First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) is responding to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian community emergency needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic to minimize the risk of Native communities becoming collateral damage.

The COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund is designed to distribute funds efficiently and swiftly to Native nonprofit organizations and tribal programs that need it most. Initially, funds are being prioritized in high-concentration areas – California, New Mexico, the Pacific Northwest, New York, Navajo Nation, Hopi Nation and COVID-19 hotspots.

First Nations is passing through 100% of donations to the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund without any agency cost. The entire amount of any donations and grants received from foundations will reach Native communities directly.

Donations can be made securely here. Read on to learn why this Emergency Response Fund is so important.

What COVID-19 Means for Native Communities

Native communities (both urban and rural) are often invisible in “normal” times. This is exacerbated in times of crisis. Native communities are ripe for the effects of COVID-19 to intensify at extraordinary levels as follows:

- With health already compromised by high rates of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and other chronic illnesses, Native people are a seriously at-risk population.
• 13% of Native American homes\textsuperscript{1} lack safe drinking water and proper wastewater disposal, creating conditions in which recommended sanitary standards cannot be maintained.

• 16% of homes in tribal areas are overcrowded\textsuperscript{2} and multigenerational, making social distancing impossible.

• Food shortages and the logistics of accessing food further threaten the health and resilience of Native families. One out of 12 Native individuals is so food insecure as to be classified as hungry\textsuperscript{3}. American Indians have the highest food insecurity in the U.S., and Native households with children have a food insecurity rate of 28% compared to 16% for non-Natives.\textsuperscript{4} An overlay of the USDA Food Deserts Locator map with Native communities shows a marked absence of retail supermarkets, meaning that healthy, fresh, or any food is not easily accessible for Native people.\textsuperscript{5}

• The federal government spends half as much on health per person for Indians as it does for federal prisoners.\textsuperscript{6} The already chronically-underfunded Indian Health Service (IHS) – the primary health care provider for 2.5 million American Indians and Alaska Natives – is caught in a bureaucratic nightmare. Procedures are lacking for IHS and tribes to access the $40 million allocated for Native health care that is part of the March 6 federal $8.3 billion Coronavirus response package.

• Closed tribal gaming operations that fund much-needed services for tribal members are creating economic emergencies as unemployment – and the resulting demand for social services – will rise to new heights.

We anticipate history repeating itself, as the effect of COVID-19 could mirror the devastating pandemics that decimated Native populations upon colonization and the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny.

\textsuperscript{1} Retrieved from https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/616.html

\textsuperscript{2} Retrieved from: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/odredge/odr-edge-research-022117.html


\textsuperscript{5} Retrieved from: https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/

For Native communities, we are looking at not only potentially tragic death tolls but also the irreplaceable loss of tribal elders who are the keepers of traditional knowledge, tribal cultures and lifeways, and Native languages.

As of April 16, 2020:

- There were 921 confirmed cases of COVID-19 on the Navajo Nation Reservation with 28 deaths.
- In Arizona, 16% of deaths are Native Americans yet Native Americans account for less than 6% of the state’s population.
- In New Mexico, Native Americans make up 31% of COVID-19 cases, almost three times their percentage of the state population as a whole.
- There are other confirmed cases in North Dakota, Oregon, and Washington.

**Immediate Needs Identified by Community Leaders**

On March 23, 2020, First Nations’ senior staff met virtually with Native community leaders to ask how we can help. Initially-identified needs include those that can be supported with general operating dollars to Native nonprofit organizations and Native nations:

- **Pandemic Response:** As anchor institutions in Native communities, Native nonprofits are being called on to fill the federal leadership void and coordinate with other local service providers and state agencies to access services, supplies, and protective equipment. Without adequate resources to support these intermediaries, Native families and individuals will be the ones to pay the price – in lives.
- **Support for Continued Services:** Critical service organizations – homeless shelters, health care providers, food banks – will need financial support to remain open to meet community needs. Even under normal circumstances, these services are under-funded. Both unrestricted funding and special crisis funding, along with support for individuals whose livelihoods have been disrupted by this pandemic, will be needed. As mentioned, due to already-existing food insecurity and lack of ready access to food, the added pressure on food banks is expected to be extreme. Not having the

*First Nations’ COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund*

**Support Native Communities**

[Donate here!](#)
resources to respond to this demand will mean the difference between providing the sustenance to help a person recover from COVID-19 or NOT.

- **Staff Employment**: Native nonprofit organizations are on the front lines of providing vital services in their communities. With some federal grant-funded programs paused during this time, organizations’ ability to keep program and administrative staff is in jeopardy. Support to continue staff salaries will go far toward maintaining organization, family, and individual staff member stability.

- **Support for Equipment and Technology**: Organizations that can are having staff work from home virtually, but equipment and Internet access are at premiums for many. Funding for equipment (e.g., laptops, headsets, communications and technology access) will allow staff to work remotely as possible, continuing services and staying healthy.

Important to note: This effort currently is restricted only to immediate response and relief efforts in Native communities. Like the rest of the U.S., there will be additional needs around recovery. We acknowledge that many areas in the interior U.S. have not yet experienced a surge in COVID-19 cases, but health experts suggest it is only a matter of time that these communities are also affected by COVID-19 and subsequent strains on local health care systems.

Because of First Nations’ long history and effectiveness as a grant-maker and our deep connectivity with grassroots and grass-tops Indian communities, we believe we have a key role to play in ensuring that philanthropic efforts reach Indian Country constituents, who are often invisible or an afterthought in times like these.

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**A Call to Action**

**Please help Native communities during this unprecedented crisis**

All funds raised for First Nations’ COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund go directly to support Native organizations on the front lines of COVID-19. Donate [here](#) to send funds expressly to them.

*First Nations’ COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund*  
*Support Native Communities*  
[Donate here!](#)
What Else You Can Do To Support Native Communities

1. **Invest Directly in Native-Controlled Organizations and Tribal Nations**
   If you have existing relationships or already give to Native communities, reach out and ask how you can support them directly. You can review past and current First Nations’ grantees by state [here](#).

2. **Elevate Native Voices**
   Included here are articles about how this pandemic and economic crisis are affecting Native communities. Share them with your colleagues to raise awareness about the challenges facing Indian populations.

3. **Stay Informed**
   Sign up for First Nations emails to stay up-to-date on needs in Indian Country and track grants from the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund. Sign up [here](#).

4. **Advocate**
   Even not during a crisis, Native people are largely invisible or treated as an afterthought. When you see injustice happen or witness a Native population being marginalized, speak out.

Learn More

Though information about COVID-19 is readily available in most areas, for Indian Country, access to news is dependent on already strapped tribal governments, independent journalists and the handful of Native news outlets. Here are a few links to news articles and news outlet highlighting COVID-19 and Native communities.

**Native Media Outlets**

- [Indian Country Today](#)
- [Indianz.com](#)
- [Native America Calling](#)
First Nations Development Institute

- Navajo Times
- Hopi Tutuveni
- Native News Online

Articles

- The COVID-19 hit to Indian Country is nearly $50 billion
- Rep. Tom Cole: Fighting an invisible enemy
- Kevin Abourezk: Indian Country can’t be left behind in coronavirus crisis
- Trump administration moves slowly on coronavirus funding for Indian Country
- Tribal leaders face great need and don’t have enough resources to respond to the coronavirus pandemic
- The US Has Neglected Indian Country for Years. Now Comes a Pandemic
- How the coronavirus threatens Native American communities
- Emergency coronavirus funds for American Indian health stalled
- ‘Timing is critical’: Native Americans warn virus may overwhelm underfunded health services
- Native American tribes brace for coronavirus: ‘It’s going to be a test’
- As Schools Close Amid Coronavirus Concerns, the Digital Divide Leaves Some Students Behind

Contact Us

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Please feel free to share this document with others who may want to participate in pandemic relief for Native communities.