The Value of Culture is Prevention (CIP) Research. Paul Masotti, GloryannaValerio-Leonce, John Dennem, Karina Banuelos, Cheyenne Seneca, Christina Tlatilp Inong. **Report to Chirag Patel, Director of Planning and Development. Native American Health Center.** [Revised 28 Sept 2026]

BACKGROUND

Culture is Prevention (CIP) Research Program: The CIP research program derived from projects funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Association (SAMHSA) and the California Department of Public Health's (CDPH) California Reducing Disparities Project (CRDP). California's $120 million CRDP was initiated to reduce mental health disparities and to develop a more culturally responsive mental health system to more effectively serve at-risk populations (e.g., African Americans, Asian & Pacific Islanders, Latinos, LGBTQ, and Native Americans). The CRDP recognized that different communities have diverse historical and cultural health practices, referred to as Community-Defined Evidenced Practices (CDEPs), and that overall mental health system capacity, health outcomes and patient/provider satisfaction could be improved if CDEPs are better understood by the medical model practitioners and integrated into the healthcare system. CDEPs serve to address culture/community-specific histories, needs and characteristics. A main objective of the CRDP funding was to evaluate the effectiveness of Community-defined Evidenced Practices (CDEPs) and to allow for community-defined approaches to CDEP evaluation to then measure outcomes considered important by the communities. NAHC's CDEP was the GONA (Gathering of Native Americans) which is a 4-day manualized culture-based intervention. **The GONA approach/methods are entrenched in the CIP Framework.**

The CIP research was initiated by Community Advisory Board concerns that SAMHSA and other government funders required evaluation outcome measures/approaches that: 1) were not an appropriate method of evaluating if their Native Interventions/programs improved health, resiliency, strengths and other outcomes; 2) were not aligned with traditional Native American strength-based approaches; and 3) did not recognize culture as an important determinant of health.

Goals of the CIP research include: i) improving the health of urban Native American/Indigenous peoples; ii) providing empirical evidence that Native/Indigenous culture: a) is an important social determinant of health, b) can be measured; c) is an important program objective; and d) is a viable health outcome (proxy) measure. And additionally, that Native American health outcomes and patient satisfaction would be improved by integrating Traditional healing and cultural practices into the delivery of healthcare. The following quote should help contextualize the above:

> ***What is the meaning of Culture to Native Americans? Why is this important for Non-Native persons to understand?***
>
> Native Culture is not about esteem and taste but rather a cognitive map on how to be. It can be thought of as all the things and ways in which Native people understand who they are, where they come from, and how they are to interact with others. Native Americans learn these principles including beliefs, values, and behavior from traditional stories, ceremony and language instructed by family and community.
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> It is important for Native people to engage with core elements of culture (i.e. creation stories/mythology, ceremony and language) because it promotes intergenerational transmission of historical and traditional knowledge, positive identity, development of youth, and a strengthening of social ties within families. Hundreds of years across many generations have taught us that culture-based activities & interventions improve our health & wellbeing. (Cheyenne Seneca, 2020).

CULTURE IS PREVENTION TEAM EXERCISE

As part of a Native American Health Center (NAHC) media release for the April 2023 CIP related publication in Biomedical Central Public Health, NAHC was asked to provide information on the importance of this research. NAHC (Paul Masotti, PhD, Director of Research/Evaluation) asked the team to use questions provided to guide their response. It was expected that a few sentences from each person in total would be provided, rather than multiple responses which are provided in the following pages.

Masotti P, Dennem J, Bañuelos K, Seneca C, Valerio-Leonce G, Inong CT, King J. The Culture is Prevention Project: measuring cultural connectedness and providing evidence that culture is a social determinant of health for Native Americans. BMC Public Health. 2023 Dec;23(1):1-0. https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-023-15587-x

From Paul Masotti, PhD:

"Hi Team,

As CIP authors, I am requesting your input into the request from our NAHC Media Department. See email from AJ (NAHC Media). Please reply all to this message. I will send responses to AJ – and maybe do a little synthesis or content analyses/grouping.

My thoughts to guide your responses are listed below – but please respond in any way that you feel best:

a) **What does the Culture is Prevention research (program/projects) mean to you?**
b) **Why is Culture is Prevention Research timely/needed/important?**
c) **How can this research benefit/improve: community, Native Peoples, Native/Indigenous healthcare organizations?**
d) **How can this research improve/teach/inform: health policy, education, government, healthcare delivery?**
e) **Why is the recognition/understanding of Native/Indigenous culture important?**
f) **What else needs to be done or what is still to be learned or evaluated/researched?**
g) **What good things/benefits/new things….could continuation of Culture is Prevention related research do/bring?"**

Responses:

a) **<u>What does the Culture is Prevention research (program/projects) mean to you?</u>**

R1) "This project has been instrumental in guiding my education and understanding of Native American Epistemology as well as proper use of Community Based Participatory Research. Each project expands my knowledge. Each Project only strengthens my resolve to continue working with community members to ensure proper Prevention, Interventions, and programs implementation."

R2) "As a Native American person being a part of this project. The Culture is Prevention research project means to me "Healing of our Nations". The Culture is Prevention project helps our Urban Native Communities reclaim and validate Native American cultural/healing concepts that have been forcibly removed and stripped away. Native peoples continue to live out the ramifications of colonization going all the way back to first contact. The Culture is Prevention project reclaims sovereignty of how Native American people view concepts of their overall health and wellness which includes spiritual, mental, physical, tribal/inter-tribal/and community health…If any of these areas suffer then so does the individual."

b) <u>Why is Culture is Prevention Research timely/needed/important?</u>

R1) "The Culture is Prevention Research is extremely important as it highlights the key role that the connection of culture plays in the health of Native American communities. This type of research is generally not as abundant in scholarly formats, oftentimes Native American communities and behavioral health clinicians are not believed when the importance of culture is connected to positive health and mental health outcomes. This research is important because it helps educate the Western health systems about the validity of incorporating culture in wellness activities for Native American communities."

R2) "This project has been and continues to be a leader in the Indigenizing research and the importance of re-enculturation and reclamation of culture within Urban Native Americans. The Urban Native American is the least understood population in the United States and the world. With 70 percent of Native Americans living in Urban Settings. It is important to understand and comprehend their experiences in order to be informed of best practices for this populations."

R3) "Even with the passing of the "The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975" Western government continues to perpetuate colonization by mandating Native/Indigenous people validate Native/Indigenous heling methodology data tools that use Western/Euro concepts that do not capture or aid in the fidelity of the Cultural nuances of Native/Indigenous healing methodologies. These cultural nuances go beyond the capability of the colonial/Western Euro concepts and sciences. Therefore Native/Indigenous research is valuable to reclaiming "Indigenous holistic sovereignty.""

c) <u>How can this research benefit/improve: community, Native Peoples, Native/Indigenous healthcare organizations?</u>

R1) "This research project stresses the importance that culture plays in positive health and mental health outcomes for Native American communities. It benefits Native/healthcare organizations in learning about the importance of creating culturally relevant health care services. Ultimately, this research benefits Native American communities in that it supports health care systems in understanding and potentially working to create culturally relevant care."

R2) "It can start to include a Strength based and Resilience based approach to programs. It can facilitate a paradigm shift away from the deficit model of seeing Native Identity as a risk factor and see it as a buffer that needs to be strengthened."

R3) "By conducting research to validate and provide appropriate formats in which to aid Native/Indigenous people sense of feeling seen, heard, validated, accepted and understood we aid in the improved notion of self-worth, self-importance and overall improved spiritual, mental, physical, tribal/inter-tribal and community wellness. Continued research will aid in the ownership and creation of tools that will allow Native/Indigenous agencies to aid further expression of the health and wellness of Native American/Indigenous peoples living in the Urban environment. This research will continue to support the do away with of the Western deficit approach which has systematically injured and negatively impacted our Urban and non-Urban Native/Indigenous communities. By continuing this research, we create opportunities for Native/Indigenous people's self-perspectives and self- empowerment to manifest through providing opportunity for continued "holistic sovereignty". As well, as the power to put funding dollars into Culturally relevant healing methodologies that have survived systematic erasure and colonization. That in itself should be substantiating on its own."

Note: Many of NAHC's Intertribal participants expressed an instantaneous feeling of gratitude, reclamation and re-connection to their Native/Indigenous culture and communities just by completing the Culture is prevention survey.

d) <u>How can this research improve/teach/inform: health policy, education, government, healthcare delivery, other areas?</u>

R1) "This research can help inform our health systems, policy systems and funding systems in understanding why it is important to fund and support culturally relevant health care delivery. Oftentimes, these systems fund and support a main Western Eurocentric way of addressing health, which does not completely help Native American communities achieve their full health and wellness goals. Ultimately, our healthcare system is founded upon colonial approaches at addressing negative mental health outcomes, this research supports Native American communities in being able to exercise self-determination with regards to their health care treatment options."

R2) "This research supports the fact that Native American "ways of knowing" can no longer be dismissed as "wife's tales," "lacking validity," or lacking validity. The idea that Native Americans are not scientist, or have an understanding of their own needs is racist and outdated. This research moves away from these long held beliefs. It introduces a companion piece of knowledge that can be tapped into and used to design research, programs, intervention, prevention and evaluation criteria and delivery of services."

e) <u>Why is the recognition/understanding of Native/Indigenous culture important?</u>

R1) "It is important for Native American culture to be recognized in playing a key role for Native communities as this act supports Native communities in healing from the centuries of genocidal policy and government acts that have disrupted this connection. This recognition affirms the importance of Native communities remaining connected to health as an act of resistance and to support wellbeing."

R2) "We have substantial proof that re-enculturation and reclamation of culture improves lives, mental health, and physical health. It also decreases the development of those health disparities previously linked to Native American Identity (e.g., diabetes, substance use disorders)."

R3) "Recognizing and understanding Native/Indigenous connection to Cultural Knowledge and tribal/inter-tribal/ community connections as it relates to the individual and the whole… as well as, the inner connectedness with "all of Our relations". Is paramount in the healing of Native/Indigenous populations. Understanding and recognizing that there are many layers to the nuances of cultural understanding and cultural expressions of Native/Indigenous peoples that go beyond the capability of the colonial/Western Euro concepts and or sciences. By recognizing, understanding, and honoring Native/Indigenous culture we can then do our work wholly and holistically"

f) <u>What else needs to be done or what is still to be learned or evaluated/researched?</u>

R1) "Continued research showcasing culturally relevant care models for Native American communities is still to be evaluated. Being able to provide this research and health care model structure supports the validity and replication of care across Indian Country."

R2) "There is so much that must be done to undo over a 3 centuries of colonization. There needs to be better support for education programs and advanced degree programs. There needs to be funding made available to support the ongoing multifaceted programs in place already and the expansion of those programs."

g) <u>What good things/benefits/new things could continuation of Culture is Prevention related research do/bring?</u>

R1) "This research could support the development of Indigenous led health care models that support Native communities in healing from the intergenerational trauma they have and continue to experience due to living in a settler colonial state."

R2) "This project continues to provide evidence for the ongoing approach of using Native American epistemological approaches to research design and methods. It supports the continued expansion of evidence that Native American epistemological knowledge has always been and continues to be the starting point for understanding and healing this population."