

TRIBAL HEALTH IN FOCUS



Data-Driven Prevention through AICAF's REACH Program





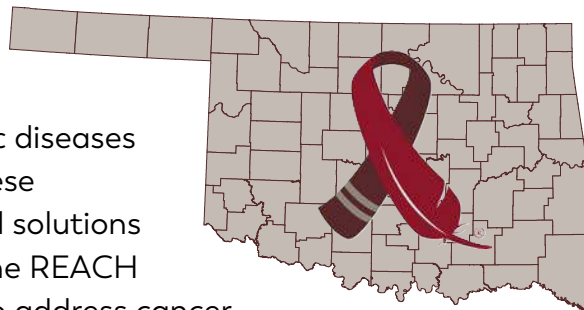
Introduction to AICAF and the REACH Program

The American Indian Cancer Foundation (AICAF) is a national Native-led nonprofit that is dedicated to eliminating the cancer burdens faced by Indigenous communities through culturally respectful education, prevention, early detection, and healing practices.

As a part of the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) initiative through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), AICAF and the Indigenous Cancer Solutions Oklahoma Coalition are working together to strengthen the health and wellness of Tribal communities that have a presence within the borders of Oklahoma.

The Need and Why this Matters:

American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities continue to experience persistent health disparities, including high rates of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. These disparities highlight the need for community-led solutions that are rooted in our Indigenous knowledge. The REACH program helps communities identify solutions to address cancer risk factors such as poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and commercial tobacco use.



These disparities are also deeply connected to broader social determinants of health. Housing, education, employment, access to transportation, and the availability of culturally safe healthcare all play critical roles in shaping outcomes for Tribal Nations.

To reduce cancer risk and promote long-term wellness, AICAF's REACH program supports Tribal communities in advancing policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes that honor cultural values and traditional practices. These are essential steps toward achieving health equity and eliminating cancer burdens in AI/AN communities.

Why Oklahoma?

The lands within the present-day boundaries of Oklahoma are home to 39 sovereign Tribal Nations and 579,440 American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) individuals alone or in combination (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). It's important to note the data throughout this resource is presented at the state and national level based on publicly available data. Tribal sovereignty and data sovereignty must be respected in this process. Tribal Nations are sovereign governments and should have ownership over how their data is collected,

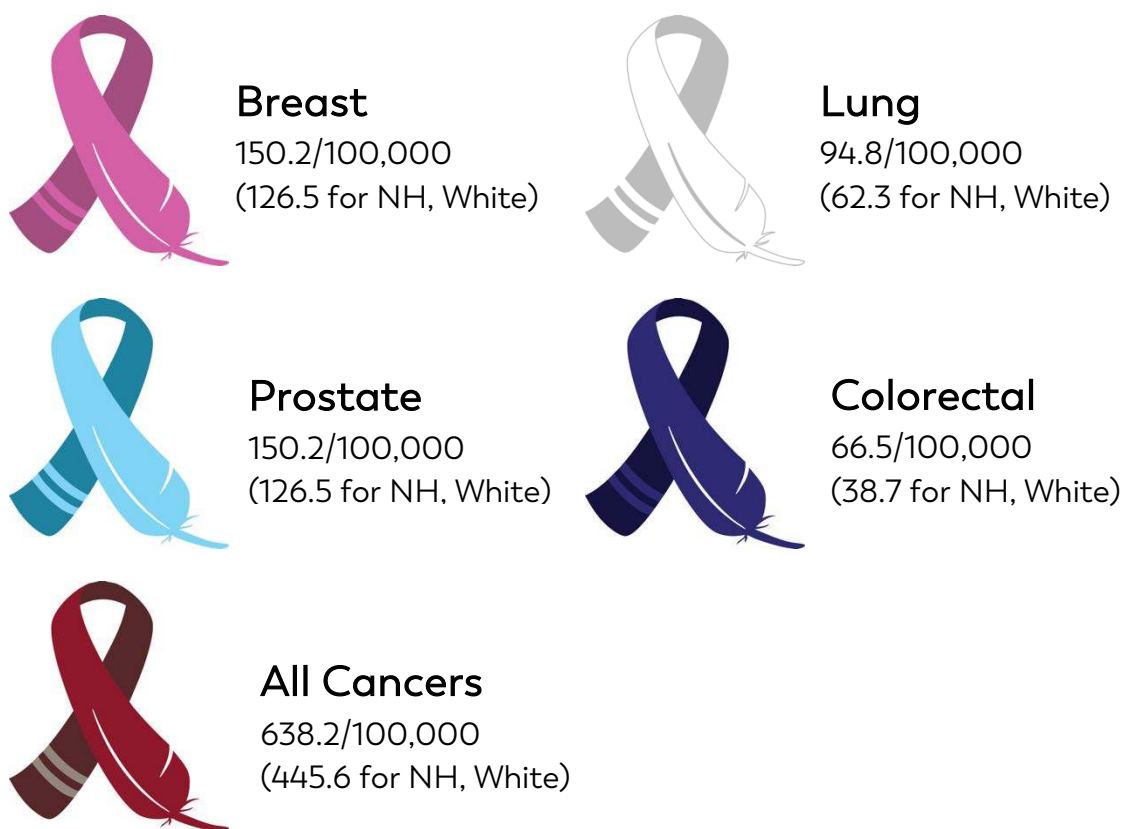
interpreted, and shared. Honoring data sovereignty means engaging Tribes from the beginning of research and evaluation processes to ensure accuracy, respect, and benefit to the community.

Oklahoma faces significant health challenges, particularly in its Native communities, where the need for culturally tailored prevention and health resources is critical. Addressing these challenges can lead to healthier communities and significant long-term savings in healthcare costs.

The top two causes of death within the lands of present-day Oklahoma are heart disease (257.1 deaths per 100,000 people) and cancer (171.6 deaths per 100,000 people) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024d).

AI/AN individuals have higher rates of getting cancer compared to white individuals in Oklahoma.

5-year cancer incidence rates in Oklahoma's AI/AN population (2018-2022) (U.S. Cancer Statistics Working Group):



AI/AN life expectancy is 65.6 years—over a decade shorter than the U.S. average of 76.4 years. (Arias et al., 2023). This disparity results from historical and ongoing systemic barriers. Native healthcare systems have not received the support they need, and access to services that truly reflect our cultures is still limited. By focusing on traditional ways of eating, staying active, and living free from commercial tobacco, we can take back our health and build real, lasting change in our communities.



Indigenous Cancer Solutions Oklahoma Coalition (ICS-OK)

Founded in 2024, the Indigenous Cancer Solutions Coalition (ICS-OK) strives to promote healthy behaviors and reduce chronic disease risk factors, while collaborating with and for Native communities to reduce health disparities and achieve health equity.

We're working toward long-term changes that build on the strengths our communities already have. The ICS-OK Coalition knows the solutions are within the community. By coming together, listening to each other, and staying grounded in our cultures we're creating a strong path toward lasting health and wellness.

Nutrition

Food Service Guidelines (FSG)

Standards ensuring healthy, culturally relevant menu offerings in food service settings (CDC, 2024b).

Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines

Evidence-based strategies to improve access to healthy foods ("Healthy Eating Research," 2020).

Produce Prescription Programs

Healthcare providers prescribe fruits & vegetables to patients, improving diet and chronic disease outcomes (CDC, 2024e).

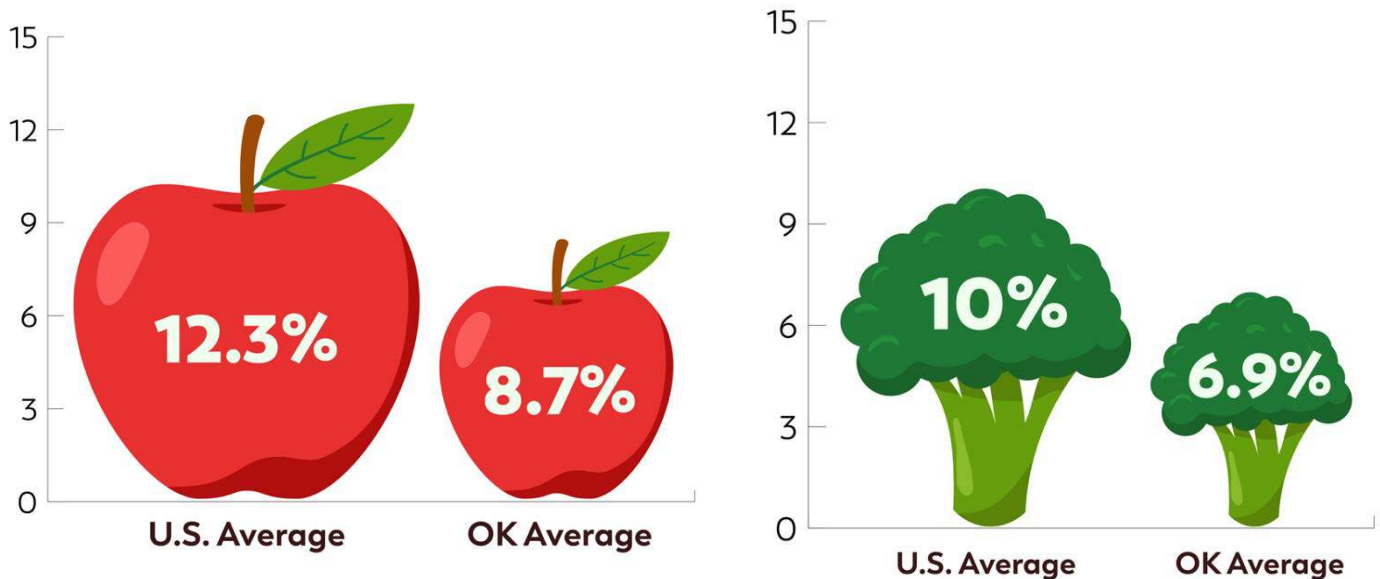
Food Security

Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2025).

Food insecure households in Oklahoma (USDA, 2025): **15.4%** vs **12.2%** for U.S. average

Oklahoma ranked 42nd nationally in 2022 for diabetes prevalence overall, exceeding the U.S. average (Oklahoma State Department of Health). In Oklahoma and nationally, diabetes rates are highest among AI/AN communities (CDC, n.d.-b).

As seen below, less than 15% of US adults meet the recommended fruit intake guidelines and only 10% meet the vegetable guidelines. These percentages are even lower in Oklahoma.



This makes it critical for Tribal communities to prioritize Food Service Guidelines (FSG), Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines, and Produce Prescription Programs to combat this growing health crisis. Benefits of these efforts and the need for Indigenous programs include:

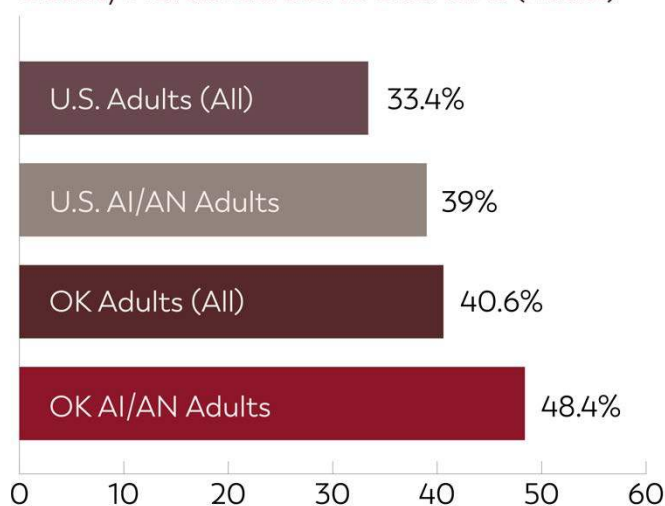
- Restoring our traditional foodways
- Supporting chronic disease prevention by increasing access to fruits and vegetables
- Healing through Indigenous foods and knowledge

ICS-OK's Role:

- Supporting Tribal partners with the tools to implement FSG and HER Guidelines in tribal clinics and schools.
- Assisting community-led produce prescription models that integrate traditional foodways.
- Building capacity through technical assistance to strengthen existing food sovereignty movements.

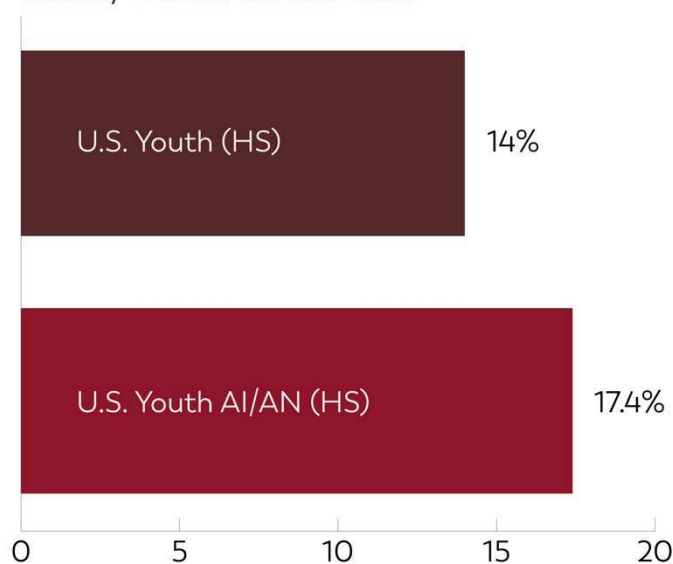
Obesity Prevalence

Obesity Prevalence: U.S. vs Oklahoma (Adults)



Obesity Prevalence %

Obesity Prevalence: U.S. Youth



Obesity Prevalence %

Source: USCS Data Visualizations - CDC - 2022

Physical Activity

Increasing physical activity can lead to better health outcomes and therefore reduce healthcare costs. Building active and walkable communities are steps that can be taken to contribute to improving those health outcomes. In addition, this work helps support local economies and create cohesive communities (CDC, 2024a). Movement has long been woven into daily life — from seasonal ceremonies to connections with land, family, and tradition.

AI/AN Youth who are within walking distance to schools

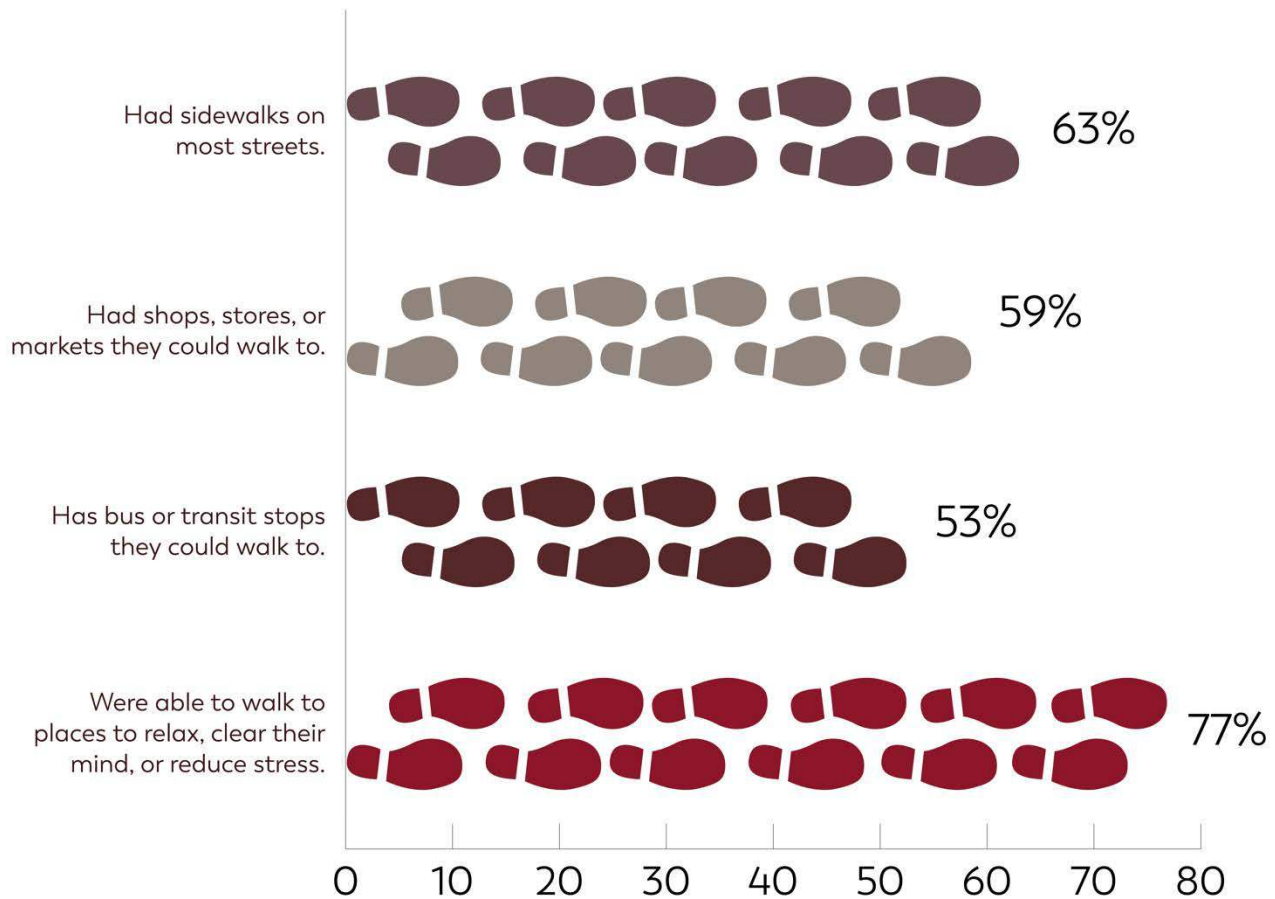
- **47.4%** of children ages 5-17 live within a mile of a public school in Oklahoma (CDC, n.d.-a)

AI/AN Population within walking distance to parks

- **53.5%** of people live within a mile of a park in Oklahoma, compared to 69.7% for AI/AN in Oklahoma (CDC, n.d.-b)

This shows us how important it is to connect activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations, whether it's to our powwow grounds, ceremonial grounds, churches, or schools.

The percentage of US adults reporting access to activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations near their home was (CDC, 2025):



Starting Point:

A good place to start is by conducting walk audits in your community. Through this activity you can learn about the structure and foundation of your streets and identify gaps, strengths, and areas for improvement. Community buy-in is essential. Without support from decision makers, efforts cannot move forward.

Tobacco

Oklahoma has higher mortality rates for heart disease, lung cancer, stroke, and COPD compared to the national average (OSDH, n.d.-b). Additionally, AI/AN people have a higher risk of death and disease caused by using commercial tobacco products like cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and cigars. In 2023, **23%** of AI/AN reported smoking cigarettes, which was the highest prevalence of smoking in Oklahoma (CDC, 2024c).



It is also important to highlight the differences between commercial and sacred or traditional tobacco.

AICAF describes that Traditional Tobacco is used for prayer, spiritual guidance, discipline, and protection. Often, Traditional Tobacco is offered to the Creator to express gratitude for land, Indigenous foods, water and ways of life. This gift should be respected and used in the proper way for health and to promote generational well-being of all people across Turtle Island. Traditional Tobacco plants and customs vary across Tribal nations.

Why is this important to point out?

Because the tobacco industry is still targeting our people.

According to Lempert and Glantz (2019), tobacco companies promote their products more heavily to people in racial/ethnic minority groups, including AI/AN people. This is a result of systemic exploitation and profit motives that involve targeting communities with historical trauma and limited access to prevention resources.

Taking Action


At AICAF, we believe the community holds the solutions. Through our coalition, we are here to support and assist with capacity-building efforts through PSE changes to help Native communities thrive.

Measuring impact is an important part of building success stories and guiding future work. Evaluation measures ensure accountability while uplifting Tribal perspectives on what health and wellness.

ICS-OK

A place for thought leaders and community members to come together. Address these inequities faced by our relatives. Here we come together to create resources, policies and hope to create lasting change.

We're committed to continuing this work through:



Policy development honoring Tribal sovereignty, Traditional Tobacco, physical activity, and nutrition.

Expanding traditional food programs and food access.

Amplifying Indigenous knowledge and solutions through coalition-building, storytelling, and community-based research.

If you are interested in learning more about our coalition or would like to join, email us at reach@aicaf.org

Reference/Acknowledgements



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