

3 Native American tribes sue opioid industry groups

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Three Native American tribes in the Dakotas are suing opioid manufacturers and distributors, alleging they concealed and minimized the addiction risk of prescription drugs.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe and the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate sued 24 [opioid](#) industry groups in federal court on Monday. Defendants include drug manufacturers Purdue Pharma, Teva Pharmaceutical Industries and Allergan, and distributors McKesson Corp., Cardinal Health Inc. and AmerisourceBergen Corp.

The lawsuit follows more than 70 cases filed across the country, including in Mississippi, Washington, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Ohio. It is one of the first to tie claims to the drugs' impact on Native Americans.

The Cherokee Nation launched a similar suit in April.

The tribes are being represented by former North Dakota U.S. Attorney Tim Purdon and former South Dakota U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson.

"The prescription opioid crisis has hit Indian Country hard," said Purdon. He added he is "hopeful" that other North Dakota tribes will also file suit.

The complaint noted that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that one in 10 Native Americans used prescription opioids for non-

medical purposes in 2012, which is double the rate of whites.

Between 2015 and 2016, Native Americans represented almost 18 percent of opioid-related deaths and 28 percent of patients treated for opioid use in South Dakota. At the time, Native Americans made up 9 percent of the state's population.

"This epidemic has overwhelmed our public-health and law-enforcement services, drained resources for addiction therapy, and sent the cost of caring for children of opioid-addicted parents skyrocketing," said Johnson.

Allegations against the defendants include deceptive marketing, fraudulent and negligent conduct and violations of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act. The complaint seeks a jury trial to determine monetary damages as well as an "abatement fund" to pay for treatment programs.

The companies hadn't responded to the suit as of Monday.

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