

**Cultural Strengthening and the Public Health Approach:  
The Wiconi Ohitika (Strong Life) Youth Suicide Prevention Project**


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### OBJECTIVES OF PRESENTATION

1. The relationship between cultural strengthening and the public health approach as a model for youth suicide prevention programming in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.
2. Methods for research and evaluation with culturally based prevention programs.
3. Results from evaluation of the suicide prevention coalition, the health survey, and the AILS curriculum.



### The Public Health Approach

- Prevention Strategies address different levels of the social ecology:
  - Individual
  - Family
  - Community (local, state, and national)
- Intervene at the earliest point possible.

### Cultural Strengthening and Connectedness

**Connectedness is:** the degree to which a person or group is socially close, interrelated, or shares resources with other persons or groups.

**Increasing connectedness between people and within communities through cultural strengthening may reduce the risk of depression, substance abuse, and suicide.**




Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nd  
Gone & Calif Looking, 2011  
Nebelkopf, King, Wright, Schweigman, Lucero, Habte-Michael, Cervantes, 2011

### Connectedness to...





### Connectedness and Culture

### Wiconi Ohitika and Cultural Strengthening



Wiconi Ohitika, A culturally enriched approach to youth suicide prevention, based on the culture, language, values and history of the Spirit Lake Dakota (Mni Wakan Oyate), promoting positive self-identity, increased self-esteem, and increased knowledge of the Dakota way of life.

The spiritual values, traditions, history of Native Americans and Spirit Lake Nation are all connected. To strengthen us as a Dakota nation, we need our traditions, culture, and spirituality. We learn from the past to change the present and to prepare ourselves and our people for the future.

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Increasing Connectedness with



Family and Community

- Cankdeska Cikana Community College
- Spirit Lake Health Center (Indian Health Service)
- BIA Law Enforcement
- Lake Region Human Services Center
- Spirit Lake Tribal Court
- Youth Healing & Wellness
- Area school counselors and administrators
- UND Social Work Intern
- Local ministers and spiritual leaders
- Substance abuse prevention and treatment programs
- Violence prevention programs
- Community members



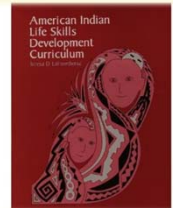
Suicide Prevention Coalition

### Cultural Strengthening Activities: Children and Youth



Evidence-Based Practice, Research, and Suicide Prevention in Tribal Communities

- A school-based suicide prevention curriculum designed to prevent suicide by reducing suicide risk and improving protective factors among American Indian adolescents 14 to 19 years old.
- Lessons are interactive and incorporate situations and experiences relevant to American Indian adolescent life, such as dating, rejection, divorce, separation, unemployment, and problems with health and the law.



American Indian Life Skills

<http://www.nps.gov/lehq/learn/development.aspx#4>

## The Impact of Cultural Strengthening: Evaluation Activities and Outcomes

- Community Health Survey
- Pilot evaluation of AILS
- Service to Science
  - Logic Model
  - Develop method to measure change resulting from cultural strengthening activities.

## Lessons and Insights

- Preventing suicide is complex.
- Prevention activities range from preventing factors that correlate with suicide, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, to acting quickly when an individual expresses thoughts of harming themselves.
- Suicide prevention requires activities that address individuals, families, and communities.
- Critical components of successful suicide prevention programs include:
  - Cultural strengthening.
  - Community support.
  - Community coalitions.
  - Stable organizations with resources to support the multi-faceted strategies.
  - Evidence-based practice.
  - Evaluation to determine what works in a particular community.
  - Change is multi-level, multi-faceted, and long-term.

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