

“CULTURE FORWARD:” Promoting Cultural Strengths to Prevent American Indian/Alaska Native Youth Suicide

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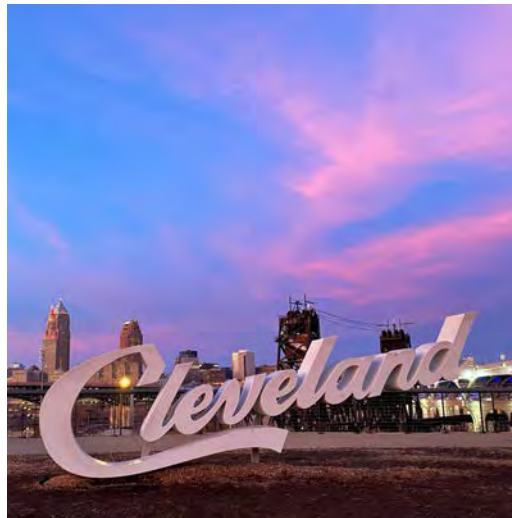
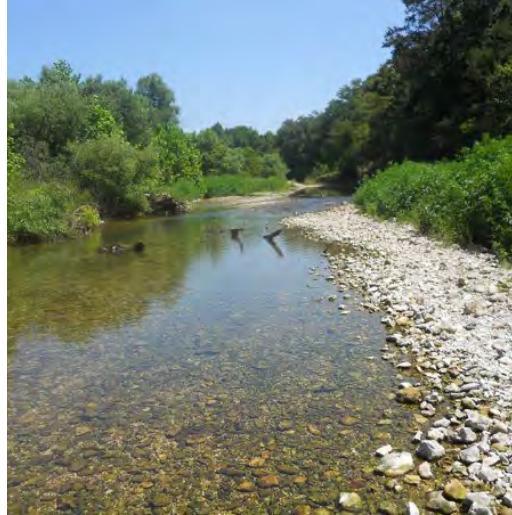
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Faculty/Presenter Disclosure

- In the past 24 months, Victoria M. O’Keefe, has no relevant financial relationships with the manufacturer(s) of commercial services discussed in this CME activity
- I do not intend to discuss an unapproved/investigative use of a commercial product/device in my presentation.





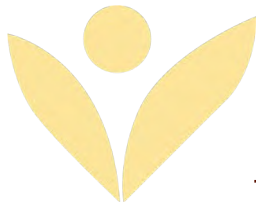
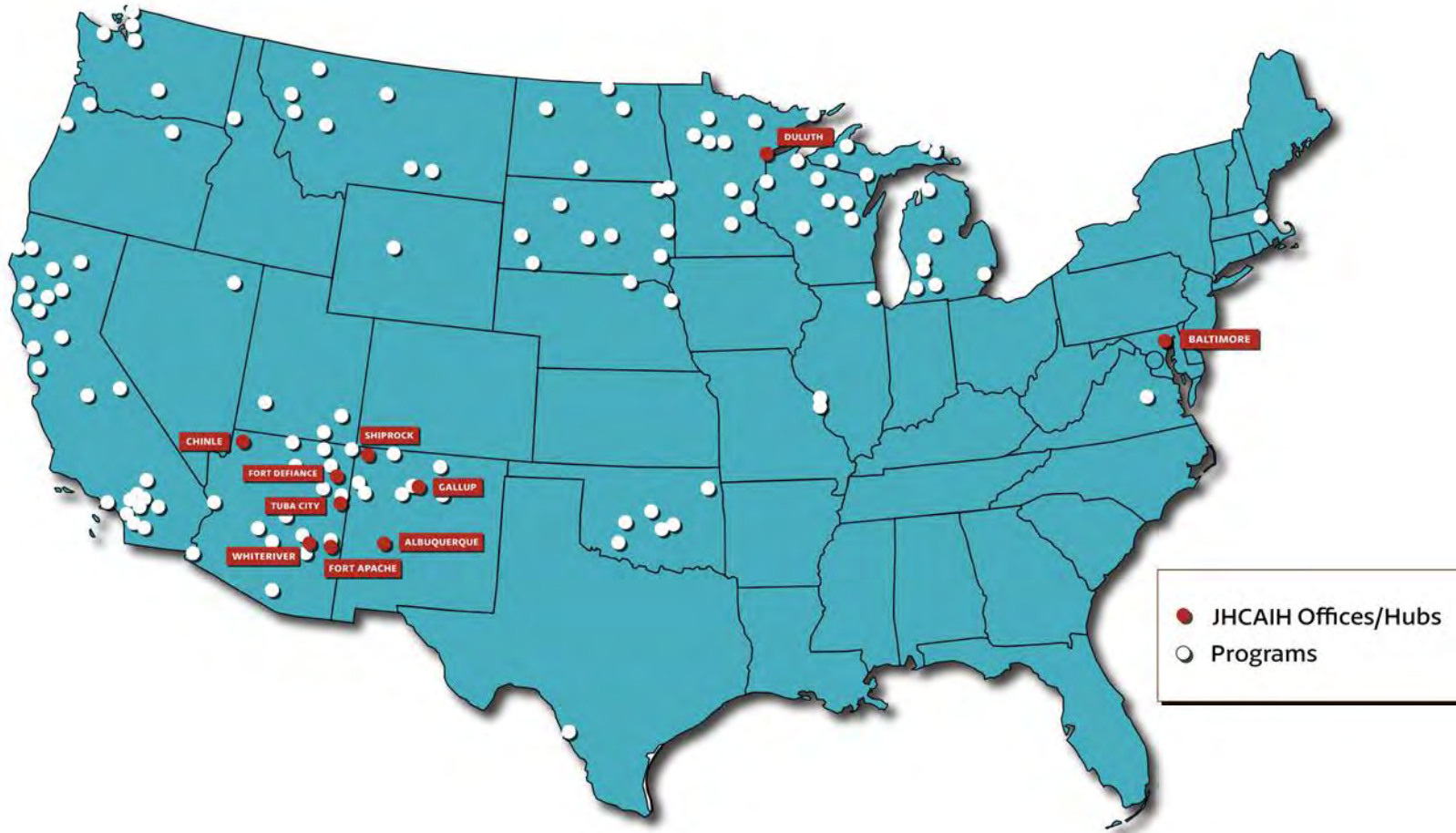
CENTER FOR
INDIGENOUS HEALTH

History & Mission

Founded in 1991 and based at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the largest and #1 ranked school of public health in the world.

We empower tribal communities to take a leadership role in designing innovative, culturally-based programs to improve Native American health and well-being.



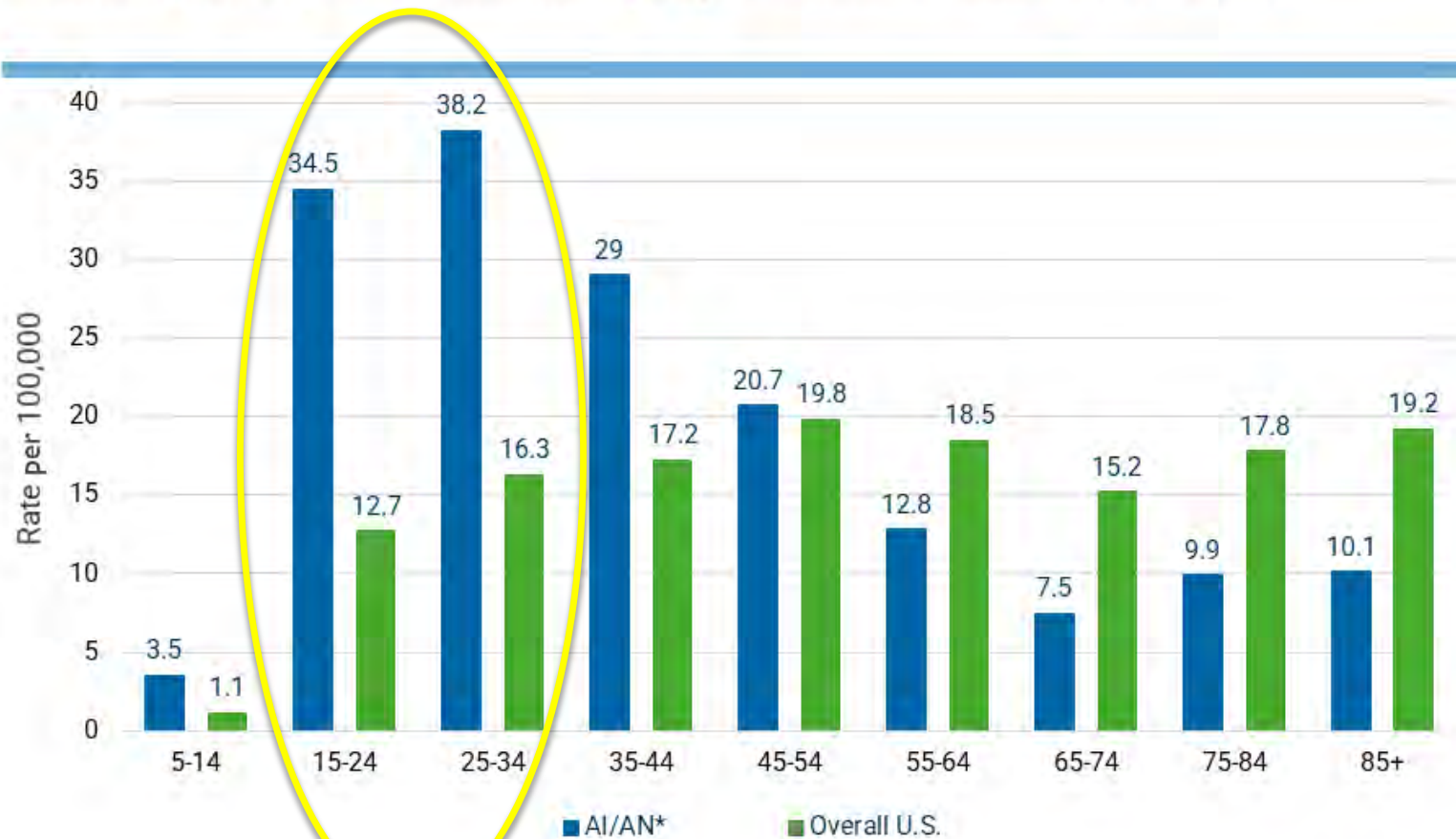


Our programs are reaching more than 141 tribal and Urban Native communities across 21 states

Background

- Indigenous knowledges, values, and traditions have promoted health, well-being, and life for generations
- Among many Indigenous communities, mental health is integrally linked with physical, emotional, and spiritual health
- Colonization, through systematic policies of land and cultural dispossession, have been extremely destructive to Indigenous communities' ways of living and being
 - Historical or intergenerational trauma, cultural genocide, colonial trauma and link to mental health inequities and suicide-related outcomes

Suicide Rates for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Populations by Age, United States 2011-2020



www.sprc.org

*Non-Hispanic

Source: CDC, 2021

Native Youth Priorities

- Indigenous youth are reporting they are concerned about suicide risk among their peers (Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, 2018)
- A national study with 1,100 Indigenous youth illuminated that a top priority for them is improving mental health and wellness (Indigenous Futures Research Team, 2020)

Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute. (2018). *Generation Indigenous: The State of Native Youth 2018*. https://www.cnay.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CNAY_AR2018_FINAL_Web_110618-2.pdf

Indigenous Futures Research Team. (2020). *From Protests, to the Ballot Box, and Beyond: Building Indigenous Power*. http://indigenousfutures.illuminatives.org/wp-content/uploads/Indigenous_Futures_Survey_Report.pdf

Strengths-Based Approaches to Suicide Prevention

- Borowsky et al. (1999) concluded promoting protective factors against Native youth suicide was more important than reducing risk factors
- Wexler et al. (2015) emphasized importance of community-based and strengths-based approaches to Native youth suicide prevention

Borowsky, I. W., Resnick, M. D., Ireland, M., & Blum, R. W. (1999). Suicide attempts among American Indian and Alaska Native youth: risk and protective factors. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine*, 153(6), 573–580. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.153.6.573>

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Developing *CULTURE FORWARD*

- **Community-engaged process:**

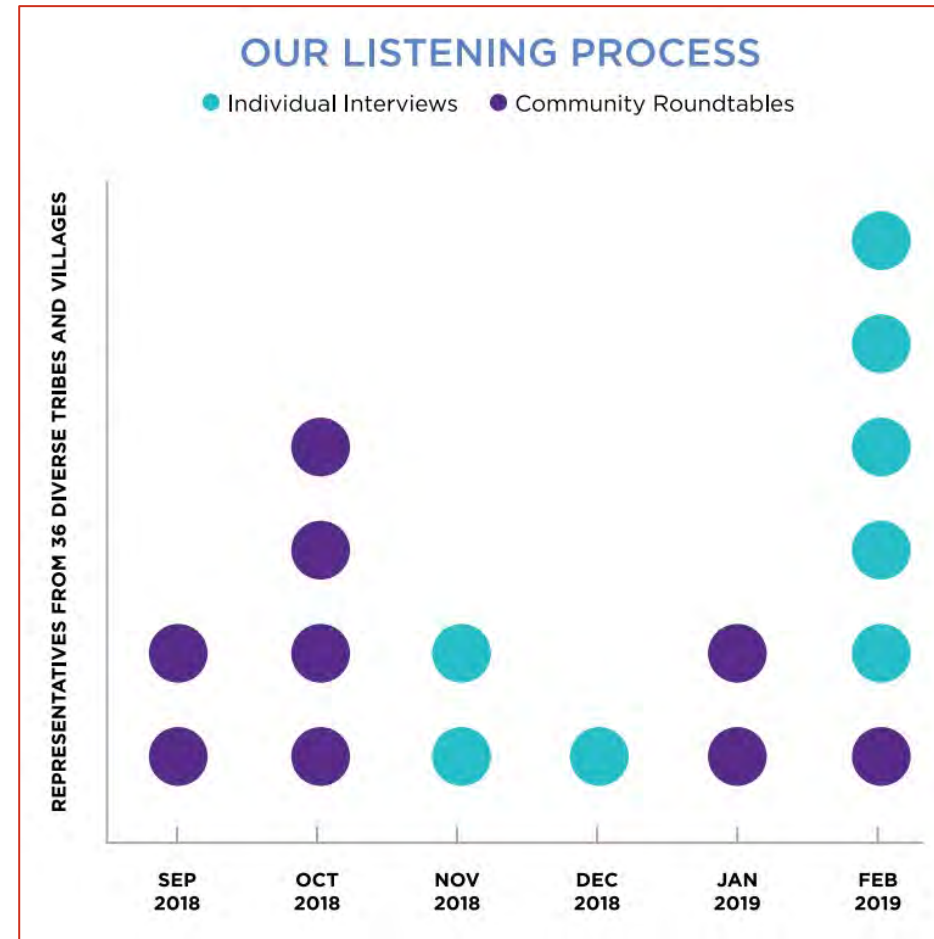
- Formative information gathering through listening sessions with 9 community roundtables and 8 interviews
 - Tribal leaders
 - Grassroots leaders
 - Native youth
 - Traditional healers
 - Elders
 - Two-spirit leaders



- National Advisory Editorial Board guided project throughout

Developing *CULTURE FORWARD*

- Listening sessions included 60 Native participants representing 36 tribal communities and diverse geographies (reservation, off-reservation, rural, urban)



Developing *CULTURE FORWARD*

- Listening sessions recorded, de-identified, and transcribed for analysis
- Two research assistants coded the data to extract key themes
 - Iterative, collaborative process to develop a codebook with input from all team members
 - Final codebook was applied to all the transcripts
- Overall theme: **Culture** is vital to promote Native youth mental health and prevent suicide

CULTURE FORWARD: Structure

- Qualitative themes became chapters
- Each chapter includes:
 - Introduction
 - How that theme helps prevent Native youth suicide
 - Review of academic literature
 - Community stories and programs demonstrating that theme
 - Action steps
 - Additional resources publicly available

CULTURE FORWARD: Five core themes

1. OUR NETWORKS HARNESS BELONGING AND HELP KEEP US SAFE.

2. CONNECTIONS TO OUR LANDS AND ELDERS ALLOW US TO THRIVE.

3. TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE HOLDS THE KEYS TO HEALTH AND HEALING.

4. NATIVE YOUTH LEAD US TO RECLAIM OUR AUTONOMY AND WELL-BEING.

5. SELF-DETERMINATION EMPOWERS US TO FIGHT.

CULTURE FORWARD FIVE CORE THEMES

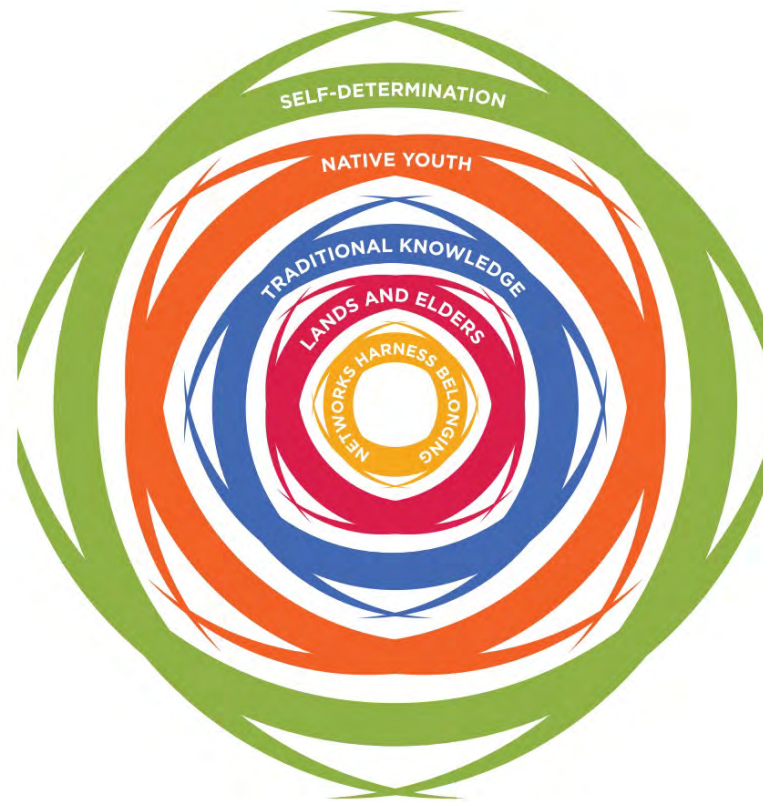


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TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE HOLDS THE KEYS TO HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Reclaiming **traditional knowledge, cultural practices and values** actively works against historical trauma and its lasting impacts, including suicide.

Action steps:

- Form a council of Elders and traditional leaders to plan and participate in cultural activities with youth
- Rekindle and promote values that embrace the important roles two-spirit community members hold
- Create culture camps for youth, with special priority to at risk youth

Community story highlighting how traditional knowledge holds the keys to health and well-being

Culture Camps are Helping Alaska Native Youth

In Northwest Alaska, tribal leaders have been running culture camps for youth as a keystone of their suicide prevention efforts since 2010. Approximately 12 to 25 Alaska Native youth at a time attend five-day camps across rural, remote regional sites away from their villages. Youth who are experiencing challenges (e.g., foster care, recent violence in the community or grieving a death by suicide) are given top priority. At the camps, Elders and other presenters teach youth their Indigenous languages and guide them through cultural practices and wellness activities. They also share traditional stories and lead team-building exercises. Youth have free time to swim, canoe, play basketball or pick berries. In the evening, youth may participate in group saunas, beadwork or skin sewing. Camps close with a talking circle. As camps increase in popularity, results from a pilot evaluation are promising. Youth participants experienced improved mood, felt a greater sense of belongingness and endorsed greater capacity to handle life stressors. All of these outcomes have been linked to lower risk for suicide.



Thank you for the opportunity to share a few words for the Culture Forward Guide. We know that suicide is an epidemic that affects Native

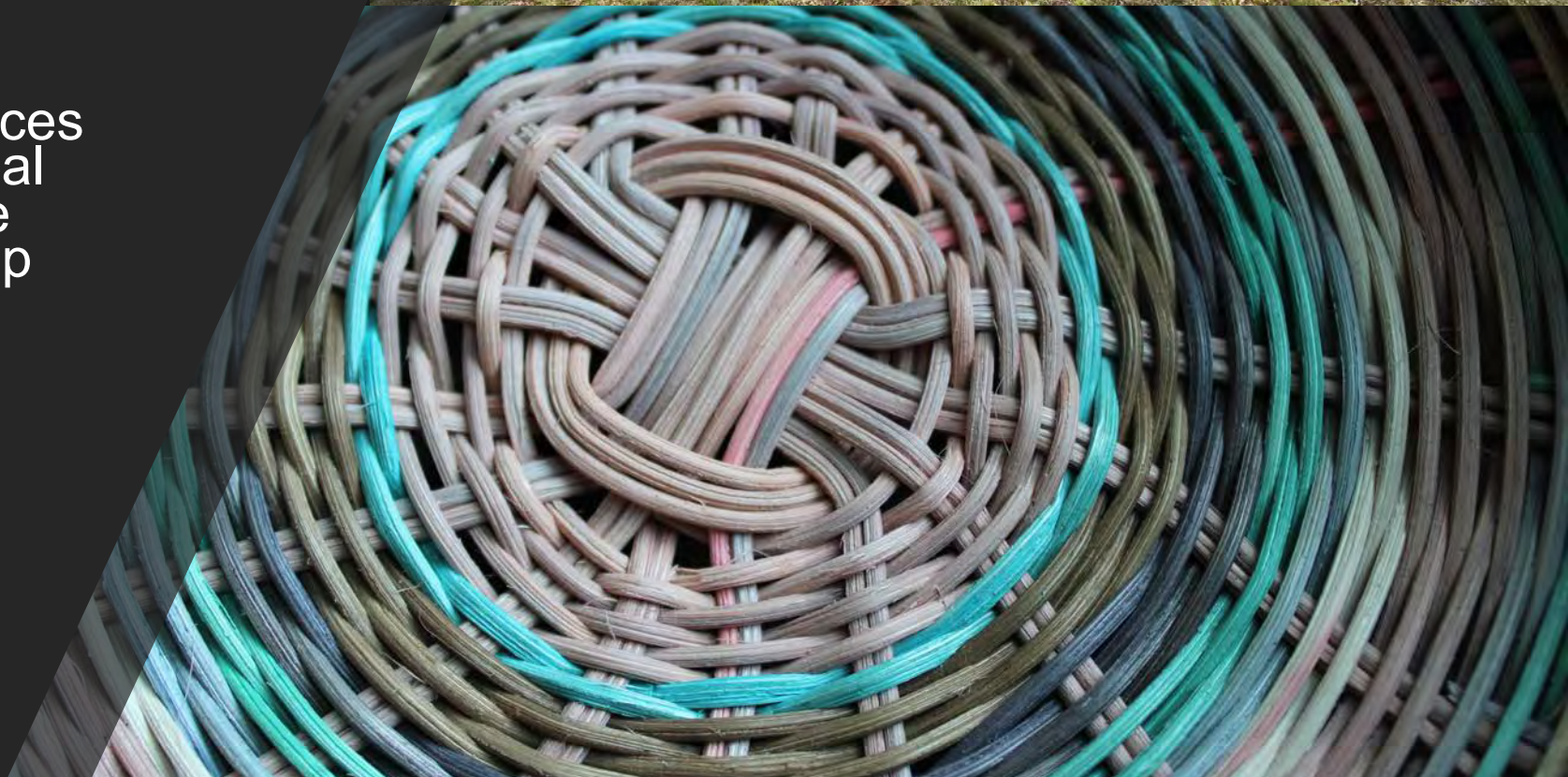
Conclusion

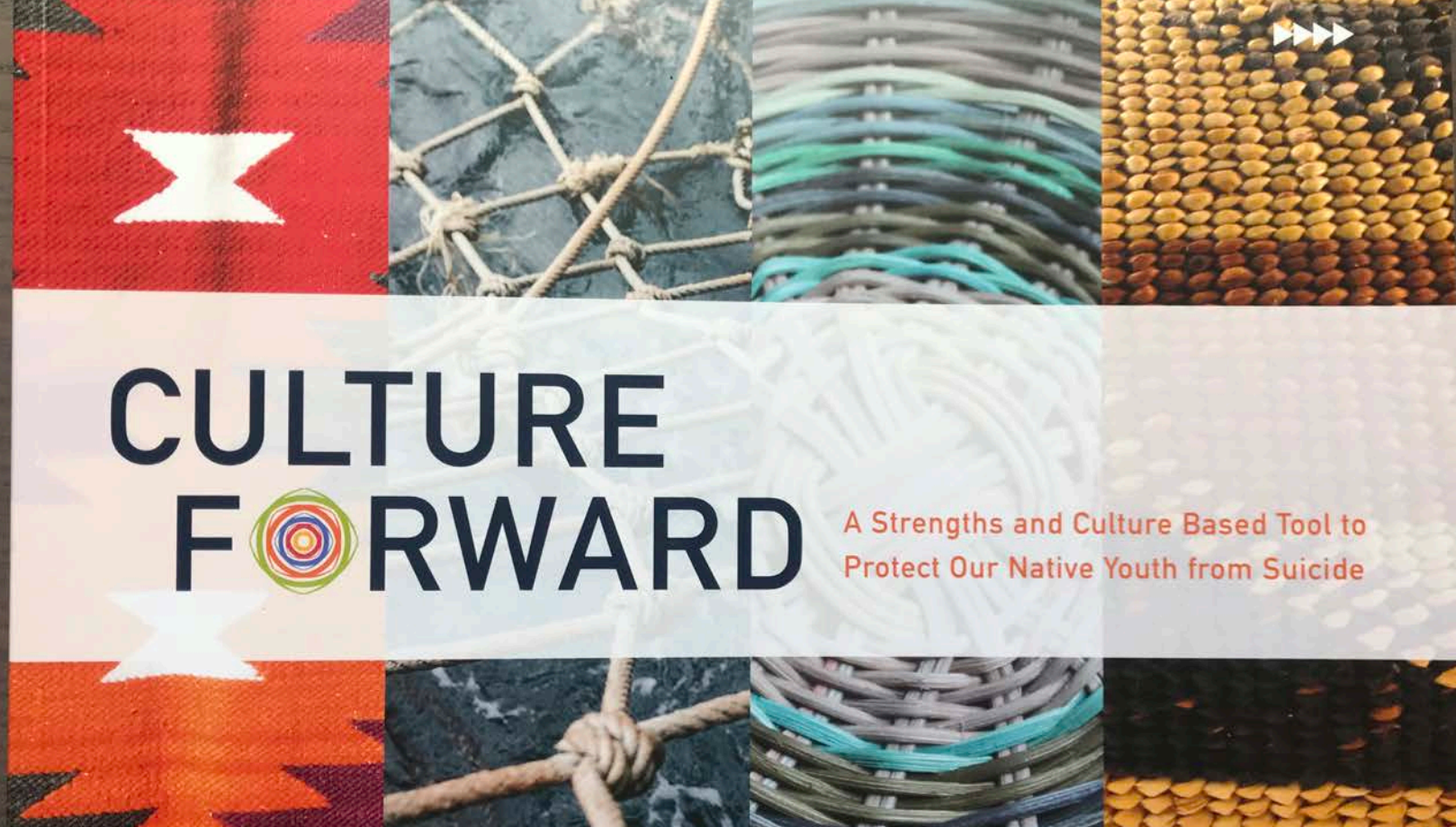
- *CULTURE FORWARD* is an innovative, cultural strengths-based resource guide to support youth suicide prevention efforts in Native communities
 - The guide has reached 750+ tribes, villages, national/tribal/regional health consortiums and organizations, and policymakers
- Listening, including, and allowing Indigenous voices to guide and lead suicide prevention work is vital
- Ensuring suicide prevention research and programs reach tribal and urban Native communities in ways that are practical and accessible through written and visual formats

“CULTURE FORWARD provides a starting place, where our Native youth thrive, pave the way for future generations of our tribal communities and continue to lead us in impactful global movements. We are committed to weaving together our collective knowledge, existing resources and diverse voices. Our goal is not just to prevent Native youth suicide, but to hold up the strengths of our communities and cultures. Please join us in this movement for a positive future for all of our communities.”



Photo Credit: Ed Cunicelli





Access *CULTURE FORWARD*:

Free PDF available online at:

<https://cih.jhu.edu/programs/culture-forward-a-strengths-and-culture-based-tool-to-protect-our-native-youth-from-suicide/>

Additional Information



Society for the
Psychological Study of
Culture, Ethnicity, and Race

Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology

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Development of “CULTURE FORWARD: A Strengths and Culture-Based Tool to Protect Our Native Youth From Suicide”

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Wado (thank you)!

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