

# DEPRESSION, ALCOHOL ABUSE, AND SUICIDE RISK

## May 24, 2012



# BROADCAST

Depression and other mood disorders have been identified as risk factors for suicide across the lifespan.<sup>1-3</sup> American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) are at particularly high risk of depression. In 2006, among U.S. adults ages 18 and over, AI/ANs had the highest rate of a major depressive episode (MDE) and adolescent AI/ANs (aged 12 to 17 years old) had the highest lifetime MDE prevalence at 13.3%.<sup>4</sup>

Studies have shown an association between problem alcohol behaviors and suicide or suicidal behaviors such as thoughts, plans and attempts. These behaviors have a high prevalence in AI/AN populations.<sup>5,6</sup> In a multi-state study of suicide decedents, the rate of positive blood alcohol findings was 37% among AI/ANs, the highest of any ethnic group.<sup>7</sup>

Known suicide risks include: Personal or family history of mental or alcohol/substance abuse disorder, access to lethal means and insufficient social support. Suicide risks for AI/ANs in particular include cultural distress and feelings of hopelessness, isolation, alienation, experiences of discrimination and racism and related stress, low use of mental health services, historical trauma, acculturation and socioeconomic factors such as poverty and unemployment.<sup>8,9</sup>

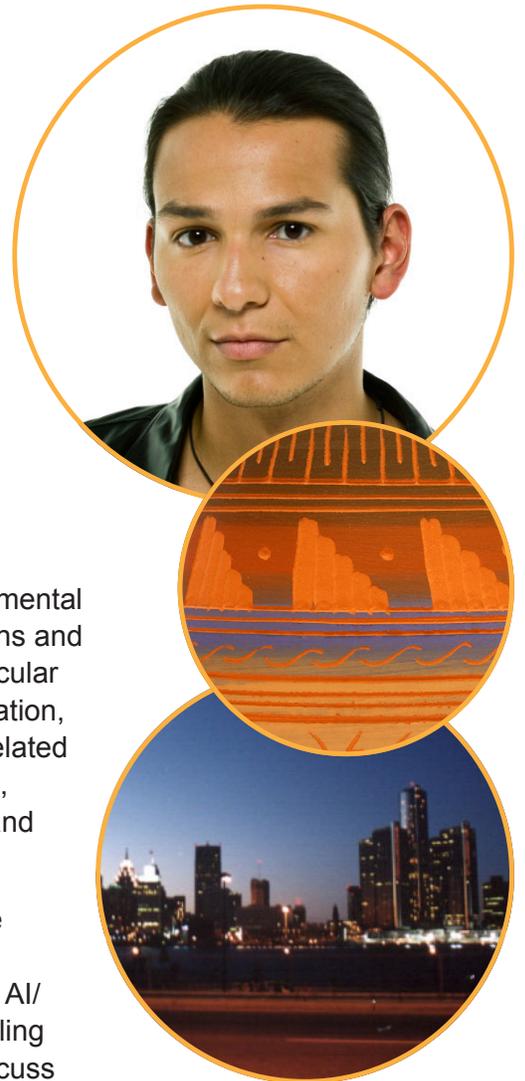
Known protective factors for suicide risks include: Effective medical care, restricted access to lethal means and family and/or community support. Additional protective factors for AI/ANs include: Cultural continuity, spirituality, traditional healing practices, family connectedness and the opportunity to discuss problems with family or friends.<sup>8</sup>

.....  
**Mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention resources for AI/ANs are available from several sources:**

American Indian / Alaska Native Suicide Prevention <http://www.sprc.org/aian>

Native American Center for Excellence – AI/AN substance abuse prevention programs, practices, and policies <http://nace.samhsa.gov/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness – American Indian Resources [http://www.nami.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Find\\_Support/Multicultural\\_Support/Resources/American\\_Indian\\_and\\_Alaska\\_Native\\_Resources.htm](http://www.nami.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Find_Support/Multicultural_Support/Resources/American_Indian_and_Alaska_Native_Resources.htm)



## References

1. Conwell Y, Duberstein PR, Caine ED. (2002). Risk factors for suicide in later life. *Biol Psychiatry*, 52(3), 193-204.
2. Moscicki EK. (1997). Identification of suicide risk factors using epidemiologic studies. *Psychiatr Clin North Am*, 20(3), 499-517.
3. Rosewater KM, Burr BH. (1998). Epidemiology, risk factors, intervention, and prevention of adolescent suicide. *Curr Opin Pediatr*, 10(4), 338-343.
4. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2007). Results from the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings. Rockville, MD.
5. Allen J, Levintova M, Mohatt G. (2011). Suicide and alcohol-related disorders in the U.S. Arctic: boosting research to address a primary determinant of health disparities. *Int J Circumpolar Health*, 70(5), 473-487.
6. Indian Health Service. (2009). Trends in Indian Health 2002-2003. Rockville, MD.
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). Alcohol and suicide among racial/ethnic populations - 17 states, 2005-2006. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*, 58(23), 637-641.
8. Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (n.d.). Suicide Among Racial/Ethnic Populations in the U.S.: American Indians/Alaska Natives. Waltham, MA: Education Development Center Division of Health and Human Development.
9. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). To Live To See the Great Day That Dawns: Preventing Suicide by American Indian and Alaska Native Youth and Young Adults. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.