The United States is home to 566 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes. Each is distinct, with its own culture, traditions, language and community. As American Indian/Alaska Native populations have grown — reflected in a 26.7 percent increase between the 2000 and 2010 census records — disproportionate representation of their children in child welfare systems has increased as well.1,2

Our work with American Indian and Alaska Native communities

Through our Indian Child Welfare Program, Casey Family Programs:

- Supports tribal capacity to develop and operate culturally relevant child welfare systems.
- Documents and educates groups about unique tribal approaches to child welfare.
- Supports tribes’ connections to other leaders in the child welfare field and builds relationships.
- Promotes compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), a federal law that we believe incorporates best practices in the field of child welfare.
Casey Family Programs works directly with tribal governments and tribal social services through child welfare initiative agreements. Seven child welfare initiative agreements currently are in place, including with the Navajo Nation, Gila River Indian Community, Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community, Spirit Lake Tribe, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe and Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. Additional agreements are under way.

The agreements honor tribal sovereignty and support nation-building efforts. Under the agreements, Casey Family Programs provides consultation and technical assistance in implementing strategies prioritized by the tribes. The strategies address issues such as resource access, program development and capacity building, intergovernmental relationships, ICWA compliance, community engagement and more.

In addition, Casey Family Programs develops cross-domain partnerships, relationships and projects that address issues of great importance to American Indian/Alaska Native children and families. We bring tribes and other partners together, provide trainings and implement pilot projects on topics such as tribal child welfare financing, capacity building and ICWA compliance.

Facts about Native American youth and the challenges they face

- More than 2.1 million American Indian/Alaska Native people under the age of 24 live in the United States today.
- American Indian/Alaska Native youth who are 15 to 24 years old are the most at-risk population in the United States. These youth face serious disparities in multiple areas, including health, education, safety and juvenile justice.
- In 2009, the poverty rate among Native Americans was 23.6 percent. Nearly a third — 32.4 percent — of the American Indian/Alaska Native population under age 18 lives in poverty.
- Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among American Indian/Alaska Native youth 15 to 24 years old. Native teens experience the highest rates of suicide of any population in the United States — at least 3.5 times higher than the national average.
- Diabetes and obesity, already on the rise in the general U.S. population, are more prevalent among American Indian/Alaska Native communities than among the U.S. population as a whole. Between 1994 and 2004, diabetes rates among American Indian/Alaska Native youth 15 to 19 years old rose by 68 percent.
- Alcoholism mortality rates are 514 percent higher among American Indian/Alaska Native populations than in the general population. Among youth 12 and older, 22.9 percent report alcohol use, 18.4 percent report binge drinking and 16.0 percent report substance dependence or abuse.
- American Indian/Alaska Native teenagers, young people and middle-aged adults have the highest rates of methamphetamine use and associated trauma in the United States.

References