

Southwest Health Equity Research Collaborative PILOT PROJECT PROGRAM

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Project Title: Native Spirit: Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Culturally Grounded After-school Program

Proposal Abstract:

American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) youth have the highest rates of lifetime major depressive episodes and, in 2017, AIANs (ages 15-19) had twice as many suicides compared to White adolescents. Major depression and suicide are often co-occurring with substance use disorder (SUD) and AIANs experience disproportionately high rates of lifetime SUD with peak prevalence rates at 16 years of age. These data demonstrate the need for early intervention to promote health among AIAN adolescents. AIAN adolescents who are culturally engaged experience positive health outcomes when compared to those who are not culturally engaged.

Culturally-grounded after-school programs (ASPs) are a proven strategy to promote wellbeing for AIAN youth. This study proposes to partner with ASPs serving AIAN youth to assess the impact of a 10-session intervention designed to enhance protective factors associated with adolescent behavioral health including decreasing substance use.

The goals of the study are to: 1) strengthen self-esteem, resilience, and cultural identity, and 2) attenuate substance use among urban AIAN youth (grades 7-12) through participation in a culturally-grounded ASP, named Native Spirit (NS). This study will use a mixed-methods waitlist control design to evaluate the impact of participation in the NS program. The study will measure changes to participant self-esteem, cultural identity, self-esteem, and substance use using a pre- and posttest self-report survey and participant interviews. This study provides an innovative connection between cultural engagement and health outcomes for AIAN youth and also highlights unique opportunities for health promotion with collaborations with ASPs that serve AIAN communities.