

Culture Matters to the Health and Resilience of Colonial Era Native American Tribes



Community Leading the Way

The University of Texas at Austin worked with the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware to understand the health status and needs of Colonial Era Native American Tribes in the Delmarva region along the East Coast.

A Health Council was formed with members from each tribal community in the region that became the leaders, co-decision makers, and community voice for the project.



What Did This Research Reveal?

The most common chronic health conditions in these tribal communities are diabetes and coronary artery disease, and being uninsured means many do not seek health services.

At the same time, cultural knowledge, beliefs, values, and practices enhanced their resilience.

As a result of colonization, a complex history of displacement, and federal policies, **these tribal communities are not federally recognized and thus ineligible for federal health services provided to other tribes**. Before this project, health data had not been collected among these communities, making it difficult to develop health promotion, prevention, and care programs.

By using a tribal-specific Native American Health Survey based on an established U.S. survey, the study also facilitates comparisons with national data.



Why Do These Findings Matter?

The new data fill a critical gap in understanding the health status and experiences of community members facing chronic disease, premature mortality, and diminished quality of life.

These challenges are shaped by health determinants operating at individual, community, and systemic levels. Addressing these modifiable determinants presents an opportunity to reduce health disparities.





How the Research is Shaping the Future

The Health Council remains active and is using the findings to guide initiatives and priorities. The Council is also exploring expanding the survey to continue collecting health data for ongoing monitoring.

The findings reinforced the idea for developing a Cultural and Environmental Center that the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware has proposed. **The center would serve as a health resource hub: a repository of cultural knowledge, beliefs, values, and practices and their contribution to health, resilience, and environmental health.**



I learned the traditional cultural healing knowledge from the grandmothers.”

— *Lenape community member*

Fostering Continued Connection and Resilience

There is a story to the survival of these communities that is based in ancestral and cultural knowledge, which needs to be brought out for the next generations—connecting the past, what is present, and what is needed for the future.



Learn More

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