

## CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) at the Aspen Institute, founded by former US Senator Byron Dorgan, is dedicated to improving the health, safety and overall well-being of Native American youth through communication, policy development, and advocacy. In our outreach to over 4,000 Native youth, CNAY consistently hears that lack of access to health care, including oral health care needs is a serious issue for Indian Country. As part of a collaborative initiative to address the dental care needs of Native youth and their communities, CNAY is highlighting youth voices about access to care and the power of tribally-driven solutions.

### Native Youth Oral Health Status

- Tooth decay is five times the national average among American Indian Alaska Native (AI/AN) children ages 2 to 4 ([US Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#)).
- 72% of AI/AN children have untreated tooth decay - more than twice the rate of the general US population ([US Department of Health and Human Services](#)).
- 91% of AI/AN teens have experienced tooth decay ([Association of Schools of Public Health](#)).
- AI/AN teens have three times the amount of untreated tooth decay than the general US population ([Health Policy Institute](#) at Georgetown University).
- Recent tribal-specific studies further underscore the need for increased access to dental care:
  - Untreated tooth decay is present in nearly 58% of Santo Domingo Pueblo children, 70% of [Navajo](#) children, and 84% of [Oglala Lakota](#) children (The Center for Native Oral Health Research – University of Colorado).
  - In Fiscal Year 2013, 1,316 AI/AN children in South Dakota had to be treated under general anesthesia because of severe tooth decay ([Delta Dental](#)).

### Native Youth and Access to Dental Care

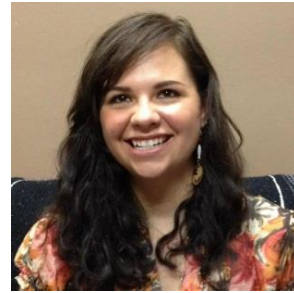
- Utilizing current [US Health Resources and Services Administration](#) and [US Census](#) data, CNAY reports:
  - Over 2.4 million AI/ANs – one third of which are youth up to age 18 – live in counties with dental care shortages.
  - 50% of AI/AN youth live in dental care shortage areas.

## Oral Health and Native American Youth

### Native Youth Voices

“If you don’t have a car that can drive on the highway for a few hours, then accessing the dental clinic is next to impossible.”

– Elizabeth, North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians



“Oral health is important in regard to speaking, passing on traditions, singing, and praying. We deserve quality dental care like other US citizens to keep our bodies and cultures healthy.” – Littlebear, Mescalero Apache Nation



“In my community the only time we can be seen by a dentist is to stand in line before the sun comes up on Monday mornings, and even then we are not guaranteed care. Since we cannot afford to get our teeth fixed in a big city many of our youth are forced to grow up with missing teeth.” – Alayna, Standing Rock Nation



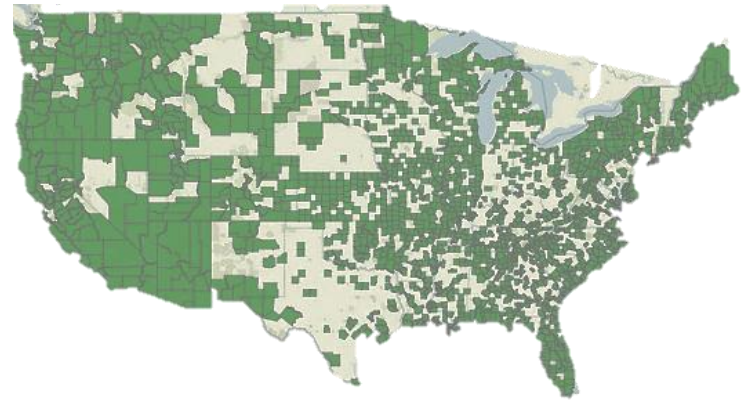
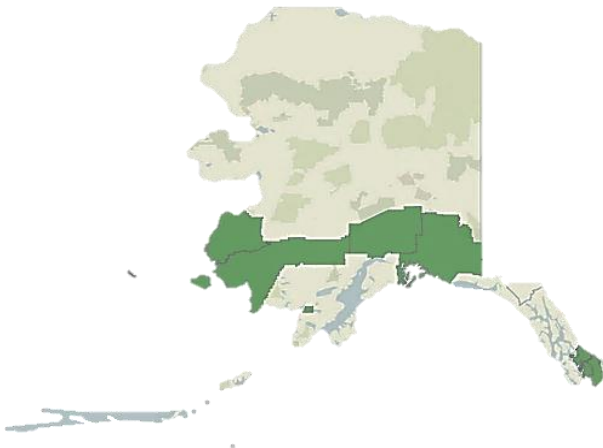
- 77% of US counties (2,425) currently have federally designated dental care shortage areas.
- Chronic underfunding of the Indian Health Service by the Federal government has led to a recurring dentist vacancy rate that approaches 30% ([Indian Health Service](#)).
- Nationally, more than 20 million youth up to age 20 covered by Medicaid insurance did not receive any dental care in 2013 ([Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services](#)).
- 54% of AI/AN youth have Medicaid coverage reports the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#).
- Up to 80% of practicing dentists in the US do not accept Medicaid insurance ([US Government Accountability Office](#)).

“Our tribes should be able use creative methods in addressing oral health problems. Having dental providers from my community would give patients comfort to learn how to take care of their teeth.”

– Charles, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation



## US Health Resources and Services Administration Dental Care Shortage Areas (as of September 2014, in green)



### Tribal Solutions

- In response to oral health disparities, Alaska Native leaders and the [Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium](#) created a mid-level dental therapy program to serve their people. Over the last decade, they trained 27 dental therapists expanding dental care access for 45,000 people in 81 remote villages.
- A [global literature review](#) finds dental therapists, the most researched dental provider, safely perform preventative and routine care such as filling cavities and simple extractions.
- The Alaska, tribal dental therapy requires a post-secondary two-year education and is an educational opportunity for Native youth.
- More than 90 tribal governments support the use of mid-level dental providers like dental therapists ([W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#)).
- The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium [reports](#) Alaska Native communities with dental therapists now see cavity-free children for the first time since the early 1900's.

### Tribal Voices

“It’s rewarding to give someone their smile back.”

– Conan Murat, Yup’ik, Dental Therapist

“Next time you see an Alaska Native child with a beautiful smile, think about the [dental] therapists working with our families across Alaska.”

– Andy Teuber, President, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

Visit CNAY’s website at [www.cnay.org](http://www.cnay.org) or contact us at [cnayinfo@aspeninst.org](mailto:cnayinfo@aspeninst.org) or (202) 736-2908 to learn more about oral health and Native American youth.