

Introduction

“Alaska Natives are the healthiest people in the world.”

Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium’s Vision

This report provides an overview of injury among Alaska Native and American Indian people in Alaska (AN/AI). It describes the leading causes of injury deaths and injury hospitalizations statewide and within each region. It presents stories about successes in tribal injury prevention (IP), and describes some challenges to IP efforts in Alaska. Monitoring injuries over time can help to identify whether IP efforts are successful. In addition, this surveillance can identify disparities between groups which can help prioritize IP efforts. Information about injuries is important for focusing and evaluating IP efforts and activities.

Intentional injuries are purposeful or deliberate harm caused by someone to themselves or another person, such as homicide, assault, suicide and suicide attempt. Unintentional injuries are those where harm was not caused on purpose or intended, such as poisoning, drowning, or motor vehicle crashes. **Intentional and unintentional injuries combined were the leading cause of death for AN/AI during 2002-2011.** Unintentional injuries alone were the third leading cause of death during this time period, preceded only by cancer and heart disease.

Summaries of statewide data use the most recent decade of data available, 2002 through 2011, for both deaths and hospitalizations. This report also includes regional information, dividing the state into twelve regions. The regional summaries include data from 1992 through 2011.

We recognize that data and the information gained from the interpretation of the data are only part of the decision-making process. Nevertheless, data can guide advocacy, policy making, strategic and program planning, and program evaluation. This document serves as a useful resource for those interested in Alaska Native injury-related issues and enables them to put data into action.



Photo by H. Strayer

Executive Summary

Injury Deaths 2002-2011

- 1,718 Alaska Native people died from injuries: 1,037 (60.3%) due to unintentional injuries, 603 (35.1%) due to intentional injuries, and 78 (4.5%) of undetermined intent. The three leading causes of injury death among Alaska Native people (AN/AI) were suicide, poisoning, and drowning. These three causes comprised 53.7% of all injury deaths.
- Between 1992-1995 and 2008-2011, there was a significant decrease in the rates of death due to drowning (56.5%), motor vehicle crash (45.6%), homicide (37.9%), and suicide (14.4%) among AN/AI.
- Between 1992-1995 and 2008-2011, there appeared to be a significant increase in the rates of death due to poisoning (360.5%), due in part to international changes in diagnostic coding.
- AN/AI were 3.9 times as likely to die by drowning as non-Natives statewide.
- AN/AI aged 20-29 years had the highest intentional injury death rate of any age group, with suicide as the most frequent cause. Those aged 70 and older had the highest unintentional injury death rate of any age group, with falls as the most frequent cause.

Injury Hospitalizations 2002-2011

- There were 16,141 hospitalizations for injury among AN/AI: 10,955 (67.9%) due to unintentional injuries, 5,069 (31.4%) due to intentional injuries, and 117 (0.7%) of undetermined intent. The three leading causes of injury hospitalizations among AN/AI were falls, suicide attempts, and assaults. These three caused 60.4% of all injury hospitalizations.
- Between 1992-1995 and 2008-2011, there was a significant decrease in the rates of assault (13.8%), motor vehicle-related (31.3%), and snowmachine-related (24.5%) injury hospitalizations among AN/AI.
- Between 1992-1995 and 2008-2011, there was a significant increase in the rates of suicide attempt (73.7%) and all-terrain vehicle-related (13.8%) injury hospitalizations among AN/AI. One out of three (34.4%) of all-terrain vehicle-related hospitalizations were for youth aged 10-19.
- AN/AI were 7.8 times as likely to be hospitalized for assault injuries and 6.6 times as likely to be hospitalized for snowmachine-related injuries as non-Natives statewide.
- AN/AI aged 20-29 years had the highest intentional injury hospitalization rate of any age group, with suicide as the most frequent cause. Those aged 70 and older had the highest unintentional injury hospitalization rate of any age group, with falls as the most frequent cause.
- Alcohol was documented as being associated with 63.2% of all intentional injury hospitalizations and 32.2% of all unintentional injury hospitalizations among AN/AI, based on blood alcohol and breathalyzer tests and other notes in the patient's medical record.