

IIMHL Leadership Briefing LVI

Beyond COVID-19: Innovative Indigenous Approaches to the Pandemic

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Introduction

“The combination of pandemics and stigma is an old story for Indigenous people. But the pain is always new. And the ill effects can last for generations unless we all, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, support each other to take positive healing action. The aim is that everyone should feel safe and supported in their communities”¹.

This Briefing shares work from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the US. In Aotearoa, consolidating knowledge for the betterment of the people has been a long-standing practice for generation upon generation. Research in Australia of social service sectors showed results that are intended to help mitigate the far-reaching social and economic impacts of COVID19, prepare child and family services and education and care systems for future crises. Similarly in Canada, indigenous governance and self-determination have led to innovative ways of assisting with services.

Aotearoa

Te Rau Ora: Ko Tōku Ara Rā COVID-19 2020

In partnership with Whakaue Research, Te Rau Ora gathered the kōrero of Māori (Indigenous people of Aotearoa, New Zealand) leaders and communities throughout Aotearoa about their experiences and responses to COVID-19.

The investigation into COVID-19 showed that approaches for Indigenous people including Māori have been limited and/or inconsistent. For these reasons it is important to capture the following challenges and particularly the success for Māori as presented over the past four months.

Ko tōku ara rā, Aotearoa COVID-19 2020 encompasses the breadth and depth of the spread of contributions made by nine rohe (regions) of te Ao Māori (Māori world), Aotearoa (New Zealand).

¹ https://www.nccih.ca/485/NCCIH_in_the_News.nccih?id=464

The call from the government of 'we are all in this together' absolutely resonated with many Māori who responded to a system which could have been viewed as punitive: *the Lockdown*. But it was taken by Māori as meaning the cultural mobilisation of the life enhancing process of RĀHUI - protect who we are as Māori and our connections.

https://terauora.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ko_toku_ara_ra_18_11_20_FINAL_Interactive.pdf

Australia

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC): COVID-19 Ongoing Impacts Survey Report January 2021

This report highlights how COVID-19 is affecting the wellbeing and service needs of Indigenous children and families. An online survey provides highlights of 243 child and family sector organisations working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, which ran in late 2020.

The survey found:

- Children's wellbeing has been affected, especially due to disruption of connection to culture and family
- The technology divide continues, with a significant number of families having no internet or phone connection
- Though child care attendance decreased in most centres, it increased in some places, most likely due to temporary easing of eligibility requirements and funding.

The survey also reveals the supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families need for both short and long-term recovery from the pandemic. This report includes recommendations that SNAICC has previously provided to governments throughout the pandemic, the importance of which has been reinforced by the survey findings.

The identified supports are intended to help mitigate the far-reaching social and economic impacts of COVID19, prepare child and family services and education and care systems for future crises, and contribute to the broader goal of Closing the Gap in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

https://mcusercontent.com/dc8fd3501b27fd7791e83830f/files/3e75505c-1f82-4c36-a130-b88c21a1c844/SNAICC_COVID_19_ONGOING_IMPACTS_SURVEY_REPORT.pdf?mc_cid=ab999f485b&mc_eid=5394594581

Canada

National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH): Virtual Series on First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and COVID-19

January/February 2021

In early 2021, the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH) presented a four-part virtual series looking at the experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and communities with COVID-19.

Held over four Wednesdays in January (13, 20, and 27) and on February 3, 2021, the series explored themes including: Indigenous governance and self-determination in planning and responding to COVID-19; socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples; data collection on COVID-19 cases in First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations and communities; and innovative public health messaging on COVID-19 and Indigenous Peoples.

The links below explore the resources from the virtual series, including video recordings, presentations, programs as well as detailed descriptions for each of the *sessions*.

- *SESSION 1* — Indigenous governance and self-determination in planning and responding to COVID-19
- *SESSION 2* — Socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations
- *SESSION 3* — Data collection on COVID-19 cases in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations and communities
- *SESSION 4* — Innovative public health messaging on COVID-19 and Indigenous Peoples

https://www.nccih.ca/485/NCCIH_in_the_News.nccih?id=459

US

Commonwealth Fund: Learning from Pandemic Responses across Indian Country

September 2020

“Even as they experienced some of the highest infection rates in the country, American Indian communities have managed to slow the spread of COVID-19.”

The rapid spread of the coronavirus among the Navajos, Mississippi Choctaw, and some other American Indian communities can be attributed to a variety of factors, not the least of which is the federal government’s centuries-long [failure to honor treaty agreements](#) with American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, which has led to underfunding of medical services on reservations and an underinvestment in basic utilities, such as water and electricity, as well as in housing, telecommunications, and roadways. In addition, many Navajo and Mississippi Choctaw families live in

multigenerational homes, making it easy for infection to spread among young and old. And in the Navajo Nation, one-third of households lack running water, and tribal members often rely on one another for transportation, increasing the challenges surrounding social distancing. American Indians and Alaska Natives also have [higher rates of diabetes and obesity](#) than other groups, which may place them at greater risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19.

In recent months, the Navajos, Mississippi Choctaw, and other American Indian communities have managed to slow the spread of the coronavirus while meeting the medical and social needs of community members. In this issue of *Transforming Care*, we look at what's worked to contain the virus and mitigate its impacts, focusing on the efforts of providers in Indian Health Service (IHS) medical facilities, facilities run by tribes, and in Urban Indian Health Programs. The solutions range from communitywide testing "blitzes" and mobile health services to improvised shelters for quarantining and outreach to meet people's basic needs. These examples offer lessons for the rest of the country as we respond to the health and social shocks of COVID-19 and point to policies that could strengthen American Indian communities for the long run.

Lessons that are emerging from providers' creative responses could be used to strengthen American Indian health care services for the long term.

To have the most impact, federal, state, and tribal pandemic responses should be aligned.

Funding for the Indian Health Service should be enhanced to reflect actual needs.

Given that many American Indians live in poverty, expanding Medicaid could make a substantial difference in expanding their access to care.

Filling workforce gaps among American Indian health care providers will require a multifaceted approach.

<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/2020/sep/learning-pandemic-responses-across-indian-country>