

# COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN NM

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# OVERVIEW

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- The concern is that there is NO equal access to COVID-19 testing and treatment
  - Yet this is an “equal opportunity crisis” but the impact and burden will not be shared equally among all communities
    - American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) will carry the brunt of this as immigrants, and other people of color
- Federal Responsibility and the Indian Health Service (IHS)
- Additional Challenges that Tribes have
- The Navajo Nation Experience
  - Challenges
- Federal Action

# FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY & IHS

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- The U.S. Government has a Trust Responsibility to AI/AN Tribes through the COTUS, Treaties, Executive Orders, Statutes
  - The trust relationship establishes a responsibility for a variety of services and benefits to Indian people based on their status as Indians, including health care.
- IHS is founded in 1955 to meet the needs of AI/AN Tribes (within US Health and Human Services)
- IHS has significantly been underfunded by the U.S. Government throughout the years
- IHS is reliant on third party reimbursement (Medicaid and Medicare, and private insurance)

# COVID-19 (AKA CORONAVIRUS)

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- Best offense and defense against COVID-19
  - Prevention is the best
    - Washing hands, social distancing, not traveling, and staying home
  - Testing is also recommended
- Similar to other hospitals and providers, IHS is not ready to address the COVID-19.
  - There are not enough Personal Protection Equipment, and even doctors, nurses, other providers
  - The IHS has 71 or fewer ventilators and 33 intensive care unit (ICU) beds at the 24 hospitals it runs. (See <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200331.659944/full/>)
  - COVID-19 testing is limited

# IHS COVID-19 TESTING - ALL SERVICE AREAS & NAVAJO & ALBUQUERQUE AREAS

Source: IHS.GOV/CORONAVIRUS

As of 3/29/20	IHS areas	tested	positive	negative
	Total (12 areas)	3083	165	1804
	Navajo Area	1275	110	839
*I did not record this	ABQ Area			

As of 4/1/20	IHS service areas	tested	positive	negative
	Total (12 areas)	4667	268	3179
	Navajo Area	1984	176	1619
	ABQ Area	143	4	71

# CHALLENGES THAT TRIBES FACE

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*“Covid-19 could be a perfect storm for Indian Country”*

Dante Desiderio (Native American Financial Officers Association)

- Some tribes do not have access to clean drinking water and lack infrastructure for water
- Overcrowded homes – 17% of AI/AN households are overcrowded making social distancing a challenge
- Health – Native Americans have high rates of preexisting conditions (i.e. diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, cancer) that impact the immune system and may contribute to poor outcomes for COVID-19 patients
- Right now, there are limited economic opportunities because tribal casinos and hotels were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic which
  - Significantly impacts households headed by AI/AN women
  - May lead to employees being laid off and therefore have to apply for unemployment
  - Hurts tribes immediately and the long run because there are no revenues coming in for tribal operations (i.e. gaming profits supports tribal health, education, and economic development)
- Source: <https://www.vox.com/2020/3/25/21192669/coronavirus-native-americans-indians>

# THE NAVAJO NATION EXPERIENCE (AZ, NM, UT)

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- Navajo Nation has largest outbreak among tribes in the U.S.
- Navajo Nation President has issued stay at home order (as early as March 17, 2020) and a curfew
- On 4/1/20, according to the Navajo Nation President, Jonthan Nez, the number of positive tests for COVID-19 reached a total of 214 and 7 confirmed deaths related to COVID-19.
- The 214 cases include the following counties:
  - Navajo County, AZ: 97
  - Apache County, AZ: 22
  - Coconino County, AZ: 49
  - McKinley County, NM: 14
  - San Juan County, NM: 22
  - Cibola County, NM: 3
  - San Juan County, UT: 7

# NAVAJO NATION CHALLENGES

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- There are limited number of IHS and Tribal 638 clinics and hospitals on the Navajo Nation covering an area the size of West Virginia.
  - Navajo is one of the largest AI/AN Tribes by population, including living on reservation
  - New Mexico sites include Crownpoint, Shiprock, Gallup
  - Arizona sites include Kayenta, Tuba City, Chinle, Pinon, Winslow
- Challenges:
  - Rural and frontier lands (2-4 hour drives to major towns)
  - High poverty rates and unemployment rates (now likely worsened by the COVID-19 as the rest of the country)
  - Lack of drinking water, and limited access to internet
  - Stark health conditions
  - Slow federal and state responses (AZ and UT had a slower response compared to NM)
  - Limited food supply and food desert (not many grocery stores)
  - Transportation for families to have AI/AN children participate in school breakfast and lunch programs



# FEDERAL ACTION

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- **H.R. 6074 – Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020**, signed March 6, 2020
  - \$8.3 billion for medical and pharmaceutical research, relief for small businesses and public health funding
  - Includes at least \$40 million in direct set-aside funding for tribal nations, organizations, and urban Indian organizations.
  - CDC to distribute funds to Tribes.
    - Tribes have asked DHHS to transfer money from CDC to IHS
  - Recommendation: Federal government should increase the set aside from \$40 million to \$120 million as Tribes have recommended

# FEDERAL ACTION (CONTINUED)

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- **Declaration of Emergency**

- President Trump declared a National Emergency in regards to COVID-19 on March 13, 2020
  - Opens up FEMA funds at 75% cost share
  - Tribal nations can request a waiver of their 25% cost share
  - Allows DHHS to release national stockpiles and waive Medicare, Medicaid, Children's health insurance regulations
    - Navajo Nation President recently reported that they got some of the equipment from the national stockpiles, but it sounds like it wasn't enough (as states have also reported)



# FEDERAL ACTION (CONTINUED)

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- **H.R. 6201 - Families First CoronaVirus Response Act (aka Phase 2)**, signed March 18, 2020
  - Includes \$64 million to be appropriated to Indian Health Services account
  - Additionally, H.R. 6201:
    - Includes coverage of testing for COVID-19 at no cost for AI/AN regardless of where services have been authorized
    - Lastly \$10 million set aside for grants for Indian Programs with Older Americans Act.
- Recommendation: More funding should be provided to Tribes to combat COVID-19

# FEDERAL ACTION (CONTINUED)

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- **S. 3528, Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or CARES Act (aka Phase 3)**, signed March 27, 2020
  - \$2 trillion stimulus package to battle COVID-19
  - For individuals:
    - Native American taxpayers can get \$1200 (individuals) and \$2400 for married couples.
    - Native Americans who become unemployed or underemployed can apply for their state's unemployment insurance
    - Native Americans can apply for SNAP (formerly Food stamps)
      - \$15.5 billion going to cover the expected costs of new applications
- Other federal/state programs are on-going such as Medicaid and ACA enrollment for Native Americans

# FEDERAL ACTION (END)

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- **For tribal government and businesses, CARES**

- creates a \$150 billion CoronaVirus Relief Fund for state, local, and tribal governments
  - \$1.25 billion for New Mexico (and other smaller states, this is the minimum) and all 562 federally recognized tribes share \$8 billion.
- \$45 billion for Disaster Relief Fund for immediate needs of state, local, tribal and territorial governments
- \$453 million to Bureau of Indian Affairs to prepare for and respond to Coronavirus for Public Safety, Welfare and social services programs, and other tribal government assistance
- US Department of Treasury's Loans and Guarantee Loans § 4002 makes Tribes and their businesses eligible for the \$454 billion loan guarantee fund
  - Tribal casinos likely will not be able to access more than \$350 billion in emergency loans available through the U.S. Small Business Association, which is prohibited from lending money to casinos or gaming operations by federal law

- [For more information, see http://www.ncai.org/Covid-19/legislative-updates/hr-748](http://www.ncai.org/Covid-19/legislative-updates/hr-748)

# FUTURE

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- 4<sup>th</sup> phase?
  - There are some reports that a 4<sup>th</sup> federal package is underway
- Other?
  - U.S. should uphold its trust responsibility and invest in AI/AN healthcare facilities, services and infrastructure so that AI/AN can be prepared for the next pandemic.

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