

# Tribally Driven Research: Highlights from the Native American Research Centers for Health (NARCH) Program

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# Outline

- Background
- Summary of Accomplishments
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- Recommendations

# Background

- NARCH began in 2000 as a collaboration between NIH and IHS to support Tribally driven research
- Purpose: Reduce health disparities, support health research projects prioritized by tribal communities, and enhance health research partnerships and reduce distrust of research by AI/AN communities while developing a cadre of AI/AN scientists and health research professionals.
- Study Strength & Resilience Factors that Reduce Disparities
- Increase AI/AN and Academia Health Research Partnerships
- Support Training/Development of AI/AN Health Scientists

# Background

- Currently, 20 NARCHs are funded by 14 NIH I/Cs, including NIEHS, NIGMS, NCI, and NIDA
- Grants are administered by IHS
- NARCHs are engaged in a wide range of Tribally driven research projects
- Total funding is currently ~ \$10 M annually
- Centers are funded for 4 years, with alternating cycles

# Summary of Accomplishments

- Preliminary results from NARCH evaluation (n=12)
  - 58% of the Principal Investigators were members of federally recognized Tribes and employed by Tribal organizations
  - Almost half (48%) of NARCHs were engaged in training and education for Native health research students, scientists, and community members
  - 80% of External Advisory Committees were Tribal members

# Summary of Accomplishments

- Total number of individuals affiliated with NARCHs ~640 individuals (89% were Tribal members)
- Resulted in 12 book chapters, over 170 peer-reviewed publications and over 280 posters and presentations at professional conferences
- About 25% of the journal article authors were Tribal members; only 5% of first authors were Tribal members

# Summary of Accomplishments

- Feedback received from NARCH PIs and PDs:
  - Unstable and insufficient funding
  - Lack of Native researchers or cultural competency of non-Native researchers doing NIH grant reviews
  - Lack of grant infrastructure in Tribal communities to successfully compete for NIH grants
  - Need for more technical assistance, i.e., site visits, evaluation, training

# Reflection

- Reflection on the past two days
  - Tribal communities need to plan, design, conduct, and interpret research; and that research needs to benefit the people
  - Traditional knowledge is required to understand ecological and other research in Native communities
  - Interdependence of ecological, social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of health must be considered
  - Spirituality is at the center of dis-ease prevention, treatment, and aftercare, e.g., importance of ceremony, sense of self and place

# Reflection

- Traditional knowledge is science
  - Based on observational data validated over millennia
- Complex systems
  - ITK/TEK - Indigenous wisdom is needed to understand complex systems

# Recommendations

- Expand and stabilize funding for the NARCH program; make room for grant applications that include aspects of traditional knowledge; make the grant process more applicant-friendly
- Coordinate federal research activities to better address research needs in Native nations , including developing of research objectives/portfolios involving multiple disciplines
- Use ITK/TEK principles to guide and inform strategic planning
- Establish training programs and fellowships that promote study and evaluation of ITK/TEK
- Increase funding for research into protective factors/resilience more generally, and evaluate current promising practices that incorporate ITK and cultural practices
- Support and recognize Tribal IRBs to help empower Tribal control of research