



Social Wellness for the Winter

Maintaining social wellness in the winter can be especially challenging because of travel difficulties and increased feelings of isolation; the holiday season also can trigger trauma and pain for many Indigenous people. It's important to cultivate social wellness as a protective measure.

SOCIAL WELLNESS RESOURCES

The National Institutes of Health created a general Social Wellness Toolkit with six strategies, including action item checklists, on how to improve your social health

(<https://www.nih.gov/health-information/social-wellness-toolkit>):

- Make connections
- Take care of yourself while caring for others
- Get active together
- Bond with your kids
- Build healthy relationships
- Shape your family's habits

Social wellness is the ability to form healthy relationships with oneself and others, as well as fostering positive connections with friends, family, and the community. In June 2023, the Surgeon General [issued an advisory](#) on the healing effects of social connection and community. In recent years, according to the advisory, almost half of American adults reported experiencing loneliness. "And that was before the COVID-19 pandemic cut off so many of us from friends, loved ones, and support systems, exacerbating loneliness and isolation," the advisory notes.

For American Indian and Alaska Native individuals and communities, social connection is a fundamental element of culture. After the profound disruption of the pandemic, regaining social wellness is even more critical to both individual and community health. This fact sheet provides some resources on nurturing social wellness.

WHY IS SOCIAL WELLNESS IMPORTANT?

Social wellness revolves around the concept of nurturing relationships and oneself. Multiple studies have shown that strong, positive relationships are protective for both mental and physical health because they foster critical social support systems that in turn have a positive impact on physical wellbeing. Research also shows that the health risks from feeling and being isolated are comparable to the health risks associated with obesity, blood pressure, and cigarette smoking.

In American Indian/Alaska Native communities, traditional ways of life that protect and promote good mental health are passed on through generations. Each community has its own strengths and cultural practices, and it is important for mental health that Indigenous people honor where they came from, stay knowledgeable on language and traditions, and are committed to protect the land and people. Activities that improve social wellness can range from taking a break from electronic devices, to reading a book, or even going out and getting exercise. To enhance social wellness in Native communities, a focus on culture and community has been shown to be most beneficial.

Resources and Techniques to Foster Social Wellness

Community Involvement

If your community has loosened social distancing restrictions, you may be able to get involved with or volunteer at any community events. Often, communities hold events, classes, or group activities to help get community members involved. Examples include participating in a community garden, attending language classes, learning how to create Indigenous art, or learning about different cultures. By spending time with people who have similar interests/passions, you can improve your overall mental, physical, and emotional health.

Cultural Elements of Native Mental Health with a Focus on Rural Issues

In collaboration with the Northwest MHTTC, this webinar offered an overview of disparities in mental health for Native populations, especially in rural areas, and offered cultural elements for improved rural mental health.

[Watch the recording here.](#)

Newsletter: Addressing Suicide in Native Communities

This issue of Mental Health in Native Communities focuses on tools and resources to provide culturally informed suicide prevention services, especially for Native youth and young adults.

[Download the newsletter here.](#)

“Honoring Our Sacred Heritage” posters

This customizable poster series emphasizes cultural strengths in drug use prevention with images and text that remind viewers to connect with their culture and heritage.

[Download the posters here.](#)

Newsletter: Trauma-informed Prevention Strategies

This issue of Prevention in Native Communities examines how traumatic experiences can lead to long-term consequences of substance use and/or mental health disorders.

[Download the newsletter here.](#)

National Museum of the American Indian

The National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution offers online educational opportunities to educators and students on Native American history and cultures through their Native Knowledge 360° (NK360°) program. NK360° provides virtual student programs, teacher trainings, and other educational materials that incorporate Native narratives, histories, and accurate information to enlighten teaching and learning about Native America.

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/about/native-knowledge-360>

References

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