

Opioid Response Network Increases Support for American Indian and Alaskan Native Communities

American Indians and Alaskan Natives (AI/AN) are second only to whites in the rate of opioid-related mortality with 8/100,000 versus 12/100,000 deaths respectively. To help address this crisis, the *Opioid Response Network (ORN)* has received supplemental funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to expand its technical assistance services focusing on tribal communities. *ORN* is currently:

- Vetting culturally appropriate opioid use disorder resource materials;
- Developing a process for recruiting and vetting tribal prevention, treatment and recovery providers with tribal community experience;
- Recommending processes for integrating tribal technical assistance requests into the overarching *ORN* technical assistance process; and
- Coordinating with the AI/AN Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network at the University of Iowa.

“Healthcare programs that serve AI/AN individuals and families do best when they are aware and understanding of cultural factors at play in AI/AN communities. These communities have unique needs, unique strengths, and face unique barriers that need to be considered when working toward health equity. *ORN* is dedicated to meeting locally identified needs, and support is provided by local consultants,” said Kamilla Venner, PhD (Athabascan tribe), *ORN* Technical Assistance Provider and AI/AN Co-Lead.

Examples of the technical assistance *ORN* provides in AI/AN communities include helping implement medication assisted treatment programs for pregnant and postpartum patients; supporting the creation of taskforces that address opioid use disorder; mentorship for newly waived practitioners; and providing prevention and recovery education in substance use disorder.

ORN is also travelling to AI/AN specific healthcare conferences, summits and meetings across the country to explain how *ORN* can help through technical assistance and to underscore that activities are free, locally driven and support is provided by local experts. In May, *ORN* attended the National Indian Health Board’s 2019 Tribal Public Health Summit in Albuquerque, New Mexico (see photo). In August, *ORN* will be exhibiting at the Association of American Indian Physicians Annual Meeting and Health Conference as part of “Shoring Up Native American Health.” Stay tuned for an update.

“Strategic planning sessions at the National Indian Health Board summit, like the National Opioid Response Planning session, help to guide *ORN*’s support for AI/AN communities. At this summit it was also a pleasure to hear U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams speak about better health through better partnerships. This motto is at the core of *ORN*’s work,” said *ORN* Core Team consultant, Holly Echo-Hawk. “The broad range of expertise offered through the *ORN* network and its ability to listen to local tribal perspectives on what’s needed and how best to provide it, combined with an assembled group of vetted tribal prevention, treatment, and recovery consultants, is a combination that can contribute to lasting, local change.”



ORN’s Caroline Gray, MSW; Holly Echo-Hawk, MSc; and Kamilla Venner, PhD

