

REVEALING AN INVISIBLE POPULATION: URBAN INDIAN COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES



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Executive Summary

Despite the fact that “urban Indians” now constitute some 50% of the overall American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN, also referred to throughout as “Indian” and “Native”) population in the United States, reliable data on the characteristics of this population do not exist. Certainly, a number of reports about urban Natives have been produced over the years; notably, the status and wellbeing of urban Indian families has been discussed in a 1998 special edition of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, American Indian Policy Center (2000), Willetto and Goodluck (2003), Besaw *et al.* (2004), Annie E. Casey Foundation (2005), and Huenemann (2005). While valuable, these reports tend to aggregate data statewide and/or nationally, and in so doing, ignore potentially important differences between Indian communities in different urban centers and between urban Indians and Indians residing on tribal lands. As a result, there is limited information with which to address important service, outreach, and political concerns of Indian people in America’s largest urban centers.

To address this deficit, the National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center (NCAIPRC), the National Urban Indian Family Coalition (NUIFC), and the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (HPAIED) will partner to conduct a multi-year comprehensive research project aimed at providing a snapshot of urban Indians’ socio-economic status, wellbeing, and overall experiences as members of urban Native communities. Primary tasks will include gathering and analyzing existing quantitative data and generating and evaluating new qualitative data that together will speak to the needs, diversity, social organization, and tribal connections of urban Indians.

In terms of outcomes and products, we are particularly interested in creating a communication platform through which Indian Country as a whole can examine and discuss issues facing urban Indian America. Other products include a dataset on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Native people living in 50 urban centers and research papers that use this baseline of knowledge to create dialogue, inform policy, and identify community strategies that can contribute to the wellbeing of urban Indian communities. We believe this body of work will inform and educate multiple players engaged with America’s urban Native peoples, including tribes, urban Indian organizations, foundations, federal, state, and local governments, and other policy makers.

This project is a hallmark partnership between the National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center (NCAIPRC), the National Urban Indian Family Coalition (NUIFC), the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (HPAIED), and a key field consultant, Julie Nielson.

For more information or a detailed explanation of this project please contact Janeen Comenote at the National Urban Indian Family Coalition at 206.829.2229 or jcomenote@unitedindians.org