

Social Wellness in Challenging Times

SOCIAL WELLNESS RESOURCES

The National Institutes of Health created a general Social Wellness Toolkit with six strategies, including action item checklists, on how to improve your social health

(<https://www.nih.gov/health-information/social-wellness-toolkit>):

- Make connections
- Take care of yourself while caring for others
- Get active together
- Bond with your kids
- Build healthy relationships
- Shape your family's habits

Check out resources from the National American Indian and Alaska Native Addiction, Mental Health, and Prevention TTCs on page 2.

Social wellness is the ability to form healthy relationships with oneself and others, as well as fostering positive connections with friends, family, and the community. As the holiday season approaches, it can be a challenge on several levels for some individuals to maintain their social wellness. This is particularly true of Native individuals, as many people who observe Thanksgiving and Christmas do not realize the harmful truth of how these holidays came to be celebrated on Turtle Island. The historical trauma of colonization, combined with the “normal” stress of the holiday season, can be overwhelming. This fact sheet summarizes information over social wellness and provides resources for Native peoples to improve their social wellness while staying connected to their culture and heritage.

WHY IS SOCIAL WELLNESS IMPORTANT?

Social wellness revolves around the concept of nurturing relationships and oneself. Multiple studies have shown that strong, positive relationships are protective for both mental and physical health because they foster critical social support systems that in turn have a positive impact on physical wellbeing. Research also shows that the health risks from feeling and being isolated are comparable to the health risks associated with obesity, blood pressure, and cigarette smoking.

In American Indian/Alaska Native communities, traditional ways of life that protect and promote good mental health are passed on through generations. Each community has its own strengths and cultural practices, and it is important for mental health that Indigenous people honor where they came from, stay knowledgeable on language and traditions, and are committed to protect the land and people. Activities that improve social wellness can range from taking a break from electronic devices, to reading a book, or even going out and getting exercise. To enhance social wellness in Native communities, a focus on culture and community has been shown to be most beneficial.

National AI/AN ATTC Resources

Virtual Native Talking Circles

On the second Monday of every month in 2022, the National AI/AN ATTC hosts Virtual Native Talking Circles: Staying Connected in Challenging Times. These virtual meetings are facilitated by a Native guest and focus on concerns about yourself, your family, your work, and/or your tribal community. [Register here.](#)

Cultivating Connections in These Changing Times: Keeping the Fire

This 3-part series hosts a diverse panel of Native Americans to address both personal and collective barriers to living healthier. The panel explores ways to navigate a linear colonial system in a good way while maintaining balance and shares teachings on helping both ourselves and Native people.

[Register here.](#)

Care & Share for Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery

This is an expanded version of the popular TOR Care & Share sessions that began in early 2020, now open to all prevention, treatment, and recovery professionals working with Native populations. This session is a guided discussion for participants to share their expertise, unique tribal and community practices, and offer peer-to-peer support for others serving Native people and tribal communities. Discussion topics are determined by registration responses.

[Register here.](#)

National AI/AN MHTTC Resources

Cultural Elements of Native Mental Health with a Focus on Rural Issues

In collaboration with the Northwest MHTTC, this webinar offered an overview of disparities in mental health for Native populations, especially in rural areas, and offered cultural elements for improved rural mental health.

[Watch the recording here.](#)

Native Medicine: Cultivating Mental Health Resilience and Deep-Rooted Vitality for AI/AN Youth

This series shared techniques to generate emotional stability even in uncertain or stormy times.

[Watch the first session here.](#)

Newsletter: Addressing Suicide in Native Communities

This issue of Mental Health in Our Native Communities focuses on tools and resources to provide culturally informed suicide prevention services, especially for Native youth and young adults. [Download the newsletter here.](#)

National AI/AN PTTC Resources

"Honoring Our Sacred Heritage" posters

This customizable poster series emphasizes cultural strengths in drug use prevention with images and text that remind viewers to connect with their culture and heritage.

[Download the posters here.](#)

Newsletter: Trauma-informed Prevention Strategies

This issue of Prevention in Our Native Communities examines how traumatic experiences can lead to long-term consequences of substance use and/or mental health disorders.

[Download the newsletter here.](#)

References

Dang, K. (2021, July). Practicing social wellness. University of Washington. <https://hr.uw.edu/cfd/2021/07/20/socialwellness/>

First Nations Health Authority. (n.d.) First nations perspective on health and wellness. <https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-for-first-nations/first-nations-perspective-onhealth-and-wellness>

University of Minnesota. (n.d.). July is social wellness month. Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing. <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/july-social-wellness-month>

Other Resources for Social Wellness

National Museum of the American Indian

The National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution offers online educational opportunities to educators and students on Native American history and cultures through their Native Knowledge 360° (NK360°) program. NK360° provides virtual student programs, teacher trainings, and other educational materials that incorporate Native narratives, histories, and accurate information to enlighten teaching and learning about Native America. <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/about/native-knowledge-360>

Community Involvement

If your community has loosened social distancing restrictions, you may be able to get involved with or volunteer at any community events. Often, communities hold events, classes, or group activities to help get community members involved. Examples include participating in a community garden, attending language classes, learning how to create Indigenous art, or learning about different cultures. By spending time with people who have similar interests/passions, you can improve your overall mental, physical, and emotional health.

