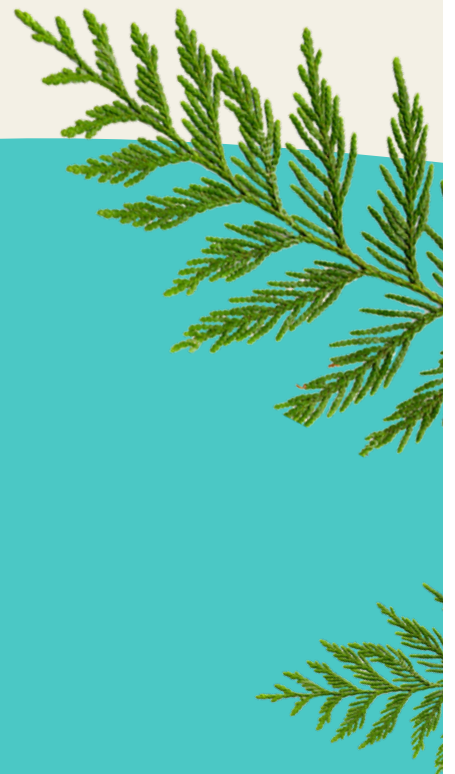




CENTER FOR
INDIGENOUS HEALTH

Quick Guide to Conducting a Needs Assessment

TRIBAL PRINCIPLES



The Tribal Principles (tribalprinciples.cih.jhu.edu) are culturally relevant, Indigenous-centered guidance for tribes to consider when creating spending plans for the use of tribal opioid settlements. The Tribal Principles may guide the development or help bolster programs, policies, services and research that will meet the needs of Indigenous communities, families, and individuals affected by the opioid crisis.



PRINCIPLE 1

Culture first: Support cultural and traditional healing in your community



PRINCIPLE 2

Invest in reciprocal learning and partnerships across tribes



PRINCIPLE 3

Healing support for families: Invest in parent, caregiver and Elder resources



PRINCIPLE 4

Sustain and enhance substance use services for youth



PRINCIPLE 5

Create opportunities for holistic well-being

INTRODUCTION

The Tribal Principles support tribal communities to use opioid settlement funds to supplement and invest in opioid abatement work that is driven by community needs across the 574 federally recognized tribes throughout the United States. Using opioid settlement funds to conduct a local needs assessment is a powerful option for determining how to disburse these limited resources for maximum impact and longer-term planning.

What is a needs assessment?

A needs assessment is a systematic process for identifying a community's needs and assets of relevance to a given programmatic or policy goal.^{1,2,3} ***In the context of tribal opioid settlement planning, a needs assessment is used to identify the areas in which interventions, treatments, or prevention activities can save the most lives and improve the quality of lives for tribal communities, families, and community members impacted by the opioid crisis.***

What are the goals of a needs assessment related to tribal opioid settlement planning?

The goal of a needs assessment is to collect data that help tell the story of a community's opioid challenges and current methods for navigating them. Needs assessments use these data to identify differences between a community's needs and its capacity to make these changes, and can help assess and prioritize the work that needs to happen.

What information do you need to create a needs assessment?

Needs assessments rely on local data. It is well-known that there are challenges to collecting and accessing data within tribal communities, however, data can be collected both formally and informally. Two main sources of data are quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (words, often story-based) data. Quantitative data (e.g., number of overdose events, number of individuals receiving treatment, and number of naloxone kits distributed) may be captured through community health center information logs or through community surveys. Qualitative data (e.g., written feedback, 1:1 meetings where community members share their experiences of care) may be captured by health staff. [Tribal epidemiology centers](#) have access to current data which can support planning and programming across and within tribal communities. There are endless options for data collection that vary in depth and complexity of methods. The approach should be tailored to the objectives of the needs assessment and available resources.

Who conducts a needs assessment?

In many tribal communities, needs assessments are entirely administered by the local health department, though they may also contract with other organizations to conduct all or part of the

¹ <https://hsc.unm.edu/cnah/cha/>

² <https://www.ihs.gov/HPDP/communityhealth/>

³ <https://www.healthycommunities.org/resources/community-health-assessment-toolkit>

assessment (e.g., universities, non-profit organizations, [tribal epidemiology centers](#), external contractors, etc.).

How often should a needs assessment be conducted?

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration suggests conducting a needs assessment [every three years](#). The substance use needs of community members and the community priorities can change quickly. Periodic needs assessments can help tribal communities tailor their opioid response strategies to their population’s evolving needs.

Why is a needs assessment important for planning tribal opioid settlement spending?

Tribal opioid settlement funds are arriving after years of community-led opioid response efforts. A needs assessment can help tribes invest this new funding strategically to expand the reach of currently funded solutions and close gaps in service, either where needs are not being met or where new needs arise. These settlement funds may be disbursed annually over many years. A needs assessment can help tribes ensure opioid settlement funds support opioid prevention, harm reduction, and treatment efforts over the long-term.

Many tribes already have the resources and data to conduct a needs assessment. This guide will serve as a quick reference to support tribes in conducting such an assessment to assist in investing their tribal opioid settlement funds.

In 2019, a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers at University of Southern California conducted a statewide needs assessment to “meet the specific needs of California’s American Indian and Alaska Natives (AIAN) urban and rural communities to reduce opioid use disorders (OUD) and substance use disorders (SUD)”.⁴ Their 2019 [Addressing the Opioid Crisis in American Indian & Alaska native Communities in California: A Statewide Needs Assessment](#) outlines their participatory action research approach methodology, results, and summary of recommendations.

⁴ https://ipr.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/USC_AI_Report.pdf

STEPS FOR CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. Define the scope

Prior to launching a needs assessment, define the learning objectives and areas to be studied. Planning and implementation go most smoothly when the scope of the needs assessment aligns with the scope of challenges that tribal opioid settlement funds can be used to address (e.g., access to treatment, traditional activities associated with cultural identity and healing, harm reduction supplies, and community workforce development). The scope should:

a. *Specify the issue*

Define the scope of the problem within the community—the needs assessment may look only at opioid use or at substance use more broadly. Understanding the changing nature of opioid and substance use in the community can help tribal communities invest in programs that address polysubstance use (using multiple substances at one time).

b. *Locate geographic boundaries*

Determining the appropriate geographic area clarifies the needs of the community and the services that are available to tribal community members. For example, a treatment facility that is widely used by community members might be located in an adjacent county. Understanding such patterns in service use will help a community more accurately address gaps within and between service systems.

c. *Identify populations of focus*

No community is homogeneous and the needs of different subsets of a tribal community may vary significantly. Tribes should determine which subgroups should be studied as part of the needs assessment. This could include breakdowns by age, health status, substance use needs, and geographic location.

d. *Establish existing mechanisms for intervention*

A needs assessment can identify community strengths and gauge a tribe's readiness to implement other solutions. It can explore:

- Currently available resources across the continuum of care, including:
 - Prevention projects/programs
 - Harm reduction resources
 - Treatment options
 - Recovery supports
 - Indigenous cultural strengths (traditional activities, ceremonies, language programs, access to Elders, etc.)
 - Evidence (e.g. cultural, experiential, academic, etc.) of effectiveness of currently funded interventions
 - Existing funding sources

- Opportunities to address service gaps and other key challenges facing the community

2. Assign who will conduct the needs assessment

Tribal health departments may be well-positioned to conduct the needs assessment based on existing staff capacity or staff hired with settlement funds. The selected staff members should have basic quantitative and/or qualitative data collection and analysis skills.

There are many effective ways to structure the administration of a needs assessment. Tribal health departments may decide to contract out all or part of the needs assessment. The assessment can be led by either a state or a region. When a regional needs assessment is preferred, the tribes in that area may consider pooling resources. Local foundations or academic institutions (e.g., schools of public health, social sciences, Tribal Colleges, etc.) can also assist with the needs assessment.

Potential Partners for Conducting a Needs Assessment

- Community-based organizations
- Charitable foundations
- Public hospitals
- Social service agencies
- State departments of health
- Colleges and universities
- Private health system
- Civic and volunteer groups
- Private research firms/contractors
- Tribal epidemiology centers

3. Choose the data

A needs assessment weaves together different types of information to compare the scope of the problem with existing solutions to inform recommendations. Much of this data is already available and key partners can help track down missing data. This information can come from:

- I. *Quantitative assessments:* Quantitative information can demonstrate the magnitude of the issue being studied, and whether certain outcomes are improving or deteriorating. Potential sources of data include:
 - Healthcare systems (e.g., number of visits to emergency rooms for nonfatal overdoses, number of naloxone kits distributed, hotspot areas where overdoses are reported)
 - Treatment providers (e.g., number of individuals receiving or awaiting treatment and support services)

- Medical examiner reports (e.g., specific substances present at the time of a fatal overdose)
 - Tribe, state or national surveys on drug use
- II. *Qualitative assessments:* Qualitative information can fill any gaps in the local story and answer the “why” and “how” questions that quantitative data cannot. These data can be collected through listening sessions, focus groups, talking circles, individual interviews, among many other methodologies. In seeking community input, it is important to include individuals who represent the larger community. These might include:
- People with lived and living experience of substance use (people who previously or are currently using drugs)
 - Family members of people with lived and living experience
 - Knowledge keepers, culture and traditional practitioners
 - Elected tribal and/or hereditary leadership
 - Community members who represent the diversity of the local community (selected based on their age, health status, substance use needs, geographic location, and other relevant factors)
 - Service providers (treatment providers, harm reduction practitioners, and other social service providers)
 - Other community leadership (e.g., public health directors)
 - Law enforcement (e.g., tribal police)

4. Put the needs assessment to use

Once the needs assessment has been conducted, tribal leadership may consider making the findings of the needs assessment public so the community can see the decision-making process, and offer their review and input. Then leadership can determine which interventions they will fund to fill any gaps the needs assessment has identified.

As decision-makers review the needs assessment, they should identify the most appropriate source to fund the identified areas of need. For example, tribes may have more flexibility to fund capital projects, harm reduction programs or cultural activities with resources from tribal opioid settlements than they do with other funds. This information is also useful in planning for the long-term effectiveness of these programs.

Tribes can also use the needs assessment process to examine possible barriers to program success. This could include insufficient or inconsistent funding, provider availability, bias, or local policies or regulations that block the program implementation that is needed.

