



Alcohol **Treatment** and **Health Disparities** in **American Indians**

Overview: Some American Indian communities are disproportionately affected by alcohol use disorders and alcohol-related problems, yet surprisingly little is known about the access to alcohol treatment services and the content and quality of alcohol treatment services available in those communities. These gaps in knowledge have seriously undermined community efforts to mount a sustained, effective response to a growing number of alcohol-related health, social, and economic challenges. This research project examines processes of treatment and treatment outcomes among American Indians enrolled in alcohol treatment at the Native American Rehabilitation Association (NARA) Northwest in Portland, Oregon, and the Seattle Indian Health Board (SIHB) in Seattle, Washington. These two treatment settings, which primarily serve urban American Indians, provide numerous treatment options for people with alcohol problems; are closely connected with general medical services; offer ancillary care such as family therapy; and support a number of ongoing research projects. Both agencies serve members of several tribes and both have clients who spend part of the year in the city and part on reservations. They have adapted for American Indian people a number of standardized therapies, including motivational enhancement and cognitive behavioral therapy, and incorporated them into their treatment protocols.

Design/Methods: Clients entering these programs for treatment of alcohol problems and who consent to enroll in the study undergo multiple comprehensive evaluations using uniform assessment instruments to determine baseline demographic and clinical characteristics and to monitor response to treatment. Interviews with clients and providers, observations of treatment sessions, and reviews of taped treatment encounters are being used to elicit details about the nature of treatment services provided. Currently, the research team is completing the data collection phase of the project. Data analysis then will be undertaken and manuscripts will be produced. The research team will use a variety of statistical models to relate treatments to clinical outcomes, including but not limited to abstinence, number of drinking days, alcohol-related problems, psychological distress, and general medical problems. Information generated by this project will inform future efforts to develop and disseminate effective approaches to the treatment of alcohol use disorders among American Indians living in urban communities.

Significance: Information generated from the project will be useful in devising optimal treatment for indigenous people living in urban areas and in planning randomized clinical trials. The research team (headed by a Cherokee psychiatrist and including members of several tribes) will disseminate results in collaboration with the newly funded American Indian and Alaska Native National Resource Center on Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment.

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