American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people are those who are members of any of the Indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America. Wisconsin is home to 11 federally recognized tribes. Wisconsin's urban Natives are from many different tribal nations due to economic relocation. Many Native people have a complex relationship with tobacco.

**Traditional Tobacco Use Promotes Well-Being.**

Tobacco is used by American Indians as spiritual medicine for healing of mind, body and spirit. It is used in prayer to the Creator or other spiritual beings. The smoke is used to cleanse, purify, or bless. It is believed to be a great spiritual "commodity" that can be offered as a gift, to say thank you, as a sign of respect, and to ask for prayers, advice, or favors.

*Source: Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC)*

Because of its importance in tribal ceremonies and culture, tobacco use in traditional ways is protected by a U.S. federal law known as the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA). AIRFA was created in 1978 to protect and preserve traditional religious rights and cultural practices, and prevents governmental agencies from interfering with the free exercise of those religions.

*Source: University of Idaho*

**Examples of Ceremonial Tobacco Use in Some AI/AN Cultures**

Tobacco is put down at a tree, next to harvested plants and animals, or in a body of water for prayers. This is an act of powerful meditation and gratitude, both of which have positive benefits for personal well-being.

**Consequences of Commercial Tobacco Use**

The amount of cigarettes sold in Wisconsin in 2018 could wrap around the Earth 7 times. Cigarette butts are the most common man-made contaminant. They've been found throughout rivers and inside fish, which are vitally important to protect. Improperly discarded cigarettes can also lead to forest and home fires.

*Sources: GLITC, WI Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), and Anglia Ruskin University*

For culturally tailored help to quit commercial tobacco, American Indians in Wisconsin can contact:

American Indian Commercial Tobacco Program at 1-855-372-0037
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Commercialized tobacco use brings despair.

Tobacco companies research and exploit AI/AN culture as a way to sell more product. These companies have corrupted the sacred meaning of the traditional tobacco plant with their commercial tactics.

Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Due to cultural infiltration of commercial tobacco products, 37% of AI/AN smoke in Wisconsin, more than double that of the general population.

Source: BRFSS

AI/AN have a higher risk of experiencing tobacco-related disease, such as diabetes, than others due to high prevalence of cigarette smoking and other commercial tobacco use. The risk of developing diabetes is 30–40% higher for smokers than nonsmokers.

Source: CDC

Compared to white Wisconsinites, American Indians have a 34% higher risk of dying from cardiovascular disease, 70% higher risk of dying from lung cancer, and 250% higher risk of dying from diabetes, all of which are known to be caused or worsened by cigarette smoking.

Source: GLITC

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