



APIA

ALEUTIAN PRIBILOF ISLANDS ASSOCIATION

With Spirit and Strength

APIA is a federally recognized tribal organization of the Aleut Unangax people of Alaska. A 13-member Board of Directors governs the Association. APIA was chartered in 1976 as a nonprofit and we contract with federal, state and local governments, and receive private funding so we can give the Unangax people in our region services like health care, education, social programs, psychological interventions and support, employment and vocational training, and we offer public safety services as well.

We are humbled and honored to be awarded The Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program. This award enables the VA to provide resources toward community-based suicide prevention efforts to meet the needs of Veterans and their families through outreach, suicide prevention services, and connection to VA and community resources. In alignment with VA's National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide (2018), this grant program assists in further implementing a public health approach that blends community-based prevention with evidence-based clinical strategies through community efforts. The grant program is part of the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019, signed into law in October of 2020.

This objective of the SSG Fox project coincides with the mission of APIA to “strengthen and preserve Unangan cultural heritage”, as utilizing culture as a form of prevention. We use SAMHSA's evidence/practice based Gathering of Alaskan Natives (otherwise known as The Gathering of Native Americans in the lower contiguous states) as a model and have adapted it to specifically fit our region. The geographic area of proposed services will be our existing Health Department communities consisting of Atka, Nikolski, Unalaska, King Cove (i.e., Belkofski tribal members), and St. George, AK. The population of focus for Finding Our Anġix: Unangax Learning the Wisdom of our Ancestors is Service Members, Veterans and their families comprised of Unangan tribal members. (Note: Anġix is the Unangax word for “breath”.) We will hold a yearly ANCHR healing gathering in Unalaska, AK each year of the grant-life, as well as hold quarterly educational training in alternating remote communities and monthly educational trainings in Anchorage, AK. We will establish peer support services that will aid in suicide prevention and assistance in obtaining VA and/or other emergent needs, and provide nontraditional and innovative approaches and treatments.

Healing doesn't happen in a vacuum. These Gatherings are empirically substantiated to accomplish the suicide prevention we seek. To quote Dr. Gary Ferguson from our region, “Culture is truly medicine when it comes to mind, body, and spiritual well-being. Powerful transformation can take place, as we (re)connect to our roots. The traditions, values, and stories from our ancestors create a terrain for inter-generational healing.” The challenges in working in Behavioral Health in Native country, especially for our Native Veterans is the effectuality gap between the “Western model of service delivery which is an extension of Western colonization”, and Indigenous methods of treatment. Our program stands to bridge that gap.

It's imperative that we offer all that we do and strive for more wide-reaching suicide prevention modalities because

- American Indigenous peoples have a higher rate of suicide per capita than any other demographic.
- We have lost over 61% of our population to suicide.
- Veteran rate of suicide is considerably higher than the general population. Previously the stats were 1 in 5 suicides was a Veteran.
- Compounding the Veteran suicide rates with the Alaskan Native/American Indian (AN/AI) suicide rates, it's staggering, but it's a preventable reality.
- Our Aleutian Pribilof Region has the highest per capita veteran population in the state.

This is where the mission of The Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, and the purpose of this award coincide perfectly, as prevention on tribal lands are one of the priority areas for SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program.

We are poised and ready for this sacred lifesaving work.