

Background

Fifteen years ago, the Alaska Federation of Natives published its *AFN Report on the Status of Alaska Natives: A Call for Action*. That study, prepared by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Alaska Anchorage, summarized population, health, economics and education statistics about modern Natives. The report raised awareness of serious issues, such as alcohol abuse and other health problems, rural economies and educational attainment. It urged Native leaders and public officials to address those challenges.

The issues raised in the 1989 AFN Report led to the very detailed *Alaska Natives Commission Report* in 1994 and the *AFN Implementation Study*, submitted to Congress thereafter. From these studies, regional "Wellness" programs were funded by Congress, and federal funding was added to the re-authorized Alaska Native Education Equity Act.

Since the mid-1990's, there has not been an updated report on the Alaska Native population and its socio-economic conditions. Thus, in August, 2003, AFN asked UAA's ISER to update and expand the 1989 Report. AFN wanted to know how the landscape of Alaska Native well-being had changed in the intervening years.

ISER recently completed its work, entitled the *Status of Alaska Natives Report 2004* (hereafter referred to as *Natives 2004*). That Report is a 400-page document which contains very detailed information on the population, health, economy, and education status of Alaska Natives.

AFN also wanted the updated statistics to be shared with the Alaska Native Community, and it wanted to know what the Native Community thinks about the statistics. Accordingly, AFN contracted with the First Alaskans Institute's Alaska Native Policy Center in a knowledge development effort to:

- bring ISER's updated statistics back to the Native community in order to get feedback from Native

people on what the data mean and what actions can be taken to improve the statistics; and

- write and publish an analysis of the 2004 statistics from a Native point of view, for a Native audience.

The *Natives 2004* data report and the Alaska Native Policy Center's analysis can be used to gain a better understanding of the Alaska Native population and the issues Alaska Natives face. More importantly, the data can be used to understand the status of rural and Native communities today, in order to plan effectively for tomorrow.

Both the ISER *Natives 2004* Report and this analysis of its data were funded by AFN, utilizing grant monies from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Process

In order to guide this 11-month project and to oversee the writing of its analysis, the Policy Center formed a seven-member Project Team made up of experienced leaders from around the state. The Project Team met between November, 2003 and June, 2004. They kept the project on track, guided this analysis, and assisted in bringing data presentations to the regions. The team included:

- Kanaqlak, Dr. George P. Charles, Assistant Professor, Department of Alaska Native and Rural Development, UAF; Director/Principal Investigator, National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native, & Native Hawaiian Elders: "Voices of our Elders", UAA; Bethel Native Corporation and Calista Corporation Shareholder; Alaska National Guard, US Army Reserve and U.S. Navy Vietnam veteran. (Calista region).
- Linda Joule, Executive Director and former Wellness Director, Native Village of Kotzebue-Kotzebue IRA. (NANA region).
- Susan LaBelle, Community & Social Services Division Director, Chugachmiut, Former Trustee,

Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Adjunct Faculty, UAA. (Chugach region).

- Will Mayo, sole proprietor - Nagheltaale Consulting; President, VINE Alaska, Inc., a Native ministry for wellness; former President of Tanana Chiefs Conference, Inc; former Senior Advisor on Rural Policy under former Governor Tony Knowles. (Doyon Region).
- Dr. Gordon L. Pullar, Director, Department of Alaska Native and Rural Development, UAF; President, Leisnoi Village Tribal Council and former President, Kodiak Area Native Association. (Koniag Region).
- Ricardo Worl, Loan Program Manager, Tlingit Haida Regional Housing Authority; Dartmouth College Admissions Office Alumni Director for Alaska; Native Youth Olympics coach; former Assistant Vice President of National Bank of Alaska and Editor of *Alaska Native Magazine*. (Sealaska region).
- Miranda Wright, Academic Program Head and Assistant Professor, Department of Alaska Native and Rural Development, UAF; Treasurer and member, Board of Directors for Doyon, Limited. (Doyon region).

Because of limited time and budget, the Policy Center used two criteria to select the regions it would visit to bring the information to the Native community: 1) Coverage of all major ethnic groupings of Alaska Natives (Athabascan, Aleut/Unangan, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq, Inupiaq, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimpian, and Yupik); and 2) Coverage of those regions with the largest numbers of villages. Using the numbers of villages from the membership of the Alaska Federation of Natives, the Policy Center chose five regions:

- Bering Straits/Kawerak region, representing 20 villages.
- Calista/Association of Village Council Presidents region, representing 57 villages.
- Bristol Bay Native Corporation/Bristol Bay Native Association region, representing 31 villages.
- Doyon/Tanana Chiefs Conference region representing, 42 villages.
- Sealaska/Central Council of Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska region, representing 21 villages.

By the end of the dissemination project, the Policy Center had reached seven regions including Bering Straits, Calista, Chugach, Cook Inlet, Bristol Bay, Doyon, Sealaska and had made 20 formal presentations to Elders, high school and college students, regional and village leaders, and to Native community members:

- Four presentations of data to the Alaska Native Policy Center Discussion Series, held in the Anchorage area. Each meeting in the Series focused on a separate data category (population, health, education or economy). Participation in the Series included representatives from Native organizations, including the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and the Native Village of Barrow. Representatives from organizations like Alaska Pacific University, the Denali Commission, the Alaska Industrial and Export Authority, and the Alaska Energy Authority also participated in the discussion series.
- A presentation to the Bristol Bay Village Leadership Workshop in Anchorage, reaching dozens of regional and local leaders.
- A presentation to students from the Kuspuk School District Career Exploration program.
- A presentation to the UAA College of Education's faculty and administrators in Anchorage.
- A presentation to the College of Rural Alaska's "Federal Law and Alaska Natives" course, by teleconference through UAF.
- A presentation to Elders and community leaders at the Chugachmiut Regional Wellness Conference in Anchorage.
- A presentation to the Kawerak Elders and Youth Conference in Nome, which was also broadcast by radio across the region.
- A presentation to regional and village leaders attending the Calista Regional Economic Summit in Bethel, also broadcast region-wide by radio.
- Another large community presentation in Bethel.
- A presentation to the Bristol Bay Land and Resources Conference in Dillingham, also broadcast region-wide by radio.
- A presentation to regional and village leaders at the Tanana Chiefs Conference's Annual Convention in Fairbanks, also web-cast by the Internet.

- A presentation to Native youth participating in the Alaska Native Professional Association/ Alaska Native Heritage Center Mentor Program in Anchorage.
- A presentation to Native and non-Native college students at the UAA's "Alaska Native Perspectives" Class.
- A presentation to Native and non-Native college students at the UAA's "Alaska Native Politics" Class.
- A presentation to members of the Alaska Legislature's Bush Caucus (House and Senate) in Juneau.
- A presentation to 120 Native and non-Native high school student government leaders attending the semi-annual meeting of the Alaska Association of Student Governments in Yakutat.
- A presentation to regional and village leaders and delegates to the 2004 General Assembly of the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska in Juneau.

More than 1,400 people have seen selected data from the *Natives 2004* Report and have discussed them in some detail. Many more have heard some of these presentations aired over radio stations KDLG, KYUK and KNOM. The feedback, comments and questions received during these discussions are an important part of the analysis that follows.

Structure of the Report

This report examines selected data that give a good overview of the current health, economic and education situation of Alaska Natives. They were selected from among the several hundred data findings in ISER's *Natives 2004* Report.⁴

Chapter One is the introduction to this analysis, including a brief project background and summary of the project process.

Chapter Two summarizes the sources of these data, the limitations of the data, and why it is important to know and understand data.

Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six present a discussion of selected data on Alaska Native

population, health, economy and education and includes feedback from participants in the Policy Center discussions and regional meetings and information on programs that address many of the issues raised by the data. Each chapter closes with issues and implications of the selected data.

Chapter Seven is an overview of selected data by the 12 Native regions in Alaska. As the Policy Center presented this material in each region, participants requested many of the statewide statistics for their own region. The Policy Center has made an effort to accommodate those requests where such regional data are available.

Chapter Eight summarizes the issues and implications of the data from the previous chapters.

A glossary, works cited, and selected resources for further study follow Chapter Eight.

When the Policy Center took the data to the Native Community, meeting participants consistently noted that the data do not stand in isolation from one another. They are inter-related and influence one another in daily life. Thus, there is a reason why the data sections of this analysis focus first on population, then health, economics, and education. Population identifies who and where Alaska Natives are. Health provides fundamental indicators of physical well-being. Economics and education are important "drivers" of issues presented under health.

Endnotes

⁴For the detailed *Status of Alaska Natives 2004* report, please visit these websites: Alaska Federation of Natives at www.nativefederation.org; First Alaskans Institute at www.firstalaskans.org; or ISER at www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu.