

Indian Adolescent Mental Health

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Foreword

American Indians and Alaska Natives have a unique historical and legal relationship with the Federal Government. In this “government-to-government” relationship, Federal programs for Indians are administered principally by the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Indian Affairs. Federal health programs are administered chiefly by the Indian Health Service, a component of the Public Health Service in the Department of Health and Human Services. In addressing the health needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives, mental health has lagged behind.

The U.S. Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs is considering the introduction of legislation to address the mental health needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives. In connection with a full OTA assessment of adolescent health issues, the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs asked OTA to evaluate the mental health needs of American Indian and Alaska Native adolescents.

Adolescents are among the most vulnerable of American Indians and Alaska Natives. To the extent they were born with fetal alcohol syndrome, are abused or neglected, live in distressed families and communities, or exhibit mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, developmental disorders, learning disabilities, substance abuse, conduct disorders, and suicidal behavior, Indian adolescents are both distressed themselves and affect the collective future of Indians. This Special Report responds to the Committee’s request for information on these problems and on the services available to respond to Indian adolescents’ mental health needs.

The Special Report is the second publication of OTA’s adolescent health assessment. The first publication was *Adolescent Health Insurance Status: Analyses of Trends in Coverage and Preliminary Estimates of the Effects of An Employer Mandate and Medicaid Expansion on the Uninsured*, a Background Paper published in July 1989, and scheduled to be updated in spring 1990. The full report on adolescent health will be published in 1990.¹


JOHN H. GIBBONS
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¹With respect to the overall health of American Indians and Alaska Natives, OTA also published *Indian Health Care*, a report addressing the health status of Indians of all ages and the Indian Health Service delivery system, in 1986.

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NOTE: OTA **appreciates and is grateful for the** valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the **advisory panel members**. The **panel** does not, **however**, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this **special** report, OTA assumes full responsibility for the special report and the accuracy of its contents.

**OTA Special Report—
Indian Adolescent Mental Health**

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