



Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board

Building the Next Generation of Native American Cancer Control Researchers

Public Health Problem

Cancer is the second leading cause of death among American Indians and Alaska Natives in the Pacific Northwest, which encompasses Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. In these three states, 16% of deaths among American Indians and Alaska Natives are caused by cancer, according to the Indian Health Service. Research is needed to better understand the cancer burden in this population. However, American Indian and Alaska Native students face many challenges in obtaining the level of education needed to become cancer control researchers.

Program Example

In response to a priority identified in its comprehensive cancer control planning efforts, the Northwest Tribal Cancer Control Project has launched a training program to build the next generation of Native American cancer control researchers. The training program provides American Indian and Alaska Native students with the opportunity to explore cancer research as a career option. This project was based on a relationship between the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board and the Cancer Information Service of the Pacific Region. The Northwest Tribal Science Education Partnership: Building on Tradition and Community to Prepare the Next Generation of Researchers is the product of this collaboration. Staff of the Northwest Tribal Cancer Control Project consulted with tribes about the proposed program and then recruited American Indian and Alaska Native high school students to participate in two sessions of HutchLab, an intensive laboratory course designed by staff at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. This training introduced students to cancer researchers, concepts of scientific research, and other Native American students who are successfully pursuing college careers in research. It also gave them hands-on experience in a laboratory.

Implications and Impact

The Northwest Tribal Cancer Coalition is a broad-based group that represents tribes and organizations with the common goal of reducing the cancer burden. By building strong relationships, members seek and learn about opportunities to coordinate and integrate their efforts. This collaboration has offered American Indian and Alaska Native students the opportunity to learn about cancer research. This program could be used as a model for other states and communities to educate and train future cancer researchers.