



# The Healthiest People in the World

How ANTHC's vision came to be



ALASKA NATIVE  
TRIBAL HEALTH  
CONSORTIUM





ANTHC is the largest, most comprehensive Tribal health organization in the United States and Alaska's second-largest health employer offering an array of health services and community support for our people throughout Alaska. Our logo and vision statement are often the first messages that partners and patients see from the Consortium. Learn about the inspiration for the ANTHC vision statement and logo, and how they continue to guide our work today. Parts of this story were originally produced in partnership with the Anchorage Daily News in 2019.

In 1998, Alaskans gathered to form the first board of directors for the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and one of their first tasks was to develop a vision statement for the Consortium.

The inspiration for the vision, "Alaska Native people are the healthiest people in the world," was and continues to be the strength of Alaska Native peoples and cultures across the state.

In addition to the vision statement, the board needed a symbol to identify the Consortium. The logo acted as a powerful symbol to mark Tribal self-determination in the delivery of health care to people across Alaska. The logo was forged during this exciting time, symbolizing partnership, innovation and the promise of a bright new day in Tribal health. The mark represents our Tribal partners coming together around our shared vision.



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ANTHC's logo is the most common and recognizable representation of our organization. Correct logo usage is key to maintaining a clean and consistent brand image.

The vision may seem like an ambitious statement, but Chair Don Kasheveroff, who was guiding the board through development of a strategic plan, urged the leadership of the new Tribal health consortium to take on a "big, hairy, audacious goal" — a mission and vision that exceeded the everyday.



## What Alaska Native people have in common with some of the world's healthiest populations

This vision has guided program development and goal setting at ANTHC for more than 20 years. Considering some of the well-known challenges facing Alaska Native people, it might seem like a bit of a reach. But it wasn't picked at random. Board members said their research showed that traditional Alaska Native lifestyles actually have a lot in common with those lived by people in places where life spans are long and disease is rare.

"We went and studied where those places are," said Paul Sherry, who served as ANTHC's first CEO. "They're New Zealand farm wives, and they're people that live in Andorra, and they're people that live in Okinawa. Places where people consistently live (to be) over 100 years old."

Although there's no definitive ranking of the healthiest populations in the world, there's plenty of research into places where residents tend to live longer, more disease-free lives. In 2017, researcher Dan Buettner identified five "Blue Zones" where residents grow old "without health problems like heart disease, obesity, cancer, or diabetes."

"We need to get back to the basics of who we are and use those principles to shape our health," said Evelyn Beeter, who has represented Unaffiliated Tribes on the ANTHC board since 1998.

Criteria vary, but there are some common characteristics connecting the people who are said to be among the world's healthiest. They get some routine exercise (like walking) every day, eat and drink in moderation, and live in collaborative communities. Diets vary from group to group, but they tend toward traditional, regional foods — fish in Scandinavia, sweet potatoes in Okinawa, whole grains in Sardinia. Healthy people have a sense of

purpose and belonging. They often belong to faith communities. A clean environment and access to good health care are pieces of the equation, too.

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Sherry doesn't think it's rocket science. "When we looked at that, what people realized was that Native people live eight out of nine of those probably better than non-Native people. They live off the land, they eat natural food, they breathe clean air."

As the board saw it, if Alaska Native people could have access to good medical care, learn to navigate the Western diet and avoid or overcome substance abuse, there was no reason they couldn't be ranked among the world's healthiest people, too.

"Once upon a time we were (among the healthiest people in the world)," said Beeter, who is Athabascan from the Copper River region. "All of us were, once upon a time. The Yupiks and Inupiaq, they eat off the ocean there. We lived off of moose and caribou and rabbits and all of that. We took care of ourselves."



Traditional Alaska Native cultures have a lot in common with the people thought to be the world's healthiest: eating off the land, living in close-knit community with shared values, having a sense of connection and purpose. A subsistence lifestyle means lots of everyday physical activity, too, and among other things, the Blue Zone study found that "routine natural movement is one of the most impactful ways to increase your life span, and a common habit among the world's longest-lived populations."





## Alaska Native traditions as a part of our health

Many Tribal groups are now supplementing ANTHC services — like improved sanitation and comprehensive health care — with cultural programs meant to reclaim traditions that have been lost through decades of forced assimilation.

Beeter said it's important to invest, as many Tribal governments and corporations are doing, in camps and programs that teach subsistence and survival skills, familiarize young people with their lands, and reinvigorate languages.

Research shows that being disconnected from one's own culture and language is a trauma that directly impacts American Indian and Alaska Native people. A University of Alaska evaluation

published in 2019, found evidence that cultural camps have the power to reduce suicide risk among Alaska Native youth.

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"The problem is still there," Sherry said. "But what I see is that many more people have made choices for sobriety. I think the whole emergence of the pride in culture, in dance, in language, in art, in all of that is reflective of the people moving away from the problems of substance abuse. Those things are coming back very strong now."

"We're strong people," Beeter said. "We can get back there if we put our minds to it."



To view ANTHC's brand guidelines, please visit the ANTHC Marketing and Communications intranet page at [bit.ly/anthcmarketing](http://bit.ly/anthcmarketing).

