

**HIV/AIDS among Native Americans in New Mexico**

**Special Report for Circle of Harmony Conference, Apr. 20, 2004**

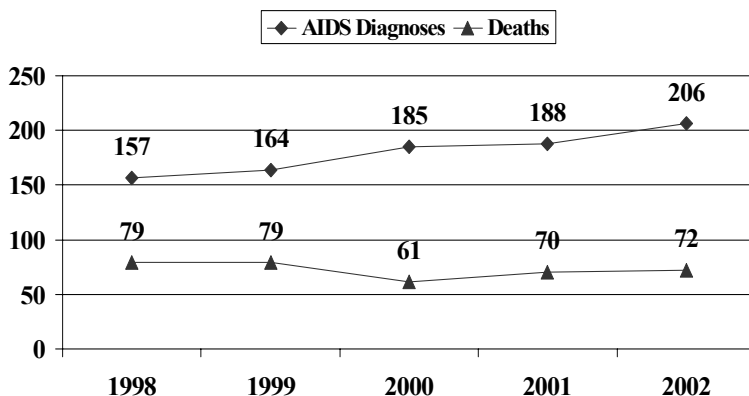
For many years, data on Native Americans with HIV/AIDS have suggested that the epidemic had not yet arrived full-force in “Indian Country.” Today, while it is still clear that the epidemic began primarily as a “white man’s disease” in the U.S., national and local surveillance findings clearly demonstrate the substantial impact of HIV/AIDS on men and women of all races and ethnicities, including Native Americans.

Although the availability of effective antiretroviral therapy since 1996 led to immediate declines in AIDS incidence and mortality across the board, the number of new AIDS cases and deaths among Native Americans began to rise again almost immediately (see Fig. 1).

Today, nationwide as well as in New Mexico, per-capita annual incidence of AIDS among Native Americans has risen to a level nearly 50% higher than that of non-Hispanic whites (see Fig. 2).

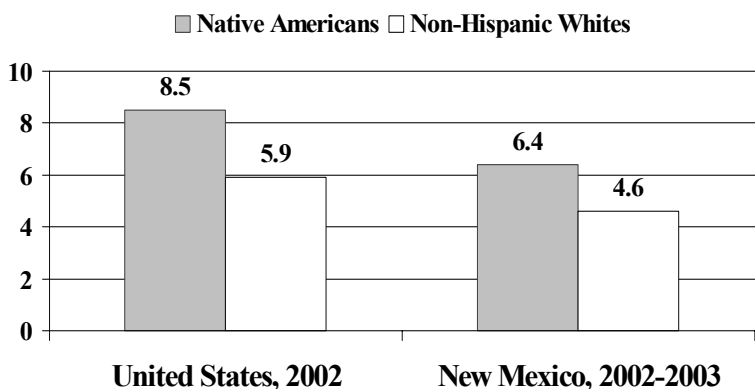
**New Mexico Data.** The New Mexico HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Program has identified a cumulative total of 180 cases of HIV/AIDS diagnosed among Native American New Mexicans since the early 1980s, including 58 individuals who have died. The 122 living cases amount to 6.5% of all living NM cases, still well under Native Americans’ proportion of the general population (9.3%, according to Census estimates for July 1, 2002).

Figure 1. AIDS Diagnoses and Deaths among American Indians & Alaska Natives, United States



Source: CDC HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report 14

Figure 2. Annual AIDS Diagnoses per 100,000 population



Source: CDC HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report 14; NM HIV/AIDS Reporting System

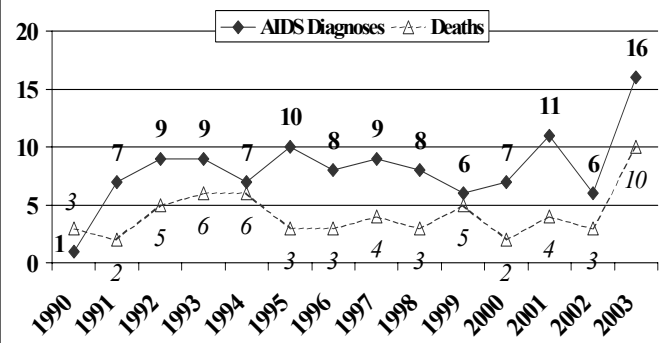
The program has recorded an additional 67 cases, including 48 living cases, that were diagnosed out-of-state but have been seen in New Mexico. The final page of this report provides a statistical summary of the 122 living NM-diagnosed cases with breakdowns by disease status, gender, risk factor, age at first positive HIV test, and region of residence. Comparative breakdowns are provided for all living New Mexico cases.

Prevalence of reported HIV/AIDS among Native Americans in NM remains well below the statewide rate of 101 living cases per 100,000 New Mexicans (see Figure 3), but incidence of AIDS – the number of new diagnoses per 100,000 – for the period of 1998-2003 is nearly on par with the statewide rate of 5.6 (see Figure 4).

For 2003, the NM HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Program has recorded 16 AIDS diagnoses and 10 AIDS deaths among Native Americans, figures that are roughly 50% higher than ever previously recorded in a single year for this group (see Figure 5). While increased numbers of AIDS diagnoses could be a

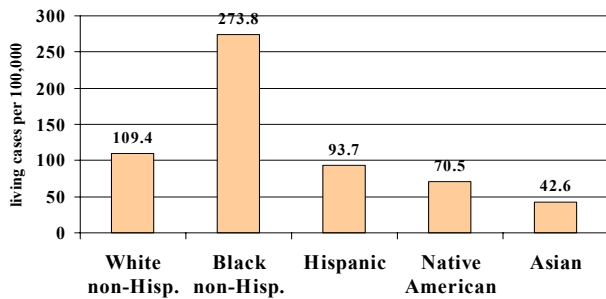
product of heightened surveillance efforts, the number of deaths is far less likely to reflect such an effect. The proportions that these figures represent of NM totals, based on preliminary data, radically amplify the rising trends documented through 2002 in the NM 2003 HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report (see Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 5. AIDS Diagnoses and Deaths among Native Americans in New Mexico, 1990-2003



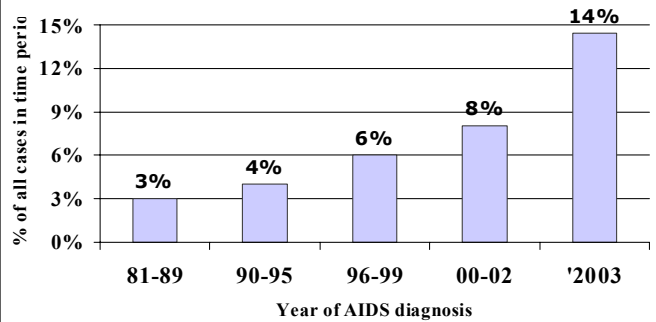
Source: NM HARS, April 2004

Figure 3. Prevalence of HIV/AIDS in New Mexico, by race and ethnicity



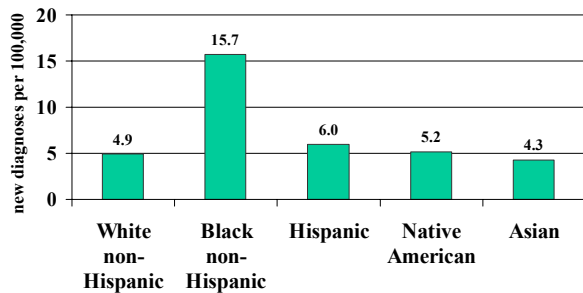
Source: NM HARS, April 2004; rates per Census estimates for 7/1/2002

Figure 6. AIDS diagnoses among Native Americans as a % of all NM diagnoses



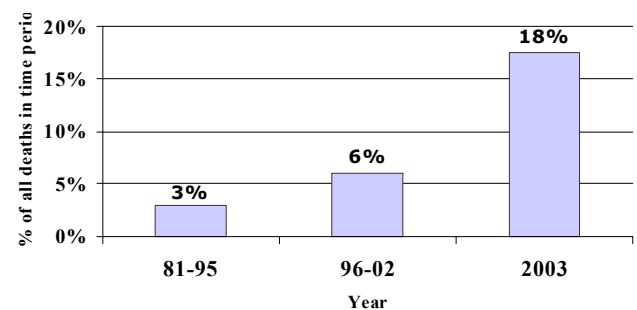
Source: NM 2003 HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report; NM HARS, April 2004

Figure 4. Annual Rates of AIDS diagnoses among New Mexico residents, by Race/Ethnicity, 1998-2003



Source: NM HARS, April 2004; rates per Census estimates for 7/1/2002

Figure 7. Deaths among Native Americans with AIDS as a % of all AIDS deaths in NM



Source: NM 2003 HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report; NM HARS, April 2004

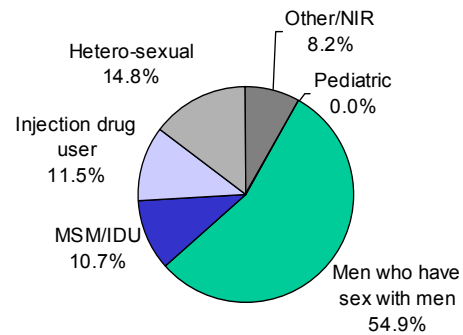
The majority of Native Americans living with HIV/AIDS in New Mexico remains men who have sex with men (see Figure 8). The proportion of living cases attributed to heterosexual transmission, however, is the highest of any major racial or ethnic group at just under 15%. Likewise, one-fifth of living Native American cases are women, also higher than for any other group in New Mexico. Roughly half of the cases among Native American women are directly or indirectly attributable to injection drug use; for almost all of the remaining cases, the risk factor of the woman or her heterosexual partner is simply not known (see Figure 9).

Nationwide and in New Mexico, Native Americans with HIV/AIDS tend to first test positive for HIV or be diagnosed with AIDS at a younger age than members of other racial groups. Half of Native Americans with HIV/AIDS in New Mexico tested positive at under 30 years of age, for example, as opposed to just one-third of all living NM cases. Similarly, Native Americans living with HIV/AIDS are generally younger than other groups. The 2003 NM HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report found that 62% of Native Americans living with HIV/AIDS in NM at the end of 2002 were under 40 years of age, well above the 44% of all New Mexicans living with HIV/AIDS.

Just under half of Native Americans living with HIV/AIDS in New Mexico were diagnosed as residents of the Northwest region (see Figure 10). One-third were residents of Bernalillo County at time of diagnosis. As for all racial and ethnic groups, per-capita prevalence rates for HIV/AIDS are highest in Santa Fe County, followed by Bernalillo County (see p. 4).

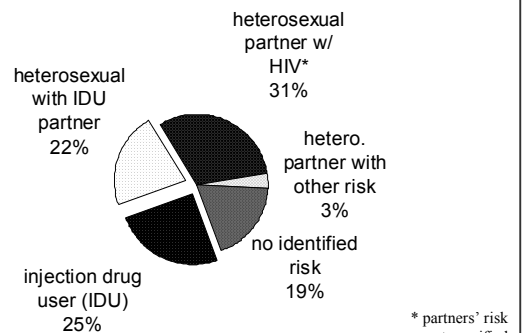
**Conclusion.** Data showing rises in AIDS diagnoses among Native Americans may be new, but they reflect HIV transmission that may have occurred 10 years ago or more. Information on concurrent diagnoses of HIV and AIDS in New Mexico suggests not only a failure among many Native Americans with HIV to test early on in the course of their disease, but also implies that these individuals may have unknowingly transmitted the infection to sexual and injection drug partners for many years. Meanwhile, rising case counts for HIV/non-AIDS among Native Americans and the identification of syphilis outbreaks and acute HIV disease in the Four Corners area and Bernalillo County in particular, indicate recent and ongoing transmission of disease that poses a formidable obstacle to efforts in the areas of HIV prevention and services.

Figure 8. Native Americans living with HIV/AIDS in NM, by mode of transmission



Source: NM HARS

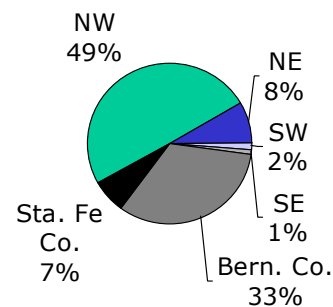
Figure 9. Native American women diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in New Mexico, by mode of transmission



Source: NM HARS

\* partners' risk group not specified  
N = 32 cumulative cases

Figure 10. Native Americans living with HIV/AIDS in New Mexico, by region of residence



Source: NM HARS

A statewide telephone survey conducted by the N.M. Office of Epidemiology found that 39% of Native Americans surveyed in 1998-2002 had ever been tested for HIV. This proportion, the smallest of any racial or ethnic group and well below the overall finding of 46%, suggests that surveillance data for Native Americans with HIV/AIDS in New Mexico may still understate the degree of the problem.

## HIV/AIDS AMONG NATIVE AMERICANS IN NEW MEXICO

Cases reported through Apr. 8, 2004

Since 1981, New Mexico's health care services have helped us document 247 cases of HIV/AIDS among Native Americans in our state, 180 of whom were originally diagnosed as residents of New Mexico. Living cases diagnosed in New Mexico, which are used by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to represent prevalent cases, are summarized below and compared with data on all New Mexicans living with HIV/AIDS. Data including out-of-state diagnoses may provide a better reflection of local prevalence patterns and are available upon request.

<b>HIV/AIDS Cases Diagnosed in NM</b>	Living Native American Cases, as of Apr. 8, 2004			All Living Cases in NM, as of Mar. 31, 2004	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<i>Rate per 100,000*</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<i>Rate per 100,000*</i>
<b>HIV/AIDS: Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>71.1</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>101.4</b>
<b>Type of Case</b>					
HIV	54	44%	31.5	40%	40.8
AIDS	68	56%	39.6	60%	60.6
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	98	80%	118.4	89%	182.5
Female	24	20%	27.0	11%	22.9
<b>County or Region**</b>					
Bernalillo County	40	33%	182.1	45%	148.0
Santa Fe County	8	7%	229.9	16%	226.7
NW Region	61	50%	47.4	13%	60.1
NE Region	10	8%	132.6	6%	79.2
SW Region	2	2%	26.1	13%	73.9
SE Region	1	1%	45.0	7%	46.5
<b>Age at First Positive HIV Test</b>					
	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of total</i>		<i>% of all NM</i>	
	0-12 years	0	0%	<1%	
	13-19 years	4	3%	2%	
	20-29 years	56	46%	31%	
	30-39 years	44	36%	42%	
	40-49 years	16	13%	18%	
	50+ years	2	2%	5%	
<b>Exposure Category</b>					
Men who have sex w/men (MSM)	67	55%		62%	
Injection drug users (IDU)	14	11%		11%	
MSM / IDU	13	11%		10%	
Heterosexual Contact	18	15%		9%	
Other Identified Risk (adult/adolescent)	2	2%		1%	
No Identified Risk	8	7%		6%	
Children (<13 at diagnosis)	0	0%		<1%	

\*Rates based on census estimates for July 1, 2002; \*\*Residence at time of diagnosis, rates revised May 2004.

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