

# Promoting Mental Health During COVID-19

## Dealing with COVID-19 is Stressful

Community members of all ages may be experiencing increased stress and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic, whether due to concern for personal health and the health of loved ones, adapting to the disruptions of routine patterns of life, or managing feelings of isolation due to recommended distancing measures. Community members may also experience stress because they are not able to attend events and gatherings including powwows and ceremonies which reduce stress and promote a sense of connection.

When community members can cope in a healthy and good way, it can strengthen the individual, family, and community.

## Notice the Signs and Symptoms of Stress

Stress and anxiety can be physical, behavioral, and emotional. Individuals should monitor themselves and their loved ones for:

- **Changes in sleep or eating patterns**
- **Difficulty concentrating**
- **Pre-existing chronic health problems becoming worse**
- **Pre-existing mental health conditions becoming worse**
- **Increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or other substances**

## Consider Providing Additional Resources for Specific Groups

Some members in a community may experience more stress or need additional resources. It is important to consider mental health resources for:

- **Elders and adults over 60 years of age**
- **Children and teenagers**
- **Caregivers**
- **Frontline healthcare workers**
- **Individuals experiencing job loss or financial challenges**
- **Individuals experiencing homelessness**
- **Individuals who live alone or in remote settings**
- **Individuals with substance use disorders or mental health disorders**

## Staying Connected

Community members can uplift and support one another by staying socially connected even while remaining apart physically. Some ways to promote this within the community include:

- **Encouraging phone calls and messaging to friends, family, and loved ones**
- **Safe and sanitary contactless drop-off of supplies, food, wellness supplies, letters, etc. at the home**
- **Encourage balanced use of social media, including social or ceremonial events held over social media when possible**
- **Use of large signs, banners, and billboards with cultural messages of strength**

## Healthy Ways to Manage Stress

**Know what to do if you are sick.** Having a plan in place will increase feelings of security and can reduce stress and anxiety. Tribal leaders should communicate clearly and frequently about the latest guidance for what to do if an individual has COVID-19. Urban Indian Health Centers and programs can serve as a source of information and guidance for Native communities living in urban areas outside of tribal lands.

- Individuals and families can make a plan for how to deal with COVID-19 in the home, how to gather food and supplies, and how to isolate from others.
- Tribal leaders can communicate clearly and frequently about the latest guidance for what to do if an individual has COVID-19. Make sure that community members know the latest guidance about testing, including where to get a test.

### **Know where to access mental health resources.**

Tribal and community leaders should communicate about the resources available for mental health support, including counseling, suicide prevention, prevention and treatment of substance use problems, and other support networks.

**Take care of your mind, body, and spirit.** It is important for community members to stay healthy by eating a nutritious balanced diet, getting physical exercise, getting enough sleep, avoiding excessive drug and alcohol use, and participating in activities that promote holistic well-being. Participating in cultural events or religious events (when done safely) can also help to boost a sense of connection with others and put things in perspective.

**Know the facts about COVID-19.** Staying educated and relying on trusted sources for facts can help dispel myths, reduce stigma, and dispel rumors that can cause stress and harm in the community.

