

MHDD EDI Webinar Transcript:

# An American Indian/Alaska Native Perspective on Mental Health, Disability, and a Greater Understanding of Native Culture

Recorded live October 28, 2021. View the recording on [YouTube](#).

## **Tatiana Perilla**

Hello everyone, my name is Tatiana Perilla. I'm a project coordinator for the Equity Diversity and Inclusion Project. I'm joined by my wonderful team of people who helped make this webinar and make this project happen. So I do want to say thank you to Faith Thomas, Eduardo Ortiz, Mindy Dokos, and Aubrey Snyder. Also, before we start, I just want to say thank you to our speakers today. And thank you to everyone joining us and devoting some of their time to increase your knowledge on this topic. Before we start, let's see, I was going to share the pre assessment link. Unless someone did that. Okay, so please, we're going to be like a minute or two, it's not very long, it's just six questions. If you can take that pre assessment link, it would be very helpful. You'll also be asked to take a post assessment afterwards, which you'll need to do to be able to get your certificate of completion. While you guys are working on that, I'm gonna find the PowerPoint to start sharing it.

## **Dr. Chuck Foster**

I'm seeing something in the chat. For the pre assessment link, okay, I'm seeing in the chat on my end cuz..Faith, do you mind sharing that link again? Because I think maybe not everyone could see it?

## **Faith Thomas**

Yes, we still have people joining us. So I will continue to just put the link in.

## **Tatiana Perilla**

That sounds good. And just double check. Can everybody see the PowerPoint so far? It's not in the big view yet. But Can everyone see the PowerPoint? Screen? Yes. Thank you. Yes. Okay, good. Yeah, this is odd when you're in this presentation mode. There's a lot of things I can't see right now. Okay.

## **Faith Thomas**

And I believe we still are waiting for the interpreters.

## **Aubrey Snyder**

Yes, that is correct. So just so everyone knows, we do have interpreters coming both live captioning and American Sign Language. And as soon as we identify them, we will be putting them to your screen

## **Tatiana Perilla**

I'm going to wait another moment to let people fill out the pre assessment and get a chance to get our interpreters on here too.

**Tatiana Perilla**

I'm going to jump into this. This is not the actual webinar starting I'm just going to be giving a bit of introduction. So our topic today we're going to talk about an American Indian Alaska Native perspective on mental health, disability and a greater understanding of native culture. So our wonderful presenters today I'm very happy to introduce is Dr. Chuck Foster is an American Indian education specialist is with the Utah State Board of Education. We're also joined by Erica Ficklin. She's a doctoral student in the psychology department at Utah State University. And Julius Chavez, he is individually lived experience. And he's a traditionalist and Student Advocate. Just to let everyone know we are going to have better introduction that's always nice when speakers introduce themselves. So as we go through the presentation and they start their parts, you'll also get to hear from them.

**Tatiana Perilla**

Our purpose today is to provide an understanding of American Indian and Alaska Natives' mental health, disability in their cultural context for better services, and increased knowledge. We are intending to make this purpose by addressing our objectives, which are to provide a perspective and understanding of how American Indian and Alaska Native people view mental health, disabilities, and native culture, provide an understanding of how traditional American Indian and Alaska Native societies understand mental health, disability, and culture contrast with Western society, and provide an understanding of how mental health, disabilities, and native culture fit within the Circle of Life of the American Indian and Alaska Native people. Okay, and Dr. Foster, this is where you jump in.

**Dr. Chuck Foster**

Okay.

**Dr. Chuck Foster**

I appreciate that. Thank you for that nice introduction. I also like to thank the State University in the Department of Psychology, which is Dr. Ortiz. Nice start departmental staff a little bit about my background in terms of where I'm coming from. Oftentimes, as a person in the audience, you'd like to know a little bit more about who is presenting. So I'm going to do a little introduction first, then I'll switch gears to the slides that I have prepared. I like to thank everyone for this opportunity to address the address the audience. You know, some of my background is I've been a teacher for 16 years at the high school. And soon after that, I became a principal at a middle school and a high school. And I'm recovering from that. So the 16 years of that really nice experience for me has really set the stage. For me, in terms of what I see, education should be like this experience have all been on the reservation, as well as just the border towns of the reservations.

**Dr. Chuck Foster**

I was born and raised in Fort Defiance Arizona, on the Navajo reservation. And I just like to make a small compliment to my father. My father was a Navajo Code Talker for those people who, who know who they are. Raised by him and you know, the things that he's gone through and the encouragement that he's given me. So at this time, I also like to express myself in a Navajo way, this is a traditional

value in a tradition that has been given to us, you know, way back where we were adolescents. So I'm going to talk a little bit Navajo as an introduction and give a greeting in Navajo. \*Navajo language\* What I said was this basically introduction, where we're a clan, or we're a society where we take the mother's side of all our teachings. My mother is from the Kiani clan. That's who I am. And I was born to my father, who was Testani, which is the corner Cove people. And my maternal is the Edgewater people on my grandfather's side. And my grandmother on my mother's side is \*Navajo lanugage\*, which is the walk around clan. So basically, those are the four clans that I belong to.

### **Dr. Chuck Foster**

Now I'd like to begin by an overview of what we see as American Indian Alaska Natives today. And I'd have I have that broken down into four large categories, you know, the population, the reservations, the trust land, and the American Indian tribes. And I'm going to focus a little bit more on the American Indian tribes. I think those other three topics are further discussion some time along the way. And as you know that we do have 574 American Indian tribes, which are federally recognized in the United States, and I'm pretty sure there are much more Indian tribes, American Indian tribes, but they're not federally recognized. And here, specifically, Utah, we have eight federally recognized tribes in in Utah. My next slide is,

### **Dr. Chuck Foster**

is a good I have the next slide. Basically, this is this is if we were to go up into space, and you will look down into Utah. This is basically what we would see in the state of Utah. And all the red marks on the map of Utah are Indian reservations. And on the left hand side are all the Indian tribe or American Indian tribes in Utah. And we see down in the southwest corner in all Four Corners area is the Navajo reservation, which is the largest American Indian Reservation in the United States. And, of course, you know, at about 200 years ago, this was all in red. But as we gone through the stages of progression, progress or progression of society, we found that our land bases begin to shrink, and this is where we're at right now with our reservations. Let's go to the next slide. Now, what I wanted to do today is to make a contrast between the American Indian and the White people. And oftentimes that when we refer to American Indians, you know, there are a lot of terms that we we use

### **Dr. Chuck Foster**

a few years or a few 100 years ago, we were referred to as Indian. And time goes on. Now we're referred to as American Indians.

### **Dr. Chuck Foster**

Time goes on after that, now we refer to as Native Americans. Soon after that, we we start to turn the corner in terms of getting into the awareness era. Now we're referred to as First Nations. Time goes on even today, you know, that term has changed from Indian, American, Indian, Native American, First Nations to indigenous. Now, I guess, basically, the question is that, what, what terms should we use, which is appropriate to address the American Indian tribes, and I feel that it's, it's, it's up to the audience, it's up to you. Because you put it into a context where you feel comfortable, where you can defend, you can, you can talk about the why that term is being used by you. And for me, it's the American Indian, because, again, I have my reasons. Also, you go across the way you have the white people, you know, before they were European Americans, you know, time goes on their Euro

Americans know, time goes on, they're Anglo Americans, and maybe a few years back, it was Caucasians. And today, I'm going to use white, because basically, that's, that's the term I'm very comfortable with.

### **Dr. Chuck Foster**

So what we have here is a contrast between two societies, American Indian and the White. And not all American Indian people today, exhibit these characteristics. And not all White people exhibit these characteristics anymore. For reasons of society's movement, we find that a lot of the two groups are meeting in the middle, and at times, they switch sides, they switch across and come on back. And what I like to do is, take a few of these examples. And, and talk a little bit about that, because I think that really impacts the cultural aspect of the American Indian, because the American Indian, they strive on their beliefs and values, their traditions. And when that all is in place, they find that you have identity for the American Indian, you also have language, you know, across the nation, we do have languages are being yes, they're trying to do a lot of times with the English only states they're made an effort to, to do away with all the languages except English. But see, we we've been here for 1000s of years. And these words that we use in the Navajo, in my case, in the Navajo language is very important to me. As I said, before, you know, we have the extended family through clans and bands, like I introduce myself through the clan system, which gives me a kinship with all those people who are, belonging to that clan. And it gives me that relationship. So now, I have a seat at the table in terms of where I am within the tribe. And that's for for many, that this is this is a very, it's detrimental in terms of who we are as American Indians. You know, the next one I like to highlight is the, the eye contact, you know, every every so often that we find that the eye contact is very important in terms of in the professional world. But we find that many times that the American Indians, and oftentimes with minority groups, they really don't look you in the eye and they hide the eye contact for the American Indians, which is really, really interesting because being a principal at a middle school as well as the high school, I observe a lot of that eye contact face. Oftentimes, the American Indian, especially when they're raised, traditionally, they would not have that eye contact with you because they have respect for you. And when they have that respect for you, they put you on a pedestal in terms of you're the authority figure. So in that context, this is one example I've, as a principal at a middle school I, I observe this.

### **Dr. Chuck Foster**

My observation was that we had this individual, this one student, he was running down the hallway. And the teacher comes out of his room. And he stops this student in the middle of his tracks. And he tells the student to come in and talk with him. And they conversation went like this conversation from the teacher says that, you know, the rules here we have guide, we have guidelines to follow, we have rules in the hallway, we do not run in the hallway, look at me when I'm talking to you. And all of a sudden, you have silence. What happened here was that the tradition in the value in in the value system, the belief system has been severed. Because in the home for the American Indian child, student, they were brought up that you had you are looking at an authority figures, so there's no eye contact. But when you make that switch into a school system, where you have the Western thought, you're breaking that where you're asking the student to look you in the eye, so the now the student is a little confused, you know, so that, you know that that context there, oftentimes that that really surfaces to the top. And I see that quite a bit when I do visit the schools here in Utah.

**Dr. Chuck Foster**

We also have the, the other, you know, the carefree, you know, unconcerned with time. And a lot of the American Indian people who are traditionalist, they live in the journey, not in the journey of the process. So they're living presently, not in a past or not, and not in the future at the present time that they're there. They're there at. And, you know, my my dad would always say that, because, you know, he was a Marine, and Navajo Code Talker, he would say that time is really, really important. If you're five minutes early, you're five minutes late for your assignment. So you know, I kind of followed his his direction. Now the other two are just things that we can have another conversation on another day, because of time I like to move on. Let's go to the next slide.

**Dr. Chuck Foster**

The next slide also is a, again, we're comparing the two groups and oftentimes that we have the questions for our cultural identity. And oftentimes that just a cultural identity really, really becomes controversial. Because at times that we don't have that consultation with the tribes with the local tribes or with the tribes within your schools. And we find that oftentimes, when they don't have that tribal consultation, there's a violation here in terms of how to address the issue. Let me give you a few examples here. Oftentimes, there's no questions about identification. And oftentimes, that we violate that through inappropriate literature, through books, supplies, material, even goes as far as mascots. You know, in Utah, this this past year, there are two schools that changed names from a derogatory or derogatory term of the American Indian to a name, which is much more appropriate for society. So I feel that there's that consultation that it needs to take place, and it's very, very necessary. Also, we have a little bit of pressure, not pressure, but you know, concerns from the National Congress of American Indians, as well as the National Indian Education Association, they have addressed these issues. And a few years back, it was more of a militant group, which is the American Indian Movement, they start to address these issues with society. And today, we see that some of the changes, name changes, you know, one that is most noted is with Washington, you know, the big name change, and, of course, you know, you have the World Series that's going on today. You know, it's, it's kind of interesting.

**Dr. Chuck Foster**

You know, one example of that is, you know, you know, I was sitting there watching TV last night, and my grandson comes to me, he's nine years old, and they had this a tomahawk chop. And my grandson says to me, says, Grandpa, what are they doing? I said, Well, you know, let's, let's, let's talk a little bit about this. Because he was confused. He says that we as American Indian people, we don't do stuff like this. That's derogatory, that's an insult. That's marginalizing in this child, my grandson nine years old, he's beginning to understand that piece of information. And that perpetuates itself. As the years go on, we find that as they grow, and they start to be part of society, you find that it's, it becomes a very marginalize approach. And, of course, you know, you have the other the other elements, you know, the differences here, too. And I'd like to do a couple more here, is there respect for other religions? You know, I haven't seen an American Indian group with ceremonies, that would pressure the society that you must attend American Indian ceremonies that I have never seen that all my 69 years of living. And, and I see the other side where it's always conversion. It was really interesting. My mom and my dad, my second employment was, I was brought back to the reservation to teach, and there were three churches sitting side by side, and this is basically talking about the religion piece. And I was showing

them around town, and there were three or three churches sitting side by side, and there were about maybe 40 yards apart. And my dad says to me, says, stop here, son. So I stopped the car. And he says that, you know, I was, I was baptized in all three churches. And I was confused on that. I said, Why were you baptized in all three churches? And he says, one of those churches have to be right. So he covered all these bases, you know, and he had the right to speak like that, because, you know, he's a former veteran, and, you know, he fought, you fought as a Navajo Code Talker for the United States. So you know, I take that into, I take that into account as being very, very serious in terms of his lifestyle.

### **Dr. Chuck Foster**

In the last if areas we lived through, we live through culture versus we were learning through books. And oftentimes, this sets into the science and biology areas. You know, I think we've all gone through the biology class, where we find that one of the requirements is to dissect the frog. And that's very, very controversial with American Indian people. Because with their lifestyle, their beliefs and values and traditions, the Navajos, specifically, they don't dissect frogs. And I think there's alternatives to that. And then, in the state of Utah, we found alternatives to that, to that type of teach. And from this whole scenario, go ahead and leave, can you go to the next the last slide, you know, with with American Indian, they do have options here. And these options are on a daily basis, where they leave the home, they go into a society where they go to a classroom where they go and meet their colleagues to work and so on, so forth. You know, and I see that they there are four options here. They accept that the culture that they're in, or they reject the culture that they're in or become bicultural. And I think that's the plus bit, that's the best place to be. I feel it's very, very dangerous, which is reject both cultures and start your own. So I think the, the American Indian people, they do have a lot of options here, because, again, they're living, they're living in two worlds, you know, the stepping into two societies. And oftentimes, that we find that, especially with these students are trying to find a best place where they can be and where they're safe. And there's a lot of learning process.

### **Dr. Chuck Foster**

Now, let's go to the next last last. Last slide. This is usually where I go. This is a Monument Valley, Utah in the early morning. Or if we find you know, with the Navajos, these are morning angels that come out to greet you. When you greet the morning angels you are given offering the offering is either a prayer, you know, some tobacco, maybe a smudge of, of cedar and sage. And this is basically it keeps me balanced. It keeps me where I feel that I have a seat at the table in society. I have a voice that I could speak or hopefully I could be heard. And this is a very, very Beautiful place to be. And for the Navajos that live in that area, they indicate to a lot of the visitors there that this is the the center of the universe. And when you visit this place, if you ever visit you know, you'll see why. And again, I'd like to thank everyone here and I think for this for this opportunity, I'm looking forward to our conversation at the end of our program ahead. Thank you.

### **Erica Ficklin**

Hey, everyone. So, like Dr. Foster, I would also like to introduce myself a little bit more. So my name is Erica Ficklin. I am currently a fifth year student in the combined clinical and counseling psychology program at Utah State University. My advisor's name is Dr. Melissa TeeHee. She is amazing and has taught me so much. And I'm grateful for the opportunities that I've had. I'm grateful to be here with you

all today. Just a little bit more about me. I am a member of the Tlingit and Oglala Lakota tribes, my grandparents met at High School University. And that is how I came to be connected to both a tribe from Southeast Alaska and appoints tribe as well. So, my my grandfather, he does a lot of work with suicide prevention with the Tlingit tribe, and has for many years. And that was a big motivator for me to continue on this path into psychology. My mom grew up on the Rosebud Reservation, and then she went to college at high school, and then to the University of Kansas in Lawrence. And that is where she met my dad. And my dad works for the National Weather Service. He was later stationed in Alabama, which is how I came to grow up in Alabama, even though you know, that is pretty far from my ancestral lands. Um, I say that just to contextualize myself, you know, and who I am, share a little bit more about my story, so that you can understand a little bit more about me.

### **Erica Ficklin**

So yeah, today I'm going to be talking about mental health and Native American communities. Like Dr. Foster said, they're very many different names for a very, very diverse group of people. So one of them is Native American, which I think is a term that is pretty widely used as well, it is, I feel that the term American Indian is very important as that's a term that was used in our treaties. Also, you know, a lot of people use the word indigenous, or shorten Native American to Natives. And those are the terms that I use most often. So I identify as Native or indigenous, and I will probably use those interchangeably throughout the talk today.

### **Erica Ficklin**

So to get started, I just wanted to share a little bit about some mental health statistics in the native communities right now. So to start off, there are some pretty high rates of depression, and anxiety among Native American youth. So there are a lot of factors that go into this. And it's something that has led to a pretty big crisis right now. So there is, you know, very, very high rates of suicide. And I believe, proportionally, in terms of the size of the population, the rate of suicide among native adolescents is the highest of anywhere in the world. So it is absolutely a very huge problem. There are also some impacts of discrimination. And so this can be very overt discrimination. You know, so kind of maybe what you picture whenever you picture racism, but it's also can be sneaky, and some of the systemic institutionalized racism that people are living with and that Dr. Foster talked about a little bit. So there are that can lead Native students to feel misunderstood or undervalued. And that is incredibly painful. It can also lead to, you know, a lack of a sense of belonging, which is so important if we're going to succeed in school. It can also exacerbate symptoms of depression and anxiety.

### **Erica Ficklin**

And so I just wanted to note that and I think that's incredibly important. I also, given everything that's been happening in the continent recently, I think it's important that we talk about historical trauma as well. So historical trauma is whenever something that is truly terrible happens to somebody. And the stress from that trauma is passed down from generation to generation, to the point where it impacts epigenetics. And one of one of the really big factors to historical trauma, you know, that has really been something that we've talked about recently is with boarding schools. So boarding schools have been, I mean, I'm sure that you've heard the news recently that there have been so many bodies of children coming up at the sites of old boarding schools. And it's incredibly, it's not, it's not good, it's painful, and it's wrong. Boarding schools were also a situation where students were taken from their families, they

were taken from their homelands and placed into a school, their hair was cut, and hair has very, very important cultural implications as well and values. And so cutting that hair was awful, they were also forced to wear clothing that was considered to be white, you know, into the whole, you know, idea behind it was to kill the Indian and save the man, children were forbidden to engage in traditional practices, they were forbidden to talk about their language. And it sends a very strong message that who you are in your culture is wrong. And that is something that has definitely had impacts going down the line, you know, so it led to a huge loss of culture, it led to people feeling afraid of talking about their culture and their experiences and their lives, it led to a loss of language, you know, so it's, there was a lot going into it. And that is something that also could be impacting some of the high rates of anxiety and depression that we're seeing today. And the rates of suicide.

### **Erica Ficklin**

So there have been a few studies that have talked about suicide, and what could be contributing to these really high rates that we're seeing, and a loss of culture and a disconnect from traditions as part of it. On the other hand, there have been cultural adaptations and culturally based interventions that really focus on connecting youth with their culture, connecting them with their traditions, you know, engaging in language and talking about, you know, everything that people can do to reconnect with who they are. I know that there are classes for learning Navajo now that makes it to where that students can reconnect with their language and learn it and you know, become certified as being bilingual, I believe. So, there are things that people are doing, I know that the Tlingit also they have an app where you can learn Tlingit, which is really cool. So people are working on reclaiming their language, reclaiming sovereignty, from the experiences that we had through boarding schools. Another thing that can be helpful in preventing suicide is connecting with traditions and connecting with elders. So in many, many, most, if not all, native, tribal cultures, others are incredibly valuable. They teach us our values, they teach us about who we are, where we came from, you know, and how we should be living our lives. And they also tell us about, you know, who we are, you know, and that leads to a really critical understanding and a development of identity, which I feel like it's so important to consider. So, that was something that I wanted to mention, you know, was just being with elders. And that's something that has also been huge with COVID. And everything. Our elders were at risk, respiratory illnesses, have a very long history of not been kind to Native communities. And that was something that we were experiencing as a loss of elders, which is really a loss of connection to our culture, and a sense of who we are. So that has also been something that's been really heavy that native communities have been dealing with.

### **Erica Ficklin**

Other things that I wanted to talk about briefly before I jump in a little bit more about what I'm going to talk about next. But there are a number of cultural adaptations that have been developed to address some of these problems that we're seeing. So with suicide, with anxiety, with depression, with with substance use, there have also been, you know, cultural adaptations developed for people coping with chronic pain in very long term. serious illnesses. So one of them that I wanted to mention was trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy that was developed by Dr. Deepa Bigfoot. And so that's something that has been incredible. And I encourage you to look into it more if you're interested. Dr. Jackie Gray has also developed a cultural adaptation based on the medicine wheel. And talking about well being in a holistic approach to that well being as well. There's also in indigenous focusing oriented

therapy that was developed by Dr. Shirley Turcotte. And there's also the reading balance into life for managing cancer symptoms, that was developed by Dr. Hodge and some of their colleagues.

### **Erica Ficklin**

So there's a number of adaptations that are available, that are culturally based, I would say that, you know, your thoughts are mentioned previously. There are 574 federally recognized tribes, there are even more that have not yet been federally recognized. Each of those tribes has a unique culture, you know, and I feel like that is important to recognize whenever you're working with native clients. So yeah. Thank you for listening. Yeah. Okay, cool.

### **Erica Ficklin**

So what I wanted to talk to you about today a little bit, is some information about a study that I did with Dr. WorkKeys. And Dr. Foster too was a mentor and helped me immensely throughout that the study was actually my thesis. And the goal of it was to gain a better understanding of how disabilities are viewed and perceived among Native communities throughout Utah. The reason why we chose to focus on Utah is because we're all living in Utah. I'm currently at Utah State University. So it was a matter of trying to, you know, there was like a range thing that was, so that's why we focused on Utah. In total, we had 26 participants, we had six sharing circles throughout the state. In the sharing circles are an indigenous research method that's comparable to focus groups. All of the participants were over the age of 18, all of them self identified as native. We coded the sharing circles, and I then transcribed them, and then use the thematic analysis to identify the major themes. So from this study, the four major themes were a definition of a disability, which, ultimately, what participants were sharing is that a disability is anything that you might need a little bit of extra help with in your life. It's very personal, individually based on whether or not it's something that they feel is a disability. And another big part was a sense of belonging, and how important belonging is, you know, to native peoples with disabilities, making sure that people feel included and supported and a part of the community. A huge part was that people with disabilities were viewed as having a gift, and that they should be respected. Because they have something to share with the world. And we need to pay attention and listen to them.

### **Erica Ficklin**

Another big part was some of the barriers to services, so challenges accessing those services, and also some needed action, which I will talk about a little bit more. Today, I'm going to focus about the mental health aspect that came up during this study. So I'll be talking about this. But whenever we were asking people about disabilities, mental health, and some of the challenges that come with that was also discussed. So I'll talk to you a little bit more about that. But thank you. So some of the results. The impact on life that mental health can have was something that participants talked about quite a bit, and the amount of control that any kind of mental health concern can have on your life. So one person shared. And they were talking about mental health, they were talking about anxiety in particular. They said, that's probably one of the only things you ever think about, if you know the cause, and you're probably thinking about the cause. But if you don't know the cause, then you're just thinking Why am I so anxious all the time? So really, they're sharing That kept trying to find an understanding and trying to find a reason behind why this is happening, why you're experiencing anxiety was huge. And it was really important for people to understand a little bit more about

**Erica Ficklin**

another person shared that, you know, mental health can change the way that you interact with others, the way they see you when you act a certain way, you know, so also thinking about community and the impact that that can have, you know, on your relationships, which is so huge is huge to feel connected to other people. And like I said, belonging was something that was key throughout this study, so anything that could influence that was huge. Yeah, Could I could I see the next slide, please. Okay, so a little bit more about the impact on life. So it can also cause you to have distractions at work or at school, just any everyday activity, it's so hard to engage in life, you know, if you are not feeling great, if you're struggling with depression, if you're struggling with anxiety, it's impossible to focus in to be going about your day in the same way.

**Erica Ficklin**

Another person shared their obstacles and challenges you have to go through, just like anyone else, but it's more difficult for them, because they're going through stuff, which is very true. You know, everybody does face challenges throughout the day, everybody has something that is eating at them. And if you're dealing with a mental health concern, on top of that, it can make it that much more difficult to deal with throughout your life and to get through the day. So can I see the next slide, please? All right. Um, so another aspect that people talked about was invisibility. So some people, one person shared that, you know, I think people might not or other people might not see it as a disability because they don't see it. So, you know, sometimes people are encouraged to hide anything that they're going through, if they have a mental health concern. Something else that could happen is that, you know, since it's not something that you can look at somebody and see it, people were concerned that it wouldn't be considered a disability.

**Erica Ficklin**

Another person shared, I don't think other people would see it as a disability, because it's common among many people, which I think speaks to, again, the high rates that I was discussing earlier, you know, if you look around everybody around you, and everybody seems like they are struggling with anxiety and depression, it can kind of start to feel like this is just the way that life is, you know, maybe this isn't a disability, because everybody else seems to be going through something similar. And so that was a challenge that people were talking about. It's just this invisibility aspect. Yeah, so one of the last things that I wanted to talk about today is just some of the barriers to accessing the services. So it can be pretty challenging to access mental health services. Earlier, I said that there were barriers to accessing services for disabilities, and those exists for mental health as well. One of them is time, you know, it is, it can be really challenging to find time, you know, to go if you need to make sure that you're going to work so that you can provide for your family, it's really hard to make the extra time to go out and see a therapist, you know, once a week or once every other week, depending on the situation.

**Erica Ficklin**

Also, location can be a challenge. So there are many native peoples who still live on a reservation, which they tend to be very rural. And there might not be as many mental health providers, which then means that you need one to have transportation in order to go and see a therapist or a mental health professional. That also means that you need to have the ability to pay for gas, you know, to be able to go and see somebody. It also comes back to the time issue because not only are you taking an hour

out of your week to go and see a therapist, you might also be driving an hour there and back. So that's a significant amount of time. as well, as I know what the pandemic many mental health services transition to be more in an online format. Internet can also be challenging to access in a very rural location. So even though there is the option to meet with people over zoom or any other, you know, virtual meeting place that people might be using, there's still an added issue of is the connectivity going to be okay? You know, am I going to be able to see this person are we going to actually be able to have a therapy session or our internet problems going to get in the way, there are a number of barriers to services that do need to be addressed, and that we need to work on going forward. And that is something that I personally would like to continue working on. Thank you all for your time. I am very glad to be here today and I believe that is now Julia Chavez is turned to present. Thank you.

**Tatiana Perilla**

Okay, I'm going to stop sharing the screen now just so we can see Julius better as he gets into his part here. Thank you, Julius.

**Aubrey Snyder**

And Julius is muted right now. So Julius, if you want to go ahead and unmute yourself

**Julius Chavez**

okay, is that okay?

**Tatiana Perilla**

You're good. Thank you.

**Julius Chavez**

All right. Thank you. Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Julius Chavis. And first of all, I would like to thank the Department. Thank Dr. Ortiz, Dr. Foster and Erica that we could all join together to present to you some important information and some personal experience or what we've observed concerning disabilities. And like Dr. Foster, I would like to introduce myself and in our native traditional way. My name is Julius Chavez \*Navajo language\*. We introduce ourselves with our clans to establish our relationship to put everyone at ease, who we are and we mentioned where we are we come from. I come from an old place called Old sawmill \*Navajo language\*. It's an Arizona on the Navajo reservation. And Dr. Foster was set he was from Fort Defiance, which is probably only about 12 miles away. And so that that's where I come from. And that's how I identify myself as \*Navajo language\*, or \*Navajo language\*. Or we are also known as Navajo. I'm grateful today to join you to share some cultural aspects of, of mental disability and just just to enlighten you on on some aspects of, of how we deal with certain parts of disability. To all the Native Americans our strength lies in our culture, it lies in our language and our spiritual and ceremonial knowledge, which is not so different from tribe to tribe. We all share different aspects of these. Most important Yes, of course, our our language. It helps us to to communicate.

**Julius Chavez**

When I was young, about eight years old, I was sent away to school. It was through the what they used to call the Indian placement program. It was with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and

we were sent away to live in foster homes to gain our education. My mother and grandparents somehow felt that we would gain a better a better education by participating in this program and My first year I went to a place in Utah, it was called Mayfield, Utah. And I discovered a whole new world going on that program. And the following year, I was transferred to a different area, not too far from my first area. The second area was a place called Big Nail, in Wayne County. And there I started fourth grade. And I stayed there and stayed with the program until I finished all the way to when I finished high school.

### **Julius Chavez**

So we have our we have our, our challenges with education, we have our challenges with with discovering, discovering who we really are. And I was lucky enough to to grow up around my elders, around grandparents, around parents that that spoke our native language. And we always, at least got one lecture a day, on on behavior, and on self awareness. And I was told that we come into this into this earthly life from a spiritual realm. And in that spiritual realm, it was the holy people that decided our journey. It was the holy people that decided how we should be and how we should come to this earth. Before we came here, we say that we, we were given four agreements, to obtain our physical body and to be able to live on this earth. The first one was an agreement to give back a part of our life. The first one is our placenta. After the traditional way, after the baby is born, the placenta is buried in an ash pile. Families dumped their their their fire their ash pile, in a certain place. And usually that's where the placenta was buried. The second is our navel. After the baby is born, and the little piece of umbilical cord dries up and falls off. It is usually up to the father and the mother to determine where to bury that, that navel. It's either buried in a livestock corral or at the family's cornfield or the family usually plants. And that was given back to the earth in that way. Next is our body waste, that is always given back to the earth. And finally, at the end of our life, our physical body is given back to the earth. And those are the agreements that we agree to, to come to this earth.

### **Julius Chavez**

And then, when we are born, they say that the Holy Wind marked us on our bodies to remind us of this agreement, we are marked on our feet, on our toes, on our fingers and the top of our head, the top of our head could be seen the hair whirl, or when a young child is born that soft spot on top of their head. We say that when we took our first breath, several holy winds exited out of our body. And they marked giving us our fingerprint, giving us our footprint on our feet and then on our toes. When we are born, we are born with a spiritual sense of direction. It's regarded as the sun's path or a clockwise motion. And of course, all of us live in our area and we know which way the sun comes up and we know which way the sun comes down. And so, we know that the sun comes up towards the east, that direction is our self identity. Who we are where we come from, in the south direction is self respect. How we, how we learn to to discover who we are and to respect who we are through our cleanse system to our language to our ceremonial practices. In the west direction is self care how. We take care of our bodies that we have. And in the north direction is the protection of ourselves, through prayer, through faith, through the hope, all these things that are, are needed to protect us. And this has been, of course, with all of us a great concern. We've come through this pandemic, we're able to sit here and to, to listen to one another. Even though we can't gather in huge gatherings anymore, we have the technology to still have our voices heard, and to still have our language to be heard. And so that's what I'm very grateful for is that we were able to come through this pandemic. We're living for purpose, we're living for our future.

We've lost a lot of elders. Along the way, a lot of knowledge has been lost. But we're able to pick up some of these and the fragments of what we've been told, put them back together again and bind them together again, so that we can continue our journey forward.

### **Julius Chavez**

From these directions, the east, the South, the west and the north, the center of it is symbolic of our home fire. The center represents our resiliency, we are introduced to our home fire, by our loving mother, our loving Father, our maternal grandparents or our paternal grandparents, the fire is a symbol of unconditional love. It connects to the bottom of our feet, so that we may have that same compassion and love for mankind and all of creation. The Earth knows our footprint, and the sky knows our handprint. We walk between our parents each day, we can hide nothing from them because our shadow communicates with the earth and the sky day and night. And that's always been important for me to remember when I look down when I'm walking is to acknowledge my shadow. And that I there's a purpose for having that shadow.

### **Julius Chavez**

When a child is born with disability, we look to our spiritual realm. Within our ceremonial system, among our tribe, there are a lot of medicine men and medicine women that are gifted with certain abilities. One of this is the ability to diagnose and using their, their special gifts they can diagnose through what we call stargazing, they can diagnose through hand trembling or by listening. This this diagnosis is performed on this child with a disability. And the reason is determined and the right ceremonial chair or remedy is found. It is applied and is considered fixed. After this the child is viewed as normal and whole, they are no less than and they are not handicapped, they are provided an equal opportunity to learn and understand their uniqueness within the family and the community. So it is very important that the mother and father take care of themselves while the child is still in the womb. In some ways that the mother and father would take care of themselves is to avoid certain negative things in their daily activities and their daily living. Sometimes you'll see a deer hit on the road or an animal hit on the road. They're they're instructed to avoid looking at some of these and also some ceremonies they are to avoid attending. At home, they are advised not to tie knots or to cut ropes or to do excessive burning. And a lot of a lot of restrictions like this are placed on on the father and the mother so that the baby will develop properly. So that the baby will not have a hard time coming into this world. And so that is a very important part of addressing balance, addressing the beginning of the child in the womb and to to learn to be happy to learn To maintain a good attitude, so that we're waiting for that new life to come into this world. All of these things, our culture and our language, we view it as a living entity. The stories of how our people came to be upon this Earth, our creation or migration.

### **Julius Chavez**

All of this we understand our culture and stories they don't know disability. That tells us who we are as a human being. It reinforces the reality of acceptance and respect within each of us. By destroying culture, through neglect or in ignorance, we create a disabled culture, confusion and identity, confusion and self worth degrading of man and woman. All this starts to prevail in our home. The center fire soon becomes dim for the future generation, erosion or forgotten language seems to be the most hurtful. Our language conveys the sound and emotion which binds our songs and our prayers to one another. Our culture helps us to perpetuate and strengthen our people. If we are to be self determined, and if we

value our sovereignty, then we must address the center always. This will help us gauge our resiliency gauge where we are lacking and help us address any disabilities with service support and self advocacy. I've heard our elders always say that everything that is base or lacking in our life, we can address it with our with our native ceremonial. The rituals that we have for purification, for healing, for recovery, and to lead a balanced life that everything is within our culture to address these things. And at the same time, our cultural stories are full of disabilities and shortcomings, rule breaking and spiritual decay, a solution or a chant way is learned and given to the people. These are the news to correct and to provide recovery and to provide healing and to provide strength and protection.

### **Julius Chavez**

I'd like to give two examples of stories of how some of our our 10 ways or some of our ceremonies develop for our people. The first one is a good example I feel for, for how to how to deal with disability or shortcoming. The same seems that two individuals were seeking their healing and cure for their disabilities. One was handicapped in a way that he was unable to walk, and the other one was blind. They lame one climbed on the back of the blind one and they were known as the stricken twins. And they were soon led to a sacred sweat lodge. And at last they had found a source of their healing. But before they entered, the holy people instructed them not to utter a single word inside the sacred sweat lodge. As the ceremony progressed, one of the stricken twins cried out and spoke. This ended their ceremony or nullified their ceremony and their healing. Now they were to seek the long way for their healing and many herbs were sought. Many ceremonial items had to be obtained. Night after night, herbal infusions, sand paintings, singing and offerings were made for their healing. This is just a small story of how the night we chant came to our people. This next one is that a certain man went hunting. along his hunting journey he had an adulterous relation with the wife of white thunder. In anger and jealousy, white thunder unleashed a bolt of lightning and shattered the hunter into tiny pieces. When his family and hunting party came searching for him, all they found was a stream of bloody water flowing away from his hunting arrows.

### **Julius Chavez**

Gila monster was summoned to restore this Hunter back to life. To prove his restorative powers Gila monster cut himself up with an agate knife and reassembled his body through sacred chants. The hunters body was restored. But not until white thunder fully humbled Himself were the hunters moving life powers restored by the very powers that shattered him and destroyed him. This begins the stories of our Red Hat way chant, Lifeway chant, shooting way chant, and a host of other ceremonies connected to the story. So we can see that our cultural stories are a cultural songs and prayers play a major part in the development of a young child. And if the language is spoken within the home, and some of these cultural practices are, are, are being practiced, trials, the child soon learns that he is capable, he is capable to overcome the weaknesses in his life.

### **Julius Chavez**

This last story I would like to share with you has become one of the most important stories in my life. A story that I've heard time and time again, from my grandparents, I've heard it in sweat lodges. I've heard it from a host of elders. And it's just not one story. And it's a story that's taken from a ceremony. And the ceremony is called, where the two came to their fathers. And it's a story about our enemies that we live with. We are told that we we live with four enemies in this life. The first one, there is nothing that

we can do about it. We are born with this enemy. Every day this enemy wears out our life. This enemy is called Old Age. Old age was spared because she pleaded for her life saying that if you destroy me, there will not be any people left here on this earth. But if I live with you, even though your elders leave this earth, the younger generation will come up, they will feel their place. And so you need me she said, through this old age through this enemy. We teach about reproduction. We teach about the procreation of life. You were born on this earth as a man for a reason. You were born on this earth as a woman for a reason as a man to procreate live, and as a woman to bare children and to bare life into this world. Those were the instructions given to us by old age. She then gave her sacred name. And she gave her sacred song and was allowed to live with us. The next enemy is hunger. Hunger was more concerned about about our bones are our skeletal system. And through hunger, we are taught to be wise and industrious and to work to move our bodies. He said that food is difficult to obtain here on this earth. You have to plant, good meat and game is far into the mountains and you got to be strong to obtain that. When you plant he said rise up early in the morning when it's still cool outside and start beginning to water your plants your corn your bean your squash and do it while the while the sun is still down before sunrise. And soon in time you will have big rows of corn, your melons and your squash all those will be glistening in the sunlight. And people will admire you for that. He said if you rise, when the sun is up and you start beginning to water, your your field, all you will be doing is boiling your roots.

### **Julius Chavez**

And he said if you do this and you keep your body strong and your bones strong. He said look out there. Look at that mountain. You will be able to put that mountain beneath your feet. And then he gave his sacred name he gave his secret song He was allowed to live among us. The third one is lies. I'm sure you guys are all smiling now and how can lies be our enemy? Lies, she spoke up. And she said what you've heard from hunger is true. She said, she reinforced hunger. And she reinforced about the importance of our bodies, and to keep our bodies clean. She says, when you go through this life, you wash your body, wash every part of your body. If you don't, I will live between your fingers. I will live in your hair, I will live in your ears. I will live everywhere on your body if you don't keep your body clean and do as hunger said, to strengthen your your skeletal system to strengthen your bones. And she said, I'm afraid of two medicines. And she pointed out there and she said, I'm afraid of that plant out there that yucca. I'm afraid of its root. When you dig out the yucca root and you pound it and you put it in water, it turns into a traditional soap. And you use that soap to wash your body. We use that same soap to wash wool. And to to wash a lot of items, mainly to keep ourselves clean. And she says look over this way, there's a tree there that I'm afraid of. And she was pointing to a cedar tree. And she said, remove the bark from there and put it in your sweat lodge. And make a place for yourself to sit upon it. And as the heat rises to goodness from that bark will come over your body and destroy the bacteria. Destroy the illness and sicknesses that are lingering on your body. If you do this, I will not live on your body, she said. And she said look over there at that mountain. If you do what I say, I will give you the health and the strength needed to put that mountain beneath your feet. The fourth enemy that we live with is called poverty and poverty, lives close. Poverty lives right here under our fingernail. That's how close he lives. And then he is torn and ragged clothing and his ragged breath. He said, I will overtake your life. But I will tell you what I fear. Who said I fear the human heart. I fear, hope. I fear faith, I fear motivation. I fear these things from the human being he said. And so he taught us to offer our prayers to use our faith, to use our sacred offerings each morning. As we begin our day. He says if you do this,

I will stay away from you. And if you look over that way, you will put that mountain beneath your feet he said, so he gave his sacred name and his sacred song. And he was allowed to live with us.

### **Julius Chavez**

This is a very important story that I remember from when I was a young boy and it stayed with me my whole life. And I continue to teach it to my own to my own children. And to those that would listen, especially our young men and young women. So it is true that every Native American tribe is unique in their own culture, their own language, their spiritual and ceremonial knowledge for their own people. And it's important it's important to hold on to this. Respect is taught through our language, our language, it doesn't tell us to be disabled. Our language tells us to live. Our language will never tell us to die. It tells us to live and to survive and how to do it. Gaining cultural knowledge, skill and strength will help us to perpetuate the life of our people. It means strengthening our backbone. Our backbone is our children. Our child renders our future our children As our prime resource in this life, we have our hope in them, that they will pick up on the importance of who they are, to take care of themselves, and to have self respect and learn how to approach this life with strength. And so, I would like to end by encouraging you to understand the Native American population, to give us time to help us so that our voices will be heard. So that we can all gain a better understanding that we won't move towards weakness, but we'll move all together in strength. Thank you. And I hope that you have a very good day today. Thank you very much.

### **Eduardo Ortiz**

Thank you, Julius. Thank you, Dr. Foster. Thank you, Erica. What great information that we have a lot of to internalize and to process so much at once. But now it is time for questions and answers we have until 130. And we are reading was we're collecting some questions that I would like to start asking to you. First question, say that what can we done to? What can what can be done to improve access to public health and emergency preparedness or response activities for Native American and Alaska Native with disabilities? And this question also is aligned with another question that was made before that says that, okay, the pressure on American Indian or Native American individuals to choose a culture sounds very exhausting? What are some support systems we can refer individuals to? And also, what can we do to lessen the cognitive load for individuals? As they pass through our services? So those are the questions that to start with the panel,

### **Erica Ficklin**

I think those are very big questions. And honestly, I think that, you know, it's kind of hard to know, at least with improving public health and access to services, I think complicated. One of the things that I would mention is that, you know, it would be helpful if there was more infrastructure built in, if there were more providers available to be able to work with native clients, I think that that's a really big part of it. I, there is IHS or the Indian Health Services, but just to give an example of kind of how it can be hard, so services, the nearest IHS hospital to me is seven and a half hours away. So it's kind of always away. So that's something that I would say could change is just more services being available. I think another big part of it is cultural competence. I think, you know, providers and professionals being willing to learn how to work with native clients and native peoples is huge. There, I know that there's a cultural competence course here at Utah State for faculty, called the Teach course. And that's all about, you know, working with Native students. So I think if that could be developed further and maybe you know,

adapted for mental health professionals, and that would be helpful. But I think cultural competence is a huge part of it. That's just what comes to my mind. Right away.

### **Dr. Chuck Foster**

You know, I also agree that I think the getting to know the community is one big one big area, you know, understanding a little bit about the community in terms of their lifestyle, their traditions, and their belief system. And because you do have certain areas or certain groups with American Indians, you have the urban you know, the urban life, American Indians living in urban areas, then you have to reservation and you have the rural. So all three of these are areas in which we get to know. Within the Navajo, like, in this case, in the Navajo reservation or any reservation you have, again, you have the most remote areas where they don't have any association with the outside world. You know, they don't have technology, they don't have electricity, you know, running water. So I think the, the, the knowledge has to be in the area of education, educating yourself in terms of what the population that you're serving. So I think that if, if that education, you learn a little bit more through the education system, about that group, you'll understand the the client that you're you're serving. And I think that the, the problems are there, you know, I think the the issues are there. Now, it's, it's a matter of understanding how to get there. And once you get there, then your training will take you through that space in terms of great assistance.

### **Julius Chavez**

I would like to offer maybe a suggestion is, when I even though I'm in the urban setting, there was a there is a lot of people that asked for traditional healing or working I go to, to get access to it. And and like Dr. Foster said, is a no, no, the community and what are the what are the main points are for the nav for the Native American population go, we have a place it's called the urban Indian Center. There's another place called sacred circle, there's other places that provide recovery for your spirit. Get to know get to know these programs and get to know I think the most important is to be seen. We need to know who you are. One example is, there's a great man that I used to work with in the American Indian services, his name was Dr. Dale Teaming, he was visible, he was very visible to the native communities. He had a program that offered scholarships, and funding for our students going to go into school, but he was very visible. Everybody knew who he was. And if there was a need, you know, he could address it because he knew the communities and he knows he knew the leaders of those communities, say from down and Paiute to Shivwits and all the way across to the Navajo Nation, clear up to Fort Hall and his areas, he he went there, he was visible to them, and so people knew him. So that's what I would suggest is, is get get to know the native population where you're at, they can see you and know, know, the services that you have.

### **Eduardo Ortiz**

Thank you, thank you, all of you, then that's some additional questions related with the same topic that you already answered. So I'm gonna try to get at different topics from the participants who are asking. That is another question that says, Could you please help me to understand the process of grieving in the Native American culture? She is a teacher in the south of Utah, he said Is there anything I can do to help the children during their journey of grief that would be culturally appropriate?

### **Julius Chavez**

I would I would say, as far as grieving there are a lot of different cultural approaches to that. I can only speak from from my own from my own cultural background and the Navajos instead, it does take time takes a lot of strength to to receive that healing and recovery from from losing a loved one. In our, in our culture, we're instructed that when when someone passes away or when someone is deceased, that you have four days to to put put their body away And after that you have another four days of, of self respect. And after those four days, you're instructed to wash your hair. Some families they put on, they put on a paint on their face, while they are in those four days of self respect, or four days of grieving. And after that, after that, after your hair is washed, you go on, you go on to know that there are 1000 reasons to go on. You're not caught up in that grieving. I know, it's painful. I know, it's hard, especially for young children. But we have to set the pattern, we have to set that strength to them, you know, because someday, they'll be doing that. There'll be burying us. So we have to teach them from the beginning to understand that this is a natural process of life.

**Eduardo Ortiz**

Thank you. The next question. In light of historical intergenerational trauma, do you have recommendations for trauma informed practices in supporting Native people with disabilities?

**Erica Ficklin**

I feel like that's also a complicated question. You know, and I think that historical trauma and intergenerational trauma is something that we don't fully understand yet. I would recommend looking into trauma informed cultural behavioral therapy. So that one was developed for Native communities that was developed by Dr. DT Bigfoot, I believe, and I can share, I can share a link to some of the information about that training and about that adaptation after we wrap up today

**Eduardo Ortiz**

thank you, Erica. Here's another question. Do you have any suggestions on how providers can do outreach with Native American American Indian individuals to help connect more people with services?

**Julius Chavez**

Once again, I, like I say, as to to be out in the community, and to, to see for yourself the needs that are needed out there. I work in it in a retail situation, where I'm the manager of the Native American trading post here in Salt Lake City. And that kind of seems to be the hub of, of our population here and in Salt Lake City, that everyone eventually comes there and we get to know each other and I get to see families, families and their needs. were poor families are struggling. And so I think, again, you know, go go to the, to the resources in the community and look for yourself, they're not going to come to you, you have to be proactive, and you have to be strong because they're not going to accept you right away. But learn to observe and and observe the the needs of the people and where you'll be needed.

**Eduardo Ortiz**

Thank you. Here's another question. Can you share some examples of what works well, in relation to services while working with Native American population?

**Dr. Chuck Foster**

You know, I, you know, for me, it's a, you know, being employed by the Utah State Board of Education. And we have the title six programs where we have sites all over the state. And these sites are oftentimes looking for support. And oftentimes, I do meet with tribes, through tribal consultation. Tribal Consultation piece for, for, I think, with working with tribes is really really important. Because the tribe also would like to have an input as to what kind of program you're running. You know, as I mentioned before the materials, books, supplies for our children, some of the parent groups that would like to come together and suggest that let's have a celebration, especially during graduation, or promotion for our kids who are going from elementary to secondary. We also have that consultation to meet who they are and find out who they are, you know, because oftentimes that were reclassified as a silent society. You know, if you think if I think back, you know, if a question's asked, among the American Indian people, we're not, we're not a, we're not a silent society, you know, we do have some input on this. So for me, working from the State Department of Ed, that's my area is that connecting the dots in terms of consultation, the tribes, and bringing, you know, the the people together, so there's a much more under good understanding. You know, this is also emphasized by the Office of Indian Education from Washington, DC under the Education, Department of Education. So they emphasize that we should have consultation with the tribes. So that's for me that that's my biggest emphasis. And the other one, I think, Julius mentioned is the urban Indian Center, because I think all over the United States, in all the states, you do have the Indian centers that are developed. And for us, it's it's a, it's a place where, you know, I got to know a lot of the personnel there, because they do provide some really, really good services, like here in Utah. And I'm pretty sure with all the other states they do have, they do have services being provided.

### **Aubrey Snyder**

Eduardo, you are muted right now.

### **Eduardo Ortiz**

Thank you, doctor. First day, we were talking about the time at the beginning of this webinar, and it is time to closing. We would love to have you more time and joining and learning and processing all the information that you gave us. But time is limited. All questions because we have a lot of questions will be compiled and posted in the chat, the at the time that we are going to be posting these these webinars. Also, we would like to let you know that these as part of this Equity Diversity and Inclusion series effort looking for interesting intersectionality between disability, mental health, and race and ethnicity. We have developed additional products, including a fact sheet and a digital story. In this case centered on Native American and American Indian culture The information will be posted a week later after the seminar. The next seminar will be during the month of December or January. And because of that, we want you to complete the post assessment that I just put it in the chat the link to complete this process. Assessment were asking when would be the best time for doing the next set seminar. So please complete this assessment. And finally, I want to say thank you very much, Erica, Dr. Foster, Julius, it has been an honor and also a big pleasure to listen you and learn from you. I hope that it is going to be the first one of many other opportunities. Thank you.