

Getting to Know Tribal Communities

Insights for Health Care Professionals



Molina Healthcare recognizes that our provider partners and staff are uniquely positioned to care for the health of Washington State's American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities. It is our desire to work with you to close gaps in care and support our AI/AN members in preventing known health risks such as diabetes, asthma, and heart disease through culturally appropriate provider-patient engagement.

What AI/AN Patients Wished Providers Knew

- I may bring extended family members or friends to appointments to help me make decisions.
- Sometimes I prefer treatment within my Tribal community and other times I desire outside health care.
- I may have concerns and distrust about Western medicine treatment practices. So, please understand that I may want to try natural remedies. (Ask me about my care expectations/concerns and share your approach to diagnosis and treatment with me.)
- Some people in my community identify strongly with Tribes and Homelands, and others do not. Please don't make assumptions about me. Instead, ask me questions and get to know me.
- I may not have transportation to appointments. Let me know if there are available case management services and/or resources such as gas vouchers or no-cost transportation services to medical appointments that I may be eligible to receive.

“It's important to me that efforts are made to consult with Tribal providers as part of my care team.” - Molina AI/AN Member.

Barriers to Care for AI/AN Patients

- There are a limited number of AI/AN health professionals available to provide care. This often causes patients to delay care or forgo it altogether.
- Mistrust of government-funded social services.
- Physical distance from mainstream providers.

- Self-consciousness about transportation needs.
- Shame and prejudice associated with mental health services.
- Concerns about maintaining anonymity in smaller communities.
- Limited understanding among mainstream providers of the degree historical trauma and perceived discrimination have in presenting symptoms and wellbeing.

Culturally Sensitive Etiquette Guidelines for Providers

- Wait until the AI/AN patient and any friends or family sit down before you take a seat.
- Listen and observe. Be comfortable with silence.
- Correctly pronounce names (use AI/AN names when appropriate). Ask patients, respectfully, if you are pronouncing their name correctly.
- Speak loudly for elderly patients and limit big words.
- Be transparent about your role and approach to care.
- Invite questions.
- At the end of an appointment take time to express positive feedback and gratitude.



How Your Clinic Team Can Improve AI/AN Patient Communication

- Take time to learn how individual patients perceive their cultural identity and aim to reduce assumptions.
- Determine who is the decision maker at each visit. Keep in mind that AI/AN patients typically define family as extending beyond the nuclear unit. If the decision maker is present, include them in the conversation and/or suggest they attend the patient's future appointments.
- Consider coordinating services based on patient preference, which may involve including Tribal leaders or native mentors as part of their care team to help arrange traditional healing practices.

Questions

If you have culturally-related questions about Molina's AI/AN member population, please contact our Tribal Liaison Twila Mallari at Twila.Mallari@MolinaHealthcare.com. Twila is a member of the Diné Nation (Navajo Nation Tribe).

Molina embraces cultural competency and has been honored with a Distinction in Multicultural Health Care by the National Committee of Quality Assurance (NCQA). This distinction recognizes organizations that lead the market in providing culturally and linguistically sensitive services, and work to reduce health care disparities.