



COVID-19 is threatening Native communities at disproportionately high rates. The lack of food, resources, infrastructure, funding, and health care that has been here all along is now exacerbated. Native communities are facing severe challenges.

**First Nations is responding by continuing our three-prong approach to systemic change: educating, advocating and capitalizing.** That's why we created the **COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund**. Through this fund, we are addressing the needs of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities to minimize the immediate risks and mitigate the long-term effects the pandemic will create throughout Indian Country.

Grants through the **Emergency Response Fund** are being made efficiently and swiftly to high-concentration areas in California, New Mexico, the Pacific Northwest, New York, Navajo Nation, Hopi Nation and COVID-19 hotspots nationwide.

These grants are being distributed promptly, without bureaucracy or an arduous application process. In addition, all donations to the Emergency Fund are being passed through without administrative fees. **100% of donations are going directly to Native communities.**

Donate [here](#) and read on to learn more.

### EMERGENCY FUND BY THE NUMBERS

- **7 rounds** of grant support
- **\$1,441,500** in funds distributed
- **102** Native organization or tribal government program recipients
- **14,000** pounds of meat distributed
- **21,000** gallons of water donated
- **100%** of funds going directly to Native communities



## UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

Native communities (both urban and rural) are often invisible in ordinary times. This invisibility 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<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> An overlay of the USDA Food Deserts Locator

*"I am especially proud of First Nations' actions and approach to community investments during the COVID-19 pandemic. First Nations' fundamental belief is that communities have the solutions and know best what's needed. Our job is just to be a vehicle to get funds quickly to people on the ground fighting the good fight. It is refreshing to see funds already out the door, unrestricted without the barriers of extensive applications and other red tape that holds up vital resources when they are most urgently needed."*

New Mexico Sen. Benny Shendo, Jr., Jemez Pueblo  
First Nations Board Chairman

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/616.html>

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-research-022117.html>

<sup>3</sup> Henchy, G., Cheung, M., & Weill, J. (2000). *WIC in Native American communities: Building a healthier America – Report summary*. Food Research and Action Center. Washington, DC.

<sup>4</sup> Gunderson C. (2008). Measuring the extent, depth, and severity of food insecurity: an application to American Indians in the USA. *Journal of Population and Economics*. 21: 191-215

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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.<sup>5</sup>

- The federal government spends half as much on health per person for Indians as it does for federal prisoners.<sup>6</sup> 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 effects of COVID-19 could mirror the devastating pandemics that decimated Native populations upon colonization and the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny.

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.

## IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM NEEDS

Soon after the pandemic hit, First Nations' senior staff met virtually with Native communities to identify immediate needs. Those needs are far-reaching.

- **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.

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<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, K. K., & Patchell, B. (2009). State of the science: A cultural view of Native Americans and diabetes prevention. *Journal of cultural diversity*, 16(1), 32.



- **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 underfunded. 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 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.

In the long term, COVID-19 will lead to additional detrimental effects on health, economies, food and access. Even after businesses and highways open, the ramifications in Indian Country will remain.

## POSITIONED TO RESPOND

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 philanthropic efforts reach Indian Country constituents, who are often invisible or an afterthought in times like these.

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**As such, we have made three rounds of grant funding totaling \$1,083,000 to 71 Native organizations nationwide.** We have done this without requiring already overwhelmed organizations to submit applications or requests. And, 100% of funding has been directly passed through, without administrative and overhead costs.

First Nations is the most highly-rated American Indian nonprofit in the nation, meeting strict criteria of top charity watchdogs.



BBB Accredited Charity. First Nations meets all 20 Standards of the [Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance](#), achieving key objectives in governance and oversight, effectiveness, finances, fundraising and donor privacy.



Charity Navigator. First Nations scores an overall score of 97.13 out of 100 on [Charity Navigator](#), including a 100 out of 100 score for accountability and transparency.



GuideStar Platinum. For eight years in a row, First Nations has received the top 4-Star rating from [GuideStar](#), Charity Navigator's partner in evaluating organizations and impact. Only 4% of the nonprofits rated by Charity Navigator have earned this distinction for so many consecutive years.

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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.

## 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**

In crisis or not, 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,

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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](#)
- [Indians.com](#)
- [Native America Calling](#)
- [Navajo Times](#)
- [Hopi Tutuveni](#)
- [Native News Online](#)

### **Articles**

[The Coronavirus is Hitting Tribal Schools Hard](#)

[Coronavirus Infections Continue to Rise on Navajo Nation](#)

[Doctors Without Borders Rushes to Aid Navajo Nation in COVID-19 Battle](#)

[Makah Tribe Fights Coronavirus with Self-reliance and Extreme Isolation](#)

[New Mexico Pueblo Fights a High Infection Rate](#)

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

Stay in the know about First Nations' Emergency Response Fund at [www.firstnations.org/emergency-response-fund](http://www.firstnations.org/emergency-response-fund), where you'll also find a complete list of funders, food and water donation partners, and grantees.

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