



PRESS RELEASE
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Arizona Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Commission Issues Advisory Memorandum on COVID-19 Impacts on Native American Community

On May 20, 2021, the Arizona Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Committee) issued an [Advisory Memorandum](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on Native American communities with respect to healthcare and local economies in the state. The Memorandum was issued after a series of public hearings and with testimony provided by researchers, academics, public health experts, community advocates, and tribal government officials. The Memorandum focuses on how Native American communities have experienced disproportionately large adverse impacts as a result of the pandemic. From a civil rights perspective, the Committee sought to understand various underlying factors that have exacerbated the high rate of coronavirus cases, hospitalization, and deaths among Native American communities in Arizona. The Committee issued multiple recommendations to address related civil rights concerns.

Key Findings

Longstanding systemic inequalities and historic underinvestment in Native American communities have made them more susceptible to coronavirus infection. Factors like broken infrastructure, inadequate health services, chronic health conditions, less access to clean water, overcrowding, and a high rate of immunocompromising diseases have compounded to create a disproportionately adverse impact of coronavirus. The Committee's issued many findings, but most significantly found:

- Indian tribes have suffered dire economic consequences because of COVID-19 related shutdowns.
- Long-term underfunding of tribal healthcare systems is a major contributing factor to Native American health disparities, which has resulted in a higher risk of severe illness and death due to coronavirus interaction.
- The coronavirus pandemic has exposed underlying infrastructure disparities across tribal nations.
- The federal government's attempts to undo historical damages and support self-determination are undermined by the lack of resources and infrastructure necessary to adequately serve Native Americans. While the United States has stated its promises to Native Americans, many treaties have not been honored or upheld.



The Advisory Committee made recommendations at both the state and federal governments to address related civil rights concerns. Including,

- To support the development of Indian Country’s critical infrastructure during and after the coronavirus pandemic by developing a comprehensive strategy for providing broadband internet access, delivering clean drinking water, renewing electric grid, and repairing and building roads and bridges.
- To address the chronic underfunding of tribal health systems.

Committee Patty Ferguson-Bohnee said, “The coronavirus pandemic has revealed significant infrastructure, economic, and health disparities affecting Arizona’s Tribes and Tribal citizens. Our Committee’s Advisory Memorandum provides recommendations to federal and state officials in order to address these inequalities and to develop culturally-appropriate solutions that support Tribal self-determination.”

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 51 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: in our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For information about the Commission, please visit <http://www.usccr.gov> and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).