



Native Youth Pathways to Healing

Vision Statement: Every Native young person should have access to a pathway to healing from any childhood adversity and ensure that they can — now and in the future — achieve their dreams.

Background

Native Boys & Girls Clubs have been providing safe and caring environments to Native youth for over 30 years and are the largest Native youth serving organization that is committed to strengthening the cultural identity of Native youth. Clubs currently serve **120,000** Native youth in approximately **212 Clubs** in **28** states and American Samoa, representing **132** different American Indian, Alaska Native (AI/AN), and Hawaiian tribal communities.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) recognizes that youth in Tribal communities face their own unique set of challenges and inequities. Native communities currently experience higher levels of poverty, with unemployment rates in Indian Country often standing above 50%. Inflated rates of substance use disorder (SUD) afflict Tribal communities and unfortunately, is something Native people have been battling for years. Suicide has become an epidemic in some Tribal nations. At rates of 2.5 times the national average, suicide has become the second-leading cause of death for Native youth aged 15–24.



Every dollar invested in Boys & Girls Clubs **returns \$9.60** in current and future earnings and cost-savings to their communities.

By participating in programming and initiatives that promote positive youth development, Native youth can stay connected to caring, trusted mentors from their own community and strengthen their cultural identity, while feeling supported, healthy, and knowing their future is still bright to light the way for future generations.

Native Club Approach

The Native Boys & Girls Clubs provide and expand access to vital mental health services and trauma informed care practices and environments to support the social emotional development of Native youth that also fosters their resilience.

Among Club teens, 62% report being concerned about mental health issues, 45% about substance use and violence, and 39% about diversity, equity and inclusion. **Among Native Club teens noting what is key to their optimal Club experience, 79% say a safe, supportive environment, 77% say adult connections, 71% say fun and belonging, and 82% say expectations.**



We ask Congress to create **pathways to healing** from the impacts of substance use, trauma, and mental health issues by **fostering resilience through positive youth development programming and initiatives for all Native youth.**

To promote healing and foster resilience so that all Native youth can achieve their true potential, we urge Congress to support the following key pieces of legislation:

Family Support Services

Family Support Services for Addiction Act (S. 485/H.R. 433): This bill would establish a grant program for family community organizations that provide support for individuals struggling with substance use disorder and their families. We urge Congress to include youth-serving organizations as primary nonprofit partners vital to the recovery and treatment process from addiction and substance use disorder for whole families. H.R. 433 passed in the House in Spring 2021 and the Senate must now do the same.

“The intent of these family-supportive grant programs is to help the nation’s communities address cycles of substance use that have beset families for generations by meeting people where they are and providing the evidence-based services and supports they need to carry on through the healing process.”

- Assistant Secretary Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.d. Mental Health and Substance Use, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Trauma-Informed Approaches

RISE from Trauma Act (S. 2086): This bill would improve the identification and support of children and families who experience trauma. Included in the bill is the authorization of demonstration projects for nonprofit partners to play a role in the prevention or mitigation of the impact of trauma and toxic stress in a community or promoting resilience by fostering protective factors. We urge Congress to push forward the RISE from Trauma Act and ensure inclusion of nonprofit partners in the critical work that can be accomplished at the local level in any broader legislative package moving forward in the trauma and mental health space.

Emotional Well-Being

Pursuing Equity in Mental Health (S. 1795/H.R. 1475): This bill would support expansion of services to address mental health issues for youth, particularly youth of color. We urge Congress to prioritize the expansion of mental health services in Native and Tribal communities and ensure community-based youth serving organizations have a role to play in ensuring fair and equal access to mental health support and services for Native youth and families.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Student Social, Emotional Well-Being¹



- A significant portion of young people, likely 30 to 40 percent, have experienced negative impacts on their mental or social-emotional health during the pandemic.
- Students who learned remotely for long periods of time and historically marginalized students were more likely to experience these negative effects.
- Rates of anxiety and attempted suicides, already on the rise pre-pandemic, appear to have increased among all students, especially among girls.
- Schools and districts, especially in rural areas without a strong social-service infrastructure, lacked systems to track student well-being or strategies to address and improve it.

¹ The Center on Reinventing Public Education. (2021). https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/sel_report_2021_final_8_10.pdf