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The National Congress of American Indians Calls for More Attention to COVID-19 Impacts to Indian Country

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The National Congress of American Indians Calls for More Attention to COVID-19 Impacts in Indian Country

In the wake of the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic, tribal nations – comprised of some of the most vulnerable communities in the United States – have been left out of the conversation. As the COVID-19 pandemic has now reached all 50 states, tribal governments also face heightened challenges to protect their citizens, and have inadequate federal funding and resources to do so.

“We cannot ignore the elevated risks faced by Indian Country from this virus,” said NCAI CEO Kevin Allis. “The federal government’s chronic underfunding of its treaty and trust responsibilities to American Indians and Alaska Natives must end – lives are at risk.”

American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) experience higher rates of the underlying medical conditions that increase the risk of severe illness and death caused by COVID-19 as compared to the general U.S. population. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), those at highest risk for complications associated with COVID-19 are the elderly (age 60+) and those with chronic diseases or who are immunocompromised, which include:

- Heart disease
- Lung disease including asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Endocrine disorders such as diabetes
- Chronic kidney disease

- Chronic liver disease
- Compromised immune system; taking immunosuppression medications

Compounding this risk is the significantly higher rates of overcrowded housing in Indian Country, which increases the risk of coronavirus transmission and makes the recommended social distancing strategy unfeasible in many tribal homes and communities.

According to a 2017 report on the Housing Needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives in Tribal Areas:

- 16 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native households in tribal areas are overcrowded compared to 2 percent for the United States.
- Among the 213 largest tribal areas, the quarter with the highest levels of overcrowding—all more than 18 percent— was mostly in the poorest regions—the Plains, Arizona/New Mexico, and Alaska.

“The appearance of COVID-19 within any American Indian or Alaska Native Reservation or community could be a recipe for disaster. Despite this, Indian Country has been left out of the national conversation on critical response and recovery efforts. More attention must be given to the unprecedented risk and harm tribal communities now face. NCAI is committed to discussing needs with leaders and media to ensure that Indian Country’s needs do not go unmet,” stated Allis.

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About the National Congress of American Indians:
Founded in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians is the oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization in the country. NCAI advocates on behalf of tribal governments and communities, promoting strong tribal-federal government-to-government policies, and promoting a better understanding among the general public regarding American Indian and Alaska Native governments, people and rights. For more information, visit www.ncai.org (<http://www.ncai.org>).

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RT @NCAIPRC: CDC now has data on AI/AN COVID-19 Cases by Age. All AI/ANs are at risk. How to protect yourself: <https://t.co/7AThBe7S4f>
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