



May 2015

A Spotlight on Native Women & Girls

May is a month to honor our mothers, but we also wish to honor our sisters and daughters. This is a synthesis of current research reflecting their realities.



This month, the NCAI Policy Research Center wanted to highlight the status of Native women and girls by sharing new data and reports that show where we are gaining ground and where further support is needed. We hope these resources will be of value to your work. To contact the Policy Research Center for more information, please call or email Sarah Pytalski, Policy Research & Evaluation Manager, at (202) 466-7767 or spytalski@ncai.org.

EDUCATION

Native women are increasingly pursuing higher education: Over the 30 years between 1976 and 2006, the number of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) women enrolled in colleges and universities increased by nearly **200 percent**, from 37,600 to 111,000.ⁱ

*"Particularly notable is the **four-fold increase** in Native women earning masters, doctoral, and professional degrees" over this same time period.ⁱⁱ*

Native women are increasingly pursuing STEM degrees: **One in five** AI/AN female students who earned a bachelor's degree in 2010 majored in science, technology, engineering, or math.ⁱⁱⁱ

Yet a continued focus on retention is required: In 2010, only **41 percent** of AI/AN female students had completed the bachelor's degree that they commenced in 2004.^{iv}

And attention must be paid to Native girls with disabilities: In primary schools, **one in five** Native girls with disabilities receive out-of-school suspensions. This is largely attributed to a lack (or absence) of special education services.^v

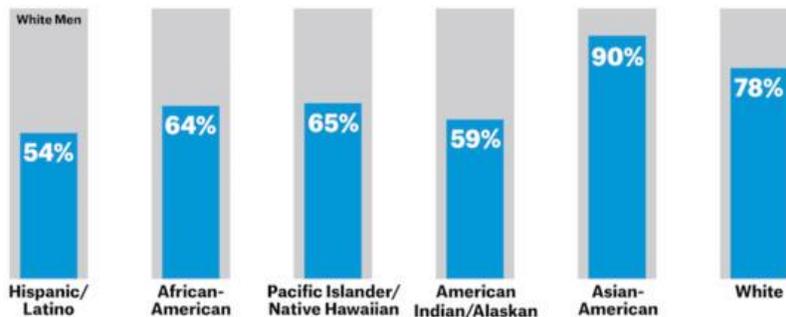
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Our women are driving entrepreneurship: AI/AN women-owned businesses grew by a staggering **108 percent** from 1997-2013.^{vi}

They are taking the reins: In 2011, Native women outpaced their male counterparts by **16 percent** in professional positions in the private sector.^{vii}

Yet the wage gap persists: For every dollar earned by a White male, AI/AN women earn **less than 60 cents**.^{viii}

The Gender Pay Gap for Women of Color



Source: American Association of University Women

NEW REPUBLIC

And thus, poverty persists for Native women and girls: In 2013, AI/AN women faced the highest poverty rate of **28.1 percent** - surpassing all other racial/ethnic groups, both male and female, ages 18 and older. The poverty rate for AI/AN men was 24.4 percent.^{ix}

HEALTH

Native women need coverage: In 2013, only **67.7 percent** of AI/AN women had access to health insurance.^x

Their health outcomes depend on quality care: Women who do not receive preventative screenings are at an increased risk for cervical cancer mortality. In a 2014 analysis, AI/AN women were nearly **two times as likely** to die of the disease than White women residing in the same counties (4.2 v. 2.2).^{xi}

Their health depends on the environment: The **increased presence of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)** in traditional foods poses a threat to Native mothers and their unborn children.^{xii}

And their health depends on resilience, culture, and protection: Native girls ages 15-19 attempt suicide more often than boys (**32 percent** v. 22)^{xiii}, but research shows that "each additional protective factor (e.g. family involvement, safe neighborhoods, cultural immersion, resilience, etc.) decreases the likelihood of a suicide attempt by **50 percent**."^{xiv}

SERVING OUR COUNTRY

Native women serve in greater numbers: Nearly **20 percent** of AI/AN Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard Servicemembers are female, compared with 15.6 percent of their Non-Native female counterparts.^{xv}

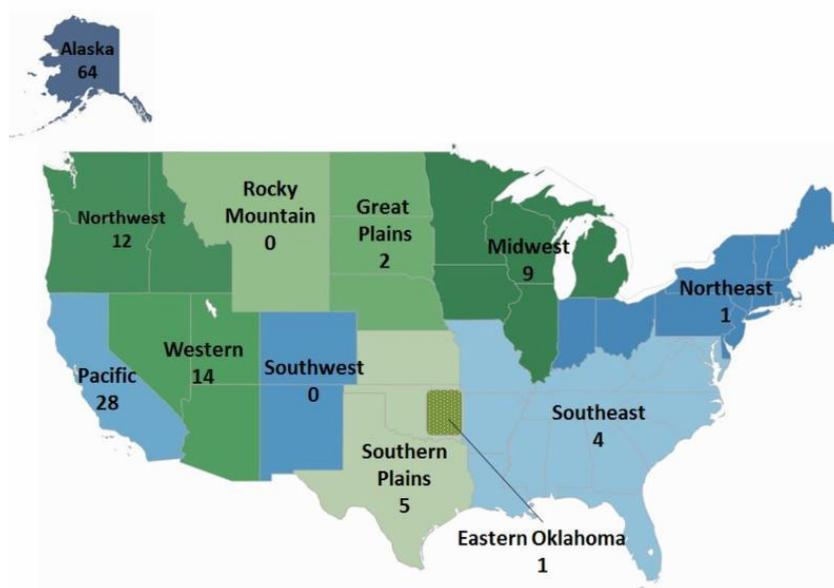
More than one in ten Native veterans are female: In 2010, **11 percent** of AI/AN veterans were female, compared with 7.2 percent of their Non-Native female counterparts.^{xvi}

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Making progress to parity: In 2014, there were 147 AI/AN women elected to serve as tribal leaders, which amounts to **26 percent**^{xvii} of 566 federally recognized tribes. Entering 2015, female tribal leadership has decreased slightly to **24.5 percent**.^{xviii}

Nevertheless, elected female leadership among tribes is more than **two times** that of the **12 percent** of female state governors nationwide.^{xix}

Figure 1. Elected Female Tribal Leaders in 2015, by NCAI Region



Serving in State Legislatures: There are 20 Native women legislators serving in state elected office, comprising **29.4 percent** of all Native state legislators.^{xx}

JUSTICE

Attention to detention: The number of Native women inmates confined in Indian Country jails has increased by **56 percent** between 2000-2013, from 354 to 551.^{xxi}

Preventing violence: Nearly **40 percent** of AI/AN women will be subject to intimate partner violence in their lifetimes.^{xxii} Among the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, the **43 percent** of single mother households have been the most vulnerable to domestic violence (DV). As one of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) pilot tribes, the Tribe charged 18 non-Indian defendants over the course of one year for DV crimes; defendants who had a combined total of **80 documented tribal police contacts, arrests, or reports** since 2010.^{xxiii}

Victims of sex trafficking: While the data are limited, Native women and young girls have been found to be disproportionately represented in the commercial sex trade. Across four sites surveyed in the U.S. and Canada, an average of **40 percent** of the women involved in sex trafficking identified as AI/AN or First Nations.^{xxiv}

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ⁱⁱ Waterman, S.J. and Lindley, L.S. (2013). Cultural Strengths to Persevere: Native American Women in Higher Education. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education* 6 (2), p. 140. Accessed online at: <https://urresearch.rochester.edu/fileDownloadForInstitutionalItem.action?itemId=28004&itemFileId=142803>.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Center for Education Statistics (2012). Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study. Published by the U.S. Department of Education. (p. 207) Accessed online at: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED534691.pdf>.

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- ^{iv} Ibid, p. 206.
- ^v U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2014). Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: School Discipline. (p. 4). Accessed online at: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-discipline-snapshot.pdf>.
- ^{vi} Center for American Progress (2014). "How Women of Color and Driving Entrepreneurship." Accessed online at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/report/2014/06/10/91241/how-women-of-color-are-driving-entrepreneurship/>.
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- ^{ix} Institute for Women's Policy Research (2015). Status of Women in the States. Accessed online at: <http://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/poverty-opportunity/poverty-and-opportunity-full-section/#pofig4.4>.
- ^x Ibid. Accessed online at: <http://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/poverty-opportunity/poverty-and-opportunity-full-section/#pofig4.1>.
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- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Bureau of Indian Affairs (2014). Tribal Leaders Directory (2014 Fall/Winter Edition). Accessed online at: http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/tribalenergy/pdfs/tribal_leaders_directory_2014.pdf.
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