

Montana Produces First-Ever YRBS Reports on American Indian Youth Risk Behaviors

Problem Overview:

Although 10% of Montana's high school student population is American Indian (AI), the state did not have representative data on youth risk behaviors for this population group through the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). As a result, Montana's schools and other youth-serving organizations and agencies lacked critical data necessary for developing effective health promotion and disease prevention programs and messages for the AI population—which is disproportionately affected by a number of different health problems. For example, in the United States,

- The gonorrhea rate in 2010 among American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) was 4.6 times the rate among whites, and overall, the rate of chlamydia among AI/AN was more than four times the rate among whites.
- A study showed the survival of youth 36 months after AIDS diagnosis was lower for AI/AN youth, compared with white youth.

Program/Activity Description:

To address the lack of representative AI youth risk behavior data, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) worked closely with the CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health surveillance staff to

- Set up detailed procedures for surveying AI students during the 2011 YRBS data collection.
- Create step-by-step instructions for local school staff to follow in administering the YRBS.
- Conduct regular quality-assurance checks during the survey to ensure proper data collection methods were being followed.
- Provide complete, timely, and accurate data while working across multiple tribal organizations and within appropriate cultural contexts.

Program/Activity Results:

For the first time in 20 years, Montana collected representative (weighted) data about health risk behaviors among its AI students. The OPI then produced a series of special reports featuring the AI data, including reports documenting differences in risk behaviors between AI students living on or near a reservation, and AI students attending urban schools.

The YRBS AI reports were disseminated to 180 agencies and organizations across the state that work with, or have an interest in, the health of American Indian young people, their wellness, their education, and their futures. These new AI reports are being used to —

- Guide AI agencies in determining the type of interventions that will most benefit AI students in promoting healthy behaviors—based on their greatest needs and current risks.
- Increase awareness of the complex issues facing AI students, their families, and their communities, including the need for multiple layers of support to improve their health and academics.
- Help Native American public health agencies and other organizations design more effective prevention messages regarding sexual risk behaviors, drinking, drug use, and other unhealthy behaviors.

In addition —

- The Montana Board of Crime Control uses the YRBS data to monitor risk factors among AI/AN youth, who are disproportionately represented in the state's juvenile justice system. Having the AI/AN data better equips the state to educate these youth regarding sexual behaviors that put them at risk for STDs and HIV.
- One Montana school district hired a full-time staffer to work specifically with AI youth and their families on accessing community resources and improving academic achievement.

