

September 2024

Washington State Indigenous Perinatal Status Report



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Prepared by: Camie Jae Goldhammer, MSW, LICSW, IBCLC
Hummingbird Indigenous Family Services





Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the mothers, community members, organizational partners and agencies that supported the development of this report.

We honor and acknowledge that America rests on the occupied ancestral lands of the Indigenous peoples of this continent. We honor that the original peoples are still here, despite not having treaty rights honored or having yet to be justly compensated for their land, resources, and livelihood. We acknowledge this work as situated within a process of reparations and decolonial praxis toward healing these ongoing injustices.

We must also acknowledge that America, including its culture, economic growth, and development throughout history and across time, has been made possible by the labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants who suffered the horror of the transatlantic trafficking of their people, chattel slavery, and Jim Crow. We are indebted to their labor and their sacrifice, and we must acknowledge the tremors of that violence throughout the generations and the resulting impact that can still be felt and witnessed today. We raise our hands to the resiliency, dedication, perseverance, and radical wisdom of those who have survived apocalypse and keep dreaming. As an Indigenous organization, we are committed in solidarity with the Black community and undoing anti-Blackness as necessary to true decolonization and reparations work.

Author Unknown

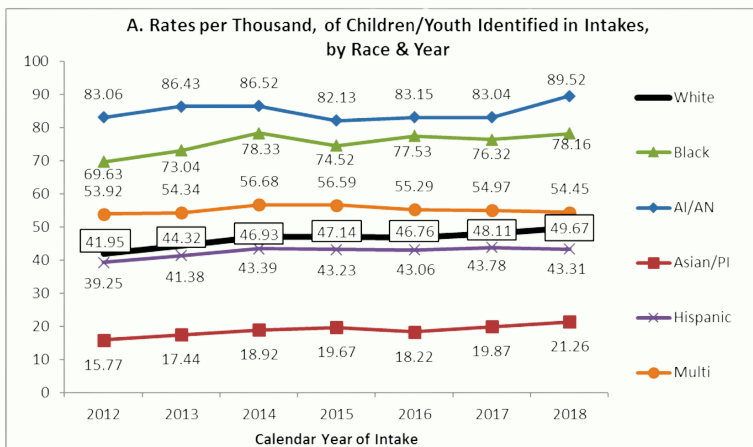


The Invisible Majority: Native American and Pacific Islander Reproductive Wellbeing

21% of Native Americans in
Washington State live in poverty.

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019

Trends in Rate of Occurrence and Disproportionality Index (DI) for All Intakes



Source: 2019 WASHINGTON STATE CHILD WELFARE
RACIAL DISPARITY INDICES REPORT

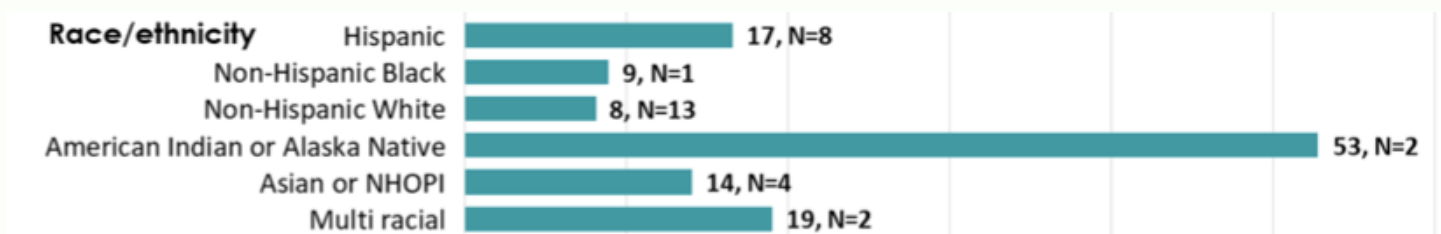
In Washington, the
preterm birth rate among
American Indian/Alaska
Native women is 53%
higher than the rate
among all other women.

Source: March of Dimes 2021 Report
Card, Washington State

During 2018-2020 (average) in Washington,
preterm birth rates were highest for American
Indian/Alaska Native infants (12.8%)

Source: March of Dimes, Prematurity Profile Washington

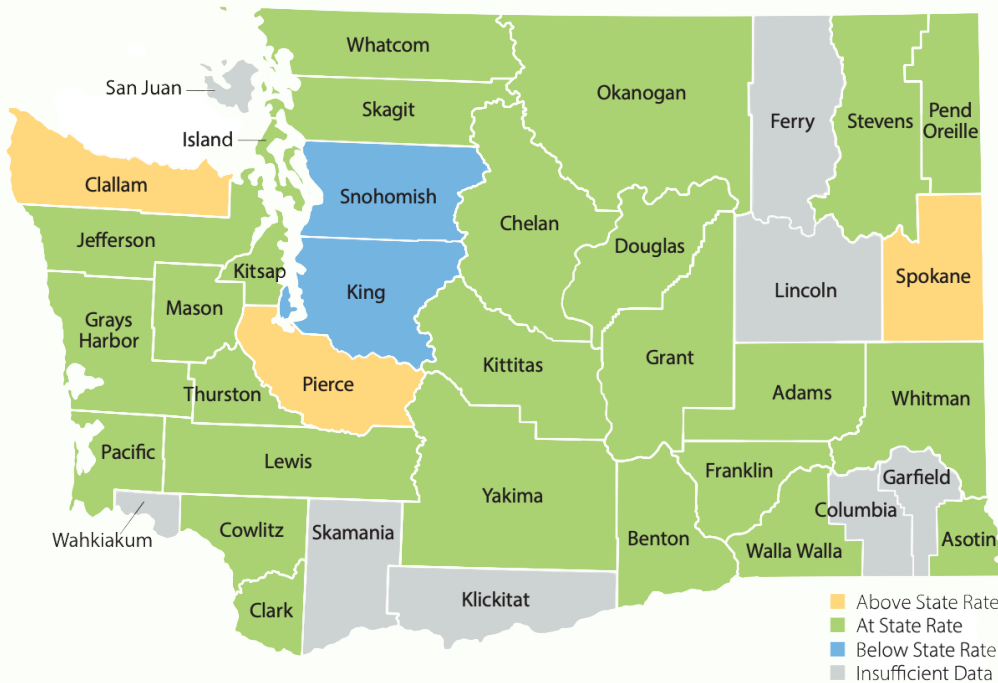
Demographics, Maternal Mortality Ratios (deaths per 100,000 live births) and
Counts for Pregnancy-Associated Deaths (N=100), Washington State, 2014-2016



Source: Washington State Maternal Mortality Review Panel: Maternal Death 2014-2016 October 2019RCW 70.54.450

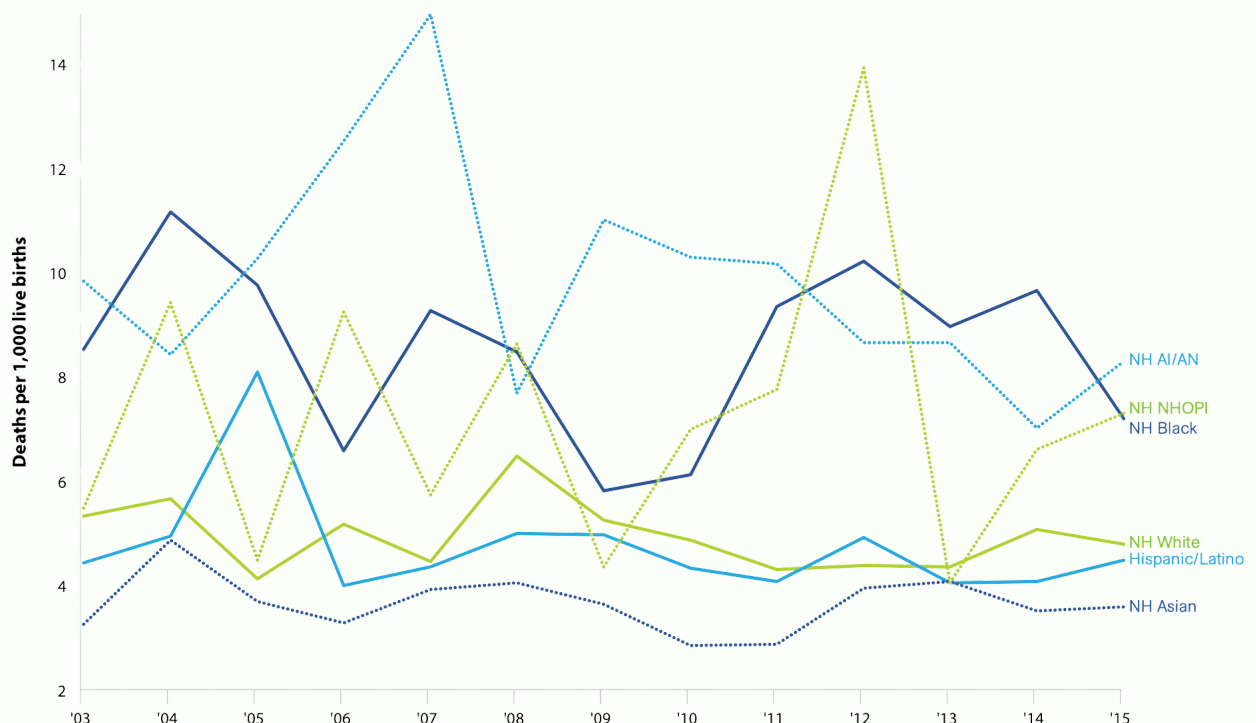
Infant Mortality in Washington State

Infant Mortality by County



Between 2011 and 2015, babies born to Native American mothers experienced infant mortality rates that were twice the rate of those born to White mothers.

Infant Mortality Rate by Maternal Race/Ethnicity, Washington State, 2003–2015



"We have no choices." -

The State of Maternity Care in Washington State



Maternity Care Desert:

Ferry County
Douglas County
Lincoln County
Garfield County
Columbia County
Skamania County
Pacific County
Wahkiakum County

Low Access Maternity Care:

Adams County
Franklin County

Moderate Access to Maternity Care:

Stevens County
Lewis County
Shelton County

Source: U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Area Health Resources Files, 2019

No Hospitals or Birth Centers:

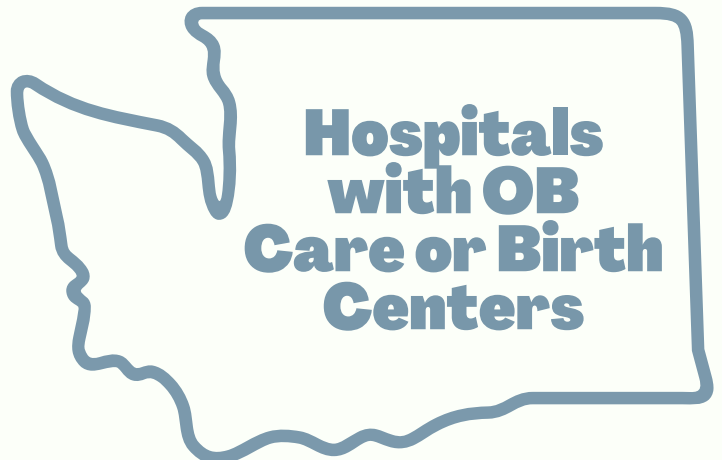
Jefferson County
Grays Harbor County
Pacific County
Cowlitz County
Skamania County
Douglas County
Asotin County

Ferry County
Lincoln County
Adams County
Franklin County
Pend Oreille County
Columbia County
Garfield County

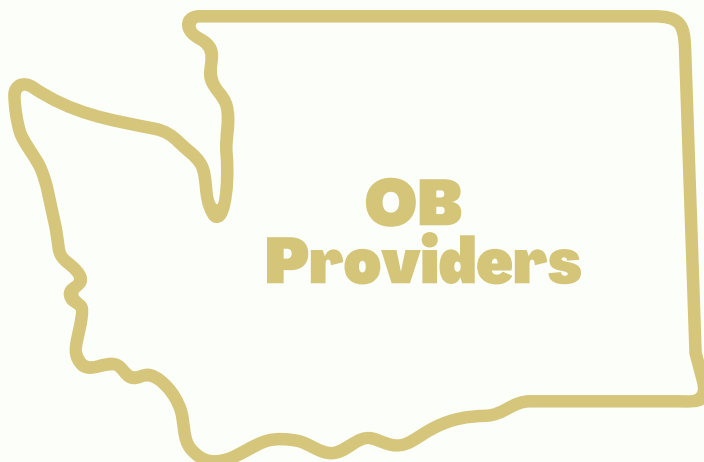
One Hospital or Birth Center:

Okanogan County
Stevens County
Walla Walla County
Kittitas County

Lewis County
Mason County
Clallam County



Source: U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Area Health Resources Files, 2019; American Association of Birth Centers, 2020



No OB Providers:

Ferry County
Douglas County
Lincoln County
Garfield County
Columbia County
Skamania County
Pacific County
Wahkiakum County

Fewer than 30 OB Providers:

Shelton County
Stevens County

30-60 OB Providers:

Adams County
Franklin County
Lewis County

Source: U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Area Health Resources Files, 2019

Maternity Care for Washington's 29 Federally recognized Tribes

Makah

Medical Facility: Sophie Trettevick
Indian Health Center
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 75 miles

Lower Elwha Klallam

Medical Facility: Tribal Center
Building
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 5 miles

Quileute

Medical Facility: Quileute Health
Clinic
Maternity Care Services: Yes
Closest Hospital: 70 miles

Hoh

Medical Facility: Chief Klia
Wellness Center
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 60 miles

Quinault

Medical Facility: Quileute
Health Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 45 miles

Skokomish

Medical Facility: Skokomish
Wellness Center
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 12 miles

Squaxin Island

Medical Facility: Squaxin Island
Health Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 5 miles

Shoalwater Bay

Medical Facility: Shoalwater Bay
Medical Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 30 miles

Cowlitz

Medical Facility: Cowlitz Tribal
Longview Medical Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 5 miles

Chehalis

Medical Facility: Chehalis Tribal
Wellness Center
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 20 miles

Maternity Care for Washington's 29 Federally recognized Tribes

Nisqually

Medical Facility: Nisqually Tribal
Health & Wellness Center
Maternity Care Services: Yes
Closest Hospital: 5 miles

Puyallup

Medical Facility: Takopid Health
Center
Maternity Care Services: Yes
Closest Hospital: 5 miles

Suquamish

Medical Facility: Healing House
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 10 miles

Sammish

Medical Facility: None
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 20 miles

Lummi

Medical Facility: Lummi Tribal
Health Clinic
Maternity Care Services: Until 26
weeks
Closest Hospital: 8 miles

Nooksack

Medical Facility: Nooksack
Community Health Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 13 miles

Upper Skagit

Medical Facility: Upper Skagit Tribal
Health Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 12 miles

Swinomish

Medical Facility: Swinomish
Medical Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 10 miles

Sauk-Suiattle

Medical Facility: None
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 30 miles

Stilligamish

Medical Facility: None
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 5 miles

Maternity Care for Washington's 29 Federally recognized Tribes

Tulalip

Medical Facility: Tulalip Health
Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 15 miles

Port Gamble S'Klallam

Medical Facility: The Port Gamble
S'Klallam Community Health Center
Maternity Care Services: Until 20
weeks
Closest Hospital: 20 miles

Snoqualmie

Medical Facility: None
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 10 miles

Muckleshoot

Medical Facility: Muckleshoot
Health and Wellness Center
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 5 miles

Spokane

Medical Facility: David C.
Wynecoop Memorial Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 50 miles

Yakima

Medical Facility: White Swan
Health Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 31 miles

Colville

Medical Facility: Nespelem Health
Center and Omak Health Center
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 40 miles

Kalispel

Medical Facility: Camas Center
Medical and Dental Clinic
Maternity Care Services: None
Closest Hospital: 20 miles

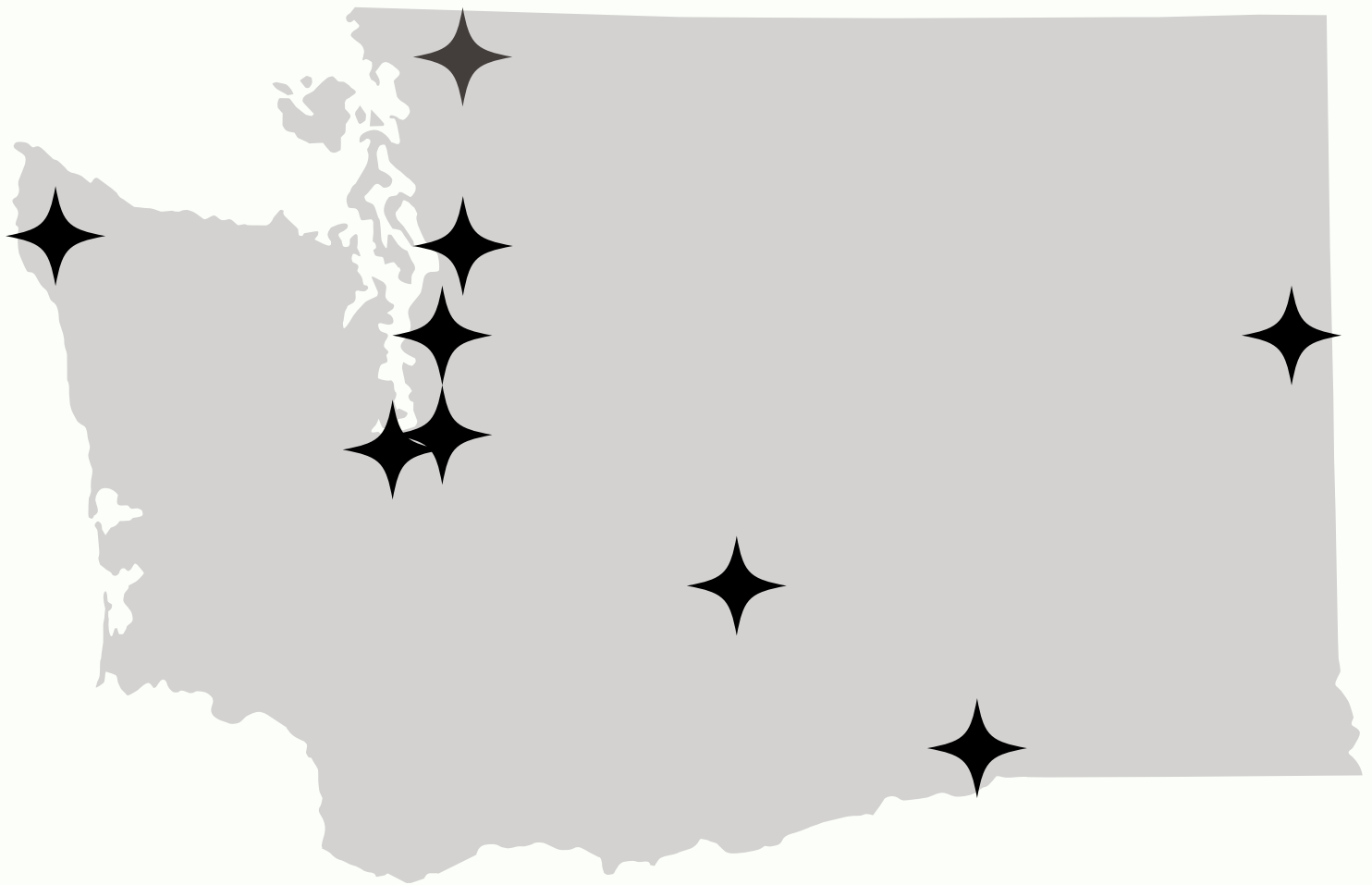
There are 2 clinics that serve urban- Native American Populations

Seattle Indian Health Board

Medical Facility: Seattle Indian
Health Board
Maternity Care Services: Yes
Closest Hospital: Seattle

The Native Project

Medical Facility: The Native Project
Maternity Care Services: No
Closest Hospital: Spokane



We held virtual listening sessions in several urban, rural and Tribal communities throughout Washington state as well as spoke directly with community members, leaders and providers.

Listening sessions were held in the following communities:

- Seattle
- King County
- Pierce County
- Bellingham/Lummi
- Olympia/SW Washington
- WA Peninsula
- Spokane
- Tri-Cities
- Yakima
- Statewide Dads session

Who did we hear from?

Listening sessions were held in several locations around WA state along with a statewide Dad's session. We recruited participants directly as well as via social media and through various community partners. All participants met the following criteria:

- Identify as Native American, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian
- Live in Washington State
- Have had a baby or been pregnant within the last 2 years

In addition to our listening sessions we had one-on-one conversations with community members, leaders and perinatal service providers.

I want him to feel loved. Have a happy home. Feel supported with anything that he does. I want him to know his culture and language. I want to raise a respectful man and to treat women well.

-Native American mom of 1

Dad's Listening Session

Indigenous fathers play a vital role in their families and communities, often embodying the values and traditions passed down through generations. Their role extends beyond the typical Western notions of fatherhood, as they are deeply connected to cultural teachings, spiritual guidance, and the well-being of the extended family. In many Indigenous cultures, fathers serve as protectors and providers not only in a material sense but also in a cultural and emotional capacity, ensuring that their children remain connected to their heritage, language, and values. They are often seen as role models who teach respect for the land, community, and the interdependence of all living beings. The bond between Indigenous fathers and their children is nurtured through storytelling, shared experiences in nature, and participation in ceremonies that reinforce the connection to their ancestry and the larger web of life. Despite historical and ongoing challenges such as colonialism, displacement, and systemic discrimination, Indigenous fathers continue to persevere, striving to create a future where their children can thrive while honoring their identity. Native American dads continue to demonstrate resilience, working to maintain their cultural responsibilities, reconnect with traditions, and create a positive environment for their children's futures.

Q: What it feel like when you found out you were having a baby?

“Felt really good. It felt like I was getting a big hug from the universe. It was intentional. I was relieved, happy and fulfilled.”

-Native American Dad of 2

After speaking to many Native American fathers throughout the state it was clear that these men overwhelmingly feel/felt “excited” about the idea of having a baby. They were also nervous and really wondered if they had what they needed to be a good dad. Many saw fatherhood as a way to focus on providing stability to their new family.

We are gonna start a family. It was time to really get situated. This is the real deal now.

-Native American Dad of 2

Many of the dads stated that they were very worried about the care their partner would be receiving. Fear and mistrust of hospital systems were shared by nearly every participant.

I've seen some things before at IHS and stuff. Had heard so many horror stories about racism and terrible treatment. We chose to drive an hour away to get better care.

-Native American Dad of 2

One father shared how hard he found it to be a supportive partner and many of the dads echo'd what he had shared.

I knew how to change diapers, feeding, etc but I didn't know anything about how to be a good partner, when to intervene, I didn't see that growing up so I didn't know how to do it. Not a lot of models out there.

-Native American Father of 2

All the dads had big dreams for the babies. They were hopeful for their future. They wanted their children to be connected to their culture and to know who they were. They wanted them to be happy and healthy. They wanted their children to feel secure in who they were.

We want them to have connection to where they come from and their ancestors, know who they are and to have a foundation to go where they want to in life. Have love for community, strength, compassion and kindness.

-Native American Dad of 2



Ete'e Meduh (Thank You Father)
By Jamie Nole

Mom's Listening Session

Indigenous mothers hold a position of profound strength and influence within their families and communities, often serving as the carriers of cultural knowledge, traditions, and values. Their nurturing role extends beyond physical care, encompassing spiritual guidance and the preservation of Indigenous languages, customs, and histories. As matriarchs, many Native mothers are central to decision-making, ensuring the well-being of their families while maintaining balance within the community. They are instrumental in teaching their children the importance of respect for the land, ancestors, and interconnectedness with all living beings. In the face of historical trauma, displacement, and ongoing challenges like economic inequality, Indigenous mothers have shown remarkable resilience, continuing to empower their families while safeguarding their rich cultural heritage for future generations.

We spoke with dozens of Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander moms from around Washington State. When asked about how they felt about their most recent pregnancy answers varied from excited to terrified and everything in between. These mothers were largely pregnant, giving birth and parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems most Indigenous mothers had a clear idea of what they would be facing during their pregnancy, labor and delivery and postpartum period. They did not have the same optimism that we heard in the fathers session. However, many still felt hope their the future generation.

I felt irritated. I had just lost my daughter 2 years ago. I was stressed. It was scary. Both my labors and pregnancies were traumatic, stressful, I was just waiting to lose my child. Its not happy for me.

-Native American mom of 3

"I'm a single, teen mom. I was scared. It was really scary finding out at first."

-Native American mom of 1

A lot of the moms found that pregnancy made them reflect on their past. For many this was emotionally heavy.

I was really excited. I just started crying. I was shocked, scared... I lost mom at the age of 6. Finding out I was a pregnant brought on a second wave of grief. I wanted to tell my mom but she wasn't there.

-Native American mom of 1



"i will always carry you."

By: Wahkeah Jhane

Mistrust in the medical system is rooted in a long history of exploitation, neglect, and abuse by government and healthcare institutions. From forced sterilizations of Native women to the inadequate care provided by the Indian Health Service (IHS), many Indigenous people have experienced systemic discrimination and poor health outcomes. This mistrust is compounded by cultural insensitivity, lack of access to culturally appropriate care, and the enduring impacts of colonization, which has eroded trust in non-Indigenous systems. As a result, many Indigenous communities remain cautious about engaging with the healthcare system or avoiding care altogether.

Additionally, a lot of the moms had heard about the challenges Black women face but not necessarily Native/Indigenous women. This perfectly illustrates the “Invisibility”. Social invisibility is when a group of people in the society have been separated or systematically ignored by the majority of the public.

What had you heard about being BIPOC and pregnant?

Different layers especially as a queer family. Discrimination. We knew we would face stuff. My mom had home births. A lot of mistrust the medical system. How do we protect our family? We spent a lot of time and energy preparing for the racism and homophobia we would encounter.

-Native American mom of 1

I had heard a of neglect of Black women, It made me nervous going into a hospital, that is why I wanted a doula to help me speak up and having the support,

-Native American mom of 1

I had heard a of neglect of Black women, It made me nervous going into a hospital, that is why I wanted a doula to help me speak up and having the support.

-Native American mom of 1

Right off the bat I was told the health disparities being Black and Native and older, being told I was high risk, lots of anxiety with spotting and scared to go to the hospital, I prayed a lot and felt that if I went to the hospital they would find a reason to scare me. I did not feel like doctors had my health in their best interest.

-Native American mom of 2

What are your dreams for your baby?

Indigenous mothers carry deep hopes for their babies, grounded in the desire to see them grow up strong, resilient, and connected to their cultural roots. They envision futures where their children are surrounded by love, community, and a strong sense of identity, with a deep respect for their ancestors, traditions, and the natural world. These mothers hope that their babies will thrive in a world that often challenges their existence, overcoming obstacles like systemic racism, economic barriers, and historical trauma. Above all, they aspire for their children to walk proudly in both the modern world and their Indigenous ways, with the strength to carry their culture forward for future generations.

I just want my baby to know who she is and be independent and fearless in our world.”

-Native American mom of 1

My dream for my kids is for them to speak up for themselves, confident enough to ask for what they want and what they deserve, Grow up without having to struggle as much. Enjoy childhood. Emotional wellbeing is stronger.

-Pacific Islander mom of 1

I think as of right now my dreams for my baby is that they are born into this world safe and sound. And as they grow I hope to help them accomplish their dreams and not let anything hold them back, I know as of right now I am in my final year of my Bachelors degree while pregnant so I hope that brings my baby some form of empowerment to know to never let anything stop you from going after your goals.

-Pregnant Native American mom

I want her to feel loved and accepted. I want her to feel immersed in her cultures. I want her know where she came from and know her roots. I want her to feel proud of who she is.

-Pacific Islander mom of 1

I want her to grow up feeling loved and held in her community. Have a firm foundation of who she is and where she comes from. She's a Warrior Baby. She is a strong one. I want to foster and nourish that strength. Feel good about her strong voice.

-Native American mom of 1

Suggested areas of Increased Support

Indigenous BirthKeepers/Doulas

Supporting Indigenous doulas is essential for improving maternal and infant health outcomes in Native American communities while fostering cultural continuity. Indigenous doulas bring invaluable knowledge of traditional birthing practices, cultural protocols, and community-centered care, which can help Native mothers feel more understood and supported during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum. By offering care that is sensitive to the unique needs and values of Indigenous families, these doulas help counter the mistrust many Native mothers have toward mainstream healthcare systems, where they often face discrimination or cultural insensitivity. Indigenous doulas also play a critical role in addressing health disparities, such as higher rates of maternal and infant mortality in Native communities, by providing holistic, continuous care that improves physical, emotional, and mental health outcomes. Supporting Indigenous doulas not only strengthens the bond between mothers and babies but also contributes to the revitalization of traditional knowledge, creating healthier and more empowered generations of Indigenous families.

Indigenous Lactation Support

Supporting Indigenous lactation support is crucial for promoting the health and well-being of Native mothers and their babies, while also honoring and revitalizing traditional feeding practices. Indigenous lactation consultants understand the cultural, spiritual, and historical significance of breastfeeding within Native communities, and they provide care that is both culturally sensitive and accessible. In many Native communities, colonialism and systemic inequities have disrupted traditional maternal care practices, leading to higher rates of infant mortality and health disparities. Culturally informed lactation support helps combat these disparities by encouraging breastfeeding, which is proven to offer numerous health benefits, such as reducing the risk of infections, chronic diseases, and promoting bonding. Moreover, Indigenous lactation support addresses unique barriers Native mothers face, such as geographic isolation, limited access to healthcare, and mistrust of mainstream medical systems, by providing care that reflects Indigenous values and traditions. Supporting these services strengthens community health, empowers mothers, and ensures that future generations grow up nourished by both their cultural heritage and optimal nutrition.

Indigenous Mental Health

Supporting Indigenous mental health services, especially during the perinatal period, is vital for promoting the overall well-being of Native mothers and their families. Indigenous communities experience disproportionately high rates of mental health issues due to historical trauma, systemic discrimination, and socioeconomic challenges, which can be exacerbated during the vulnerable times of pregnancy and postpartum. Culturally relevant mental health supports tailored to Indigenous mothers can address these unique challenges, helping them navigate the emotional complexities of childbirth, parenting, and the pressures faced by parents on a daily basis.

By integrating traditional healing practices with modern therapeutic approaches, these supports create a holistic framework that respects Indigenous values and enhances emotional resilience. This is particularly important during the perinatal period, as mental health struggles can have lasting effects on both the mother and child, influencing infant health, bonding, and child development. Providing access to Indigenous mental health resources fosters a supportive environment where mothers feel understood, empowered, and capable of nurturing their babies while caring for their own emotional health. Ultimately, supporting Indigenous mental health services during the perinatal period contributes to healthier families, stronger communities, and the preservation of cultural identity, ensuring that future generations thrive both physically and emotionally.

Access to Maternity Care

Addressing maternity care deserts in Indigenous communities is essential for ensuring equitable access to comprehensive and culturally appropriate healthcare for pregnant individuals and their families. Many Native American communities face significant barriers to maternity care, including geographic isolation, a lack of healthcare facilities, and shortages of culturally congruent providers. These deserts can lead to delayed prenatal care, inadequate postpartum support, and increased rates of maternal and infant mortality. By prioritizing the development of accessible maternity care services, we can help combat these disparities and improve health outcomes for Indigenous mothers and babies.

Moreover, investing in maternity care within Indigenous communities fosters a sense of empowerment and agency, allowing families to make informed choices that align with their cultural values and traditions. Culturally responsive care is crucial, as it recognizes the unique needs and experiences of Indigenous individuals, promoting trust and cooperation between patients and providers. Additionally, addressing maternity care deserts can enhance community well-being by supporting traditional birthing practices and ensuring that Indigenous families can access the resources they need without having to travel long distances. Ultimately, improving access to maternity care in Indigenous communities is a critical step toward building healthier, more resilient families and preserving cultural continuity for future generations.

Indigenous Home Visiting

Home visiting programs for Indigenous families, particularly for children aged zero to three, are critical for fostering healthy development, strengthening family connections, and addressing the unique challenges faced by Native communities. These programs provide tailored support that meets families where they are, offering essential resources, education, and guidance in the comfort of their homes. For Indigenous families, home visiting can help bridge gaps in access to healthcare and early childhood education, ensuring that parents receive the information and tools they need to support their children's growth and development.

Moreover, home visiting programs emphasize culturally relevant practices that respect and integrate Indigenous values and traditions, fostering a sense of pride and belonging in families. By focusing on early childhood development, these programs can help improve outcomes related to language, social-emotional skills, and overall health, setting a strong foundation for lifelong learning and well-being. Additionally, home visitors can assist families in navigating available services, addressing issues such as food insecurity, mental health support, and substance use, all of which can significantly impact child development. Investing in home visiting programs for Indigenous families also strengthens community bonds, as they often rely on local networks of support and knowledge-sharing. This holistic approach not only empowers parents but also promotes resilience and cultural continuity, ensuring that Indigenous children grow up with a strong sense of identity and connection to their heritage. Ultimately, home visiting programs represent a vital investment in the future of Indigenous communities, laying the groundwork for healthier, more vibrant families and brighter prospects for the next generation.

Addiction Treatment for Pregnant and Parenting People

Providing more addiction treatment for mothers during the perinatal period is essential for safeguarding the health and well-being of both mothers and their babies. By offering targeted addiction treatment during this critical time, healthcare providers can address the specific needs of pregnant individuals, helping them overcome substance use challenges while ensuring the safety and health of their unborn children.

Access to comprehensive, evidence-based treatment programs that include prenatal care, counseling, and support groups can empower mothers to develop strong, nurturing relationships with their babies. Culturally congruent care is particularly important in Indigenous communities, where historical trauma and systemic barriers can contribute to high rates of substance misuse. Tailoring addiction treatment to respect cultural values and traditions not only enhances trust in healthcare systems but also promotes holistic healing for mothers and families.

Moreover, addressing addiction during the perinatal period can significantly reduce the risk of intergenerational cycles of substance use and trauma. By investing in maternal addiction treatment, we can create a supportive environment that fosters recovery, promotes healthy bonding, and ultimately leads to healthier, more resilient families.

Cultural Supports

Increasing access to cultural resources and practices for Indigenous families is vital for fostering identity, resilience, and well-being within these communities. Cultural engagement plays a crucial role in the development of a strong sense of self and belonging, particularly for Indigenous children, who thrive when they are connected to their heritage, language, and traditions. Access to cultural practices—such as storytelling, traditional crafts, ceremonies, and language revitalization—empowers families to pass down their history and values, strengthening familial and community ties.

Moreover, cultural participation has been shown to improve mental health outcomes, reducing the effects of historical trauma and contemporary stressors faced by Indigenous communities. By providing opportunities for cultural engagement, families can build supportive networks that promote healing, resilience, and mutual understanding. These cultural connections also serve as protective factors against the challenges posed by systemic inequities, offering Indigenous families tools to navigate and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Investing in cultural access also addresses the ongoing impacts of colonization, which have historically suppressed Indigenous identities and practices. By promoting cultural revitalization and accessibility, we can support Indigenous families in reclaiming our narratives and celebrating our heritage. Ultimately, enhancing access to culture for Indigenous families not only contributes to individual and community well-being but also ensures the preservation of rich traditions and identities for future generations.

Basic Needs

Supporting the basic needs of pregnant and parenting Indigenous women is crucial for promoting their health and well-being, as well as the overall welfare of their families and communities. Indigenous women often face a range of systemic barriers, including economic instability, lack of access to healthcare, and limited availability of resources that can negatively impact their pregnancies and parenting experiences. Addressing these basic needs—such as access to nutritious food, stable housing, quality prenatal and postnatal care, and mental health support—ensures that Indigenous mothers can focus on their health and the health of their children.

Meeting these needs not only improves maternal and infant health outcomes but also fosters a sense of security and stability, allowing mothers to engage more fully in their children's lives and development. Culturally competent support services that recognize and respect Indigenous traditions and values are essential for empowering mothers and strengthening family bonds. By investing in programs that provide resources and support tailored to the unique challenges faced by Indigenous families, we can help break the cycle of poverty and health disparities that have historically impacted these communities.

Furthermore, supporting pregnant and parenting Indigenous women has a ripple effect on future generations, as healthier mothers raise healthier children who are more likely to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Ultimately, prioritizing the basic needs of Indigenous women is an investment in the future of their communities, fostering resilience, cultural continuity, and a stronger foundation for the next generation.

Trusted Resources

There is a critical need for increased prenatal care, lactation support, doula care, and mental health services in Native American communities, as these resources are often limited or inaccessible. High rates of maternal and infant mortality, as well as health disparities like gestational diabetes and preterm births, highlight the importance of comprehensive prenatal care that is culturally sensitive and accessible. Doula care, in particular, can play a transformative role by offering personalized support during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum, ensuring that Native mothers receive the emotional and physical care they need. Culturally informed lactation support is equally vital, encouraging breastfeeding practices that promote infant health while respecting Indigenous feeding traditions. Additionally, many Native mothers face mental health challenges stemming from historical trauma, socioeconomic stressors, and systemic inequities, making expanded mental health services essential for fostering emotional well-being and building stronger, healthier future generations.

Throughout the listening sessions we heard from Indigenous families that there is already amazing work happening in community. Below are a list of trusted community partners that were named by several families throughout our listening session.



Center for Indigenous Midwifery, based in Olympia is a National organization whose mission is strengthening community by honoring, supporting, and reclaiming Indigenous midwifery care.

Locally, they provide a variety of classes for families, trainings for BIPOC birthworkers and occasionally attend births

Hummingbird Indigenous Family Services is a Seattle based non-profit serving Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander mamas and pregnant people. They service families in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. Their mission is Health Indigenous babies, born into healthy Indigenous families, supported by healthy Indigenous communities. They do this through a variety of services including doulas, Home Visiting and guaranteed basic income.



Hummingbird
INDIGENOUS FAMILY SERVICES



NAWDIM

NAWDIM is a collective of Native care providers, community members, grandmas and our allies who provide advocacy, education and support for American Indian and Alaska Native infants, moms and families in Washington State.

NAWDIM provides cradleboard classes throughout the state of Washington.



Our mission is to establish a cultural home, center community power, and advocate to the further the wellness of our Pacific Islander communities physically, culturally, socially, and spiritually. PICAWA traditional foods program has been beneficial to many Pacific Islander families.

The Pacific Islander Health Board seeks to cultivate resiliency within our communities to achieve health equity through culturally safe and community-driven solutions, traditions, advocacy, and policies. The PIHB offers doula support, childbirth education and patient navigation.



The Ttáwaxt Birth Justice Center, created and led by Native women, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization serving families on and near the Yakama Nation Reservation. They offer pre and postnatal care, reproductive healthcare, breastfeeding support, childbirth education, cultural classes, plant medicine, and other support for families.

The Indigenous Birth Justice Network offers restorative education and advocacy that includes remembering and revitalizing ancestral knowledge, cultural practices, and central healing. IBJ takes responsibility for caring for babies, moms and families before, during and after giving birth.



Melody and Roselle Fryberg are Tulalip sisters with a passion for supporting pregnant Tulalip families. Their work is truly grassroots-sharing birth info on social media, being of support to birthing families and opening their home to welcome the newest Relatives born into the community.

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander mothers

Addressing maternal and infant health disparities among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities is critical. NHPI communities face unique cultural, structural, and historical challenges that directly impact their health outcomes, including increasingly high rates of maternal and infant mortality. The aggregation of NHPI data with Asian American populations often obscures these disparities, preventing targeted interventions and resources from being appropriately allocated. Disaggregating this data is essential for understanding and addressing the distinct health inequities experienced by NHPIs, especially in Washington State, where these disparities are pronounced.

When NHPI maternal and infant health data is analyzed separately, the stark health inequities become evident. NHPIs experience significantly higher rates of maternal mortality and adverse birth outcomes, including low birth weight and preterm births, compared to their Asian American counterparts, who historically have some of the lowest maternal and infant mortality rates. These outcomes are rooted in systemic factors such as limited access to culturally attuned healthcare, socioeconomic barriers, and the intergenerational impacts of colonization and structural racism. For instance, many NHPI communities face challenges such as inadequate prenatal care, lack of health insurance, and cultural stigmas that prevent them from seeking timely medical attention. Without dedicated attention to these factors, NHPI families continue to bear the brunt of preventable maternal and infant deaths.

In Washington state NHPI populations in the state consistently report higher rates of maternal and infant mortality compared to the general population, yet their needs are often overlooked in broader maternal health initiatives. For instance, the state's policies and programs often fail to account for the specific cultural practices and healthcare preferences of NHPI families. This oversight leads to gaps in care, such as the absence of interpreters for Pacific Islander languages, culturally appropriate prenatal education, or doulas who understand NHPI traditions. By including NHPI voices and data in Indigenous maternal health initiatives, Washington State has the opportunity to create equitable systems of care that respect and support NHPI families.

Incorporating NHPI communities into Indigenous maternal health initiatives is also a matter of justice and equity. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders share common histories of colonization and displacement with other Indigenous groups, which have left lasting legacies of health inequities. Recognizing their unique experiences and needs ensures they are not left behind in the broader fight for health equity. Culturally tailored initiatives—such as hiring NHPI healthcare providers, offering programs rooted in traditional practices, and addressing structural barriers to care—can empower NHPI families and improve outcomes. Ultimately, inclusion in Indigenous maternal health efforts acknowledges the distinct and invaluable contributions of NHPI communities while addressing the systemic neglect that has long undermined their well-being.

