

National Tribal Tobacco Prevention Network-Tribal Leaders' Tobacco Policy Summit-Draft Position Statement

Goal: Facilitate the reduction of commercial tobacco use among American Indians and Alaska Natives through the development, adoption, and implementation of tribally specific tobacco policies.

Background:

Tobacco has an important role in traditional American Indian life, and for many tribes throughout North America, the use of traditional tobacco plants for spiritual, ceremonial, and medicinal purposes goes back thousands of years. Many of our native nations have traditional stories explaining how tobacco was introduced to their communities, many of which emphasized the sacred properties of the plant. The teachings were clear; if used properly, tobacco had the power to heal and help; if used improperly; tobacco would hurt and cause harm.

Today, the use of tobacco has changed dramatically from those original purposes and for many of our communities, commercial tobacco use among our native communities is at epidemic proportions, with 34% of our native adults being smokers, the highest among all racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. A harsh reality, commercial tobacco use is devastating our communities, and is the main cause of 2 out of every 5 deaths in Indian Country, and costing the Indian Health Service alone, \$200 million per year to treat smoking-related illnesses.

Also, the facts are clear and documented! There is no safe levels of exposure to secondhand smoke, which contains more than 4000 chemicals, 500 of which are poisonous, and at least 43 are known to cause cancer! As a result, breathing in secondhand smoke causes heart disease, lung cancer, and is a known cause for sudden infant death syndrome.

In response, the National Tribal Tobacco Prevention Network, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and an expanding alliance of tobacco prevention and education advocates, tribal leaders, community health specialists, and agency stakeholders, committed to improving the wellness of American Indian and Alaska Native people by working to reduce commercial tobacco use, convened in Bloomington, MN on August 19-21 2007 to discuss, strategize, and develop a national action-oriented response to this issue.

Given the fact the commercial tobacco use is a well-documented cause of death and disability, the most common cause of lung cancer and the single most preventable cause of premature death in Indian Country, the National Tribal Tobacco Prevention Network supports a nation-wide effort that includes youth prevention, reduction of exposure to secondhand smoke, cessation, eliminating the use of native imagery, and respects the ceremonial use of traditional tobacco.

We strongly urge all native people, especially those with policy making authority and elected tribal government leaders to support and adopt the following:

Recommendations:

Provide tobacco education for tribal leaders (especially council and department leaders within the tribe)
Foster a sense of community among all native organizations
Develop an educational campaign to inform Non-Native communities
Develop a plan to encourage tribal leaders to attend the next summit
Create a national plan-with health reps from NCAI, IHS
Provide education about effective lobbying at both tribal level and state levels
Offer status reports of successful passage of tribal tobacco policies
Share those tobacco policies
Secure youth involvement to attend events that impact their health
Involve the media-tribal newspapers
Include the definition of Sacred Tobacco and Commercial Tobacco
Encourage growth of original tobacco seeds/plants and make it a national effort
Encourage education: of Sacred vs. Commercial, harmful effects, alternative healthy & spiritual activities for youth
Commercial free reservation/grounds/casinos (signage)
Encourage Spiritual practice with tobacco
Compare health effects vs. funding
Evaluate roles of smoke shops funding drug addiction & mental health programs
Tribal leaders advocate for tobacco funding from federal gov't
Evaluation of MSA funding into tribal communities
Creation of a national tobacco youth tribal council/network
Tie studies of economic impact of smoke-free policies to goals of NTPN
Advance the health and well being of AI/AN populations
Demonstrate a commitment to finding funding and resources through taxes, formula (prevalence studies) etc.
Study healthcare costs as compared to the \$\$ tobacco industry is giving to tribes
Support efforts to mobilize tribal members from the bottom-up
Utilizing the cultural/spiritual context of tobacco in our messaging
Look at the other aspects of addiction (and its costs)
Promote the use of Holistic medicine
Promote and bring youth into the influencing positive outcomes in our communities
Return to our communities as "advocates" for smoke free environments
Look to NTPN as our "clearinghouse for info & locating funding resources
Continue communication back to this group on these recommendations
Amend NCAI ABQ-03-05 (existing resolution) to include our recommendations (stream line the process)
Reaffirm tobacco as Sacred, recognizing differences in tribal tobacco blends
Define commercial vs. traditional tobacco
Recognize medicinal and spiritual purposes of traditional tobacco
Have role models who practice using tobacco in a traditional way who do not use commercial tobacco to ensure that we have our elders for years to come
Educate tobacco effects to health issues for all ages

Principles:

RESPECT-for the original purposes
COMPASSION-*empathy for the addicted*
VISION-to see a healthy Native community
COURAGE-to make the right decisions (7generations)
ACTION-to initiate behavior and attitude change
HUMILITY-asking for guidance w/o fear
HOPE-belief that the future will be positive
COMPASSION-*empathy for the addicted*
TRUTH-seek, know the facts behind the industry
GENEROSITY-Share the knowledge