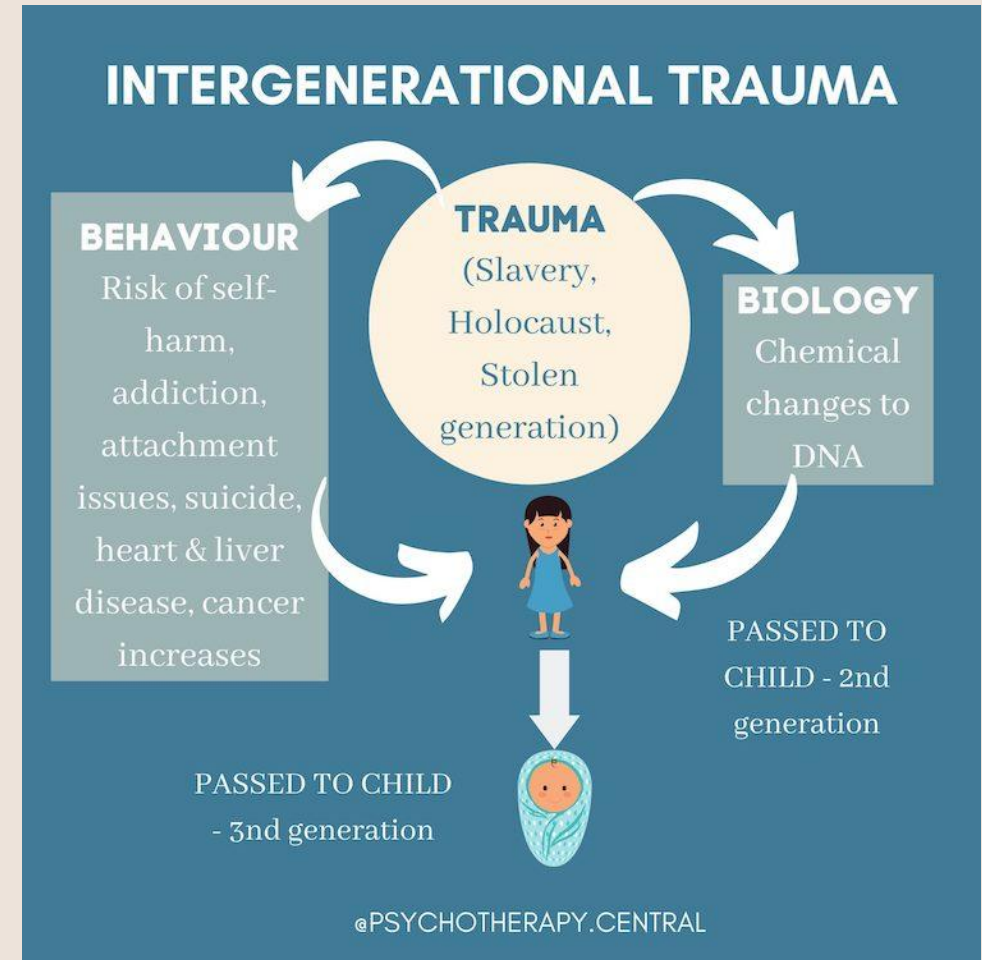
- Caries is the bacterial disease that causes cavities
 - Most noncommunicable disease in the world
 - 3.7 billion people
- *S. mutans* is a primary causative agent of caries
 - Ability to thrive in heart valves
 - Endocarditis



Residential Boarding Schools and Oral Health Care

Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975

- Tribes awarded the right to educate their own people
- Closure of most residential schools
- Official apology for U.S. Indian boarding school program in October 2024



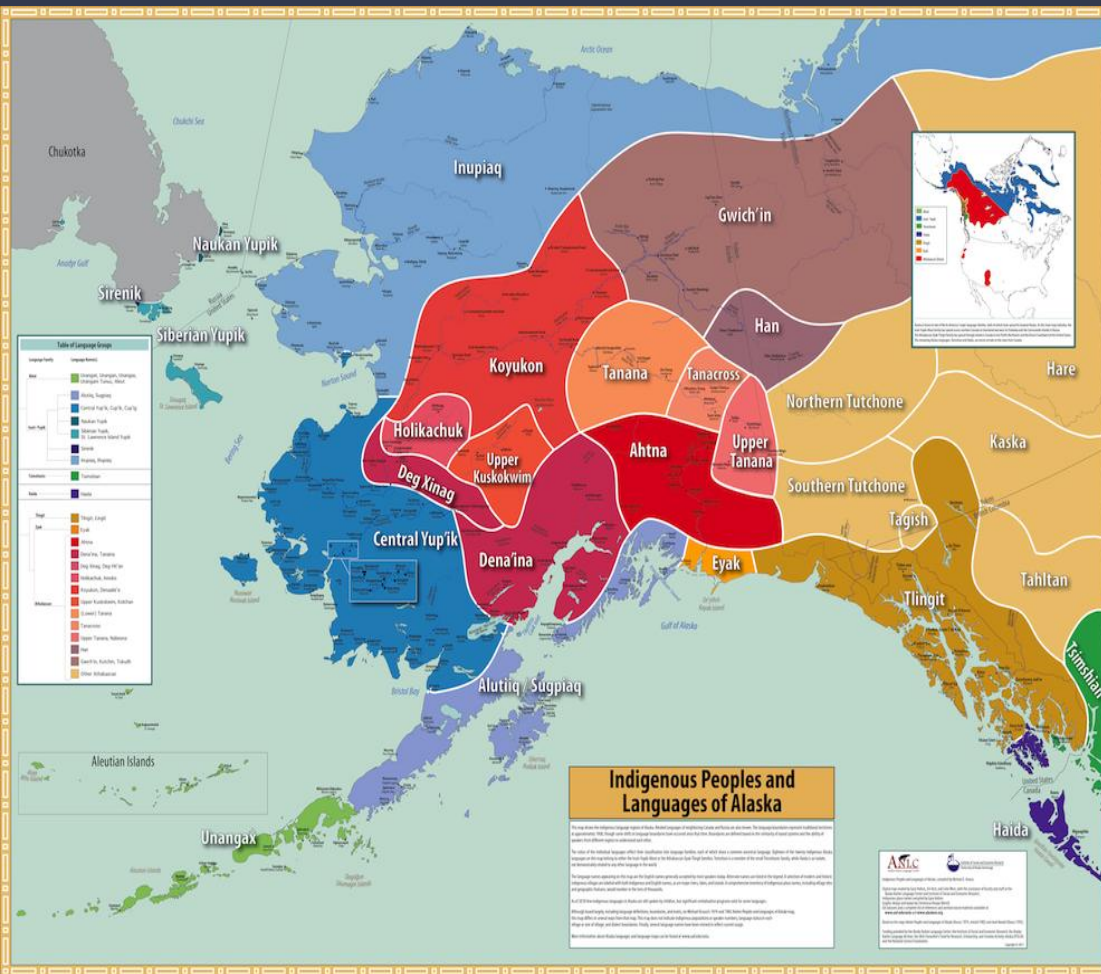
Learning Objective

Explain the inherent sovereignty of tribal nations and how sovereignty, reservations, and community structures influence health systems and oral health care.

How many tribal nations were in the Americas before colonization?

- a) 25 to 100
- b) 100 to 200
- c) 200 to 300
- d) 500+

Tribal Nations and Villages of North America



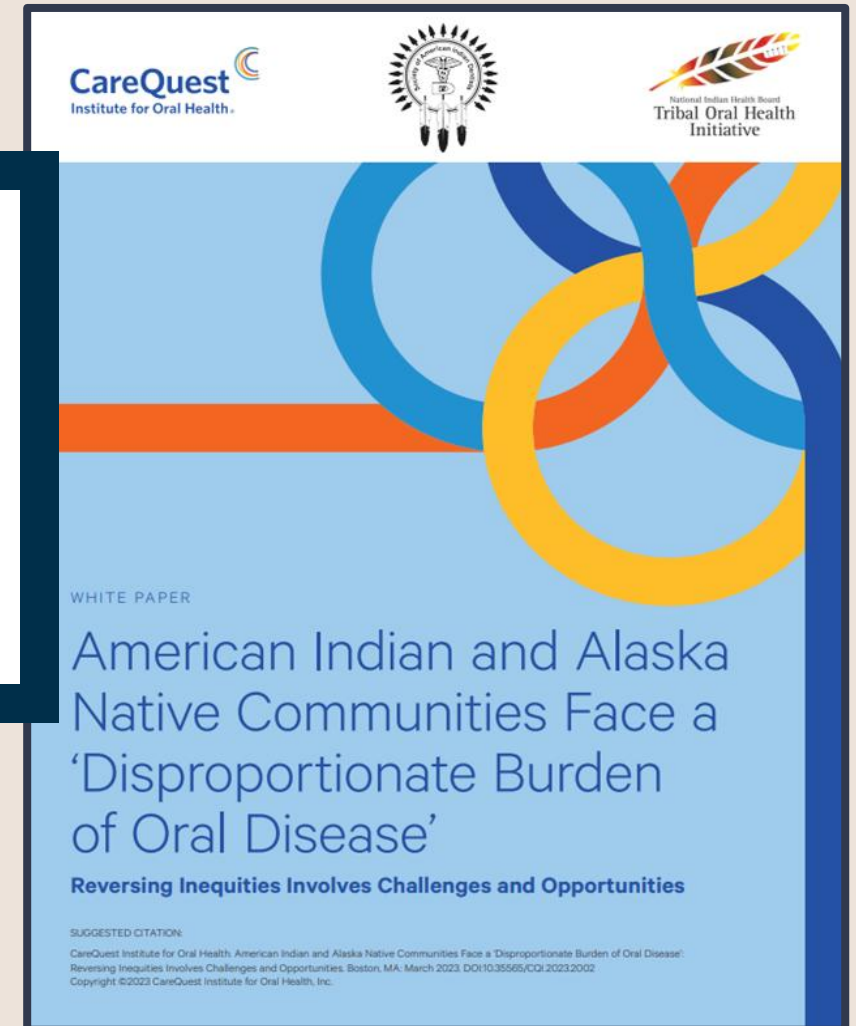
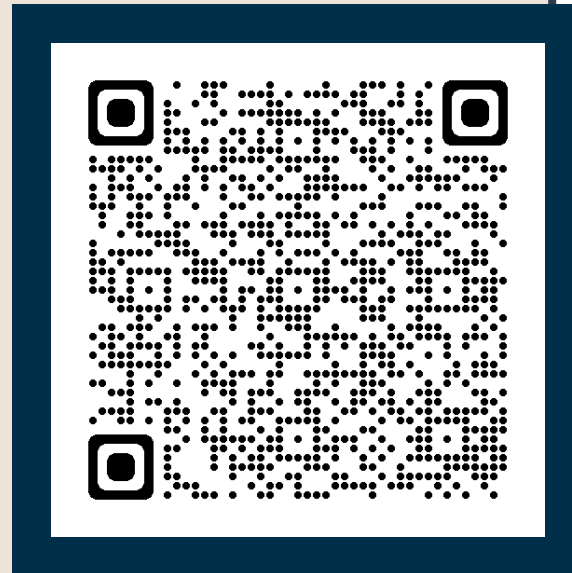
What is the responsibility of the U.S government to tribal nations?

Federal Indian Trust the U.S. Government's Responsibility

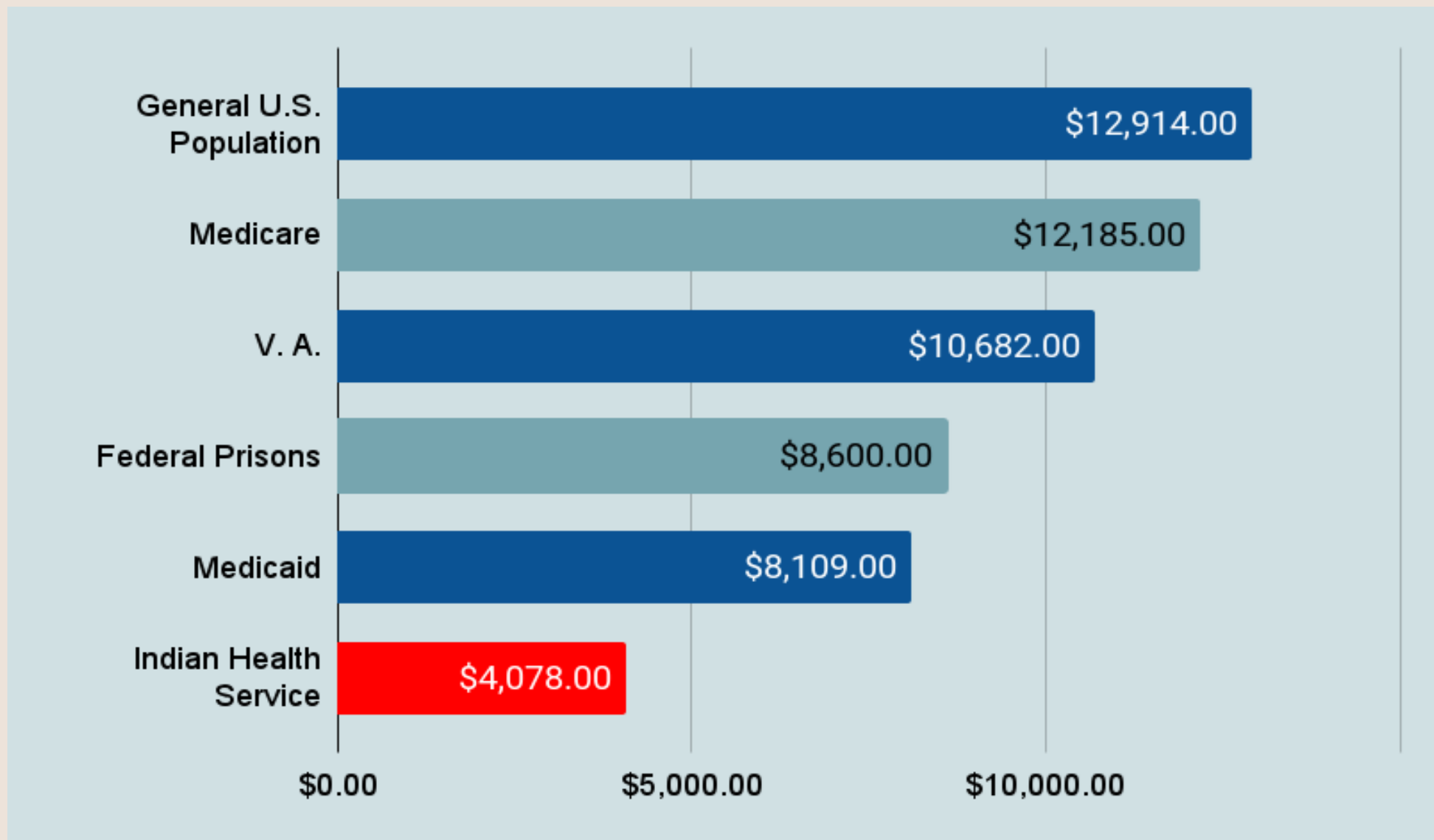
- Protect tribal treaty rights
- Lands, assets, and resources
- Legal and moral obligations surmised over the entire historical relationship
- Self-governance and determination
- Medicaid funded services for IHS centers (Indian Health Care Improvement Act)



American Indian and Alaska Native Communities Face a 'Disproportionate Burden of Oral Disease'

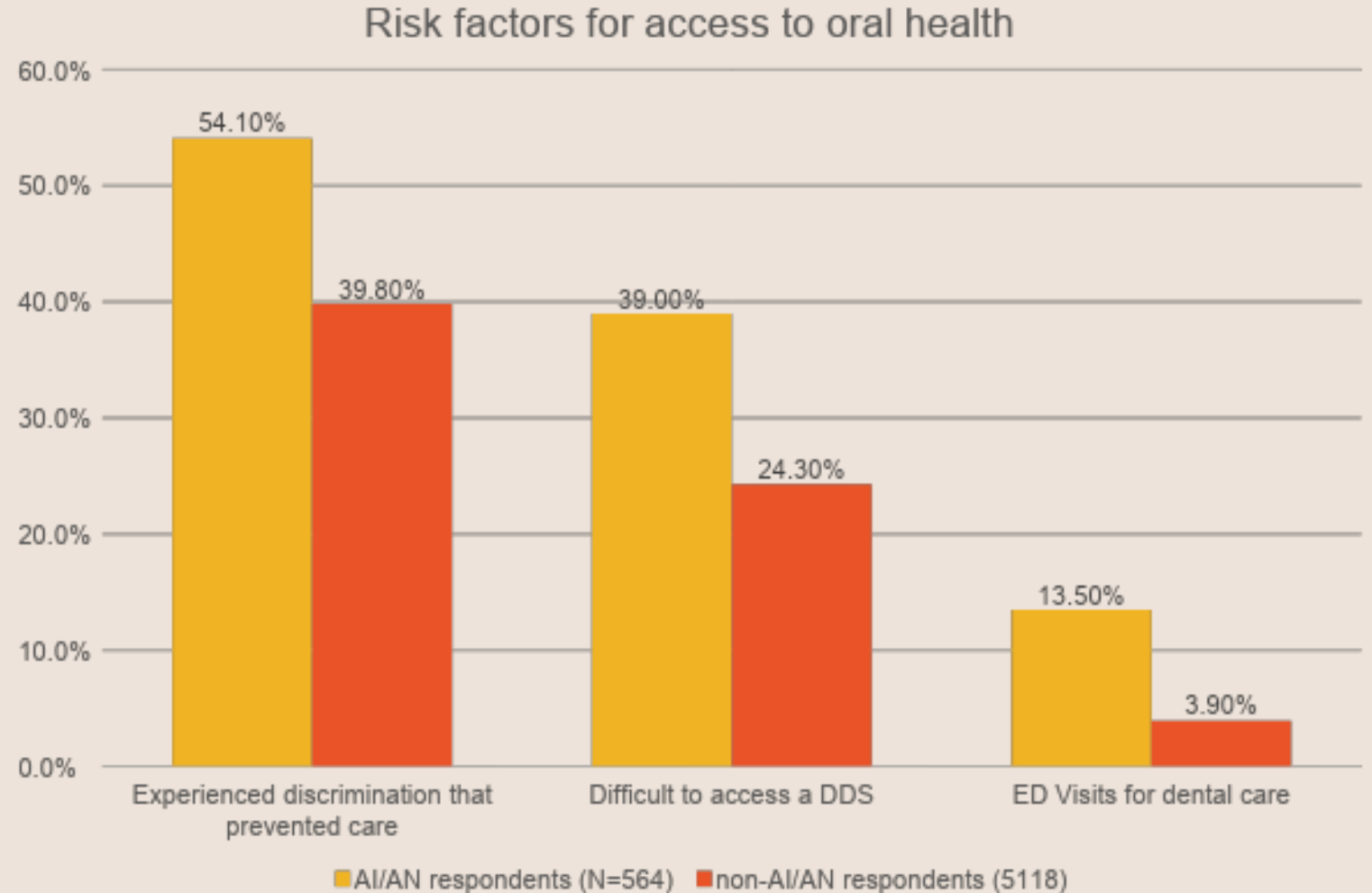


Per Capita Health Care Spending

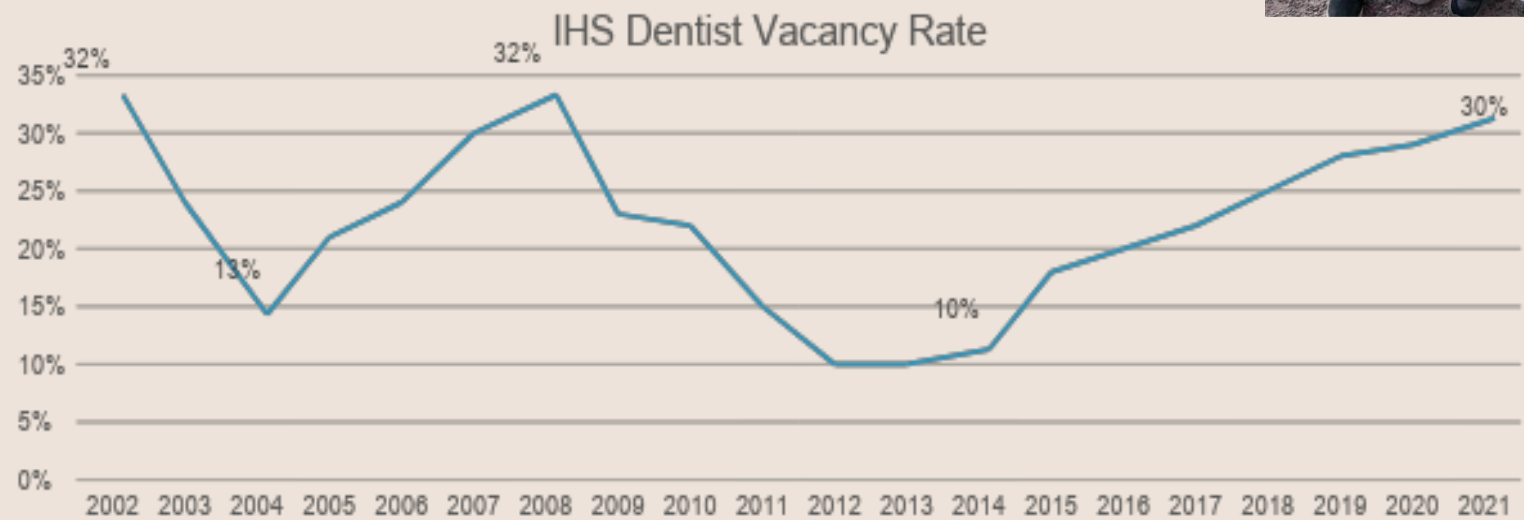




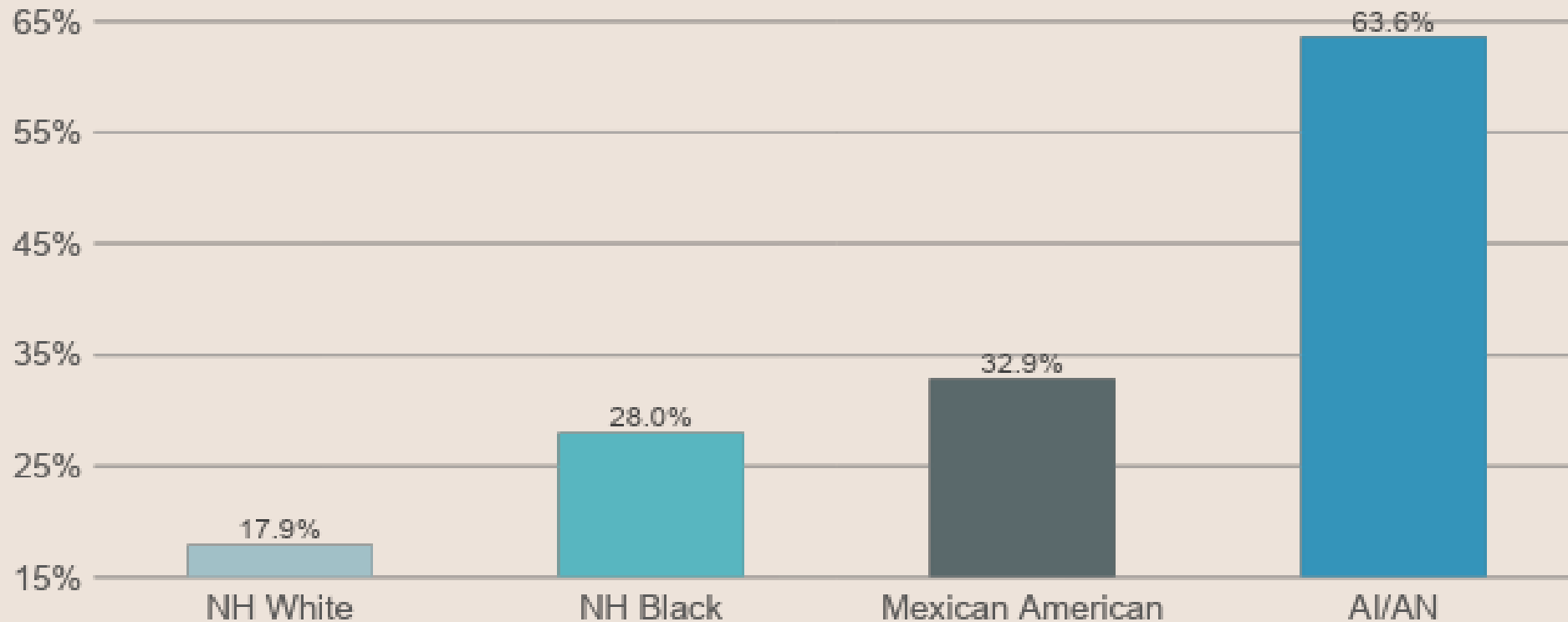
2022 State of Oral Health Equity in America (SOHEA) Survey



Provider Shortage



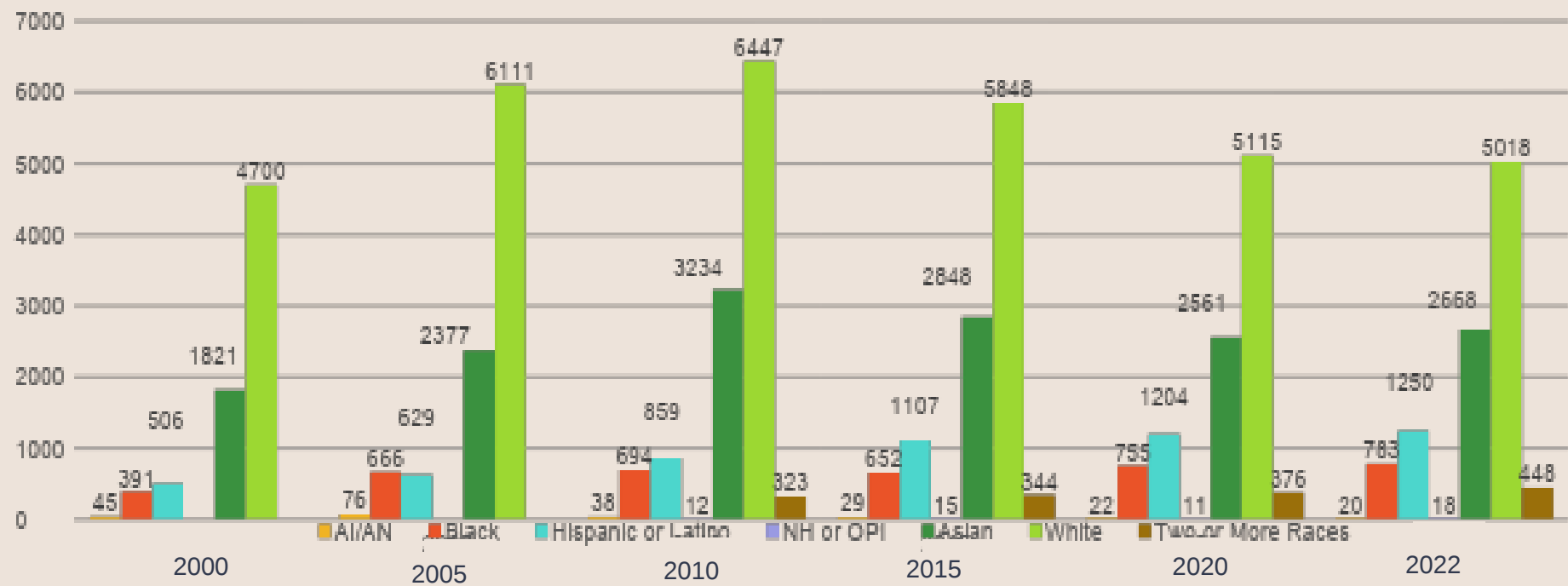
Early Childhood Caries



Percentage of children ages 2-5 with dental caries, 2011-2016 (AI/AN 2019)

U.S. Dental School Applicants by Race/Ethnicity (ADEA)

Number of Applicants by Race/Ethnicity



Public Data from the American Dental Education Association (ADEA)



Data Genocide

“two or more races” completely eliminates identity



- Misdirected resources
- Policy development
- Misidentification of high-risk groups
- Erosion of trust
- Erasure

Learning Objective

Describe the personal journeys of AI/AN dental professionals and how community identity shaped those journeys.

What is or was your biggest hurdle/s that you have had to overcome to get to where you are today in your professional or educational journey?





**High School
Diploma: 82%**

Compared to **92%**

**Bachelor's
Degree: 17%**

Compared to **33%**

**Graduate Degree:
6%**

Compared to **11%**

AI/AN Education

Cost of Attending Dental School

Average cost of four years of dental school

THEN

Public schools in
1969-70:

\$42,618

Private schools:

\$84,768

(Adjusted for inflation)



NOW

Public schools as
of 2019-20:

\$205,019

Private schools:

\$335,536

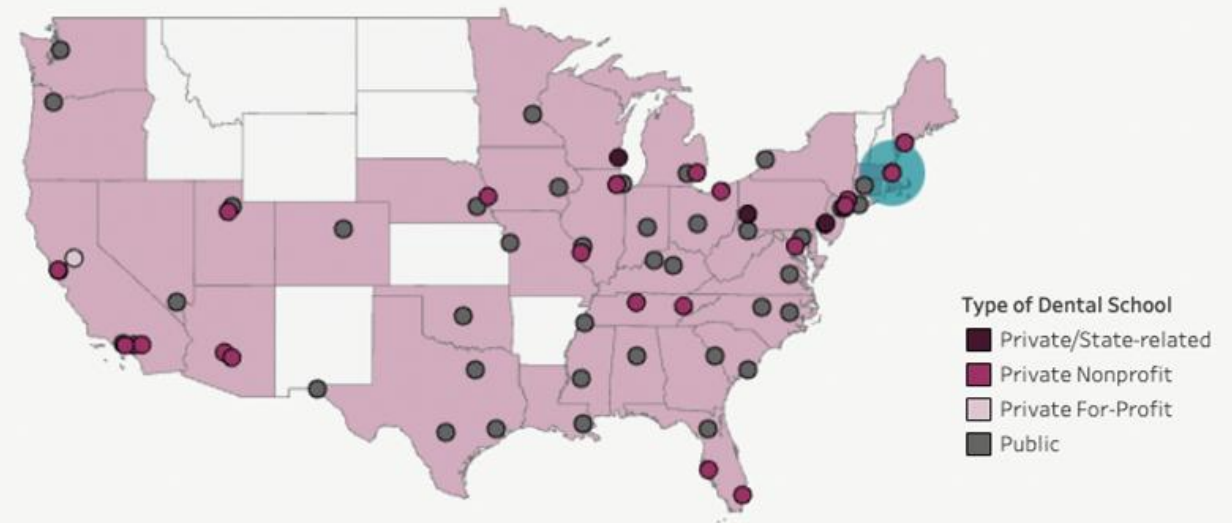
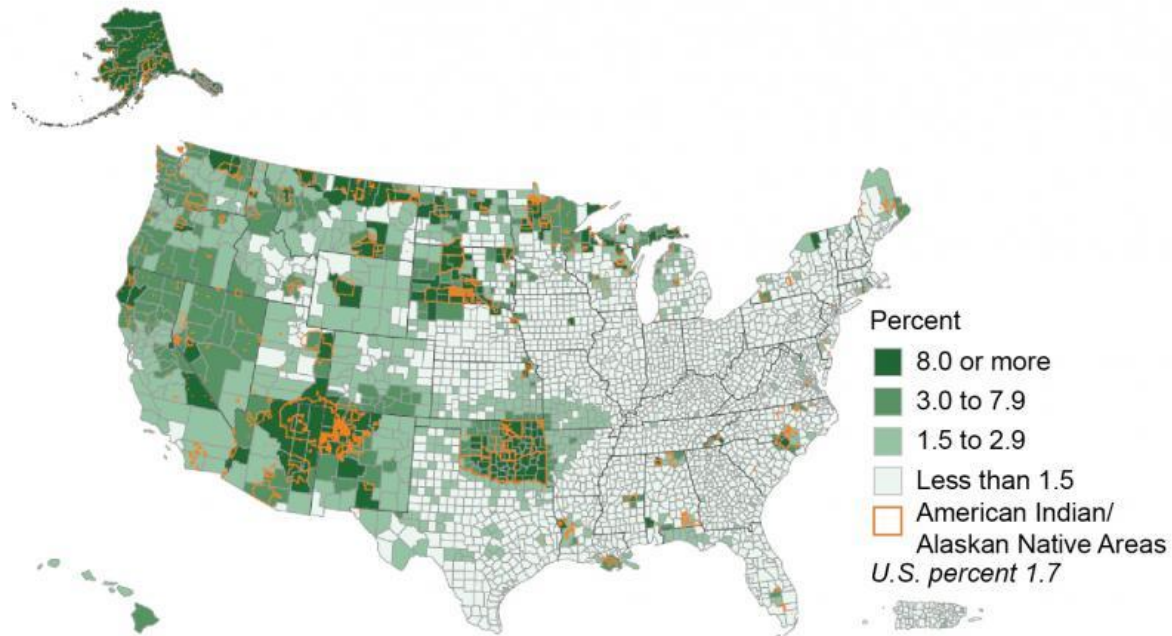
Native Population vs. Locations of US Dental Schools

AI/AN Population:
Pre-Colonization: ~10 million

1900: <300,000

2020: 9.7 million people (2.9% of the total population)

Indigenous Populations Extend Beyond Reservation Lands



Data and Images from: <https://hnh.org/library/research/genocide-of-indigenous-peoples-guide/>
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/10/27/native-americans-2020-census/>
https://www.google.com/mymaps/viewer?mid=1SXABihN-hgFqMWxAXQN5TXo1ybs&hl=en_US
<https://toolkit.climate.gov/image/897>

Familial and Cultural Barriers

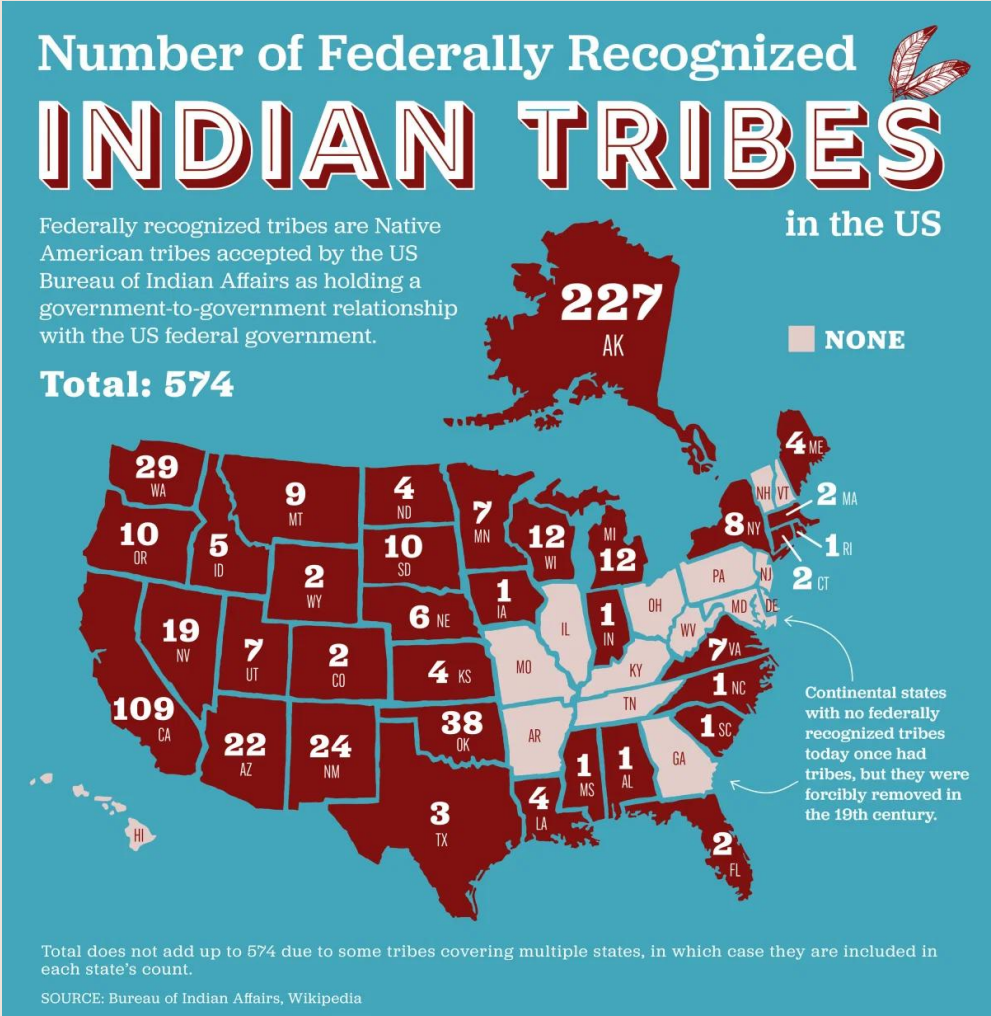
- **Knowledge Barriers**
 - Lack of knowledge on the process or steps to becoming a dentist, navigating higher education
- **Attitudinal Barriers**
 - Lack of trust, “stigmas”, or doubt in the system or themselves
- **Structural and Practical Barriers**
 - Lack of resources, time, money
- **Relational Barriers**
 - Lack of parental/familial support, involvement

Imposter Syndrome



<https://thephysician.coach/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ImposterSyndrome-02-scaled.jpg>

Systemic Barriers



https://www.voronoapp.com/_next/image?url=https%3A%2F%2Fcdn.voronoapp.com%2Fpublic%2Fimages%2Fvoronoi-Number-of-Indian-Tribes-in-the-US-20240510132512.webp&w=1200&q=85

We Need More Native American Representation in Oral Health Care

Yahoo News Native News Health Desk



Rudy Oxendine. (courtesy photo)

BY RUDY OXENDINE | MAY 12, 2023

“...having a dentist that shares similar cultures, history, and traditions is a connection that is needed, meaningful, and empowering”

Rudy Oxendine

AI/AN Dental Students Graduated in 2023:



Number we need in
EACH CLASS for equal
representation:

5

180

2.9% of 6,200 seats

Learning Objective

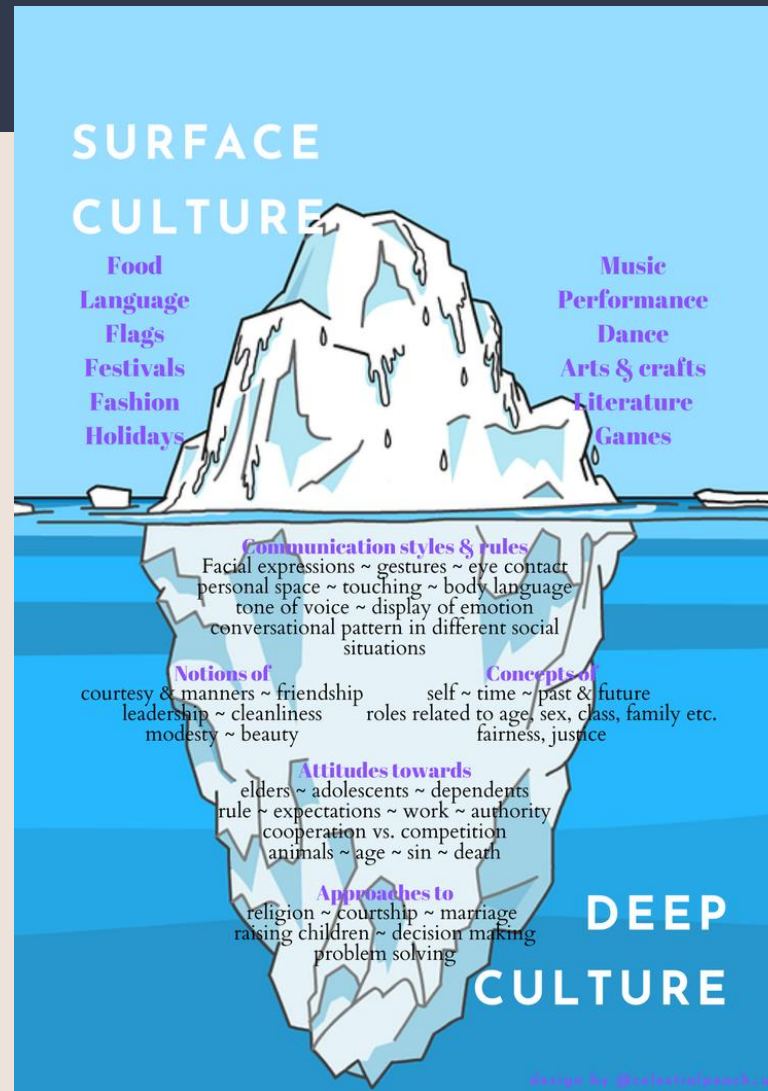
Identify culturally responsive and trauma-informed approaches to patient communication and care that honor AI/AN traditions and community priorities.

Trust



Cultural Humility

“Cultural Iceberg”



Microaggressions

- Stereotypes
 - All Natives are drunks
 - Natives get free money and healthcare
- Differences in cultural communication
 - Connect with community in a genuine manner



Image: CSKT

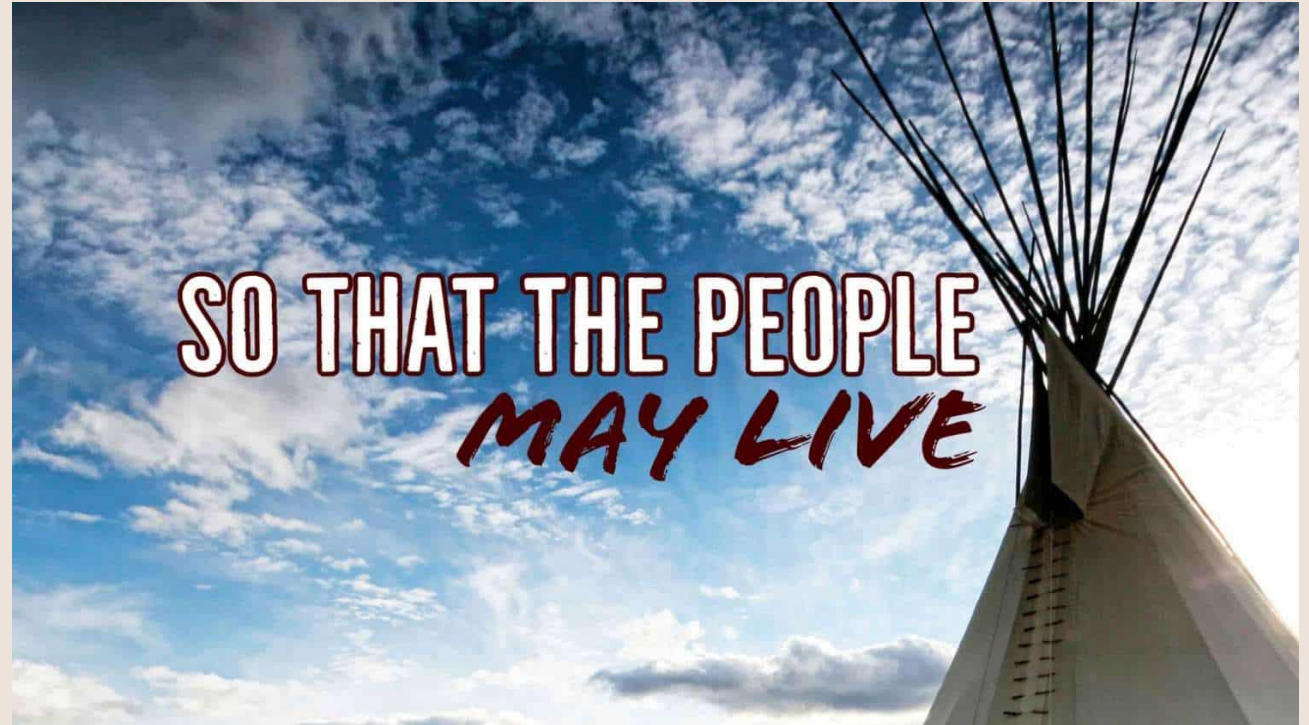
Minimally Invasive Dentistry



638 and Self-Determination



<https://www.oyatehealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/OHC.png>



https://www.greatplaintribalhealth.org/media/k2/items/cache/c9b002fe1bb0320831a8ae78670fdb6f_M.jpg?t=20250620_163034



eJACD

The Official Journal of the American College of Dentists

Diversity & Inclusion
part 2



A Case for Inclusion

The Society of American Indian Dentists

Felicia Fontenot, DMD

President, Society of American Indian Dentists

Cristin Haase, DMD, MPH

Vice President, Society of American Indian Dentists

Contributions by Student Dentist Tommie Chavis II, MS

Student Member of the Board, Society of American Indian Dentists

Disclaimer: This article is representative of our personal experiences and thoughts, and in this capacity, we do not represent any organization other than the Society of American Indian Dentists.



Today's Indigenous peoples of what is now the United States of America are a proud and strong surviving people. In writing this article from our perspective as "Native Dentists," we have the solemn awareness that our ancestors were decimated by the early U.S. government under the banner of "Manifest Destiny".¹ Our perspective also includes the belief that no one can be as uniquely qualified to treat our peoples as we are. It remains of utmost importance for Native American people to gain equal representation as providers in the field of dentistry in order for our people to achieve oral health parity. American Indians and Alaskan Natives (AI/AN) (also referred to as Native Americans) currently suffer from the worst oral health outcomes in comparison to any racial or ethnic group within the United States.^{2,3} Our organization, The Society of American Indian Dentists (SAID), is a national non-profit organization for dentists and dental students dedicated to promoting and improving the oral health of the American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) community and advocating for the American Indian/Alaskan Native dental professionals across the US.

“Our perspective includes the belief that no one can be as uniquely qualified to treat our peoples as we are.”

Why are AI/AN providers needed?



“Racial and ethnic diversity among health professionals promotes better access to healthcare” (ADEA, 2019)

“Racial and ethnic diversity improves healthcare quality for underserved populations” (HHS, 2006)

\$40k

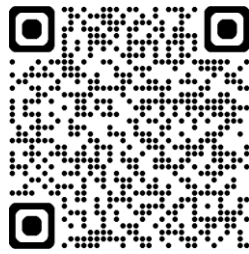
**in Scholarships
Awarded**

Save the Date!

2026 Conference

Minneapolis, MN

June 10-13, 2026



How can you, or your organization, be an ally?



- Support legislation that positively impacts Indigenous communities
- Holistic Admissions
- Recognize and celebrate Indigenous holidays (local and national)
- Education on cultural humility, trauma informed care, motivational interviewing, patient autonomy
- Teach public health best practices / minimally invasive dentistry
- Allow and encourage students to join/participate in diverse dental organizations
- Include American Indian/Alaska Native Data in research
- Racial microaggressions – do better
- Local Tribal Advisory Committee
- Land Acknowledgements + reparations + acknowledgement of wrongdoing

Where to Find Us:



Society of American Indian Dentists

<http://www.thesaidonline.org/>



Question and Answer



Share your
QUESTIONS!

Submit questions for the
panelists in the Q&A box

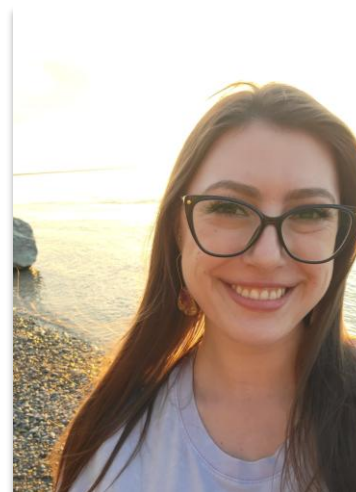
Thank You to Our Speakers



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***Registration for this webinar will open soon in our new education platform!**



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Thank you for attending today's webinar!

We appreciate your commitment to lifelong learning and oral health improvement!

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