

# Addressing COVID-19 challenges in Tribal communities

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COVID-19 continues to ravage Native American communities in the Southwest, taking lives at rates [19 percent higher than other racial or ethnic groups](#). In an effort to help those communities, the UNM Native

American Budget and Policy Institute (NABPI), in partnership with the State of New Mexico's Indian Affairs Department, created a resource guide to consolidate information and updates.

The [Tribal Resources for COVID-19 page](#) provides quick access to information on federal and state resources, as well as updates on grants and funding opportunities.

"Our Native communities deserve to be informed," said Cheryl Fairbanks, the institute's interim executive director. "The mission of NABPI is to conduct research, budget and policy analysis in order to promote social justice advocacy and encourage Native American communities to create self-determined and systematic change. The foundation of change is knowledge, and we're hoping access to these resources will educate and empower our Native communities."

The site has links to news, information and announcements and also provides downloadable infographics on how to access assistance, promote health-conscious decisions and identify misinformation. In addition, it outlines relief and support funding areas for tribal groups impacted by COVID-19. The site also makes available academic reports focused on the hardships being faced by these communities.

The most recent report is titled COVID-19: Internet Access and the Impact on Tribal Communities in New Mexico. During a time when the world is moving virtual, a big challenge in connecting Native American communities to resources is the lack of access to broadband internet.

According to NABPI, the Federal Communications Commission in 2018 estimated 35 percent of Americans living on tribal lands across the country lacked access to broadband services, compared with 8 percent of Americans overall.

"This is a significant problem for our Tribal populations that is not new but is being exposed due to the importance of high-speed internet access right now," said Gabe Sanchez, an author of the report and director of UNM Center for Social Policy. "Because of the nature of COVID-19, many services and social interactions are moving online. But these changes are highlighting the pre-existing inequality of high-speed [internet access](#), which are being compounded because of the health crisis."

The report outlines possible short-term solutions, like WiFi busses, but acknowledges it will not be an easy road to long-term solutions. Sanchez and his team hope that the disparity will become a more forefront issue among local, tribal, state and federal leaders because of the impacts of COVID-19.

**More information:** COVID-19: Internet Access and the Impact on Tribal Communities in New Mexico. [nabpi.unm.edu/assets/nabpi-iad ... and-report-final.pdf](https://nabpi.unm.edu/assets/nabpi-iad...and-report-final.pdf)

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