



American Indian  
Cancer Foundation.



**ANNUAL REPORT**

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## INTRODUCTION

Dear Supporters, Partners, Sponsors, and Donors,

It is with great pride and gratitude that I address you in the 2023 annual report of the American Indian Cancer Foundation. As the CEO, I am honored to witness the dedication and resilience of our partners,

Tribes, and the individuals who have tirelessly worked towards battling cancer disparities.

Native communities have faced unique challenges when it comes to cancer, but through our culture of giving and mutual support, we have demonstrated remarkable strength and unity. AICAF staff strive to incorporate our traditions, medicines, and teachings of Tribal communities by ensuring that the spaces we create together as a team and for the Tribes with whom we partner intentionally center on these Tribal pillars.

As we emerge from the challenges we faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become increasingly evident how certain aspects of health care have been significantly impacted. One such area of concern is cancer screening.

The disruption in routine health care resulted in many of our relatives missing their timely cancer screenings. One study published in the *Journal of Preventative Medicine* found that during January 2020 to June 2020, the largest decrease in breast and cervical cancer screenings were among American Indian/Alaska Native women (98% decline in April), compared with the previous 5-year average<sup>1</sup>.

The delayed screenings during the pandemic must be addressed promptly to prevent further escalation of cases in our communities.

Early detection remains one of the most effective strategies in the fight against cancer, and timely screenings can significantly improve prognosis and treatment outcomes.

I'm proud to share that our team has been working tirelessly with Tribal and Urban Indian Clinics to ensure that our relatives are returning for their routine screenings. It is through the generous support and donations from our sponsors and donors that we have been able to facilitate this vital effort.

Your generosity has enabled us to continue and expand our work, reaching more individuals and communities in need. Your contributions have made a significant impact on the lives of those battling cancer, and we are truly grateful for your ongoing support. The hard work and commitment of our staff, partners and Tribes have not gone unnoticed, and their efforts have been instrumental in providing hope and healing for those affected by cancer.

As we look towards the future, we remain dedicated to our mission of addressing cancer disparities in Native populations and promoting health and wellness within Indigenous communities. Together, we can make a difference and create a brighter and healthier future for all.

Thank you for standing with us on this important journey. Your support is invaluable, and we are inspired by the collective efforts of our community. Let us continue to work hand in hand, supporting each other and making a meaningful impact on the lives of those we serve.

With heartfelt appreciation, Ketabi, Woplia, Thank You,

*Melissa Buffalo*

Melissa Buffalo, *Meskwaki and Dakota*

<sup>1</sup>DeGroff, A et al. "COVID-19 impact on screening test volume through the National Breast and Cervical Cancer early detection program, January-June 2020, in the United States." *Preventive medicine* vol. 151 (2021): 106559. doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106559



# OUR STORY, OUR IMPACT

## MISSION

The American Indian Cancer Foundation (AICAF) works to eliminate the cancer burdens of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people through improved access to prevention, early detection, treatment, and survivor support.

## VISION

Through hard work, culturally appropriate community-based programs and policy change that affords Native people access to the best prevention and treatment strategies, we see a day where American Indian communities are free of the burdens of cancer.



We believe Native communities have the wisdom to find the solutions to cancer inequities, but are often seeking the organizational capacity, expert input, and resources to do so.



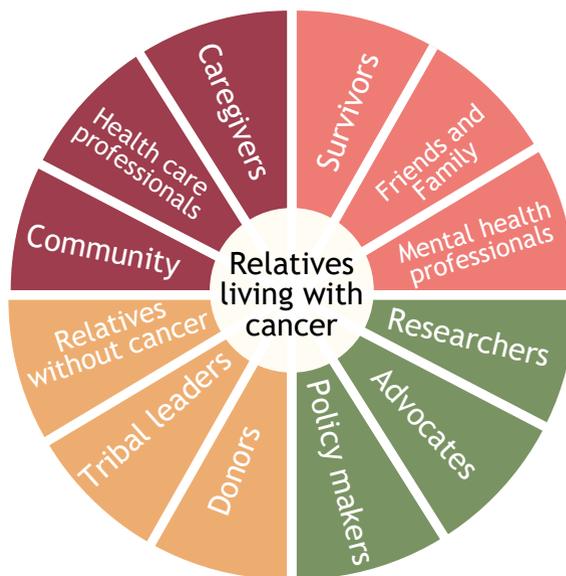
We support innovative, community-based interventions that engage Native populations in the discovery of their own cancer best practices.



We strive to be a partner trusted by Tribal and urban community members, leaders, health care providers, and others working toward effective and sustainable cancer solutions.

## WHOM WE SERVE

We are committed to providing our communities with the knowledge, tools, and resources they need to help their relatives make informed decisions about cancer prevention and care. By educating and empowering these individuals, we can collectively work towards a cancer-free future for our people and future generations.



Our circle of support represents individuals united in support of cancer survivors. From caregivers to health care professionals, advocates to Tribal leaders, and beyond. Together, we stand as a community committed to providing support, guidance, and empowerment to our relatives with cancer.



“It is crucial to emphasize the importance of reclaiming Indigenous health. This involves empowering Indigenous peoples to reclaim traditional healing practices, cultural knowledge, and holistic approaches to health and wellness that have been historically marginalized or suppressed. By recognizing and revitalizing Indigenous healing traditions, we address health disparities and foster cultural resilience and self-determination within Indigenous communities. Reclaiming Indigenous health promotes healing not just of the body, but of the mind, spirit, and community, contributing to a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to health equity and well-being.”

CoCo Villaluz,  
Health Equity Manager,  
Hidatsa, Assiniboine &  
Chamorro

## OUR PROGRAMS



Prevention & Policy seeks to engage, educate, and empower AI/AN communities in implementing healthy lifestyle practices that help reduce cancer burdens. We support these practices through Tribal resolutions and policies. We utilize culturally appropriate resources to engage community members and stakeholders to create Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) change in communities, and we also offer training and technical assistance to AI/AN communities and organizations.



AICAF's Research Program works with communities to identify research questions, methods, and funding opportunities that align with community needs and priorities. Our team supports the collection and use of population-specific data, aiming to find culturally relevant health solutions that are both effective and resonate within our unique communities. We prioritize appropriate dissemination of results, so all our communities have access to the information that is most relevant and useful to their efforts to improve their health and wellbeing.

The Evaluation Program supports the work of all AICAF teams and programs, providing insight into improving our efforts and better serving Tribal communities. It establishes and monitors program outputs, outcomes, benchmarks, and success stories. Our team accomplishes this through the use of logic models, evaluation plans, and reports that are shared with our communities.



Cancer Equity Program aims to reduce the cancer burdens on Native people by increasing cancer screening and early detection rates across Indian Country. Program staff focuses their efforts on raising awareness of many common cancers faced by Indigenous people through cancer awareness campaigns that promote screening, culturally tailored resources, cancer coalition, training, and media tools, community education and outreach activities, and collaboration with clinics to help build capacity and improve tribal health systems.

While our mission is to eliminate all types of illness in our communities, AICAF prioritizes the cancers that are most prevalent among AI/AN people. The team centers most projects around these topics: breast, cervical, colorectal, lung, and oral cancers, and HPV immunization.





Traditional  
Tobacco

Tobacco work is embedded into all of AICAF's programs and projects. AICAF's work is guided by our cultures and teachings, which include our sacred traditional tobacco. We acknowledge and honor that traditional tobacco is a gift from Creator, and many communities use it in a traditional way.

Mainstream evidence-based commercial tobacco control interventions often do not produce the same results for Indigenous people. Comprehensive strategies rooted in knowledge of customs, cultural traditions, and ways of knowing are proving to be promising practices for elevating the health of American Indian people. AICAF works with advocates across Indian Country to restore traditional tobacco practices, to reduce commercial tobacco abuse like cigarette smoking, and to prevent secondhand smoke exposure.

## OUR IMPACT

Through unrestricted funding, we not only empower Tribal and Urban Indian Clinics to implement innovative cancer solutions but also sustain vital services like our Virtual Cancer Support Circle. This inclusive platform provides a safe and culturally affirming space for individuals affected by cancer to connect, share experiences, and access support from anywhere.

Your generosity enables us to bridge gaps in care, foster community resilience, and uplift Indigenous voices in the fight against cancer. Together, we're not just providing services; we're nurturing healing, solidarity, and empowerment within our communities.

In 2023, with the support of unrestricted funding, we successfully expanded our Virtual Cancer Support Circle to offer bi-weekly sessions.

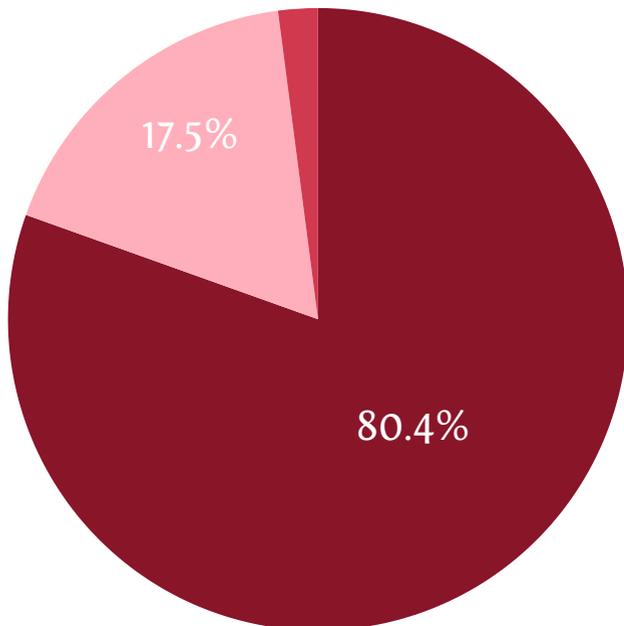
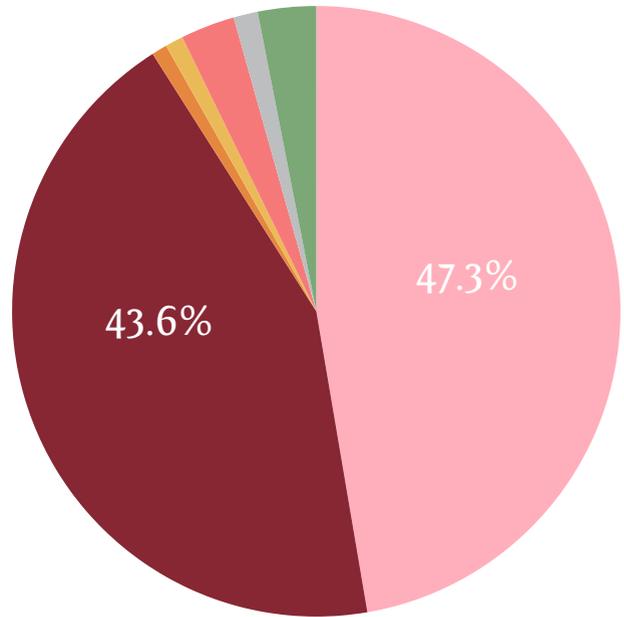
We also launched six cancer awareness campaigns and were able to partner with 33 Tribal and Urban Indian Clinics to implement innovative cancer solutions. Our efforts resulted in completing approximately 563 cancer screenings, providing early detection and vital information for individuals and families impacted by cancer, ultimately increasing the chances of timely intervention, treatment, and improved outcomes.

These initiatives collectively contribute to our mission of reclaiming Indigenous health and supporting those affected by cancer.

# 2023 FINANCIALS

## Support and Revenue

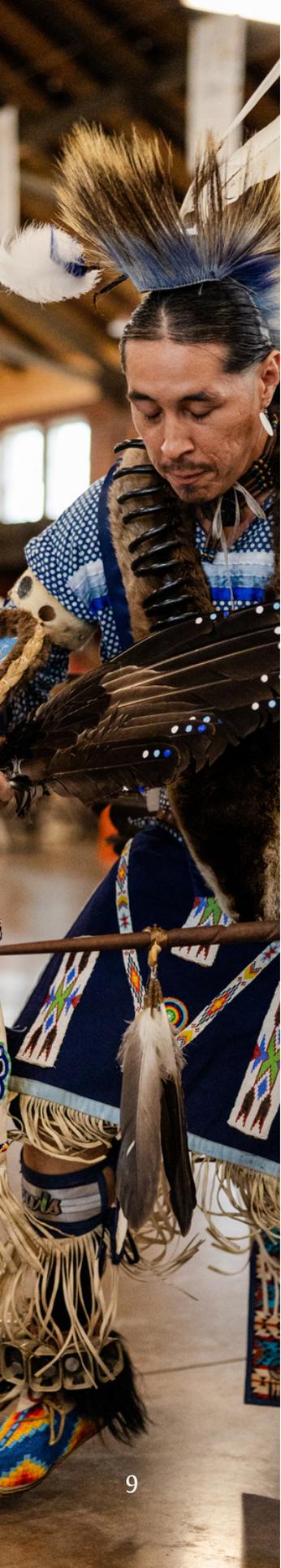
|                                      |                    |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| ■ Grants                             | \$1,651,646        |
| ■ Contracts                          | \$1,523,740        |
| ■ Individual Donations               | \$28,560           |
| ■ Corporate & Organization Donations | \$33,471           |
| ■ Powwow for Hope                    | \$100,570          |
| ■ Polar Plunge                       | \$45,000           |
| ■ Other Income                       | \$107,934          |
| <b>Total Support and Revenue</b>     | <b>\$3,490,920</b> |



## Expenses

|                        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| ■ Program Services     | \$2,238,057        |
| ■ Management & General | \$486,681          |
| ■ Fundraising          | \$107,934          |
| <b>Total Expenses</b>  | <b>\$2,782,176</b> |

*Unaudited*



## POWWOW FOR HOPE

*“AICAF honors relatives who are on the cancer journey...what stood out to me the most (at Powwow for Hope) is that AICAF remembers the caregivers of relatives who are battling cancer. That is a very Indigenous approach, we come from a holistic worldview as Native people, so giving thanks to those who care for our relatives is a big deal. They are a sacred part of the cancer journey.”*

Deanna Standing Cloud, *Red Lake Nation*,  
2023 Powwow for Hope Emcee

This past year, we were pleased to welcome survivors, caregivers, dancers, drums, and community from around the nation back in person to the 2023 Powwow for Hope: Dancing for Life, Love & Hope. After two years of successful virtual gatherings, the 2023 event was well worth the wait. Survivors, caregivers, community members, and community organizations joyfully came together to celebrate the lives of people affected by cancer and honor those we have lost. Local organizations and sponsors joined in the opportunity to support the community by providing awareness and educational health resources, strengthening our mission to provide relevant tools to increase health outcomes.

Women hold a sacred place in many American Indian communities. Understanding that breast cancer is the second leading cause for cancer death amongst American Indian women, AICAF has actively elevated breast cancer awareness during the Powwow for Hope by dedicating space to honor the lives of those affected by the disease.

This tradition was reignited as we honored survivors of breast cancer with our Pink Shawl special and honor songs.

This event has historically been a space to raise not only awareness of the cancer burdens American Indian communities experience but also to raise dollars that support the hard work of the American Indian Cancer Foundation. The Powwow for Hope silent auction and community teams event provides organizations, families, and individuals an opportunity to participate in supporting the mission of AICAF through fundraising. Culturally relevant prevention resources, connection to healing, and supportive services for survivors, caregivers, and their families benefit and grow from the monetary support of donors and funders. Every year, we are encouraged by the significant turnout and participation of community for these events. Our core values of taking care of each other, sharing, and teaching resonate in these acts of giving.

We are honored to announce that with the help of our dedicated sponsors, contributors, and donors, we reached our goal of raising over \$100,000 at the 2023 Powwow for Hope.









## Community Champion Spotlight

*“I am proud to be a part of the MHA Nation, where I witness exemplary leadership dedicated to raising awareness about cancer issues in Indian Country. The Ice Warrior Challenge epitomized individuals and groups rallying in tribute to those impacted by cancer. The atmosphere was charged with emotion and anticipation as we prepared to take the cold plunge into the icy river, all for an important cause.”*

CoCo Villaluz, *Hidatsa, Assiniboine & Chamorro*  
Ice Warrior Participant

The 7th Annual Ice Warrior Plunge at the 4Bears Marina in New Town, ND, was a testament to the unwavering dedication of former AICAF Board Chair, Mark Fox. As the host of this impactful event, Mark Fox demonstrated his commitment to AICAF’s mission and his passion for serving American Indian communities.

Challenging a temperature of only 32 degrees at 4Bears Marina, 91 participants gathered to support the cause of culturally responsible cancer awareness and education. The Ice Warrior Plunge symbolized a collective effort to address the disproportionate impact of cancer on American Indian populations and to work towards eradicating this disease.

Mark Fox’s leadership and vision shone brightly throughout the event. His tireless efforts to raise awareness and resources for AICAF’s mission inspired all who attended. Participants, volunteers, and supporters alike were moved by Fox’s dedication and the sense

of unity that permeated the Ice Warrior Plunge.

The event was not just a fundraiser; it was a celebration of resilience, hope, and community. Through traditional ceremonies, storytelling, and educational sessions, the Ice Warrior Plunge fostered a sense of empowerment and solidarity among attendees. Participants left inspired and motivated to continue the fight against cancer in American Indian communities.

As the sun set over the 4Bears Marina, a sense of optimism filled the air. The 7th Annual Ice Warrior Plunge had not only raised vital funds for AICAF's initiatives but had also sparked a renewed sense of purpose and determination in the fight against cancer. Mark Fox's leadership and the spirit of unity that permeated the event served as a beacon of hope for a future free from the burden of this devastating disease.

The success of the Ice Warrior Plunge was a testament to the power of collective action and the enduring commitment of individuals like Mark Fox to making a difference. Participants of the Ice Warrior Plunge stood united in their resolve to create a brighter, healthier future for American Indian communities by raising approximately \$100,000 for AICAF and other local cancer programs. AICAF is proud to call Chairman Mark Fox our friend, our supporter, and a fellow warrior in the fight against cancer.



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Comprised of Native leaders from diverse backgrounds and regions across the nation, our board members embody a rich tapestry of experience, expertise, and commitment to our mission.

Each member of our board brings forth an impressive set of skills, energy, passion, and invaluable connections, all dedicated to advancing the goals of AICAF.

As we navigate the complex landscape of community empowerment, cultural preservation, and policy, the collective wisdom and leadership of our board serve as guiding beacons, steering us toward meaningful impact and positive change.



**Chairperson**  
Nicole Hallingstad  
*Tlingit*



**Vice Chairperson**  
Tamera Begay, Esq.  
*Navajo*



**Secretary**  
Donna Palakiko,  
PhD, RN, APRN  
*Native Hawaiian*



**Treasurer**  
Frances Tiger  
*Muscogee Creek  
Nation*



**Board Member**  
Johnny Nelson  
*Navajo*



**Board Member**  
Lillian Sparks  
Robinson, JD  
*Rosebud Sioux*

# Staff

**Chief Executive Officer-** Melissa Buffalo, MS, *Meskwaki & Dakota*  
**Research Assistant-** Madison Anderson, MPH, *Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe*  
**Deputy Director-** Lannesse Baker, MPH, *Anishinaabe, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa*  
**Office Administrator-** Samantha Blackhall, AS  
**Coalition Coordinator-** Karri Bigboy, BA , *Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*  
**Cancer Programs Coordinator-** Ketaki Birje, MPH  
**Epidemiologist-** Emily Bobbyock, MPH  
**Nurse Project Manager-** Faith Kimberly Brandon, MS  
**Cancer Programs Specialist-** Jenna Holt, MS , *Chippewa*  
**Cancer Programs Specialist-** Misse Chapman Skinner, MLS , *Standing Rock & Santee*  
**Nurse Project Manager-** Tina Gerovac-Lavasseur, DNP, RN  
**Prevention & Policy Specialist-** Eric Gipson, MPH  
**Evaluation Specialist-** Faith Gronda, BA , *Wyandot of Anderdon*  
**Research Coordinator-** Mac Hickey, BA , *Ojibwe/ Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*  
**Health Equity Program Coordinator-** Mahlea Hunt, BA , *Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina*  
**Communications Project Manager-** Shoshanna Johnson, BA , *Absentee Shawnee*  
**Research Specialist-** Amika Kamath, BA  
**Cancer Equity Coordinator-** Misha LaPlante, BA , *Bay Mills Ojibwe*  
**Prevention and Policy Manager-** Gwendena Lee-Gatewood, BS, *White Mountain Apache*  
**Research Specialist-** Evie Odden, BA , *Sisseton Wahpeton and Mdewakanton Dakota lineal descendant*  
**Cancer Programs Manager-** Lindsey Petras, MSN  
**Research Manager-** Wyatt Pickner, MPH , *Hunkpati Dakota*  
**Operations and Human Resources Manager-** Jen Rico, MA  
**Graphic Designer-** Rhonda Schrader, BS  
**Coalition Coordinator-** Faith Sharp, MA , *Choctaw*  
**Indigenous Evaluation Specialist-** Veronica Seifert, MS , *Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*  
**Finance Manager-** Marie Smith, BA  
**Health Equity Manager-** CoCo Villaluz, BA, *Hidatsa, Assiniboine & Chamorro*  
**Prevention & Policy Specialist-** Nora Vonnegut MPP, MPH  
**Multimedia Specialist-** George Wesley



## **2023 FUNDERS**

Center's for Disease Control and Prevention  
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids  
Essentia Health  
Exact Sciences  
Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa  
Mayo Clinic Center for Outreach and Engagement for  
Research Services  
Mayo Clinic Community Engagement  
Minnesota Department of Health  
National Cancer Institute  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Urban Indian Health Institute  
University of Minnesota

## **2023 SPONSORS**

American Cancer Society- Cancer Action Network Minnesota  
AmeriHealth Administrators  
Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota  
Cellular One  
Colon Cancer Coalition  
Eisai Inc.  
Exact Sciences  
Genentech-Catori  
Hennepin Healthcare Comprehensive Cancer Engagement  
Mayo Clinic Center for Health Equity and Community Engagement  
Minnesota Department of Health  
Nashke Native Games  
Pfizer  
Ryan Mechanical  
Sears Imported Autos  
The Minneapolis Foundation  
Triple Moon, LLC  
UCare Minnesota  
University of Minnesota- Masonic Cancer Center

## ABOUT THE ARTIST



Ken Tackett is a Texas based illustrator specializing in depictions of motherhood including pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding.

### Artist statement

My goal is to create a peerless collection of mother-baby art that not only displays a vibrant uniqueness in execution, but also shows motherhood beyond the pastel depictions that are all too common. I want to show the joy, exhaustion, surprises, drawbacks, serenity, chaos, and more within my works. I work to accomplish this by perfecting a unique style that incorporates inclusivity, body-positivity, and honesty.

[www.kentackett.com](http://www.kentackett.com)



**American Indian  
Cancer Foundation®**

2355 Fairview Ave N #317  
Saint Paul, MN 55113

612.484.9670  
info@aicaf.org

[AmericanIndianCancer.org](http://AmericanIndianCancer.org)