

CULTURE. CONNECTION. COMMUNITY. NATIVE YOUTH WELLNESS.

National Indian Health Board

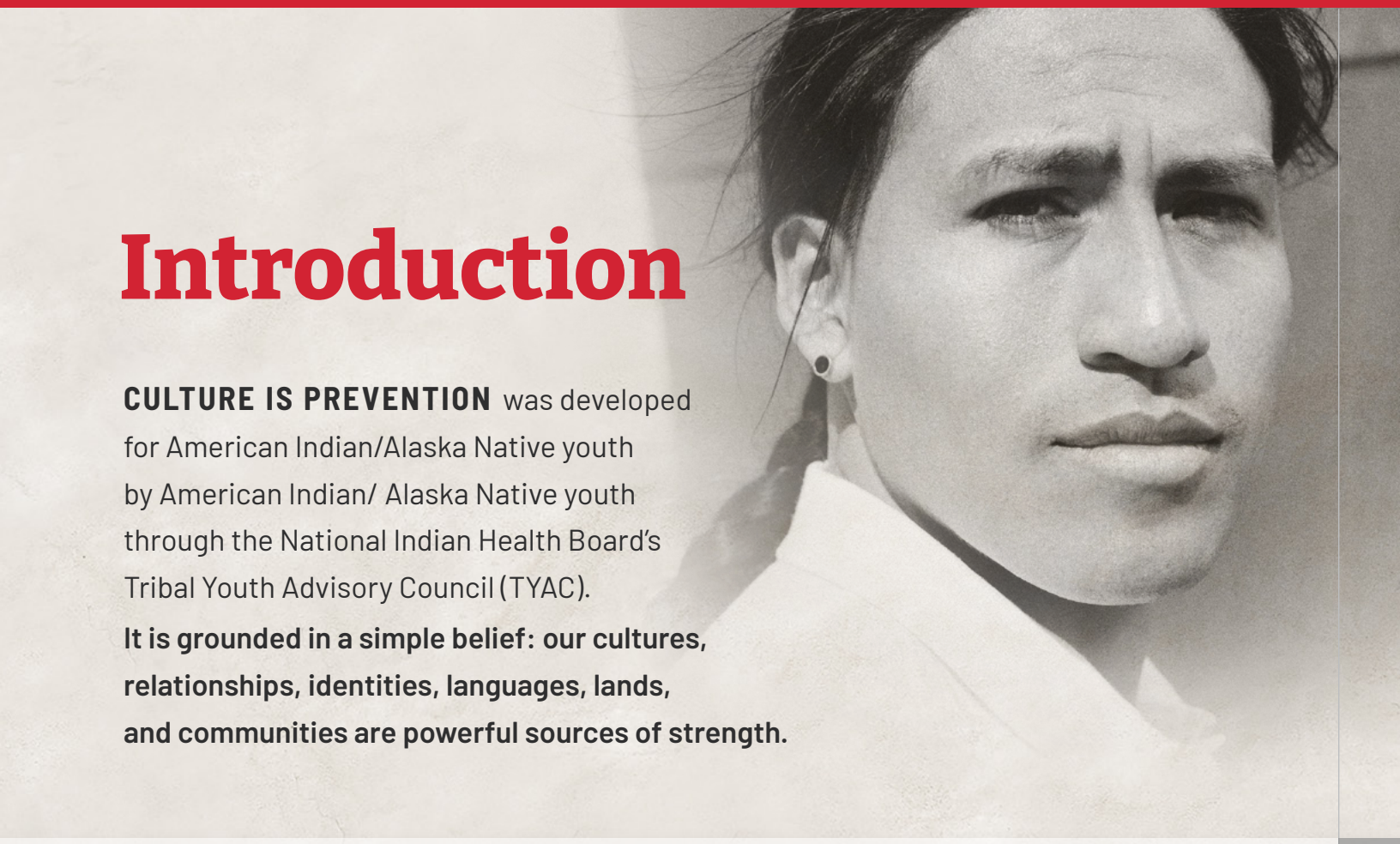
CULTURE IS PREVENTION

A Community Implementation Toolkit for Native Youth Suicide Prevention, Substance Use Prevention, and Behavioral Health Wellness



OUR YOUNG PEOPLE CARRY STRENGTH.

OUR CULTURES CARRY PREVENTION.



Introduction

CULTURE IS PREVENTION was developed for American Indian/Alaska Native youth by American Indian/ Alaska Native youth through the National Indian Health Board's Tribal Youth Advisory Council (TYAC).

It is grounded in a simple belief: our cultures, relationships, identities, languages, lands, and communities are powerful sources of strength.

This toolkit is designed for Tribal Nations, Tribal health departments, behavioral health programs, youth programs, schools, and Native-serving organizations. It provides adaptable messages, engagement strategies, and implementation of ideas that communities can use to strengthen Native youth wellness, suicide prevention, and substance use prevention through culture, connection, and community.

Communities are encouraged to center their own language, teachings, youth voices, local strengths, cultural protocols, resources, and priorities. The content within is intended to be adapted and changed by you; the toolkit is intended to be a starting place and support community-led prevention.



CULTURE IS PREVENTION

How to use this toolkit

Culture Is Prevention should not be distributed; **it is designed to be adapted**. Tribal Nations and Native-serving organizations can use it to:

BUILD

a local Culture Is Prevention campaign

SUPPORT

existing behavioral health, suicide and substance use prevention, and youth wellness efforts

ENGAGE

youth in developing community specific messages and activities

CREATE

outreach materials, social media content, and community activities

CONNECT

behavioral health data with community strengths and protective factors

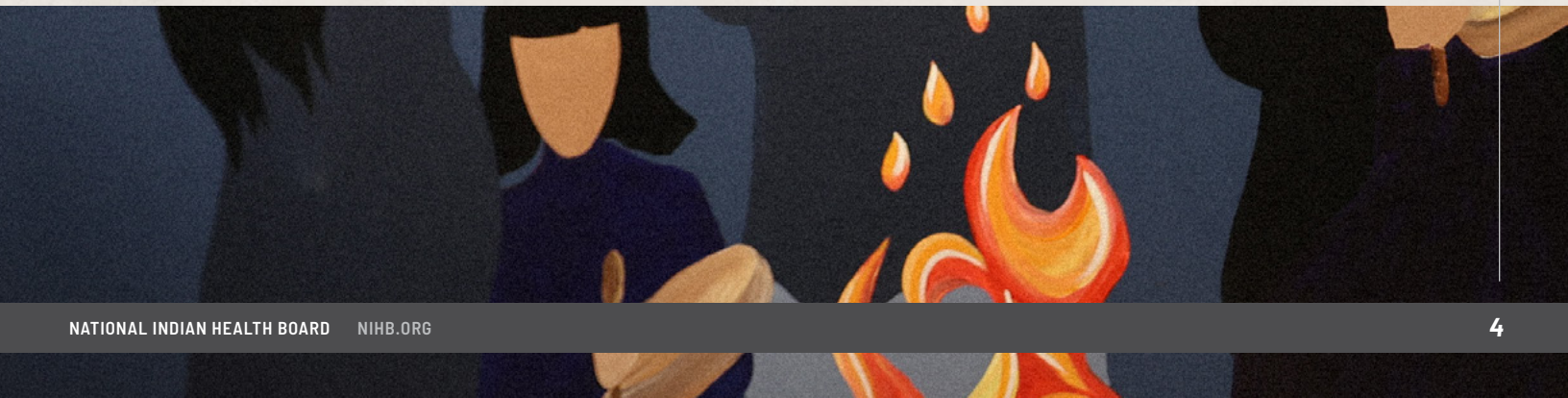
PROMOTE

Tribal, cultural, prevention, wellness and recovery resources

ENCOURAGE

conversations among youth, families, Elders, schools, health programs, and community partners.

Start small. Choose what fits your community, involve youth, incorporate local strengths and resources and **build from there**.



Plan your local campaign



Before choosing messages or creating materials, **bring together the people who know your community**. This may include youth, Tribal health and behavioral health staff, prevention programs, schools, cultural leaders, Elders, families, youth councils, and other community partners. Collectively – answer the following questions, as they will inform your messages and communications efforts:

QUESTIONS

What Do We Know?

What do Tribal, community, regional, state, or national data tell us about youth wellness, behavioral health, suicide, substance use, and help-seeking?

Who is our Audience?

Who are we targeting with our campaign messaging?

Where Do They Interact or Engage?

Where do your key audiences get their information or engage with new and informative content? Meet your folks where they're at.

What Strengths Already Exist?

What programs, relationships, cultural practices, teachings, youth leaders, Elders, community organizations, and protective factors are already supporting young people?

Who Should Be Involved?

Which Tribal programs, schools, clinics, cultural leaders, youth councils, families, behavioral health providers, and community partners should help shape and carry the effort?

What Action Are We Asking People to Take?

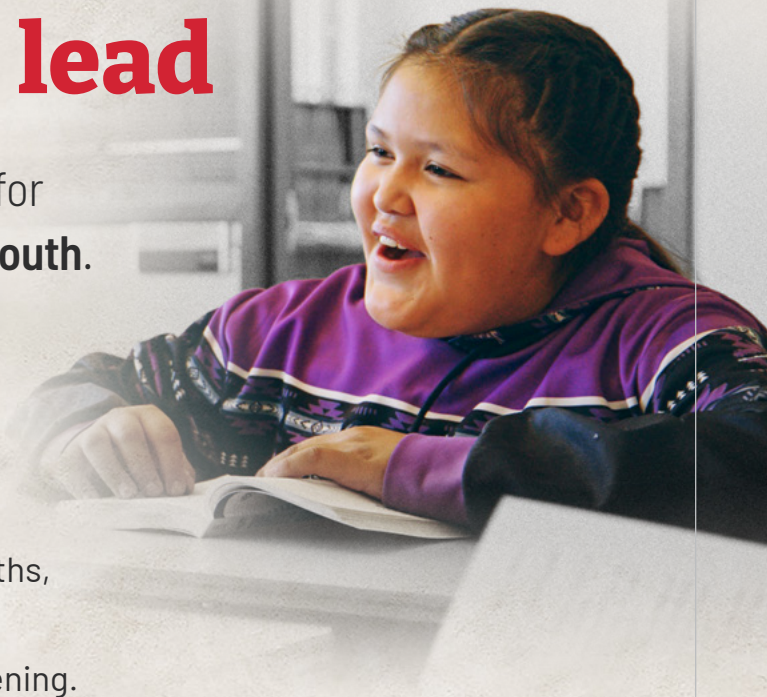
Connect each campaign message to an opportunity: attend, connect, learn, participate, seek support, share, create, or lead.

How Will We Know It Is Useful?

Ask youth and community members what resonated, what felt culturally appropriate, what resources they learned about, and what should change.



Put youth in the lead



Do not just create prevention messages for Native youth. **Create them with Native youth.**

Organizations are encouraged to involve Native youth throughout planning, development, implementation, and evaluation — not only after campaign materials have already been created. Youth understand their own experiences, strengths, pressures, relationships, and communities in ways adults cannot fully understand without listening.

Create meaningful &, when possible, compensated opportunities for youth to:

IDENTIFY

behavioral health and wellness priorities.

CREATE

or review social media posts, videos, artwork, stories, and campaign language.

ADVISE

Tribal leadership, health departments, schools, and programs.

PLAN

community and peer activities.

STRENGTHEN

cultural activities.

HELP DECIDE

what support actually feels supportive.

TAKE

meaningful roles in decisions that affect them.

REVIEW

the campaign and recommend what should continue or change.

PUT YOUTH IN THE LEAD, CONTINUED

START THE CONVERSATION ...

WHAT helps you feel **connected** to your culture and community?

WHAT do you wish adults **understood** about being a Native young person today?

WHAT would make our community **healthier** for the next generation?

WHAT messages or activities would actually get your attention and **feel useful**?



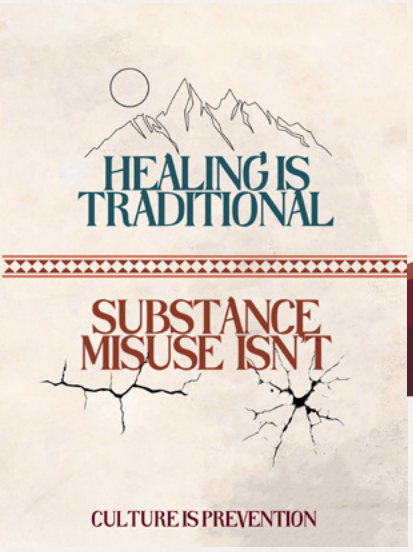
THEN LISTEN.

Strengthen Youth Leadership

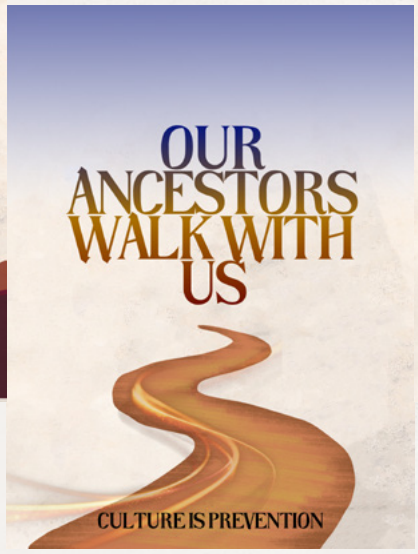
Youth councils and advisory groups can create an ongoing way for young people to shape programs, policies, prevention activities, and community decisions. Whenever possible, organizations should recognize youth contributions through compensation, leadership roles, training, or other meaningful forms of support.

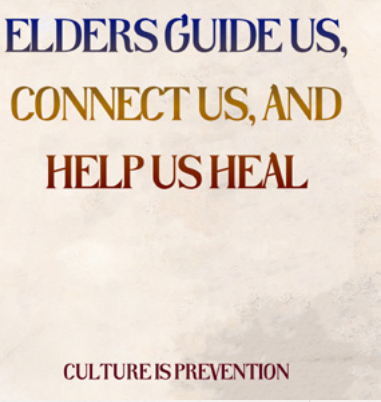
Make it your own

CULTURE IS PREVENTION









This is **your community's** campaign.
Make it sound, look, and feel like your community.

There are hundreds of Tribal Nations and Native communities, each with **distinct** languages, histories, teachings, traditions, and understandings of wellness. The following materials are starting points, not requirements.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN, CONTINUED

Consider adding:

- *Tribal language*
- *Youth artwork, quotes, photos, and stories*
- *Elder teachings*
- *Local cultural activities and traditional foods*
- *Land, place, and community-specific imagery*
- *Community-specific protective factors*
- *Local behavioral health and prevention programs*
- *Youth council information*
- *Tribal, local, or regional data*
- *Local events and opportunities for connection*

Invite Youth to Create

My culture gives me strength because _____

I feel connected when _____

My medicine is _____

I own my strength by _____

Being a good relative means _____

I want the next generation to know _____

Follow local cultural protocols and obtain appropriate permission before publicly sharing cultural teachings, photographs, stories, songs, ceremonies, or traditional knowledge.

Add Your Community's Story

OUR COMMUNITY KNOWS _____

OUR STRENGTHS INCLUDE _____

OUR NEXT STEP IS _____

Ready-to-use & adaptable campaign content

The following messages can be used as written or adapted to reflect your community. Pair them with local language, youth artwork, community photographs, cultural teachings, local events, or resources when appropriate. Communities should determine what language and imagery best reflect their own teachings and protocols.

Stay Rooted

Our history teaches us how to heal. Reconnect with the people, places, traditions, and teachings that ground you.

CAMPAIGN PROMPT

What keeps you grounded?

Tradition is Medicine

Healing is not meant to happen alone. Culture connects us to ourselves, our relatives, our communities, and generations before us.

CAMPAIGN PROMPT

Check in. Reach out. Share your story.

Keep Your Culture Strong

Culture carries us forward. A word learned, a story shared, a song remembered, time on the land, art created, or a teaching passed on can strengthen another connection.

Connection to Our People is Medicine

A relative who listens. A friend who checks in. An Elder who shares a teaching. A cousin who makes you laugh. Connection can be medicine.

CAMPAIGN PROMPT

Who is medicine in your life?

Our Ancestors Walk With Us

Native youth are part of generations of survival, strength, knowledge, love, and adaptation. Knowing where we come from can remind us that we are part of something larger than ourselves.

Your Story is Medicine

Our stories carry teachings, humor, struggle, love, survival, and strength. Your story matters. Your voice matters. Your story belongs here.

Ready-to-use & adaptable campaign content

Every Thread Matters

Families. Clans. Nations. Friendships. Generations. Every young person is connected to something larger. Sometimes prevention looks simple: checking in, listening, sharing food, giving a ride, inviting a young person in, teaching a song, showing up—and showing up again.

Be A Good Relative

Check in. Listen. Offer help. Ask for help. We do not have to carry everything alone.

Rise to Your Full Potential

Prevention is not only about keeping young people from harm. It is also about helping young people move toward purpose, possibility, leadership, and the futures they imagine for themselves.

Asking For Help is Strength

Strength does not mean carrying everything alone. Sometimes owning your strength means saying, "I need someone." Sometimes it means noticing when a relative needs you. Ask for help. Offer help. Check on your relatives. We heal together.



Take it beyond social media

A graphic can start a conversation. Community organizations can carry it forward by creating opportunities for connection, culture, storytelling, listening, and youth leadership.

Create Opportunities for Connection

Identify ways your program can strengthen relationships among youth, families, Elders, mentors, and community members. Consider youth gatherings, talking circles, cultural activities, peer programs, mentorship, family events, or informal opportunities to spend time together.

Create Opportunities for Culture

Partner with cultural programs, knowledge keepers, youth leaders, and families to identify appropriate opportunities to learn language, cook together, gather, dance, sing, create, attend ceremony, or spend time on the land.

Create Space for Story

Support opportunities for family and community stories to be shared across generations, while following local protocols and permissions.

Listen

Create spaces where young people can tell adults, programs, and leaders what they need without being interrupted or immediately given solutions. Use what you hear to shape services and prevention activities.

Share Leadership

Give youth meaningful leadership and decision-making roles—not just a seat in the room. Invite youth to co-design activities, review materials, facilitate conversations, and help evaluate what works.

Be A Good Relative

Build organizational practices that make connection routine: outreach, follow-up, welcoming spaces, warm referrals, transportation support, mentorship, and consistent invitations to participate.

Culture. Connection. Community.
These are everyday opportunities to strengthen wellness.

Support & Resources

When sharing prevention or crisis information, **place local Tribal and community resources first whenever possible**. Help young people and families know who they can actually reach and how to access support.

Add Your Community Resources

- TRIBAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROGRAM
- YOUTH PROGRAM
- CULTURAL / TRADITIONAL SUPPORT
- LOCAL CRISIS RESOURCE
- SUBSTANCE USE / RECOVERY PROGRAM
- SCHOOL OR YOUTH-SERVING PARTNER
- OTHER COMMUNITY RESOURCE

National & Native-Specific Resources

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- StrongHearts Native Helpline
- SAMHSA behavioral health and substance use resources
- Native Wellness Institute
- Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center
- One Sky Center
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center
- The Jed Foundation

When discussing suicide, crisis, overdose, or substance use, include appropriate support resources and avoid graphic or stigmatizing language.

Simple implementation and learning

Evaluation does not need to be complicated. Use measures that are useful to your community and match the size of your effort. Community feedback can help organizations understand what is connected with youth and where to adjust.

Organizations may choose to track:

- **Number and type** of campaign materials shared.
- **Youth involved** in planning, creation, leadership, or review.
- **Programs**, schools, clinics, or community partners participating.
- **Community events** or activities connected to the campaign.
- **Reach or engagement** with social media and other communications.
- **Local resources** promoted or referrals made.
- **Youth and community feedback** about what felt relevant, culturally appropriate, and supportive.
- **Ideas youth identify** for future prevention or wellness activities.



Whenever possible, return findings to youth and community partners and use what was learned to **guide the next phase** of the work.

Data & Our Strengths

Data can identify inequities, support advocacy, and show where resources are needed. But data should never become the whole story of Native youth.

Use data to identify the need. Use strengths to tell the rest of the story.

Share Data With Care

PAIR

disparities with strengths and protective factors.

USE

non-stigmatizing language.

CENTER

Native youth as whole people — not as a crisis or statistic.

INCLUDE

an action that people can take.

EMPHASIZE

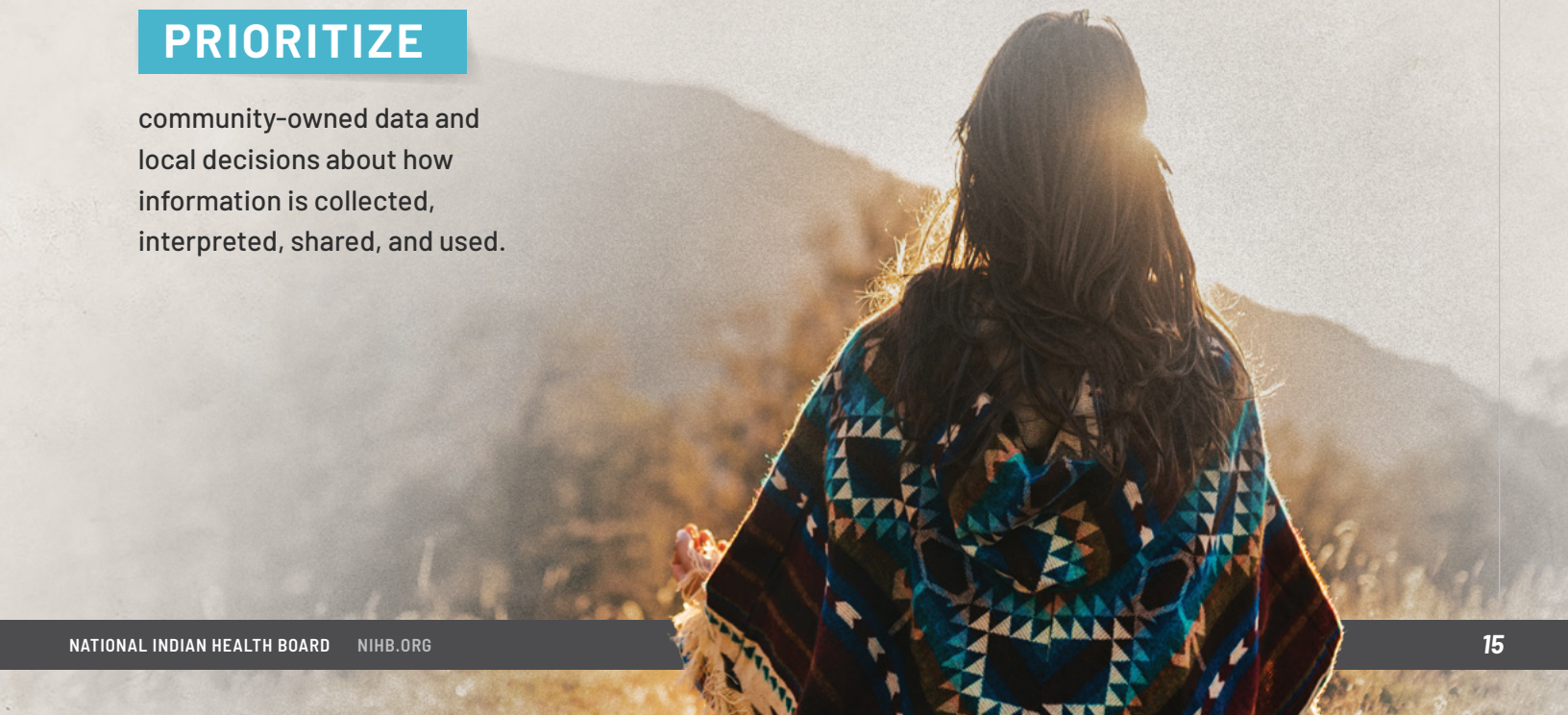
hope, connection, and help-seeking without shame.

INCLUDE

local Tribal resources whenever possible.

PRIORITIZE

community-owned data and local decisions about how information is collected, interpreted, shared, and used.



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