



Chicago American Indian Community Collaborative

March 31, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the 17 Native American-serving organizations and programs within Illinois (see below) that make up the Chicago American Indian Community Collaborative (CAICC), we respectfully request we be included in the emergency response and resource decisions taking place across sectors around the many challenges arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

Chicago is one of the primary population centers for Native Americans, representing the largest population of Native Americans in the Midwest, the second largest east of the Mississippi River and the ninth largest in the entire Nation. The Native American community plays a central role in the fabric of the city, but because we are not among the largest racial/ethnic groups, we are often rendered invisible to decision makers and left out of systemic responses. This is always central to our struggle as a community, but is particularly heightened during times of rapid response. We are worried about the devastating impacts this could have on our community, especially our elders whom are so important to our culture, in this time.

We are writing this letter in hopes of preventing the reproduction of harm to Native peoples in what we see as heartening mobilizing happening in the philanthropic sector. Further, we aim to share our needs with the hope that those providing resources to families, communities and non-profit organizations can better understand how they can support our community at this time. The coronavirus pandemic has hit each of our organizations particularly hard--placing our already vulnerable families and the organizations that serve them in crisis.

Over the past two weeks, our community leaders have been communicating with each other to share the status of their organizations, the kinds of challenges our families are struggling with, and what action is needed to support each other through this difficult period. We also recently organized an [emergency response form](#) that allows community members to articulate their needs. As the central organizations serving the Native American community, we will be working collectively to respond to those needs to the best of our ability. However, our limited resources make this difficult. None of our organizations (or any Native American organizations in Illinois) have received any emergency funding from existing non-profit-support efforts, and many of us have had to furlough employees and limit the services we provide. Those of us who have applied for emergency response funding have received no response thus far. We need your help to ensure the Native community is supported with food, housing, financial assistance, healthcare, childcare, and other services during this difficult time. The recent report by the UIC Institute for Research and Public Policy demonstrates that our community is disproportionately vulnerable on a number of dimensions that this pandemic is exacerbating

https://irrpp.uic.edu/pdf/publications/IRRPP_TheStateOfRacialJusticeForAmericanIndianChicagoansReport.pdf).

As a community, we have identified the following top-priority issues:

Our American Indian Health Service is continuing to operate on a limited basis to respond to: ongoing prescriptions refills, limited telemedicine appointments, and referrals for testing and medical attention. They are currently unable to see patients in person safely due to the lack of protective masks for their employees and trifold masks for patients with cold or flu like symptoms to ensure otherwise healthy patients are not compromised in the waiting room or exam rooms. Given the health disparities our community already faces and the level of high risk to their patients and staff, we need the resources to ensure their staff can safely support patients in managing their existing chronic illnesses through this current threat.

With the recent unexpected death of the CAICC coordinator/organizer, we need funding to support this position for a 12 to 24 month period as soon as possible – this is critical to ensuring an organized response and linkage between the community leadership and the greater Chicago efforts in response to COVID-19.

Several of our organizations that provide social services to families in need are struggling. Our American Indian Center has had to furlough all of its employees, severely impacting their ability to provide a point of connection between Native American families and available resources to the larger community. With the little they have, they are trying to remain connected with community members, provide food to families, and survey and communicate community needs.

The Saint Kateri Center at St. Benedict's church is doing wellness checks on Native American elders and preparing and delivering food. They have very limited resources and are coordinating resources mostly from individual donations the best they can. The American Indian Association of Illinois also provides social services with limited resources. Many of our organizations, such as the California Indian Manpower Consortium, the Native American Chamber of Commerce, and Visionary Ventures NFP, also provide small business, employment and housing support--much needed services in our current climate.

There are over 1000 Native American children in Chicago Public Schools, and like other under-resourced communities, they have limited access to technology and online services, which are essential for the continuance of education. Our CPS-based Native American Education Program is continuing to connect with families and CAICC is working to identify resources to support the short-term educational resources these families are seeking.

Other research and cultural organizations, including the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies at the Newberry Library, the Mitchell Museum of the American

Indian, Native American Educational Services, the Native American House at the University of Illinois, the Native American Support Program at the University of Illinois Chicago, the Center for Native American and Indigenous Research at Northwestern, and Trickster Art Gallery do vital educational work and research, supporting the dissemination of accurate and respectful representations of Native peoples and histories. These organizations are also struggling to maintain their staff and programs, and could cease to exist after the crisis is over if they do not receive additional support.

Our community is struggling as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the support organizations that make up CAICC are currently unable to provide the services that our community depends on. Further the economic downturn for our community, which is already under-employed, will have lasting impacts for the months and maybe years ahead. While we know many are struggling during this time, we are one of the only racial/ethnic groups that has been left out of existing emergency response funding efforts. We hope that by sharing our needs and calling on foundations to ensure the Native community in Illinois and greater Chicagoland does not remain invisible, this will change.

Thank you for considering the needs of the Native American community. If you are interested in hearing more about these community priorities, we encourage you to reach out to CAICC Leadership at CAICC.AOC@gmail.com or Cynthia Soto, (206) 602-7366, so we can coordinate further discussions with CAICC and the individual organizations that make up our collaborative.

Respectfully,

The Chicago American Indian Community Collaborative ([CAICC](#)):

[American Indian Association of Illinois](#)

[American Indian Center of Chicago](#)

[American Indian Health Services of Chicago](#)

[California Indian Manpower Consortium](#)

[CPS American Indian Education Program](#)

[D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies at the Newberry Library](#)

[Ho-Chunk Nation Chicago Office](#)

[Menominee Community Center of Chicago](#)

[Mitchell Museum of the American Indian](#)

[Native American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois](#)

[Native American Educational Services](#)

[Native American House, University of Illinois](#)

[Native American Support Program at the University of Illinois Chicago](#)

[Center for Native American and Indigenous Research at Northwestern University](#)

[Saint Kateri Center](#)

[Trickster Cultural Center](#)

[Visionary Ventures](#)