# American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Disparities in Causes of Death, Life Expectancy, and Social Determinants of Health

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) experience many disparities in leading causes of death compared to their White counterparts in the United States. **Figure 1** lists the top 10 leading causes of death for all non-Hispanic AI/ANs in 2020, with a comparison as to how each of these conditions ranked among all non-Hispanic Whites in 2020. **Figure 2** lists the top 3 leading causes of death by age group in 2020 for non-Hispanic AI/ANs, with a comparison as to how each of these conditions ranked among non-Hispanic Whites in the same year and age group.

**Figure 1**. Leading Causes of Death Among All Non-Hispanic AI/AN versus All Non-Hispanic White, 2020[1]

| Leading Cause of Death | Among Non-Hispanic AI/AN | | Among Non-Hispanic White | | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rank | % of Deaths | Rank | % of Deaths | |
| COVID-19 | 1 | 22.8% | 3 | 11.7% | 11.1% |
| Heart disease | 2 | 19.9% | 1 | 29.6% | 10.3% |
| Malignant neoplasms | 3 | 17.4% | 2 | 25.9% | 8.5% |
| Unintentional injury | 4 | 11.3% | 7 | 5.0% | 6.3% |
| Liver disease | 5 | 7.8% | 10 | 2.1% | 5.7% |
| Diabetes mellitus | 6 | 7.0% | 8 | 3.6% | 3.4% |
| Chronic lower respiratory disease | 7 | 4.4% | 4 | 7.3% | 2.9% |
| Cerebrovascular diseases | 8 | 4.4% | 5 | 6.5% | 2.1% |
| Suicide | 9 | 2.8% | 11 | 1.7% | 1.1% |
| Influenza & pneumonia | 10 | 2.3% | 9 | 2.2% | 0.1% |

**Figure 2**. Leading Causes of Death by Age Group Among Non-Hispanic AI/AN versus Non-Hispanic White, 2020[1]

| Age (Yrs.) | Leading Cause of Death | Among Non-Hispanic AI/AN | | Among Non-Hispanic White | | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Rank | % of Deaths | Rank | % of Deaths | |
| <1 | Congenital anomalies | 1 | 30.4% | 1 | 35.7% | 5.3% |
| | SIDS | 2 | 17.3% | 3 | 9.8% | 7.5% |
| | Short gestation | 3 | 16.7% | 2 | 19.5% | 2.8% |
| 1-19 | Unintentional injury | 1 | 39.9% | 1 | 48.2% | 8.3% |
| | Suicide | 2 | 27.7% | 2 | 20.7% | 7.0% |
| | Homicide | 3 | 12.2% | 4 | 7.1% | 5.1% |
| 20-44 | Unintentional injury | 1 | 38.7% | 1 | 53.1% | 14.4% |
| | Liver disease | 2 | 15.8% | 5 | 4.2% | 11.6% |
| | Suicide | 3 | 12.0% | 2 | 15.0% | 3.0% |
| 45-64 | COVID-19 | 1 | 21.5% | 4 | 6.1% | 15.4% |
| | Heart disease | 2 | 17.8% | 2 | 24.9% | 7.1% |
| | Malignant neoplasms | 3 | 22.2% | 1 | 31.8% | 9.6% |
| 65-84 | COVID-19 | 1 | 26.2% | 3 | 11.9% | 14.3% |
| | Heart disease | 2 | 22.5% | 2 | 26.4% | 3.9% |
| | Malignant neoplasms | 3 | 22.2% | 1 | 30.8% | 8.6% |
| 85+ | Heart disease | 1 | 26.9% | 1 | 35.2% | 8.3% |
| | COVID-19 | 2 | 22.8% | 3 | 13.8% | 9.0% |
| | Malignant neoplasms | 3 | 13.2% | 2 | 14.0% | 0.8% |

In 2021, non-Hispanic AI/AN life expectancy at birth was 65.2 years, compared to 76.1 years among the total U.S. population.[2] Specifically, between 2020 to 2021, non-Hispanic AI/ANs experienced the greatest decrease (1.9 years) in life expectancy.[3] This life expectancy of 65.2 years in 2021 is equal to the life expectancy of the total U.S. population in 1944.[3] There are many differences in outcomes related to social determinants of health which may impact this disparity in life expectancy, as listed in **Figure 3**.

**Figure 3**. Disparities in Social Determinants of Health

**Only 7% of AI/AN men hold a bachelor's degree, compared to 19.39% of all men in the U.S.[4]**

**Only 8.3% of AI/AN women hold a bachelor's degree compared to 20.8% of all women in the U.S.[4]**

**AI/ANs had a poverty rate of 16.5% in the past year, compared to 12.3% for the total U.S. population. [4]**

**In 2022, the estimated rate of unhoused AI/ANs was over 2.6 times that of the total U.S. population.[5,6]**

**32.3% of male AI/AN adults lack health insurance, while only 9.1% of all male adults in the U.S. are uninsured. [4]**

**17.4% of AI/AN female adults lack health insurance, while only 7.0% of all female adults in the U.S. are uninsured. [4]**

**Among those aged 16 years or older in the civilian labor force, 9.2% of AI/ANs are unemployed, compared to 4.3% of the total population of the U.S. [4]**

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2023). Leading Causes of Death and YPLL Data Visualization 2001-2020. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. https://wisqars.cdc.gov/data/lcd/home.

2 Arias, E., Tejada-Vera, B., Kochanek, K. D., Ahmad, F. B. (2022). Provisional Life Expectancy Estimates for 2021. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, 23. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr023.pdf.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Office of Communication. (2022, August 31). Life Expectancy in the U.S. Dropped for the Second Year in a Row in 2021. *U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.*

4 United States Census Bureau. (2023). 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. https://data.census.gov/.

5 DeSousa, T., Andrichik, A., Cuellar, M., Marson, J., Prestera, E., & Rush, K. (2022). The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress – Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness. *The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development,* Office of Community Planning and Development. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf.

6 United States Census Bureau. (2023, June 20). National Population by Characteristics: 2020-2022. https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-national-detail.html