**THE NATIONAL EYE HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAM: INCREASING AWARENESS OF DIABETIC EYE DISEASE AMONG AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES**

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Outreach in June 2002 to initiate strategic planning and cultural understanding to design an effective outreach strategy. This work group included representation from national organizations representing the target audience, federal agencies, the Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee (TLDC), healthcare providers, community members, and educators working in Indian country.

The work group provided guidance on refining the target audience and reaching American Indians and Alaska Natives diagnosed with diabetes, establishing the DED education program’s primary target audience as American Indians and Alaska Natives already diagnosed with diabetes. The secondary audiences included people who are in a position to influence or support the health practices of individuals at risk. Work group members recommended formative research in the form of focus group discussion sessions and one-on-one key informant interviews.

**SITE SELECTION CRITERIA AND OBJECTIVES**

The goal of the formative research was to acquire feedback from a broad geographic representation of tribes across Indian country, including urban and rural settings and self-governance and Indian Health Service systems. The objectives of this formative research were to learn about and measure current awareness and understanding of diabetes management, benefits of early detection of eye disease, barriers to receiving or accessing diabetes-related eye healthcare, motivators for behavior change, and preferred communication channels.

NEHEP team members selected the following data collection sites:

**INTRODUCTION**

American Indians and Alaska Natives have the highest prevalence of diabetes in the United States, exceeding 50% of adults in some groups. Diabetic eye disease (DED), a group of eye problems causing severe vision loss or even blindness, is a complication associated with diabetes. The National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP), coordinated by the National Eye Institute (NEI), one of the federal government’s National Institutes of Health (NIH), works to prevent vision loss through education programs that increase awareness of the importance of regular eye exams. Diabetes and its complications affect American Indians and Alaska Natives to a greater degree than the general US population and than any other ethnic population in the United States. As DED often has no early warning signs, the NEI recommends annual comprehensive dilated eye exams for all people with diabetes so that DED can be detected before vision loss occurs. As a result of the rising rates of diabetes and its accompanying complications among American Indians and Alaska Natives, the NEHEP has begun an outreach effort focused on reaching these populations with DED messages. Accordingly, the NEI conducted formative research with American Indians and Alaska Natives to gain a better understanding of these populations’ DED-related knowledge, awareness, and approaches to managing this disease.

**METHODS**

The NEI convened a work group on American Indian and Alaska Native...