



# Covered in Codes: The Value of a Tribal Public Health Law Database

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## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Native Public Health Law Partnership is to support the American Indian/Alaska Native communities in developing meaningful public health codes—identifying areas of priority and where gaps in protections exist.

Our objectives are to:

1. Recognize and support the authority of tribal nations to regulate public health;
2. Encourage tribe-to-tribe data sharing;
3. Enhance understanding of the unique roles & cultural functions of these laws; and
4. Showcase the broad variety of codes addressing tribal public health concerns.

Tribal nations are turning to public health law as a way to codify and protect knowledge, including customary laws from time immemorial. These laws are a tool for tribal governments in stewarding both culture and community development.

## METHODS

Over an 8-week period, former Wilma Mankiller Fellow Beth Bahe searched the National Indian Law Library and the websites of tribal nations for public health codes. Search terms included those related to public health, human health, environmental health, and emergency preparedness, as listed in Table 1.

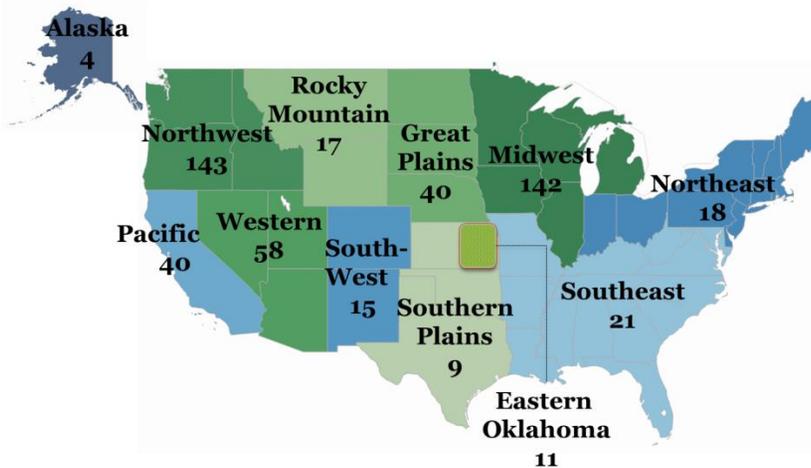
Public health	Disease
Communicable disease	Human health
Contagion/outbreak	Quarantine
Health	Isolation
Occupational health	Behavioral health
Toxin	Harm

We excluded search results if the content was found in a book, resolution, conference proceeding, or testimony. The database has been recently updated and independently reviewed over a 6-week period in accordance with these parameters.

## FINDINGS

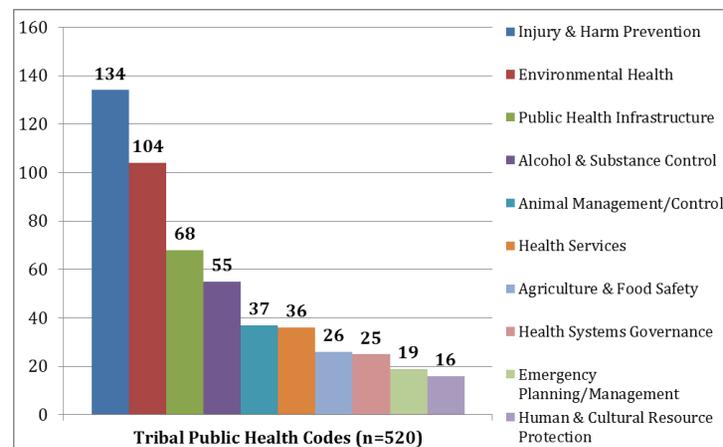
A total of 520 public health-related codes make up the current tribal public health law database. These codes represent 83 tribal nations across all 12 NCAI regions.

Figure 1. Publicly-Available Tribal Public Health Codes in Database, by NCAI Region



We are continually locating relevant codes that are found in broader codes to more accurately categorize their orientation. For example, waste management provisions are often contained in environmental codes, yet may address infrastructure.

Figure 2. Total Codes by 10 Tribal Public Health Law Database Categories



## PRODUCTS

To achieve objectives 2-4, the Native Public Health Law Partnership is continuing to collect codes and secure permissions from tribes to share them as part of the database. Once we have due consent, we will launch the online database. It will be open access; no fees or subscriptions required.

We have also released two policy briefs on road safety and solid waste management. In each, we look to highlight tribal case studies where public health codes are improving community outcomes.



## SUMMARY

This project is undertaken in partnership with the National Indian Health Board and is supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The database is a resource designed to provide tribal leaders, public health practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders with comprehensive information on tribal laws as they pertain to the health protection and promotion of Native communities.

Are you curious about the ways in which tribes are contributing to national dialogues on public health? To share some insights, we have found:

- An emphasis on preserving human dignity
- An invitation for cross-cultural understanding
- Unique considerations of injury & harm

If you would like to learn more or engage your tribe in this project, please visit [www.ncai.org/prc](http://www.ncai.org/prc) or contact Sarah Pytalski at [spytalski@ncai.org](mailto:spytalski@ncai.org).