

NATIVE



FACETS

Columbia University Cancer Prevention Curriculum

# NATIVE FACETS

*F*amily, friends, food and fun are all related to me—I will learn to make  
*A*ctive healthy choices to prevent  
*C*ancers associated with unhealthy lifestyles—and by  
*E*ating wisely, exercising and not smoking—I will embrace life and learn to be  
*T*hankful for my  
*S*urvival and happiness as a Native American

## **Reducing Cancer Risks Among Native American Youth**

**A Native American Culture-Based Curriculum For the Prevention of Certain  
Cancers Associated with Diet and Nutrition**

## FOREWORD

Cancer threatens the well-being and lives of Native people across America. Rates of cancer are unacceptably high among Native Americans and successful treatment rates for those who have fallen victim to cancer are far below comparable rates for whites. What can we do about combatting cancer among Native people?

The National Cancer Institute has helped to answer this question by sponsoring several research studies aimed at learning more about cancer among Native Americans. We were fortunate to be selected for that sponsorship. In carrying out our study, we learned vital information about the best ways to prevent cancer among Native American youth. As delighted as we are with the results of our research, we are even more excited about the response we received from the collaborating Native American communities. Their cooperation, enthusiasm, and tireless support have been impressive. On behalf of Columbia University and the National Cancer Institute, I want to extend my thanks for a job well done. Let's continue the battle against cancer in Native American people. We will not stop until we have scientifically proven methods for helping Indian youth completely avoid cancer from habitual tobacco use and poor dietary habits. That is our goal. Together with your help, we will accomplish it.

Steven P. Schinke, Professor

Columbia University School of Social Work

## INTRODUCTION

Native F.A.C.E.T.S., a project funded in 1990 by the National Cancer Institute, aimed to reduce cancer risks among Native American adolescents. Developed by Columbia University School of Social Work in partnership with Native Americans from urban and rural communities in the Northeast, the project studied *interventions* to prevent cancer among younger Native Americans. Native youths between the ages of 8-12 years old were recruited to participate in the program which took place in their community after school or on weekends.

To ensure a community-based focus, Columbia University staff worked directly with health and social service providers and representative members from the Native community to develop the curriculum. During intervention delivery, local storytellers and other Native American role models shared their knowledge and experience to enhance the cultural health concepts introduced by the site group leaders.

By encouraging the Native youths' decision-making skills, the results suggest that the project had a positive impact on youths' ability to make healthy lifestyle choices. In fact, youths' scores were significantly improved after participating in the project, especially where cultural reasons for not smoking or chewing tobacco were concerned.

The curriculum has several goals. First, to promote Native youths' awareness, integrity, knowledge, and self-determination concerning their immediate and long-term health. Second, to reinforce native Northeast cultural knowledge, values, and ancestral history related to healthful living. Finally, the curriculum's experiential, multi-disciplined approach to delivering information about cancer and its relationship to diet and habitual tobacco use teaches youths to increase their sense of self-determination.

The curriculum has 15 sessions, with the final session culminating in a community presentation by the youth participants. During this community presentation, participants exhibit the various projects and journals produced over the intervention, share highlights from the curriculum, and perform a short skit about healthy dietary and lifestyle practices.

Each curriculum session addresses general principles about how the body and mind work in relation to the social environment. Traditional Native American stories are included to promote cultural awareness. In addition, artistic and creative projects throughout the curriculum reinforce the lessons. A theater performance, for example, helps youths to refine their public speaking skills.

## **Purpose of the Curriculum**

## **Delivery of the Curriculum**

## Need for the Project

These experiences provide participating youth with an enjoyable mix of learning and activity, while simultaneously encouraging a sense of cultural continuity and open dialogue about preventive health practices.

Increasingly, Native Americans across the U.S. face cancer as a major health risk. Cancer is the third leading cause of death among Native Americans overall, and the second leading cause of death among Native Americans over age 45. Cancers of the stomach, liver, cervix, uterus, breast, gall bladder and kidneys are on the increase in many Native communities. This curriculum promotes the health philosophy historically echoed throughout Native America, and is informed by the need to maintain a balance in our physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual connectedness.

There is a long association between Native Americans and healthy nutritious foods. These foods, such as tomatoes, potatoes, corn, squash, and beans, are excellent sources of nutrition and help promote a balanced diet. It is important to recall this history in promoting health among Native children. In earlier times, Native people ate foods low in fat. Most foods were either boiled or dried. The traditional Native diet from hunting, gathering, and fishing is the same diet we promote as part of a healthy life-style

incorporating exercise, a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, and occasional meat and fish.

Selected by the collaborating Native organizations, trained group leaders were primarily responsible for delivering the curriculum to participating youth. Group leaders were trained in a comprehensive week-long program led by curriculum developers, Native and non-Native educators, social workers, and performance artists.

Over the course of this five year study, we successfully implemented three separate skills interventions for reducing Native youths' cancer risks associated with dietary habits and tobacco use. Findings from our study are available through written requests to Professor Steven Schinke, Columbia University School of Social Work, 622 West 113th St., New York, NY 10025.

Sessions were held once a week for 15 weeks after regular school hours and beginning with the start of the fall term school year. Locations for sessions varied with participating community organizations or program sponsors. Transportation of youths to and from sessions was arranged by the group leaders, with assistance from the sponsoring organization.

## **Outcome Goals**

## **Typical Session Format**