

Proposed Research Initiative - Collaborative Minority Health and Health Disparities Research with Tribal Epidemiology Centers

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Objective

To support collaborative research between Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs) and external investigators on topics related to minority health and health disparities in AI/AN populations.



Background

- 5.4 million individuals self-identify as American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN)
- 567 federally registered tribes
- AI/AN populations as a whole experience significant disparities in a range of diseases and health conditions
- Premature mortality has increased among AI/AN populations in last 15 years while decreasing in other US racial/ethnic minority populations
- Significant gaps in knowledge regarding health of AI/AN populations
 - Aggregate data obscure significant heterogeneity
 - AI/AN individuals often not represented in national surveys or epidemiological studies, not analyzed, or included in 'other' category



Background

- Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs) ideally positioned to contribute to evidence base and published research literature
- Established in 1996 under the re-authorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA)
- Funded as 5-year cooperative agreements by the Indian Health Service (IHS) along with other federal agencies (CDC, NIH, OMH)



Background

- 12 TECs nationwide, generally under the umbrella of Indian Health Board or Tribal Health Consortium



Figure 1. Location of Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TEC). https://www.ihs.gov/epi/index.cfm?module=epi_tec_tecs

Background

- Mission of TECs is to serve public health data needs
 - Collection and analysis of health surveillance data
 - Maintenance of patient registries
 - Implementation and evaluation of public health interventions and public awareness campaigns
 - Mobilization of response to public health emergencies
 - Prioritization of public health status objectives
 - Generation of recommendations for targeting and/or improving health care services



Background

- TECs have infrastructure to conduct research
 - Community partnerships
 - Avenues for gathering stakeholder perspectives
 - Access to local health data

- Research has not been a primary function
 - Mission focuses on serving local public health data needs
 - TECs vary in availability and expertise of staff to conduct research
 - Some TECs have collaborated on NIH-funded research



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Description of Initiative

A trans-NIH initiative to support collaborative research between TECs and external investigators, with a particular emphasis on areas where there are significant gaps in data and knowledge for AI/AN populations.

- Partnerships to support community responsive, scientifically rigorous projects with findings disseminated to local stakeholders, IHS, and the scientific community
- Applicant organization may be TEC organization or institution of external researchers
- Projects may be observational or intervention studies but must use data that are/have been collected by the TEC
- Pooling or comparison of data across TECs strongly encouraged



Description of Initiative

Examples of potential projects:

- Projects to understand or prevent accidental deaths, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, suicide, or other causes of premature mortality in AI/AN populations
- Projects to understand similarities and differences in health risks, protective factors, and health outcomes within or across TEC catchment areas
- Projects to understand similarities and differences in health outcomes in AI/AN compared to non AI/AN populations living within the same geographic region
- Rigorous evaluation of TEC-led public health interventions or health awareness campaigns
- Projects to develop and test methods for research with small populations to better understand AI/AN health



Description of Initiative

Potential for building capacity:

- Opportunities for TEC personnel to gain experience preparing NIH grant applications and conducting NIH-funded research
- Engagement of community stakeholders in research process
- Generation of baseline or preliminary data for future research



Description of Initiative

Collaboration and input:

- Consultation with IHS and NIH Tribal Health Research Office
- Listening session with TEC Directors
- NIDA, NIEHS, NHLBI, NCI, NIAAA have expressed interest in participating
- Concept approved by NIMHD Advisory Council Feb 2017

