

Strengthening Our School Community

– A collaborative approach to counter the high rate of suicide among Native American Youth

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“I think over again my small adventures.
My fears, those small ones that seemed
so big. For all the vital things I had to
get and reach.

And yet there is only one great thing,
the only thing. To live to see the great
day that dawns, and the light that fills
the world.”

— Anonymous Inuit



“It is time to speak your truth,
create your community, and do
not look outside yourself for the
leader. We are the ones we’ve
been waiting for.”

— Hopi Elders



“As Native Americans, we honor our families, cultures, and clan system and traditional values, but our greatest resource is our children.”

— Carl Venne

Crow Tribal Chairman, Testimony
Before the U.S. Senate Finance

Committee

September 12, 2006



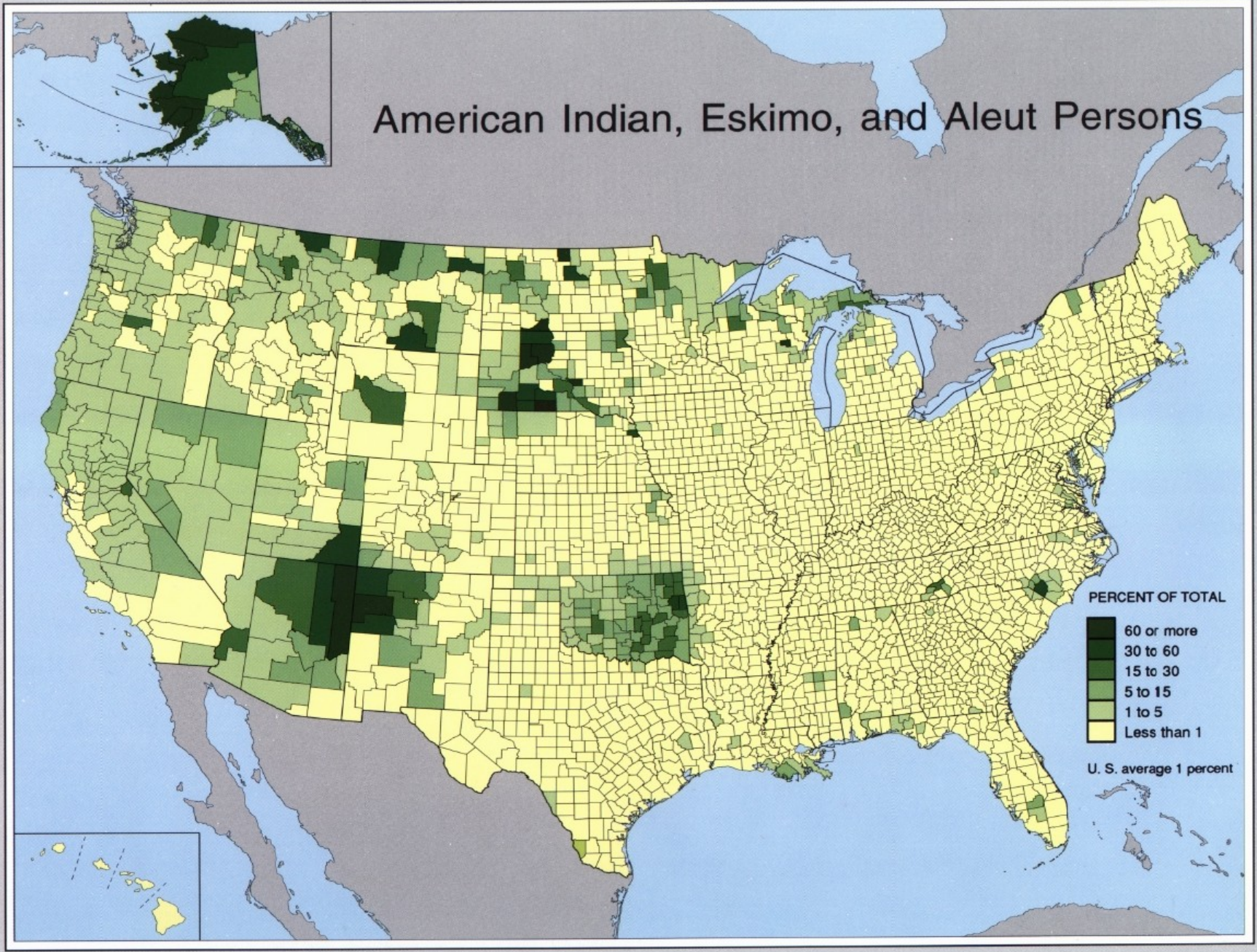


{SUICIDE}
IS 100% PREVENTABLE

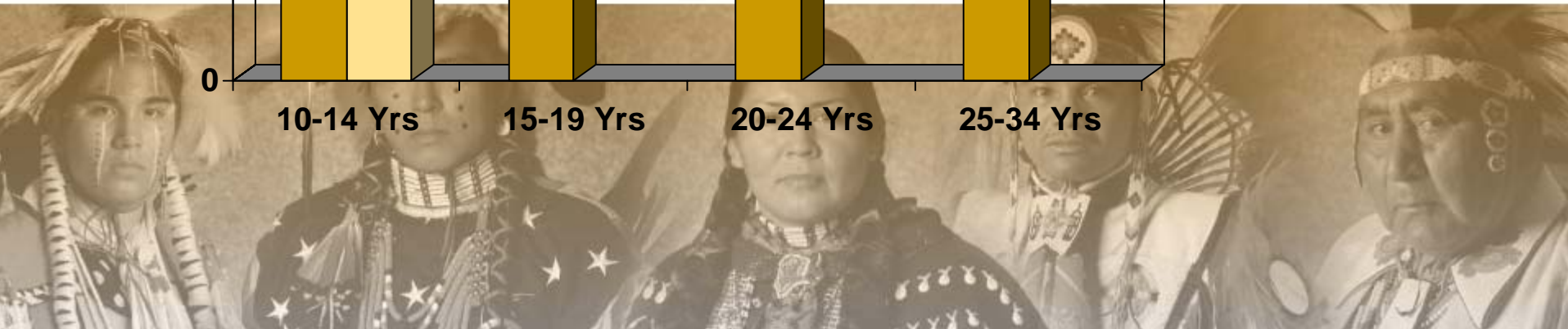
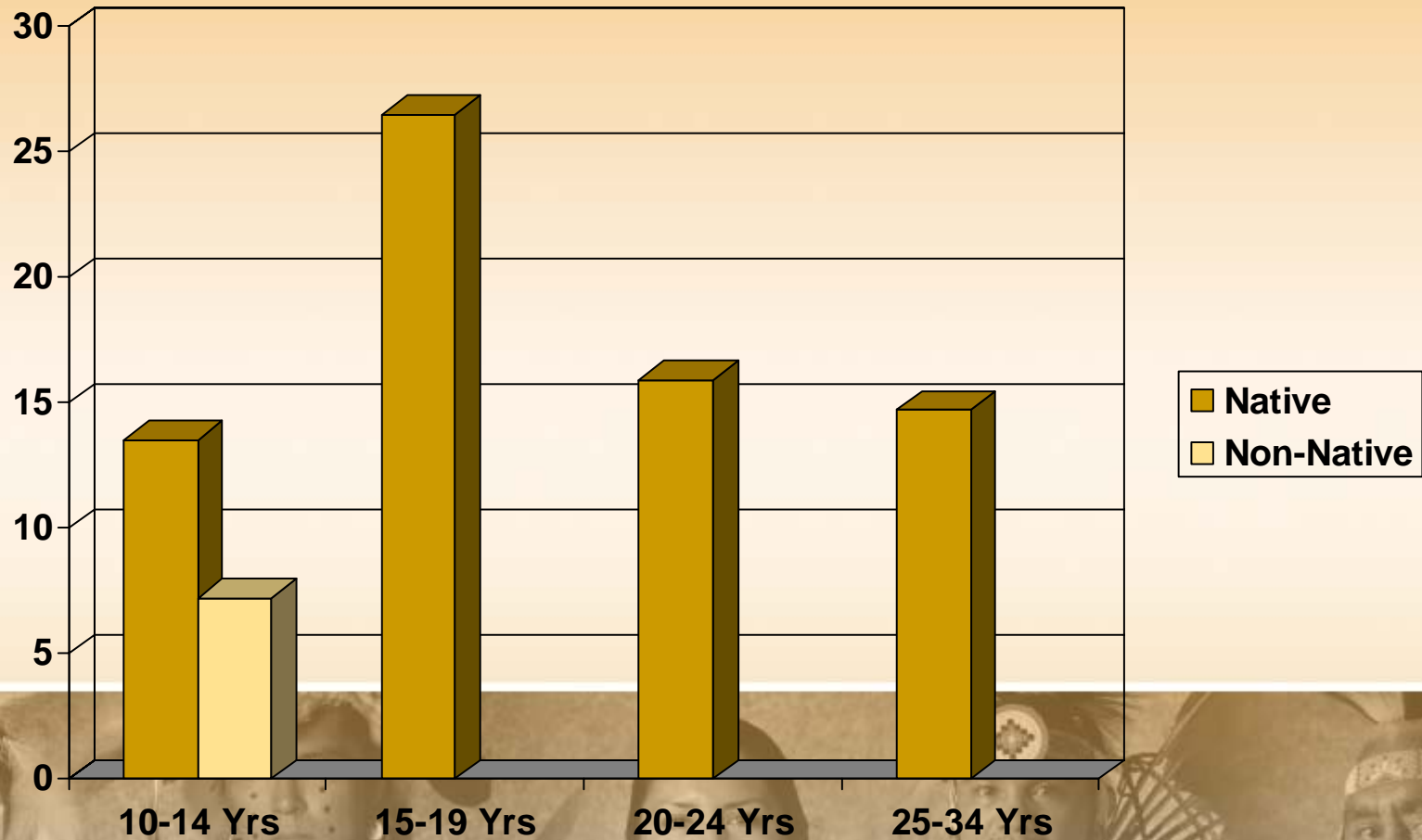
SPEAK UP
REACH OUT



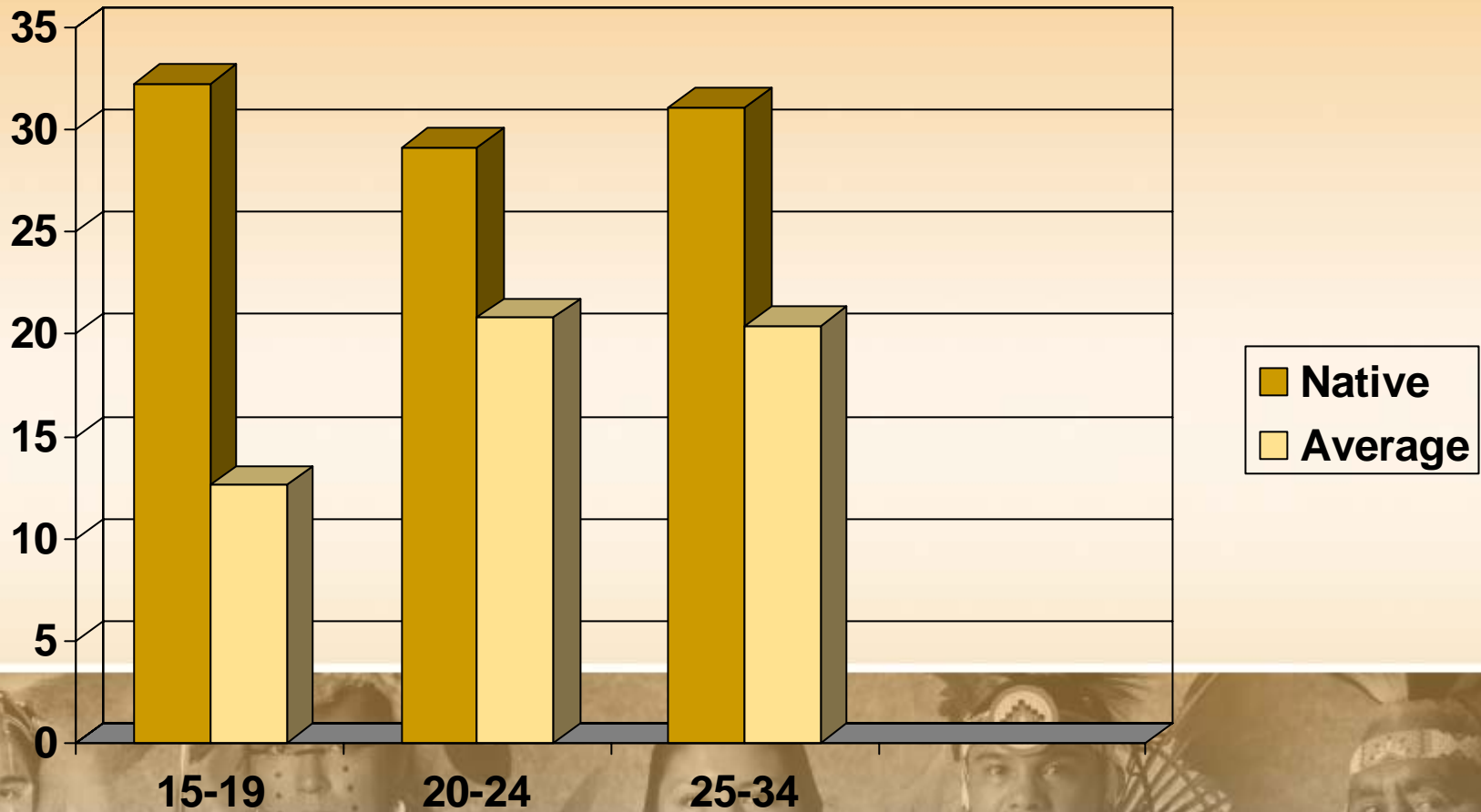
American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut Persons



Percentage of Deaths that are Suicide



Percentage Rate of Suicides by Male Youth and Young Adult Males.



Young People ages 15-24 make up 40% of all Suicides in Indian Country.



234 Native Youth and Young Adults
Died by Suicide in 2004 alone: 174
males and 60 females.



What can School Districts Do?

- Develop a Task Force on suicide prevention and intervention.
- Broad community participation and support.
- Develop policies, procedures, and/or written guidelines on how to identify and respond to at-risk students with community agencies.
- Integrate cultural aspects and approaches.



What can School Districts Do? Below are a few promising school-based strategies and tips from the American Indian/Alaska Native National Resource Center for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services.

- Suicide Awareness Curriculum.
- Staff and Faculty Training.
- Screening.
- On-site prevention and behavioral health programs/services.
- Create a crisis intervention team.
- Postvention.



Suicide Awareness Curriculum

Curriculum focuses on warning signs and risk factors for suicide, reviews statistics about suicide, and provides a list of community resources where students can turn for help.



Suicide Awareness Curriculum

If using this: 1) avoid a brief one-shot approach, use a more prolonged approach; 2) consider implementing the curriculum within the context of established classes such as health or life management skills classes; and 3) consider incorporating problem solving skills, coping skills, and self-esteem building skills into the curriculum.



Staff and Faculty Training (gatekeeper training)

Teaches staff 1) how to recognize a student potentially at risk; 2) how to appropriately intervene and communicate with a student potentially at-risk; 3) how to determine the level of risk; 4) how to refer a student who is potentially suicidal.



Screening

- Identifying potentially at risk students through interviews and administration of screening tools.
- There are many methods shown to be effective.
- Screenings must be done multiple times per year.
- Consent from parents must be obtained before initiating a school wide screening.



On-Site Programs/Services

It is estimated that approximately 70 percent of children and adolescents in need of mental health treatment do not receive services.

A recent longitudinal study provided strong empirical evidence that interventions that strengthen students' social, emotional, and decision making skills also positively impact their academic achievement, both in terms of higher standardized test scores and better grades.



On-Site Programs/Services

In addition, providing these services on site enhances access to care. Research has shown that students are substantially more likely to seek help when school-based mental health services are readily available.



Crisis Intervention Team

- Counselors, administrators, teachers, school health personnel, and community representatives.
- Team should be trained to effectively respond and intervene with a student potentially at risk of suicide.
- Regular meetings held.



Postvention (appropriate response after suicide)

- Guidelines and procedures to provide a more timely, effective, and appropriate response and review of a suicide event.
- Reduces potential cluster (copycat) suicides, reduces trauma among surviving students, and returns school to a normal routine and environment.



Instituting a suicide prevention program is a difficult task, especially given the multiple demands already placed on school systems and personnel. We hope that this section provides current, user-friendly guidelines and tools to assist schools in their suicide prevention efforts.



Suicide Prevention Programs

In 2005, Congress passed the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act (GLS) in memory of Garrett Smith, the son of former Senator Gordon Smith, who died by suicide while at college. This Act passed both houses of Congress unanimously.



NM Laws – SB 417

SB 417 creates a collaboration between the state's Indian Affairs Department and Human Services Department to establish culturally-based programs designed to increase suicide awareness and prevention in New Mexico's Native American Communities.



“Suicide prevention requires the attention of our entire community. Parents, families, coaches, grandparents, friends and public officials hold a shared responsibility to encourage New Mexico young people and never let the opportunity pass to simply tell them ‘you matter,’” remarked Governor Martinez.



“Sadly, Native American youth suffer from a disproportionately high suicide rate, and this is a problem that must not go unaddressed. I am confident that this bill will increase and improve collaboration, data collection, and resource-acquisition efforts so that we can better support Native American young people and stop the scourge of suicide.”



“Silence is dangerous when we pretend the problem is not there... communication is a healer to break the silence.”

— Canadian First Nations Elder

Lifting the Silence on Suicide: Together We Can Make a Difference Conference Report from the Aboriginal Suicide Prevention

Conference, Alberta, Canada (February 6-7, 2002)



Resources

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *To Live To See the Great Day That Dawns: Preventing Suicide by American Indian and Alaska Native Youth and Young Adults*. DHHS Publication SMA (10)-4480, CMHS-NSPL-0196, Printed 2010.
- One Sky Center, The American Indian/Alaska Native National Resource Center for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, *A Guide to Suicide Prevention For American Indian and Alaska Native Communities*, December, 2006.



Resources

- <http://www.oneskycenter.org/index.cfm>





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