

WE ARE THE FUTURE

A NATIVE YOUTH NARRATIVE



CENTER FOR NATIVE
AMERICAN YOUTH
AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

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WE ARE THE FUTURE

A NATIVE YOUTH NARRATIVE.

Center for Native American Youth, "We are the Future: A Native Youth Narrative." We are the Future, Washington, DC Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, May 2021.



The inspiration from my art comes from a young boy from the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe of North Carolina, who I frequently dance with in the powwow circuit. He is a grass dancer and watching him dance is truly medicine. I see the love and passion that he invokes with every foot step. Each honor beat is as if he is hugging Mother Earth. I also choose To do my own rendition of the medicine wheel which is displayed in the background with the colors in the same order as my tribal seal of the Lumbee people.

Raven Dial-Stanley, 22
Lumbee Tribe

ABOUT CNAY

THE CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH

The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) at the Aspen Institute is a national education and advocacy organization that works alongside Native youth—ages 24 and under—on reservations, rural, villages and urban spaces across the country to improve their health, safety, and overall wellbeing. All Native youth deserve to lead full and healthy lives, have equal access to opportunity, draw strength from Native culture, and inspire one another. At CNAY, this is achieved through empowerment and culturally competent methodologies including leadership, youth-led policy agenda, and youth-led narrative. By supporting youth-led and community driven initiatives, CNAY continues to build a network of Native youth leaders. Through hands-on trainings and technical assistance, Generation Indigenous, CNAY Youth Advisory Board, Champions for Change, and other platforms, CNAY continues to evaluate and develop our programming through Indigenous methodology.



CENTER FOR NATIVE
AMERICAN YOUTH
AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, D.C. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. In addition to the Washington, DC office, The Institute has campuses in Aspen Colorado (Ute territory) and New York (Munsee Lenapee). The Aspen Institute and its international partners promote the creation of a free, just, and equitable society in a nonpartisan and nonideological setting through seminars, policy programs, conferences, and leadership development initiatives.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Indigenous Futures Survey was a collective effort with project partners: the Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, Native Organizers Alliance, and IllumiNative. The research was led by Dr. Stephanie Fryberg (Tulalip), University of Michigan; Dr. Arianne Eason, University of California Berkley; J. Doris Dai, University of Washington; Julisa Lopez (Amah Mutsun) University of Michigan; Jamie Yellowtail (Northern Cheyenne and Crow), University of Michigan; Ariana Munoz-Salgado, University of Michigan; and Emma Ward-Griffin, University of California Berkley.

Our collective work was possible with support from tribal communities, grassroots organizations, urban Indian centers, colleges, and youth. As a result, the Indigenous Futures Survey (IFS) is the largest research project ever conducted in Indian Country with participation from over 6,400 Native peoples from across the country, representing 401 tribes.

The report, *We Are The Future: A Native Youth Narrative*, was made possible with generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation Inc., and we thank them for their support; however, the finding and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundation.

The Center for Native American Youth would like to thank youth leaders **Isabel Coronado, Sam Schimmel, Autumn Adams, Christie Wildcat, Shavaughna Underwood, Mikah Carlos, and Owen Oliver**. A special thank you to the dedicated CNAY team for their guidance and direction including: Nikki Pitre, Dr. Billie Jo Kipp, Lia LaCour, Cheyenne Brady, Jennifer Peacock, Kendra Becenti, and Kyra Antone.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



This report was written on the traditional territories of:
Nacotchtank (Anacostans) & Piscataway
Cowlitz
Tlingit
Mandan Hidatsa & Arikara
Coast Salish, Stillaguamish, Duwamish, Muckleshoot & Suquamish

Camela M.

FORWARD

**WE AREN'T SOMETHING ELSE,
WE ARE BEAUTIFUL, WE ARE VIBRANT,
WE ARE THE FUTURE.**

Written by Owen Oliver

During the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing effects that have rippled our tribal and urban populations, we've been huddling around the sense of belonging through community. The exact definition of community in Indian Country doesn't exist, as the meaning of community differs throughout the territories, languages, and knowledge systems that span across our beautiful lands. The important foundational aspects of community though, are relations, values, reciprocity, and accountability. These four aspects of community are what we've always learned to do to uplift each other with and guide our visions for the future. However, with tackling the effects of colonization, our ancestors have had to limit their interactions with these aspects of community to survive. Today as we gained footing in society, we've begun to regain our own understanding of these foundational aspects of community. We've begun cultivating the agency to qualitatively and quantitatively share them as we take sovereign ownership of the data we produce.

The importance of data isn't new. Indigenous communities all around the world have had data intertwined with the knowledge systems that have supported them and their communities since time immemorial. Data to know when to plant and harvest, data to know how to guide a canoe home after a rough journey at sea, data to make the most energy efficient adobe homes in the southwest, and data to stitch together a winter count blanket. The importance of data has been at an extreme though because it's becoming more widely accessible to those who wish to use it against us, either for profit or for the exploitation of our people.

To be a stronger collective, it's up to our tribal communities to come together and share data with one another. To push those tribal communities to follow through, it's up to our visionaries of the future, our youth. Their generation has seen grassroots movements be successful and they are the ones who've learned from the giants who've come before them. Youth lead the charge in data management because they've grown up with having to express themselves through social media and now to having to attend virtual graduations amongst their peers. As we consult with tribal communities we need to consult with tribal youth. From just our initial findings from the 2020 Indigenous Future Survey we found that youth prioritized improving mental health, addressing violence against our kin, preserving Indigenous languages, and caring for tribal elders. These prioritizations may be heard across the generations, but youth have the answers they want to use to address these problems. And it's beyond time that we start listening to them. Additionally, by publicizing this information and data, we are extending our hands to build bridges with our own narratives as the foundation.

Once Native youth are ready to use data that's from and for our people, transformative justice will continue to power our people into the continuation of the seventh generation.

Owen Oliver
Quinault / Isleta Pueblo
Secretary, CNAY Youth Advisory Board
2020/2021 Champion for Change



INTRODUCTION

Launched in the summer of 2020, the Indigenous Futures Survey (IFS) was a first of its kind opportunity for Indigenous people to voice their beliefs, priorities, and experiences through a national survey. Questions asked in the survey focused on civic engagement, COVID-19, hopes for the future and more (See *From Protests, To the Ballot Box, And Beyond: Building Indigenous Power*). A total of 6,460 Indigenous people completed the survey with representation in all 50 states.

The survey was launched in June 2020 at the height of racial unrest and Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis Police. At the time the survey was launched, COVID-19 infection rates were disproportionately affecting Native communities at rates higher than most places in the United States. For example, during the month of June, the Navajo Nation reported the highest infection rate in the country which was greater than New York state, the worst-hit state at the time and was greater than Wuhan, China at the height of the outbreak (1).

The survey was especially significant because it captured a moment that spotlighted racial injustice and impacts of a global pandemic in America ahead of the historic 2020 election.



Photos courtesy of CNAY

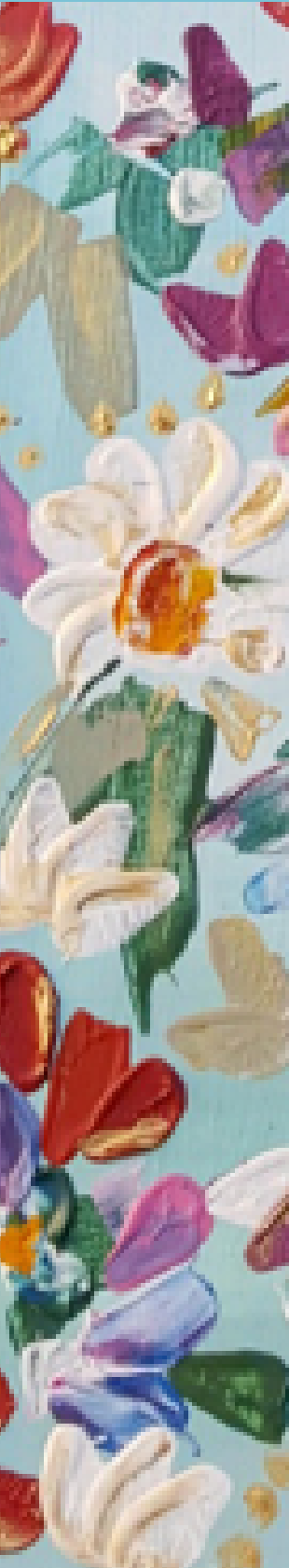
TERMINOLOGY



Danielle F.

As Indigenous people, we identify ourselves through a variety of terms. For the purposes of the We Are The Future Report, we will be primarily using **‘Indigenous’** and **‘Native’** to refer to populations who identifies with tribal nations, first nations, Native Hawaiian, and other Indigenous affiliations.

METHODOLOGY



The groundbreaking Indigenous Futures Survey was launched June 23, 2020, by researchers at the University of Michigan and the University of California, Berkeley. Participants ages 18 and older were invited to complete the online survey in exchange for the opportunity to win raffle prizes from various Indigenous businesses, artists, and more. The survey took place over the course of 53 days and was a collaborative effort with our partners across Indian Country, including Native organizations, tribal colleges, media outlets, youth ambassadors and community members. Its reach extended to all corners of the United States, citizens of over 400 federally- and state- recognized tribes, and participants from Canada, Puerto Rico, and Guam. The impact of this survey will continue to be far-reaching.

The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) at the Aspen Institute's mission is to improve the health, safety, and overall well-being of Native American youth. Our work is informed by Native youth, for Native youth. One of the most important ways we seek guidance from our youth stakeholders is through our Youth Advisory Board - a cohort of young tribal /community leaders who provide extensive input to CNAY's projects and assure the integrity of the Native youth voice in projects. Thus, upon completion of the Indigenous Futures Survey, CNAY recognized the need to ensure youth voices were represented in this independent report. Of the over 6,000 participants, nearly 1,100 were youth, ages 18-24. To effectively capture the unique lived experiences of Native youth in this survey, CNAY consulted a focus group of youth from our network. They participated in multiple sessions to support building a youth narrative that gives a greater youth voice to Indigenous Futures Survey data. The intention of this report is to share the Indigenous youth narrative, data, and priorities based on youth findings of the Indigenous Futures Survey.

The Center for Native American Youth utilizes an empowerment model for Indigenous youth that includes Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). CBPR was utilized to create this report, in which Native youth became part of the program development and evaluation. To ensure community ownership that supports program effectiveness in which culture and community of Native youth are reflected, we conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with our Youth Advisory Board. The interviews focused on the youth experience with and perceptions and interpretations of the IFS data. The focus group consisted of 7 Indigenous youth, representing village, urban, and reservation communities. The focus group represents a range of experience and passion areas including higher education, foster care, LGBTQ2S+, climate justice, food sustainability, criminal justice reform and policy change. Participants are caregivers, career professionals, and advocates for their people.

The focus group advocated their lived experience and was mindful of voices and identities left out of the conversation including those representing Native Hawaiian identities and more.

We believe CBPR methodology to be appropriate for empowering youth and addressing the needs of their communities. We commonly use it in our work at CNAY as the collaborative approach that focuses on transfer of knowledge, skills, power, authority, and hope to transcend limitations.

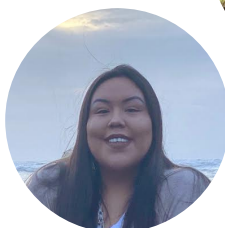
The Indigenous Futures Survey found that 78% of youth participants strongly agreed or agreed that they feel they can make a difference in their community. At the Center for Native American Youth, we recognize the contributions Native youth make every day to their communities and the next generation. It is our hope that Native youth voices and experiences are cherished and respected as well as prioritized in policy.

Sam Schimmel

Christie Wildcat

Autumn Adams

Owen Oliver



Isabel Coronado

Shavaughna Underwood

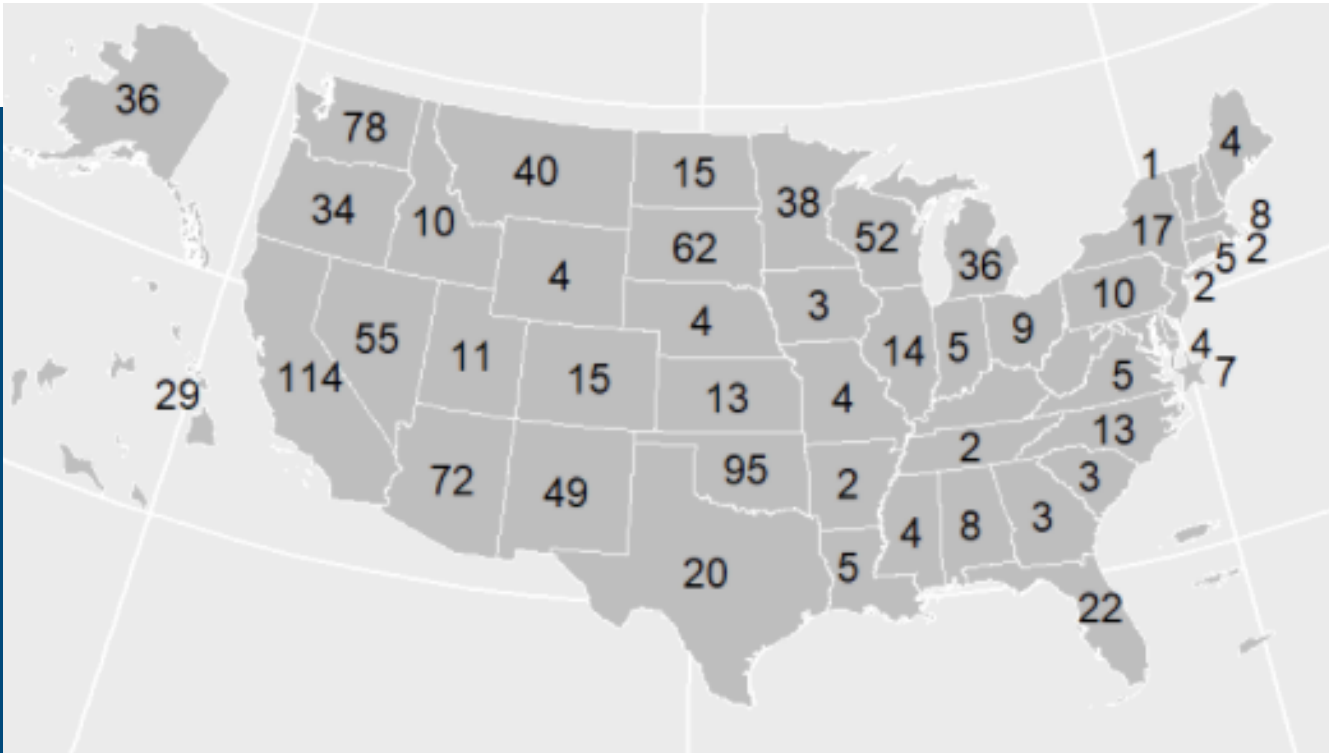
Mikah Carlos

IFS YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS

The Indigenous Futures Survey had **1,086** youth participants, ages 18-24 years old, representing **326 tribal nations** from across the North America.

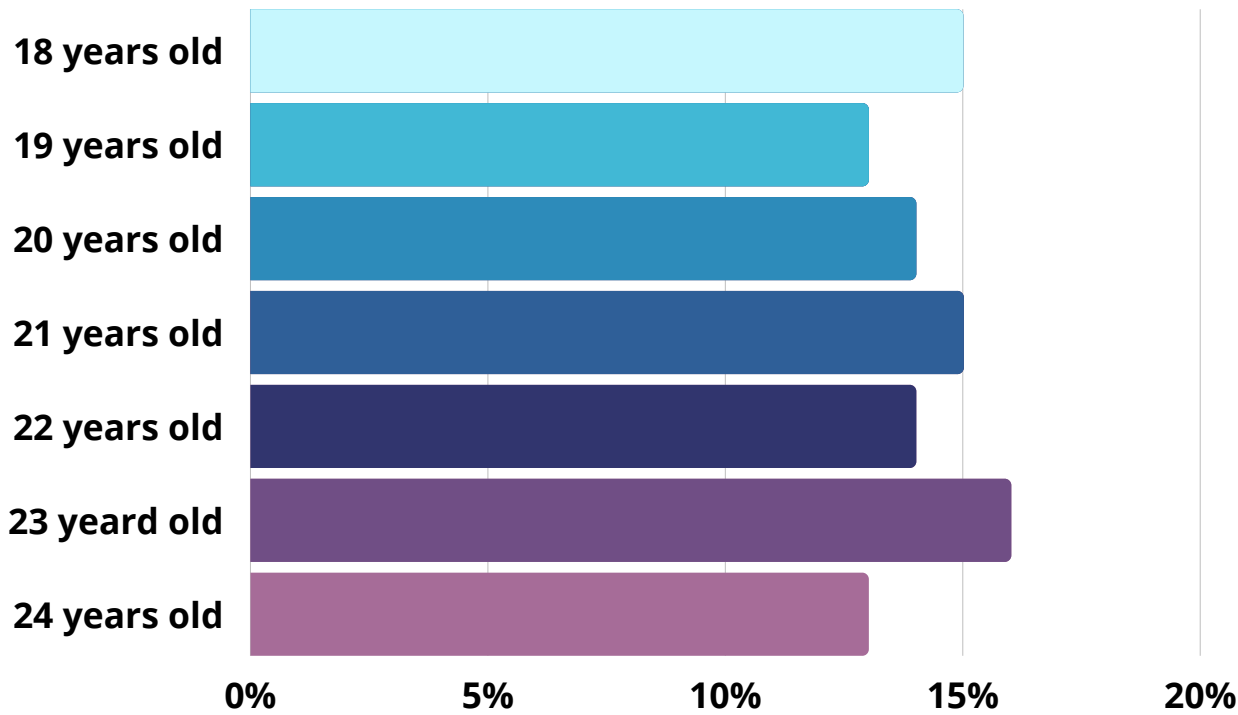
1,086

Where do we live?

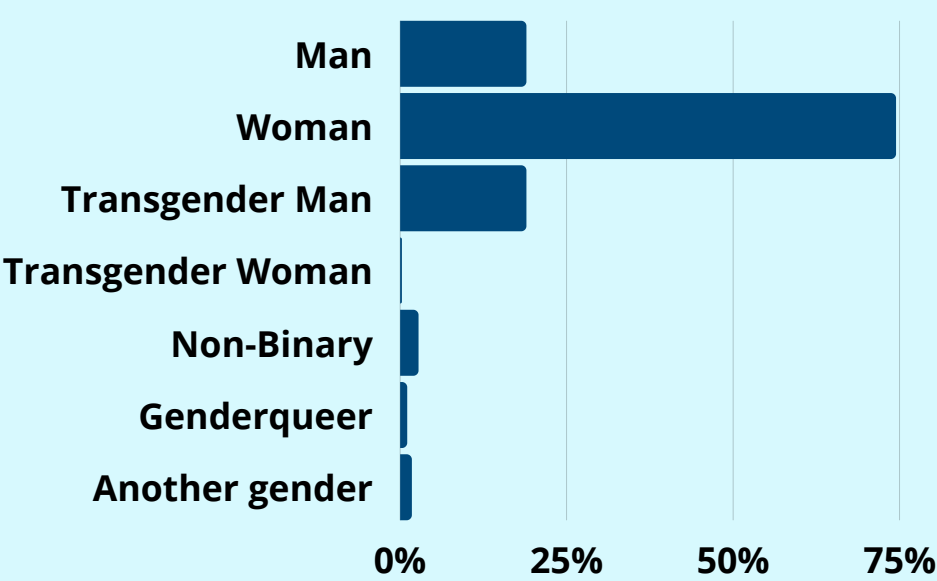


Numbers indicate various tribal nations represented across North America

Age of Participants:



Genders Represented:



Education Attainment:



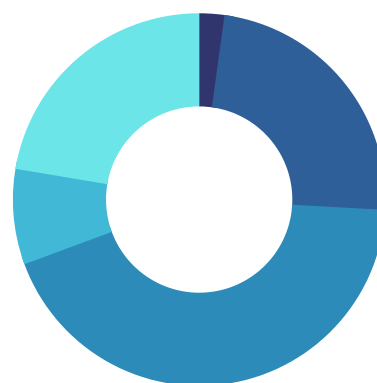
Rory W.

Bachelor of Arts/Sciences
22.4%

Associate/Technical Degree
8.3%

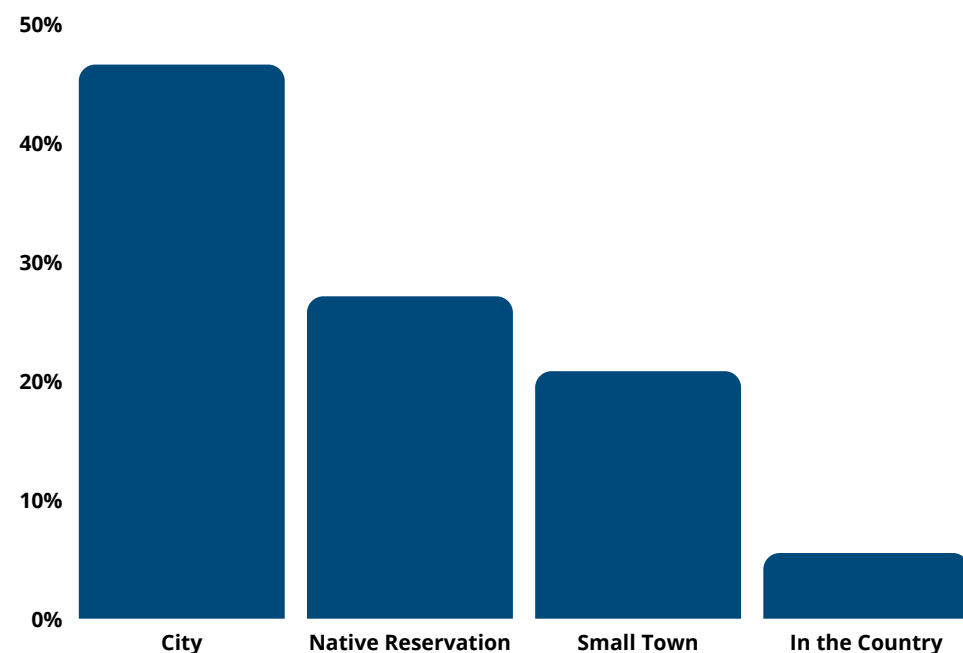
Less than High School
2.1%

High school
23.7%



Some college
43.5%

Location:



Brittany M.

COMMUNITY

When asked to identify the urgent priorities for Native communities, youth participants referred to 'Native community' in a variety of ways:



48%

**Native Tribe, Nation,
or Village**

29%

**All Native peoples of the
United States**

18%

An Urban Native Community

5%

**Native Tribe, Nation, or Village
they live among**

PRIORITIES

Native youth identify the following to be extremely urgent or urgent:

Among the priorities, the first percentage indicates extremely urgent, the second percentage indicates urgent.



**Improving mental health
(68.8% & 20.1%)**

**Addressing violence
against women, children,
and LGBTQ+ individuals
(67% & 20.4%)**

**Preserving tribal
languages and culture
(64.1% & 25.3%)**

**Caring for tribal elders
(59.9% & 25.3%)**

**Increasing access to
quality healthcare
(57.5% & 26.6%)**

**Environmental concerns
(56.2% & 23.3%)**

**Enhancing community
infrastructure
(55.3% & 22.3%)**

**Providing quality K-12
education for Native
children
(53.5% & 28.5%)**

**Protecting tribes' rights to
care for the wellbeing of
their children
(51.8% & 29.2%)**

**Improving physical health
(50.3% & 26.5%)**

**Protecting hunting, fishing,
land, water and treaty
rights
(49.3% & 26.5%)**

**Improving relations with
criminal justice system
(46.8% & 30.8%)**

**Decreasing stereotyping
and discrimination
(38.6% & 28.8%)**

**Increasing accurate
contemporary
representations of Native
people in media,
government, and education
(32.4% & 30.1%)**

**Protecting tribes' rights to
economic development
(31.9% & 31.4%)**



SECTION 1: IDENTITY

Gianni L.

Tribal Nations in the U.S.



At the time publication of *We Are the Future*, there are 547 federally recognized tribes within the United States. Under the US Constitution, the United States has an obligation to uphold tribal treaty rights that include land ownership, assets, and resources, as well as a duty to carry out the mandates of Federal Indian Law with respect to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages. Tribes with federal recognition maintain a government-to-government relationship with the United States, which includes responsibilities, powers, limitations, and obligations that must be upheld by the federal government. In addition, with federal recognition status, comes eligibility to receive funding and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Federally recognized tribes possess inherent rights of self-government, such as tribal sovereignty, and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States.

State recognized tribes are tribal communities and heritage groups that are recognized by individual states for their various internal state government purposes. State recognized tribes are not federally recognized, but federally recognized tribes may also be state recognized. At time of reporting, there are 63 state recognized tribes.

Over 90% of Indigenous youth participants strongly agreed or agreed that being Native American is an important part of their identity, with 91% sharing that being a member of their particular tribe is an important part of their identity.

While only 27% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that being an American was an important part of their identity.

The focus group shared the need for identity to expand beyond blood quantum restrictions. On the issue of blood quantum, the focus group discussed though today it is an act of sovereignty, the ideals are colonial.

"We are told we are Native Americans, but we all know that we were here before colonization, with our own autonomy."

Self- Identification

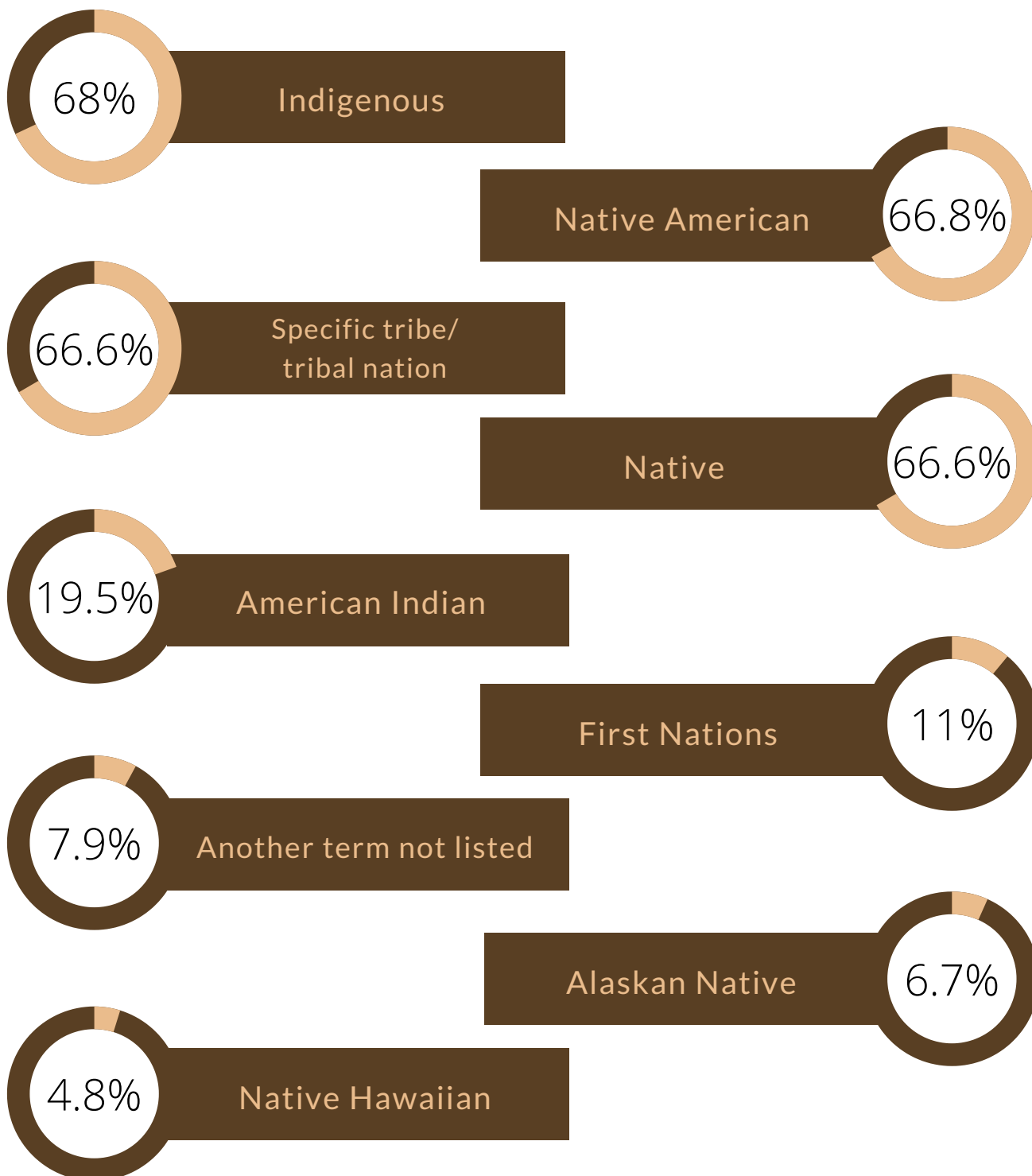
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Nearly 70% of Indigenous youth participants identify as ‘Indigenous,’ ‘Native American,’ their specific tribal nation affiliation, and/or ‘Native’. Of the overall 6,460 participants of the Indigenous Futures Survey, 27% identify as ‘American Indian’, compared to the 20% of the over 1,000 youth participants who identify with that term. The focus group argues that this suggests **younger generations are choosing to shift away from terms like ‘American Indian’ and towards terms that align with contemporary definitions and perspectives of their identity today.** Additionally, the focus group recognizes the term ‘American Indian’ has legal context because Federal Indian Law uses this terminology. ‘American Indian’ is also used in the United States Office of Management and Budget through the United States Census Bureau.



CNAY Cultural Preservation Ambassadors

How Do Youth Identify?



“The only (ones) who do blood quantum are Natives and horses”



Survey results indicate over 75% of youth reported being enrolled in a federally recognized tribe, 3% reported being enrolled in a state-recognized tribe, and 18% reported not being enrolled in either a federal or state recognized tribe. The youth focus group participants shared that the required specification between enrolled and not enrolled can be divisive. They made it clear they would like to be inclusive of all Indigenous youth, regardless of enrollment status.

Tribal communities establish their own enrollment criteria and have the right to do so as sovereign nations. Criteria for enrollment is found in respected tribal constitutions, incorporations, or tribal ordinances. Two of the most common requirements for tribal enrollment are: 1) descendency, which is one's ability to trace lineage to a particular ancestor identified on a tribal base roll, is (often the first formal list of tribal members ever created) and 2) blood quantum: a measurement of tribal blood. It is often denoted as a fraction and tribes require individuals to have varying blood quantum amounts, often ranging from 1/2 to 1/32.

Tribes have the sovereign right to enroll members based off criteria of their choosing. Other enrollment conditions include contact with tribe, tribal residency, or petition to be adopted into a tribe. In addition, there are also ceremonial adoptions into families, clans, and societies of tribes that are held in high regard but are not reflected on tribal rolls.



Photo courtesy of CNAY



Focus group participants discussed the need to address issues of enrollment, membership, and blood quantum and determine the practicality processes that facilitate reconnecting with Indigenous communities for those who were displaced or if relationship to their nation was lost. For example, youth recognize the implications of membership and enrollment for foster care youth who are currently aging out of the system, “I think about those who know that they are members of tribes or are descendants, but don’t know which specific tribe they are affiliated with (or) how to go about obtaining that recognition.”

The focus group recommends removing language of “federal” and “state” in future surveys when requesting enrollment status and focus on affiliation with tribal membership instead. For participants who are not enrolled, the recommended language should focus on descendance, tribal lineage, or tribal identification. Native youth advocate for identity that is based on familial, communal, and cultural connection.

Focus group participants discussed complexities and variations of how tribal nations determine their memberships. Native youth asked themselves:

What does Indigenous identity look like in the future?

Does tribal membership reflect Indigenous resilience and community for generations to come?

How do we ensure that youth voices are represented in reimagining Indigenous identity and membership?

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS



Joelle J.

Honor self-identification.

Support Indigenous youth on their journey to connect with tribal communities and grow in identity.

Build inclusive environments for all Indigenous youth regardless of enrollment.

Across all platforms, including research, use Indigenous concepts of belonging and identity.

Increase Indigenous-led research on Indigenous identity.



SECTION 2: HEALTH & WELLBEING

Maree M.

Mental Health

Improving mental health was the highest listed priority for Indigenous youth surveyed in IFS. **Almost 90% of the 18–24-year-old population indicated that this was an extremely urgent or urgent priority for Native communities.** Over 28% of youth responses indicated that mental health concerns had the largest impact on their own lives, which had the highest reported impact to youths' personal lives overall. Youth in the focus group discussed interconnection of mental health and anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health was of great concern. However, the pandemic exacerbated the need to better address mental health for Indigenous people. Quarantine and isolation recommendations by tribal nations and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), combined with the inability to come together in community to socialize, practice culture, or grieve are likely to have contributed to the increase in rates of mental health concern.

IFS results indicate that 25% of Indigenous youth are in some way dissatisfied with their overall life. To address this issue, focus group participants uplift culture and encourage their peers to practice their language, call elders, and connect with the earth as ways to increase mental health. As mental health continues to be a priority for youth, and in order to create change and increase wellbeing, youth need access to culture, culturally immersive interventions and quality healthcare.



Connor K.

Access to Quality Healthcare

The second highest priority for Native youth was increasing quality access to healthcare. **Over 80% of youth participants listed this as extremely urgent or an urgent priority for their communities.** Of particular concern in the focus group was access to culturally immersive mental health resources in urban, rural, reservation and village communities. When mental health resources are available, they tend to be extremely limited or at capacity. Additionally, available resources often lack cultural responsiveness and understanding of the challenges and struggles specific to Indigenous communities, such as intergenerational or historical trauma and the collective communal nature of tribal communities.

Inadequate mental health is likely due to several factors including: a social stigma of mental health, the limited existence of investment in youth programming, the government failing to fully fund the Indian Health Service, and the absence of Indigenous mental health professionals or professionals with cultural sensitivity.

A youth from the focus group shared that pre-pandemic, her community had high rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, and today the rates are at a record high. This youth works in a behavioral health clinic and believes the lack of access to community and culture have contributed to the health clinic being at over capacity.



Cordelia F.

SUMMARY OF RECOMENDATIONS



Permanently and fully fund the Indian Health Service.

Improve access to culturally informed mental health services for Indigenous people.

Increase accessibility of Indigenous mental health experts and therapists. Increase culturally immersive youth programming.

Expand resources within the Health and Human Services Administration branch of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Provide culturally rooted mental health resources and intervention methods for Indigenous communities.

Photo courtesy of Cheyenne K.

SECTION 3: CULTURE & COMMUNITY

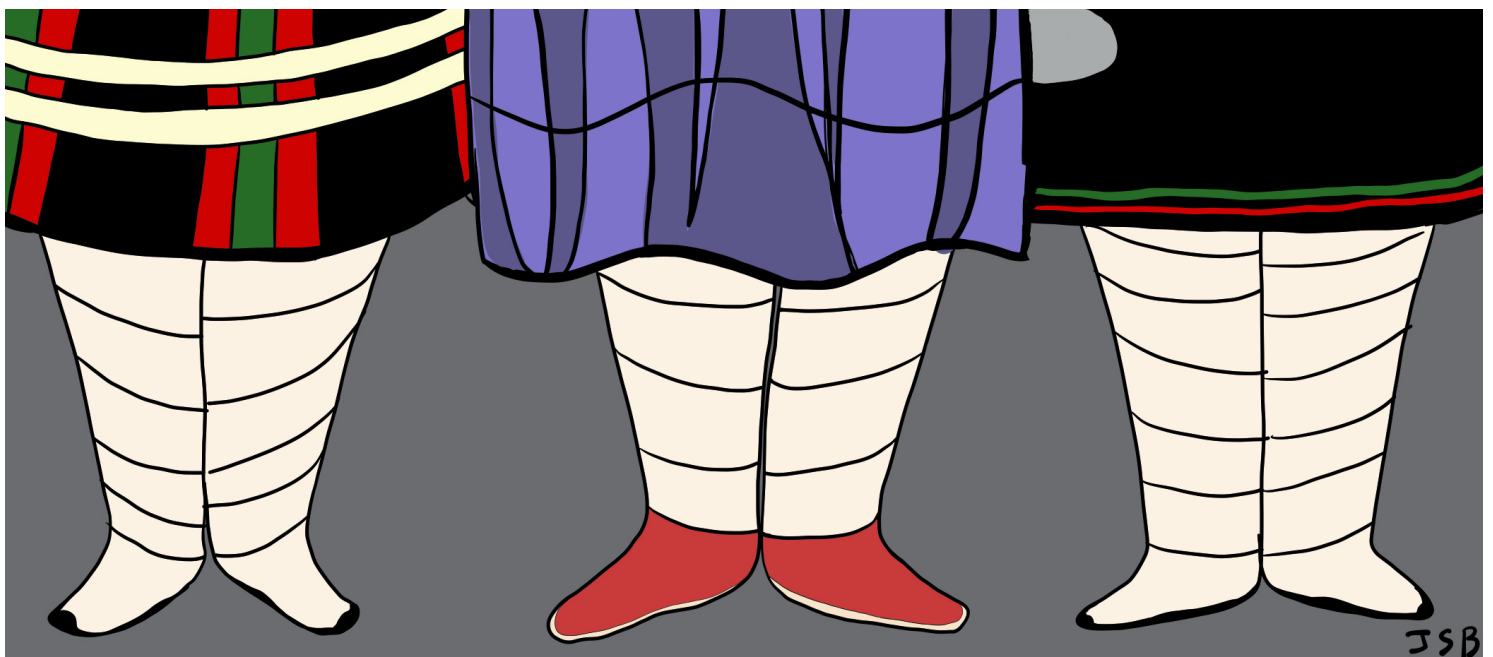


Sovereignty

Sovereignty is a tribe's inherent ability to self-govern and was affirmed through treaties, Supreme Court cases, laws, and executive orders. **Over 80% of IFS youth participants indicated that protecting tribes' rights to care for the wellbeing of their children was extremely urgent or urgent, 76% reported that protecting hunting, fishing, land, water, and treaty rights was extremely urgent or urgent, and 63% said that protecting tribes' rights to economic development was extremely urgent or urgent. Indigenous youth recognize the need to protect their sovereignty.**

Because 87% of survey participants feel that the average American does not care about the experiences of native people, the focus group believes there is an opportunity to educate Americans, and tribal citizens, about sovereignty and its importance.

"We don't talk about sovereignty in a direct way. Rather, we talk about language, community, right to land, and land reform which encompasses our sovereignty and rights."



JSB

Jaycie B.

"Our (tribal) communities instill in us that we are leaders and support us in ways where we are empowered, not tokenized."

Indigenous cultures center on respect and value of wisdom from elders and sacredness of youth. Culturally centered approaches include investment in Indigenous youth as future caregivers of the community.



Kyle W.

Youth recognize tribes' investment in cultural and social support has increased during COVID-19. Youth believe having continued access to intergenerational opportunities will increase youth involvement in community, including through civic engagement and advocating for social change. Youth in the focus group discussed beyond investment, the need to share the Native experience with those outside of their communities to combat stereotypes, erasure, and misinformation about tribes as sovereign nations within society.

Impacts of COVID-19

COVID-19 has inhibited in-person gatherings between youth and elders and community members causing loss of teachings and cultural knowledge transfer to youth as a result. **Efforts to preserve tribal languages and cultures was identified as the third highest priority for Indigenous youth, with 89% of youth reporting this as an extremely urgent or urgent priority for Native communities.** Due to community lock downs and social distance regulations, Indigenous youth were not able to freely visit their elders to receive traditional teachings nor were they able to grieve the passing of elders in their communities. These community dynamics have had strong, and potentially lasting, impacts on Native youth.

"Loss of elders is really traumatizing to my entire village, and I don't think we'll ever recover.

The fourth highest priority Native youth identified was caring for elders. **Over 71% identified caring for tribal elders as an extremely urgent or urgent priority.**



Jordan B.

"Everything we've had to do to keep ourselves safe from COVID-19 is against our culture, by not gathering with people, not sharing food, not being around loved ones when we're grieving, not being able to mourn them in proper ways. There is a lot of frustration in not being able to support and care for our elders and practice our culture."



Jaycie B.

The feeling of loss of individuals, history, and language due to the COVID-19 epidemic is widespread for Native youth and has heightened disparities that exist in their communities including healthcare, education, employment and more.

Half of youth participants in IFS reported their financial situation worsened during COVID-19. Focus group participants believe the pandemic's impact on tribal enterprises has contributed to unemployment. Additionally, youth shared that families needed greater support in food, childcare and living expenses.

“The lack of access to resources for families, such as free and reduced lunches in schools, has an impact on the entire family, from children to elders.”

There was a decrease in returning to school in the fall of 2020 that was reported in IFS. When asked why they were not returning, **nearly 80% of youth shared they did not want to take online classes, 33% reported they could no longer afford tuition, and 50% reported they needed to take care of their families.**

Focus group participants who are in college expressed the challenges of attending classes online, without the ability to access on-campus resources.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

“(Online learning) does not fit with the way that we’ve been raised; traditional learning is ingrained is in our psyche.”

Through virtual learning, students struggle to complete the amount of coursework given. For Indigenous youth, beneath the surface of these general challenges were cultural differences. Youth in the focus group communicated Indigenous learning style is through relationship and connectedness. Indigenous learning requires in-person connection, trust building, and interaction.

Establish ways to document knowledge and teachings from elders.

Support a strong economic relief plan for tribal communities to be resilient through and after COVID-19.

Support Indigenous learning styles and create those spaces safely.

Provide education opportunities for society to learn of Indigenous values system, sovereignty, and autonomy. Appoint Native and Indigenous youth into community leadership positions.

Create intergenerational spaces of learning within organizations, particularly those that are youth driven.



SECTION 4: VISIBILITY, JUSTICE & DISMANTLING RACISM

Jarrette W.

Justice Reform

Nearly 80% of youth agree that improving relations with the criminal justice system is an extremely urgent or urgent priority. Today, Indigenous people are extremely overrepresented in prison populations and violent encounters with police. Native youth make up of 70% of incarcerated children, despite making up 1% of the overall youth population in the United States (2). Indigenous men are 4 times more likely to be incarcerated than white men, while Indigenous women are 6 times more likely to be incarcerated than white women (3). Indigenous people are also most likely to be killed by police compared to any other ethnic group in the United States (4).

Violence

Another priority for Indigenous youth is addressing violence against women, children, and LGBTQ+ individuals (68%). Mental, emotional, spiritual, and cultural ways are devastated by violence. A report from the National Institute of Justice found that more than 4 in 5 American Indian and Alaska Native Women have experienced violence in their lifetime (5). Over 78% of LGBTQ2S+ Native youth experience violence in terms of harassment or assault at school because of their sexual orientation, 65% of students feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 51% feel unsafe because of their gender expression (6). Just 24% of students reported that school officials responded effectively when reporting victimization (7).

We recognize that these numbers are often underreported, and that youth are navigating complex systems that were not designed for them. Despite these challenges, Native youth continue to advocate for the next generation with strength and resilience. Youth are transforming policy, working across generations, and demanding change.

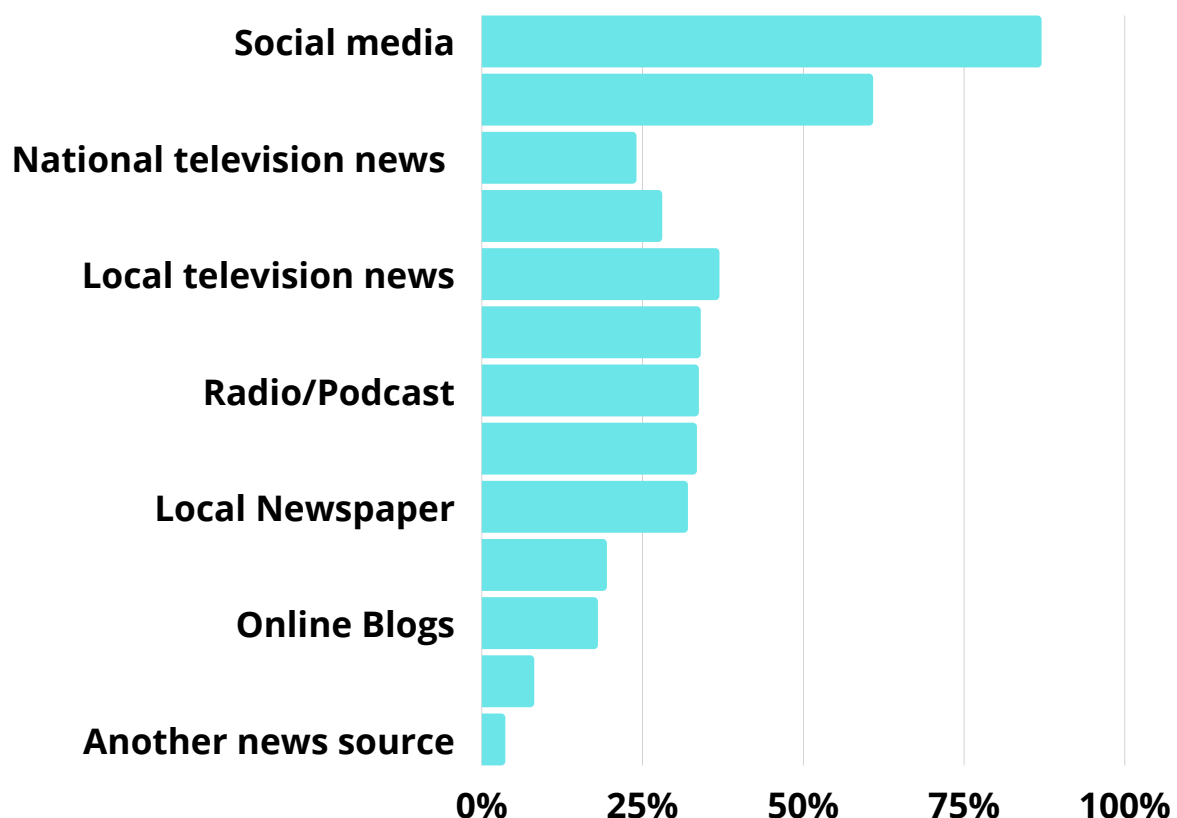
"You have to start at the root problems to address root issues."



Visibility & Dismantling Racism

We learned through IFS that social media is the primary source of news for youth. **Additionally, 75% of participants reported socializing with Indigenous friends frequently or all the time.** Focus group participants reflected on the ability to be in virtual community, fostering friendships and relations while sharing ideas and information with one another. Additionally, through groups and campaigns, youth have utilized social media for culture sharing. Social media has also served as a vehicle to voice and increase visibility to Indigenous issues.

Youth are engaging in social sharing of news and information among family members (60.8%) and by word of mouth (41.5%). **Almost 90% of Indigenous youth surveyed in the IFS also report utilizing social media as their primary news source.** However, despite use and presence on social media by Indigenous people, Indigenous issues are still erased by national news networks. Often times in media, narratives about Indigenous people are told at a deficit, or use disparaging language. The focus group stressed the importance of increasing coverage of Indigenous issues and amplifying Indigenous journalists.



Alternatively, according to IFS, approximately the same percentage of Indigenous youth utilize tribal newspapers as national newspapers. The focus group discussed that in tribal newspapers and news outlets, Indigenous journalists and Indigenous issues are made visible and accurately represented. **Over 60% of youth participants indicated the importance of increasing accurate contemporary representations of Native people in media, government, and education.**

67% of Indigenous youth indicated that decreasing stereotyping and discrimination was an extremely urgent or urgent priority in IFS.

When asked about their beliefs about invisibility of Native Peoples in mainstream society, over 80% of IFS youth survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that the average American does not care about the experiences of Native Peoples. **Almost 60% of youth feel they are treated with less courtesy or respect than others during their day-to-day lives.** The youth focus group directly connects these feelings to systemic racism and erasure.



Photo courtesy of Kyra A.

SUMMARY OF RECOMENDATIONS

Support and implement community-based justice reforms that addresses over incarceration of Indigenous people and vulnerability to police violence.

Address violence all Indigenous people and implement policies that protect women, children, and LGBTQ2S+ individuals.

Increased Indigenous representation in national and local news outlets.

Create accurate representations of Indigenous people.



Photo courtesy of CNAY

Closing

Indigenous youth are invested in their communities, their culture, and the future generations. Indigenous youth are driving the change, and leading movements, and developing solutions to creating positive futures for their people and their communities, and – their voices must be valued. Youth are the future, and we must empower them for the betterment of our people. The Center for Native American Youth is committed to uplifting young leaders to ensure they have agency in their futures.

Though the Indigenous Futures Survey may be the first of its kind, it cannot be the last. As a society, we must invest in Indigenous-led research, youth, and community-based solutions to truly honor the futures of those most impacted: Indigenous youth.

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