



STATEMENT OF POLICY

Land Acknowledgement

Mission: The mission of NYSPHA is to promote and protect the public's health through professional development, networking, advocacy, and education.

Vision: Strengthening public health and taking action to make New York the healthiest state.

Problem Statement

Land acknowledgements recognize Native American and Indigenous people as the original keepers of the land and remind all of the continued legacy of harm that forced land removal, along with prohibition of language, religion, and traditional medicine, has on health. Failing to acknowledge this historical reality, public health actors attempt to promote wellbeing in a vacuum and health equity efforts are consequently hampered. Land acknowledgements recognize the violence of the settler-colonial history and that history's continued detrimental impacts on health equity.

Position Statement

1. NYSPHA acknowledges that the land now called "New York" was previously and still is tended by multiple Native American and Indigenous nations.
2. NYSPHA encourages its members and partners in the public health system to continuously build working relationships to reduce health inequities to the indigenous population.
3. In order to keep this issue present for the NYSPHA membership, NYSPHA commits to making a land acknowledgement statement at the beginning of all conferences and other major meetings.
4. NYSPHA urges other public health organizations, public health educators, and others in New York to adopt similar positions.
5. NYSPHA supports initiatives to educate public health workers about the links between land allocation and use, the environment, and health equity.

Justification

The often-violent theft of Native lands resulted in a profound loss of cultural identity and physical health for many Native American and Indigenous people (Martínez de Vedia 2021; Truer 2019; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). The homelands of many Indigenous people hold the sacred sites of ancestral burial and ceremonies. For centuries before European contact, Native American and

Indigenous people responsibly cultivated the land so that plant and animal inhabitants were in balance, yielding healthy bodies, minds, and land (including water). Forcibly separated from ancestral land and often forced into new, unfamiliar, infertile homes, many Native American and Indigenous people lost connections to healthful ways of living, and a sense of self and esteem. The ramifications of land-people separation and centuries of structural exploitation reverberate such that Native American and Indigenous people today disproportionately experience poverty and associated poor mental and physical health outcomes (UIHI & SIHB, 2018; Krieger 2015; Wiedman 2012). For example, Native American and Indigenous people now die at higher rates secondary to diabetes than any other racial and ethnic group in the United States (IHS, 2019). In New York City, Native American and Indigenous people are twice as likely as Whites to live with diabetes (IPAERR, 2021).

Land acknowledgement centers the work of public health as action that must be rooted in socio-historical context. Public health aims to promote and protect the health of populations and prevent illness and injury. To achieve these aims, public health action must be contextually rooted and respectful. A foundation based on respect should be viewed as a starting point for public health workers to build a relationship with people who have good reason to be distrustful of institutions. Land acknowledgement pays homage to Native American and Indigenous ancestors and their descendants and reminds public health actors of historical truths that contextualize the health of populations today. Land acknowledgement models intervention at the intersection of policy and practice so that the most marginalized, sub-altern, and historically excluded communities are lifted up and re-centered, which in turn, means that all communities are elevated. It is a first step toward recognizing and rectifying systemic harms of Native American and Indigenous people, and lays the groundwork for future pathways of public health.

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Record of Action

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