



**Commission on Native Children  
January 19, 2021  
3 – 5 pm ET/11 am – 1 pm AK**

**Virtual Hearing: The Early Impacts on COVID-19 on Native Children and Youth**

This panel will discuss what is known so far about how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting Native children, youth, and communities. Much attention has been given to the health impacts of the virus in Native communities, with disproportionate rates of infection, hospitalization, and mortality among Native people compared to non-Hispanic Whites. Less is known about the pandemic's impacts on Native children's well-being, including their educational outcomes. There has been a great deal of anecdotal information suggesting increased mental health challenges, greater suicide risk, challenges accessing education, and feelings of isolation and disconnection from culture and community. During this panel, researchers will present early findings from studies looking at the health and well-being of Native children and communities during the pandemic. Though data are limited, the witnesses will present about the studies they are conducting and the trends they are seeing in the data.

- Introductions and welcome (5 minutes) Chair
- Overview of Commission and goals of meeting (5 minutes) Chair
- Stephanie Fryberg, University of Michigan (15 minutes, 5 minutes for questions)

**Dr. Stephanie A. Fryberg** (Tulalip) is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan. As a social and cultural psychologist, her primary research interests focus on how social representations of race, culture, and social class influence the development of self, psychological well-being, physical health, and educational attainment.

Dr. Fryberg provided testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs regarding the impact of racist stereotypes on Indigenous people, served as an expert witness in the *Keepseagle v. USDA* class action lawsuit, and consults with National Tribal TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). She also received the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues Louise Kidder Early Career Award,

the University of Arizona Five Star Faculty Award, and in 2011 was inducted into the Multicultural Alumni Hall of Fame at Stanford University.

- Melissa Walls and Emily Haroz, Johns Hopkins University Center for American Indian Health (15 minutes, 5 minutes for questions)

**Dr. Melissa Walls, PhD** (Bois Forte and Couchiching First Nation Anishinaabe), is a Bloomberg Associate Professor of American Health in the Department of International Health at Johns Hopkins University and Director of the Great Lakes Hub of the Center for American Indian Health. She has engaged in health research partnerships with Native communities for over 17 years. Her involvement in community-based participatory research projects includes mental health epidemiology; culturally relevant, family-based substance use prevention and mental health promotion programming and evaluation; and examining the impact of stress and mental health on diabetes and related health outcomes, including obesity. Dr. Walls has the honor of working with hundreds of tribal members across 11 Ojibwe Bands in the midwestern United States and Canada on numerous projects funded by the NIH, RWJF, and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

**Emily Haroz, PhD** joined the Center for American Indian Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health as an Assistant Scientist in July, 2016. She has extensive experience in the implementation and evaluation of programs addressing mental and behavioral health. Her background is in quantitative methods, advanced statistical approaches and epidemiology. She has conducted numerous studies to understand mental and behavioral health problems and programs across a wide range of diverse populations. Dr. Haroz works with the behavioral health team on implementation of programs to address mental and behavioral health problems and promote well-being among AI/AN populations.

- Karina Walters, University of Washington (15 minutes, 5 minutes for questions)

**Karina L. Walters, PhD**, an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, is the Katherine Hall Chambers Scholar, and the director and principal investigator of the Indigenous Wellness Research Institute (IWRI; NIMHD P60MD006909) at the University of Washington. IWRI was one of 16 National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities Comprehensive Centers of Excellence and one of two devoted to American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) research in the country.

Dr. Walters has more than 25 years of experience in social epidemiological research on the historical, social, and cultural determinants of health among AIAN populations as well as chronic disease prevention research (e.g., HIV, AOD, obesity). Much of this social epidemiological work has targeted urban AIANs and LGBT-Two Spirit AIAN populations across the United States. In recent years, Dr. Walters has since expanded her research foci to include tribally based intervention research in the areas of substance abuse, obesity, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS prevention, particularly among American Indian women. Methodologically, she has expertise in decolonizing methodologies, particularly with respect to designing community-based, culturally grounded interventions.

Dr. Walters has presented at more than 360+ national and international conferences; was an invited speaker for Wednesday Afternoon Lecture Series (WALS) at the NIH; and was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Dr. Walters has served as Principal Investigator or Co-I on over 46 National Institute of Health (NIH) grants (20 as PI) from diverse NIH institutes; has mentored over 110 scholars from historically underrepresented populations including 55 AIAN scholars; and has participated in 16 national research training programs for underrepresented ethnic minority scholars.

Currently, she is active in NIDA's American Indian Scientific Committee and is Chair of the NIH's Intervention Research to Improve Native American Health (IRINAH) Committee.

Dr. Walters received her B.A. (sociology) in 1987, her M.S.W. (clinical) in 1990, and her Ph.D. in 1995 all from the University of California, Los Angeles. After serving on faculty as an Assistant and Associate Professor at Columbia University School of Social Work (1995-2001), she joined the University of Washington faculty in 2001 and became Full Professor in 2011. She has served as Director of the Doctoral Program (2003-05) and as Associate Dean for Research (since 2012). Prior to her career in academia, Dr. Walters was a community-based psychotherapist and served as Commissioner for the Los Angeles County American Indian Commission.

- Questions and discussion (45 minutes) Chair

Starting questions from the Commission COVID-19 Subcommittee:

- One issue we are concerned about is the issue of a spike in suicides, not just broader mental health concerns. Preliminary data shows a significant increase in attempts and completions among those who have suffered from the virus. This has been seen in the veteran population there are concerns about the general population. Researchers suspect that the virus may be impacting neurotransmitters and leading to suicidal thoughts. Are you aware of this research? Are there any relevant data or observations of this phenomenon in Native populations? Are we prepared to respond to this possibility proactively in our communities? The indirect effects of COVID-19 are really a concern for our people.
- From your perspective, what resources are needed to help Native people through the process once they have lost family members and community members to COVID, or had COVID themselves? There is currently a focus on vaccines, but what needs to be put in place on the back end to help those who have suffered?
- What other research or data collection are you aware of that is underway or planned in Native communities to understand the long-term impacts of the pandemic on Native children and youth? We are concerned about the after-effects and what the underlying issues will be, on top of the health issues Native people will have.

- Wrap up (5 minutes) Chair