



A Strategic New Direction for the NCAI Policy Research Center

The NCAI Policy Research Center is changing along with the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). The recent focus on the reorganization of NCAI created a great new opportunity to rethink the mission and role of the NCAI Policy Research Center as it approaches its 20-year anniversary. The NCAI Policy Research Center was established in 2003 as a national tribal research and policy center focused on issues facing tribal communities. The NCAI Policy Research Center was initially envisioned as an independent research center within NCAI with its own Advisory Board. The NCAI Policy Research Center also hosted the Annual Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum at the NCAI Mid Year Conference as a forum for tribal leaders and researchers to discuss policy research and data topics in a variety of session formats. The NCAI Policy Research is proud of its research and data work to inform policy over the years but recognized the opportunity to reinvent itself with NCAI's new reorganization efforts.

The NCAI Policy Research Center is committed to conducting quality research and data not only inform NCAI policy priorities and align with the needs of Tribal Nations, but also to help improve outcomes for Indian Country. This approach requires more integration into the overall work of NCAI while still conducting high quality policy research. This new approach also requires a new strategy for funding that could rely on more general operating support and partnership work rather than restrictive multi-year grants that do not necessarily allow focus on the fast-paced and changing policy work at NCAI.

The NCAI Policy Research Center's strategic planning during the past year resulted in a new mission: lead, conduct, and translate high quality policy research and data to improve outcomes for Indian Country. The NCAI Policy Research Center also changed the priority of its customer focus to better support Tribal Nations, tribal leaders, and tribal staff, with less of an emphasis on developing academic researchers and students, since many other entities now do that work in comparison to the lack of this type of support 20 years ago. These changes will result in better integration and access to research during NCAI events and will lead to the development of new research-focused events and activities.

The initial objectives of the new NCAI Policy Research Center involve better integration of research and data into the policy priority work of NCAI, and as supported by tribal leadership, will include more work supporting tribal governance of research. In 2022, the NCAI Policy Research Center joins the new NCAI Sovereignty Institute to also develop research-related resources and tools to support the sovereignty of Tribal Nations as they are Thinking Beyond Self Determination. The NCAI Policy Research Center welcomes your feedback and ideas as we move forward, and you can provide that input at research@ncai.org.



NCAI Policy Research Center Update

The NCAI Policy Research Center continued to focus on research and data work to inform policies and actions to positively impact outcomes in Indian Country and conducted strategic planning as a part of NCAI's reorganization efforts. The NCAI Policy Research Center is proud to join the new NCAI Sovereignty Institute and discusses its new plans for research and data work in the commentary below. This section first provides an update on recent accomplishments.

Census Data

The NCAI Policy Research Center continued to lead on reviewing the quality and accuracy of 2020 Census data through meetings with the U.S. Census Bureau, analysis of data releases, and partnerships with various stakeholders. The NCAI Policy Research Center moved quickly with a press release to inform Indian Country of the results of U.S. Census' Post Enumeration Survey (PES) that found a persistent undercount — 5.6 percent — for AI/ANs living on reservations in the 2020 Census. NCAI President Fawn Sharp and a call for immediate tribal consultation with the U.S. Census Bureau to ensure these persistent undercounts do not occur again in the future.

The NCAI Policy Research Center also highlighted the importance of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) in funding formulas for AI/ANs, published an overview of the ACS to help educate tribal leaders, and conducted message testing to help develop materials to encourage AI/ANs to complete the ACS when it arrives in their mailbox or someone shows up at the door.

NCAI has written letters to the U.S. Census

Bureau to urge them to ensure that the 2020 Data products are as accurate and accessible as possible to ensure Tribal Nations have the data they need to ensure a fair allocation of resources to their communities.

Native Vote Data

The NCAI Policy Research Center continued to contribute to NCAI's Native Vote initiative through data and research. For the 2022 midterm cycle, the Policy Research Center developed a Native Vote update on the 2020 Census AI/AN Voting Age population that can be used by Tribal Nations on their Get Out the Vote strategic plans for the November 2022 midterm elections and a new Native Vote Report on turnout and registration in voting districts on tribal lands and for majority-minority AI/AN voting districts. Finally, the Policy Research Center worked with NCAI's communications department to develop a series of updated and new infographic pamphlets on AI/AN voting and turnout data and on AI/AN elected officials.

Tribal Research Governance

The NCAI Policy Research Center released





a Frequently Asked Questions document on how to work with Tribal Nations on research to help with all the inquiries it gets on this topic. The NCAI Policy Research Center also conducted its Holding Space: A Guide for Tribal Partners in Research training at the 2021 NCAI Annual Convention and recently for a class of students interested in community-based research at Harvard Medical School. The NCAI Policy Research Center is also completing an online/virtual update to its Research that Benefits Native People curriculum for college students that provides a basic overview of conducting research with Tribal Nations and the foundations of sovereignty in research partnerships.

The Health Impacts of Native-themed Mascots

The NCAI Policy Research Center completed and published the most comprehensive review to date of research on the health impacts of Native-themed Mascots and described how these impacts continue to promote health disparities in AI/AN communities. That research review was recently published in the American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research journal in March 2022. This data and research helps inform efforts at the local level to retire and replace harmful Native-themed mascots.

Environmental Sustainability Research

The NCAI Policy Research Center partners with the NCAI Environmental Sustainability team on research and data about the impacts of climate change on tribal communities. The team held a webinar on the impacts of

Permafrost in Alaska in February 2020 and published an overview of the 2021 IPCC Sixth Assessment Report that highlighted the latest data on climate change that revealed the urgency of action.

Other Research Updates

- The NCAI Policy Research Center continues to track COVID-19 data and watch trends to inform Tribal Nations about any new increases in cases or impacts. The NCAI COVID-19 Data Situation Summary is published weekly and posted on the NCAI Policy Research Center Publications Page.
- An update to the First Kids 1st Data Resource Book from 2019 will be published soon with the latest data on indicators of whether Native youth are thriving in four areas: healthy lifestyle; successful students; supportive environments; and vibrant communities.
- The NCAI Policy Research Center recently updated its Guide to Juvenile Justice Data webpage with links to available data sources on AI/AN youth in the juvenile justice system.
- The NCAI Policy Research Center thanks the Washington University at St. Louis Center for Diabetes Translation for their partnership over the last 11 years, and as a final outcome, published a review of diabetes prevention efforts in AI/AN communities that focused on outcomes from the Special Diabetes Program for Indians as an example for other communities.

