



# American Indian Commercial Tobacco Prevention

## FACTS

- Smoking remains a major risk factor for two leading causes of death among Montana American Indians; cancer and heart disease. <sup>1</sup> Since 1995 there has been a significant drop in youth conventional cigarette use; reducing future health cost and disease. <sup>2</sup>
- And almost 7 out of 10 American Indian youth **HAVE NOT** used any form of commercial tobacco within the past 30 days. <sup>2</sup>
- Now 87% of American Indian High School Youth<sup>2</sup> and 58% of American Indian Adults<sup>3</sup> **DO NOT** currently smoke cigarettes.
- More than **HALF** of the 42% of American Indian adult current smokers have **tried to quit** within the past year. <sup>3</sup>
- 71% of American Indian women in Montana **DO NOT** smoke while pregnant; <sup>4</sup> protecting their babies from low-birth rate and SIDS.
- 87% of American Indian males **DO NOT** use smokeless tobacco; <sup>3</sup> decreasing their risk of mouth cancer and heart disease.

*“Honoring the traditional way of life means saying, ‘Thank you’ to Creator. Traditional tobacco is offered to the earth for survival of the people and as a gift of honor to show respect for good deeds. Our children learn what is modeled in the home.”*

Diana Bird, Blackfeet Elder



### Building Community by Sharing Facts & Dispelling Myths in:

- 8 Tribal Communities
- 2 Urban Indian Health Centers

### Reducing Youth Initiation through:

- Teaching Cultural Practices and Native Games
- Hosting Summer Camps and Girl Empowerment Safe Areas
- Partnering with Indian Education for All and Youth Councils
- Offering School Presentations and Afterschool Activities

### Providing Commercial Tobacco Cessation Options:

- American Indian Commercial Tobacco Quit Coaches, 1.855.372.0037
- Quit Coaches for Pregnant and Post-Partum Women, 1.800.QUIT.NOW
- My Life, My Quit Youth Tobacco Quit Help. Text 1.855.891.9989

### Supporting Smokefree Policies & Clean Indoor Air for Tribal Members at:

- All Tribal Administrative Offices
- All Montana Tribal Colleges
- All Reservation Public Schools
- Tribal Housing Authorities and Tribal Parks
- Commercial Tobacco-Free Events

## CONTACT

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## REALITIES

- Indigenous People also refer to themselves as American Indian/Alaskan Native/ Indigenous/Indian/Native
- All American Indians, Alaskan Natives, first nations tribes have some similar but very different identities and beliefs. For example, the word **tobacco** is a blanket word for many of the different tribal blends and plants used for **tobacco**
- Most Montana Tribes use a variety of indigenous plants for their sacred and medicinal uses.
- Not every American Indian today is an enrolled member of their tribe
- Every American Indian, enrolled or non-enrolled members, consider themselves to be a citizen of their Tribe and/or Tribes.

## WORDS FROM THE FIELD:

*“Our Culture is unique, but our addiction is not. For too long, Big Tobacco has exploited our people, manipulated our practices and profited from our addictions.”* Rick Wolfname, Northern Cheyenne

*“Many American Indian tribal nations and Indian people use tobacco or herbal blends referred to as tobacco for ceremonial purposes. Not all tribes may use tobacco in the same way but, in general, it is used for ceremony, prayers and healing.”*

Mike Jetty, Lakota

*“When our practices were outlawed, picking tobacco in certain territories was restricted. The use of commercial tobacco made its way into the lives and ceremonies that way. Today, it is still prevalent but is used slightly different: used as an offering with prayer (not smoked), used as part of a mixture in the ceremonial pipe and not inhaled but sent back out of the mouth with prayers. Traditional Tobacco is treated with respect and the intent is far from abuse.”*

Diana Bigby, Nakoda

*“In my 22 years of working in commercial tobacco prevention, it still shocks me when corporate companies exploit American Indians. To sell their deadly products American Spirit states: ‘If Native Americans can overlook, or at least tolerate, the unsolicited connection to their culture that these branding schemes inaccurately imply, techniques such as these are likely to increase sales’.”*

Charleena Penama, Salish

*“American Indians do not get free stuff! There are 560 tribal governments recognized by the United States. These tribal governments have agreements with the federal government. This Doctrine of Trust Responsibility details services which may include accessing medicinal plants for traditional tobacco as part of the treaty agreements.”*

Dana Kingfisher, Blackfeet

## SOURCES

1. Montana Office of Vital Statistics, 2016, [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr67/nvsr67\\_06.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr67/nvsr67_06.pdf)
2. Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019.
3. Montana Behavioral Health Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2019.
4. Montana Birth Certificate Data, 2018.

## SIDENOTE

It’s important to recognize and dispel myths because their continuation only creates a static image of a community that is anything but uniform. The indigenous community within the U.S. is incredibly complex, with its own political structure in relation to the federal and state governments, as well as varied culturally. [Chelsea Hawkins](https://www.mic.com/articles/55557/3-myths-about-native-americans-that-need-to-be-put-to-rest), July 23, 2013, <https://www.mic.com/articles/55557/3-myths-about-native-americans-that-need-to-be-put-to-rest>