

## **SAMPLE OPINION EDITORIAL**

**[DATE]**

***DIRECTIONS:*** Use this template to let your local community know about HIV/AIDS prevention and why it is important to Native people. Include local information and your own stories to demonstrate the importance of this issue to your local community.

### **Preventing HIV/AIDS in Indian Country: A National Priority**

Twenty-eight years into the epidemic, HIV/AIDS continues to receive national attention as the number of new infections continues to rise. Populations of color have been impacted more by the disease and American Indian, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians continue to present statistics that show a growing health crisis. Currently, many funders are not listing Native Americans as a distinct target population in HIV prevention initiatives focused on racial and ethnic minorities. These decisions were made despite the fact that American Indians and Alaska Natives have the third highest rate of new HIV infections in the country based on population. American Indians and Alaska Natives also have the shortest survival rate once AIDS has been diagnosed, followed by Native Hawaiians. Of all of the Native people who have been diagnosed, 50% have already died from AIDS related complications and the devastation of HIV/AIDS is affecting all corners of Indian Country. Further, there are major misperceptions about HIV as being only a disease affecting the gay population, when in fact, the impact on Native heterosexual women has continued to grow substantially. In 2007, 57% of the American Indian and Alaska Native women living with either HIV or AIDS acquired the virus from a male partner. Further, 40% of Native women living with AIDS acquired the virus through injection drug use, the highest percentage of injection drug use acquisition of any ethnic or racial group.

Federal agencies and funders are releasing grant funding announcements to continue valuable front line prevention and capacity building efforts. Federal funding is the backbone of the prevention system in America, for all peoples of varying risk levels and populations. However, this work without the including Native populations as a distinct priority ethnic group. The state of the epidemic in communities of color and the statistics relating to the trends in Native communities do not support the de-prioritization of Native Americans.

The exclusion of Native people in grant announcements as a specific priority population is a drastic change that reflects a de-prioritization of the health and prevention needs of Native communities. The need among Native communities and Native-service agencies continues to rise as the incidence of HIV rises, however, these policy decisions strip these communities of the necessary resources and services to prevent HIV/AIDS and support those living with the disease.

HIV/AIDS is a seriously devastating disease that can be prevented with the appropriate advocacy, education, and resources, but without the necessary support from funding agencies, Native people will continue to suffer at disproportionate rates.

The prevention of HIV/AIDS in Indian Country must be a priority to ensure healthy communities. Native voices must be heard. The possibilities of healthy indigenous communities across the United States can be realized when a strong unified voice speaks out that prevention of HIV/AIDS among Native children, families, and elders is a priority!