

Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

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Early Care and Education in Tribal Communities: Research to Policy Resources

[There are](#) approximately 390,000 children age nine and under who are identified by their parents as being of American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) heritage alone, while more than 400,000 other children in the same age range [share this heritage](#) with that of other race and ethnic groups. The [large majority](#)—about 80 percent—of AIAN individuals live outside of tribal lands and reservations and, regardless of where they live, many have incomes below the federal poverty level. While about one-quarter of all individuals who report having some AIAN heritage have incomes below the federal poverty level, the [poverty rate](#) among children five and under is 33 percent. Following her visit to two Native American communities in August 2015, Sylvia Mathews Burwell, Secretary of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), [wrote](#), “At HHS, we’re committed to ensuring healthy, productive lives for families in all communities, and that is true in Indian Country as well.” This commitment is exemplified in the federal government’s continuing partnership with tribal governments through several programs within HHS, including the [Tribal Early Learning Initiative \(TELI\)](#), the [National Center on Tribal Child Care Implementation and Innovation \(NCTCCII\)](#), and the [Tribal Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting Program \(Tribal MIECHV\)](#).

The first TELI grants were awarded in 2012, and in August 2015 the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) awarded six new grants. The goal of the Initiative is to support the quality and availability of early childhood services and systems for young children, families, and the community. Specifically, the grants are intended to assist tribes in coordinating federal funding streams, including the Child Care and Development Fund, Head Start/Early Head Start, and Tribal MIECHV, to create systems of quality early childhood services. The TELI grants are generating lessons on collaboration and system building across these programs, as documented in a [recent report](#). In addition to the TELI, ACF has established the [National Center on Tribal Child Care Implementation and Innovation](#) to assist tribal organizations to increase the quality,



affordability, and availability of child care in their communities. Finally, the [Tribal MIECHV](#) program provides grants to tribal organizations to develop, implement, and evaluate home visiting programs in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities.

Overall there is not a strong research base on early care and education in tribal communities, as noted in recent [testimony](#) by Linda K. Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development at HHS. A [review of research](#) on early childhood issues conducted in 2003 for the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF identified 64 studies over a 25-year period, only some of which were on early care and education issues. This dearth of research on American Indian and Alaska Native early childhood education has continued to be the case, even after 2004, when, through a series of listening sessions, ACF outlined [a research agenda](#) to address issues of concern for American Indian and American Native Head Start programs. A search of the *Research Connections* database conducted in November 2015 identified only a handful of research reports or articles published over the past decade that specifically focused on Native American and Alaska Native young children. A [systematic review](#) of home visiting programs implemented in tribal communities highlights how little research has been completed on home visiting programs in tribal communities.

The Administration for Children and Families has responded to the need for more information specifically on American Indian and Alaska Native children, families, and communities in several ways. Beginning with the first cohort in 2011, ACF [has provided funds](#) for all tribal home visiting grantees to conduct local evaluations of their programs with research support from the [Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute](#). In 2011, the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center was established to advance research on home visiting, Head Start, and child care in tribal communities and in 2014, OPRE [convened a meeting](#) to hear from researchers in the field about opportunities and challenges in conducting research and evaluation with American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The first [American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey \(AI/AN FACES\)](#) is scheduled to begin in 2015 in 22 Head Start program sites, which will provide detailed data from assessments and parent and teacher reports on children's health, development and learning as well as information on the Head Start programs' policies and practices, teacher educational credentials, and quality of the learning environment.

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