



National  
Congress of  
American  
Indians

## Supporting Our Native Boys & Young Men National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center **Backgrounder**

April 2014



*In late February 2014, President Obama announced the launch of the “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative, an interagency effort to improve measurably the expected educational and life outcomes for and address the persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) applauds this effort and provides an initial synthesis of information below highlighting the realities facing Native boys and young men. We hope to connect with others working to develop policy solutions that address these realities and support our Native boys and young men in achieving their goals.*

**A focus on Native boys does not necessarily take away from Native girls.** If we view any support for one group in our community as benefitting us all, we can see that a focus on Native boys can strengthen our families and communities. Consider that when we work to support our Native boys, their relationships with Native girls and women may improve. In addition, it is important to consider that some policy and program supports may need to be tailored for young men in ways that are different than they would be for young women.

### **Native boys face a range of disparities when compared with White boys and with Native girls:**

- As a group, Native boys graduate high school at a rate below White boys and Native girls, especially those Native boys in South Dakota, North Dakota, and Oregon ([Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010](#)).
- Native boys drop out of school at a higher rate than White boys and Native girls ([National Center for Education Statistics, 2011](#)). In many instances, Native boys are "lured out" of school by entry-level jobs in high-risk fields or in the military, or are "pushed out" into juvenile and criminal justice institutions.
- Native boys also face higher rates of suspension ([Office for Civil Rights, 2012](#)) and special education placements than White boys and Native girls ([Ross, Kena, Rathbun, et al., 2012](#)).
- Native boys are not pursuing higher education at the same rates as White boys or Native girls ([NCES, 2011](#)).
- Native boys are also at higher risk of death than White boys and Native girls, especially due to unintentional injury and suicide ([National Center for Health Statistics, 2003](#)).

### **Native men are leading the way in some arenas:**

- Native men have the highest rate of custodial single fatherhood<sup>1</sup> than that of other racial/ethnic groups (US Census, 2006-2010 ACS).

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<sup>1</sup> Custodial single fatherhood denotes a single male householder, with no wife in present family, and with own children under 18 years; rates by race/ethnicity are AI/AN: 3.6%; African American: 2.9%; White: 2%; Asian: 1.6%.

- Native men continue to enlist in the military at a high rate compared with other racial/ethnic groups, especially those between the ages of 17 and 24 ([US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012](#)).
- In Montana and New Mexico, young Native men (aged 18-24) are registered to vote at the highest rate of all groups of Native American registered voters (89% compared with young Native women at 86% in MT and 87% in NM) (NCAI, 2012).

**Community programs designed to support Native boys and men have shown some success:**

- The United Tribes Technical College's [Demand Workforce](#) effort is new, but incredibly innovative in terms of developing initiatives that respond to realities facing Native men in their region using tools like humor and the internet to engage young men.
- Sports programs like the World Eskimo and Indian Olympics in Alaska, the REZRIDERS extreme sports initiative in New Mexico, and the Ultimate Warrior triathlon featuring traditional activities in Montana have been effective at engaging young men in healthy, community-based activities.
- The Aha Kane initiative in Hawai'i has expanded from being centered around intergenerational cultural activities to including health and jobs information for Native Hawaiian men.

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