Native American Heritage Month 2021

For Immediate Release: **(INSERT DATE)**

Contact: **(INSERT NAME, PHONE NUMBER)**

**Tribal health advocates work to prevent a generation of addiction by highlighting the differences between commercial and traditional tobacco**

**(CITY, WI)** – November is Native American Heritage Month, which provides an opportunity to celebrate the heritage, culture, and contributions of America’s First Peoples. Native Americans have preserved through centuries of discriminatory policies to make countless important contributions to society. Despite this, one enduring threat they face is the harm caused by commercial tobacco like cigarettes, chew, and other products.

A combination of tobacco industry targeting and policies that marginalized Native communities have driven high tobacco use rates among Native Americans in Wisconsin for years. Data from the 2020 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) shows that around a third of Native American adults report regularly smoking conventional cigarettes.

“The tobacco industry’s strategy of relentless marketing and the use of Native American imagery has paid off, resulting in Native people having a higher burden of tobacco-related disease and death” said (**CONTACT NAME**). “One way to fight back is by reclaiming those traditions that the tobacco industry has sullied – including the sacred use of tobacco.”

**CONTACT NAME** noted that the BRFSS data only covers the use of commercial tobacco products that are smoked, such as cigarettes and cigars -- and not the traditional tobacco historically used in Native American culture. Unlike traditional tobacco, commercial tobacco products like cigarettes are addictive and cause serious health harms, including (**PICK THREE EXAMPLES FROM THIS** [**LINK**](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/health_effects/index.htm)).

Meanwhile, traditional tobacco use is considered sacred in Native American cultures, and is used as a medicine to promote physical, spiritual, emotional and community well-being. It is also used to (**GIVE AN EXAMPLE FROM THIS** [**LINK**](https://keepitsacred.itcmi.org/tobacco-and-tradition/traditional-tobacco-use/)). Wisconsin’s Native American health advocates are educating others on the importance of traditional tobacco, as well as the ways the tobacco industry co-opts Native American iconography and customs to get Native youth hooked on their deadly products.

**(IF POSSIBLE, INCLUDE A QUOTE ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN COMMERCIAL/TRADITIONAL TOBACCO FROM A TRIBAL MEMBER. OTHERWISE, SHARE AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT YOUR ALLIANCE IS DOING TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE -- PARTNERSHIPS, PRESENTATIONS OR EVENTS)**

To learn more about tribal efforts to prevent commercial tobacco use, visit KeepItSacred.org or follow the Wisconsin Native American Tobacco Network on Facebook. Native Americans looking for free, culturally-tailored help to quit commercial tobacco can call the American Indian Quit Line at 1-888-7AI-QUIT. For more on tobacco prevention efforts in (**COMMUNITY/COUNTY**) visit (**ALLIANCE URL OR SOCIAL MEDIA**).

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