



National Indian Health Board NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

910 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE | Washington, D.C. 20003 | 202-507-4070 | www.nihb.org

04/28/20

COVID-19 AND STIGMA

What is Stigma?

Stigma is the negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease. Stigma heightens when we feel fear or uncertainty, such as with the COVID-19 pandemic, and is exacerbated by misinformation, stereotypes, and ignorance. If left unchecked, stigma can lead to discrimination and violence.

What Does Stigma Look Like?

Stigma can take many forms, including:

- Derogatory or blaming language towards individuals or groups (for example, using the term “Chinese virus” or “Wuhan virus” instead of the official names SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19)
- Avoiding or rejecting certain groups of people
- Denying people services, including housing, education, or healthcare
- Physical and emotional violence

Many groups may be experiencing COVID-19-related stigma. These groups include:

- American Indian and Alaska Native people
- People of Asian descent
- People who have or have recovered from COVID-19
- People who have traveled or have legitimate needs to travel
- Healthcare workers, providers, and caregivers

People who experience stigma may exhibit negative physical, emotional, or mental health. They may feel shame, hopelessness, or distress, among many things. They may also hide illnesses, disguise their identities, stay at home, or avoid seeking any matter of care or services to avoid facing discrimination.

American Indian and Alaska Native people may be the recipients of increased stigma and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, information regarding a lack of access to running water in some AI/AN communities have led some people to think that AI/AN do not have the ability to wash their hands and protect against the transmission of the coronavirus. This misperception of the facts have led to incidents of discrimination.

It is important to remember that **stigma harms everyone and works against community cohesion.**

Reducing stigma promotes **resilience of individuals and communities.** Resilience will help us address and recover from the impacts of COVID-19.



National Indian Health Board NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

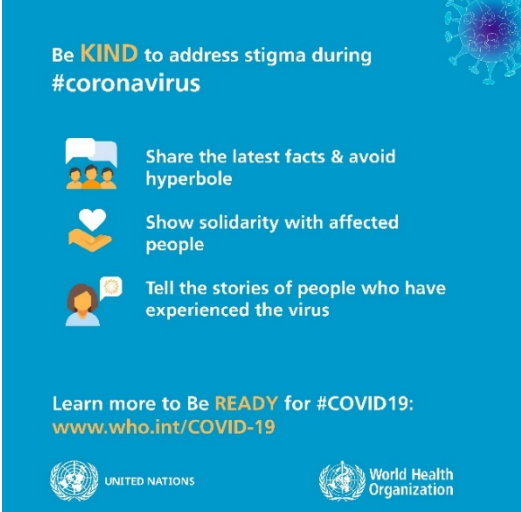
910 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE | Washington, D.C. 20003 | 202-507-4070 | www.nihb.org

04/28/20

Ways You Can Reduce Stigma

Stigma can spread quickly in a community, but can also be prevented.

- **Share the facts.** Check with the CDC, IHS, and your Tribal, local, or state government for COVID-19 information and resources. Information changes rapidly and best practices evolve as we understand more about COVID-19.
- **Choose your words carefully.** Avoid terms that reinforce a stereotype or imply blame.
- **Use ‘people first’ language,** such as “people who have COVID-19” instead of “COVID-19 victims”.
- **Show support for people affected by COVID-19 and those experiencing stigma**
- **Speak up** if you hear family, friends, or community members use biased or prejudiced language. Empathize with their feelings and correct any misperceptions.
- **Remember that COVID-19 does not discriminate,** and neither should we.



Be **KIND** to address stigma during #coronavirus

- Share the latest facts & avoid hyperbole
- Show solidarity with affected people
- Tell the stories of people who have experienced the virus

Learn more to Be **READY** for #COVID19:
www.who.int/COVID-19

UNITED NATIONS World Health Organization

Source: WHO

What to Do If You Experience Stigma

Healthy coping strategies may include:

- Talking with loved ones
- Caring for yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually
- Discussing your concerns with a behavioral health care professional or elder
- Prayer and ceremony
- Providing correct information to your community on COVID-19 and coronavirus
- Discussing your experience with local law enforcement

Resources and References

- American Psychological Association. *Discrimination: What it is and how to cope*. Available from <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/discrimination>.
- Breakthrough ACTION, Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs. *Disrupting COVID-19 Stigma: Guidance for Breakthrough ACTION Field Teams 2020*. Available from: <https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sbcc-tools/technical-brief-disrupting-covid-19-stigma>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Reducing Stigma* (updated March 30, 2020). Available from https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/reducing-stigma.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fsymptoms-testing%2Freducing-stigma.html#t3.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Stop the Spread of Rumors* (updated April 3, 2020). Available from https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/share-facts.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fsymptoms-testing%2Fshare-facts.html.
- Government of Western Australia Department of Health. *Stigma, Discrimination, and Mental Illness*. 2009. Available from http://www.health.wa.gov.au/docreg/Education/Population/Health_Problems/Mental_Illness/Mentalhealth_stigma_fact.pdf
- World Health Organization, UNICEF, International Federation of Red Crosses and Red Crescents. *Social Stigma Associated with COVID-19 2020* (updated 24 February 2020). Available from <https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sbcc-tools/social-stigma-associated-covid-19-stigmatisation-sociale-associ%C3%A9e-au-covid-19>

Disclaimer:

This fact sheet is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$2,000,000 with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

For more information, visit NIHB's National Tribal COVID-19 Response page at www.nihb.org