

Decolonizing Medicine, an Indigenous Perspective

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Points to consider

- Systems of medicine existed before colonization
- Colonization has influenced our health systems and health outcomes globally
- Arrive at considerations toward decolonizing medicine in US
- Approach to inclusive medicine empowers the voice of those whose health is at stake

Points to consider

- In the US, disparities in HIV and STI diagnoses and outcomes exist for American Indian/Alaska Native individuals
- A disproportionately higher proportion of Native American individuals are diagnosed with HIV as compared to white individuals
- Rates of undiagnosed HIV may also be disproportionately higher for indigenous persons and systemic factors present barriers to testing and treatment

Colonial Medicine

- Shift from Indigenous methods. Suddenly health was defined as absence of disease, and thus achieved by developing methods for attacking specific diseases
- Disease approach to illness appeared to be cheaper and more manageable than efforts to improve health through social/economic development.
- Viewed broader-based efforts to deal with the underlying social and economic determinants of illness impractical and unnecessary.
- Disapproved of Traditional Medicines in general, though there were exceptions.
- Shifted ecology to dependence on the colonizers for food and medicines.

Global Healing Traditions

- Are wholistic and earth based
- Include generational and community involvement and teachings
- Are intrinsically valuable to those who practice and benefit from the practice
- Were disrupted with colonization, and the health of those who lost health systems, continues to suffer
- There could be great benefit from decolonizing and indigenizing health systems.

Decolonization of Health Systems

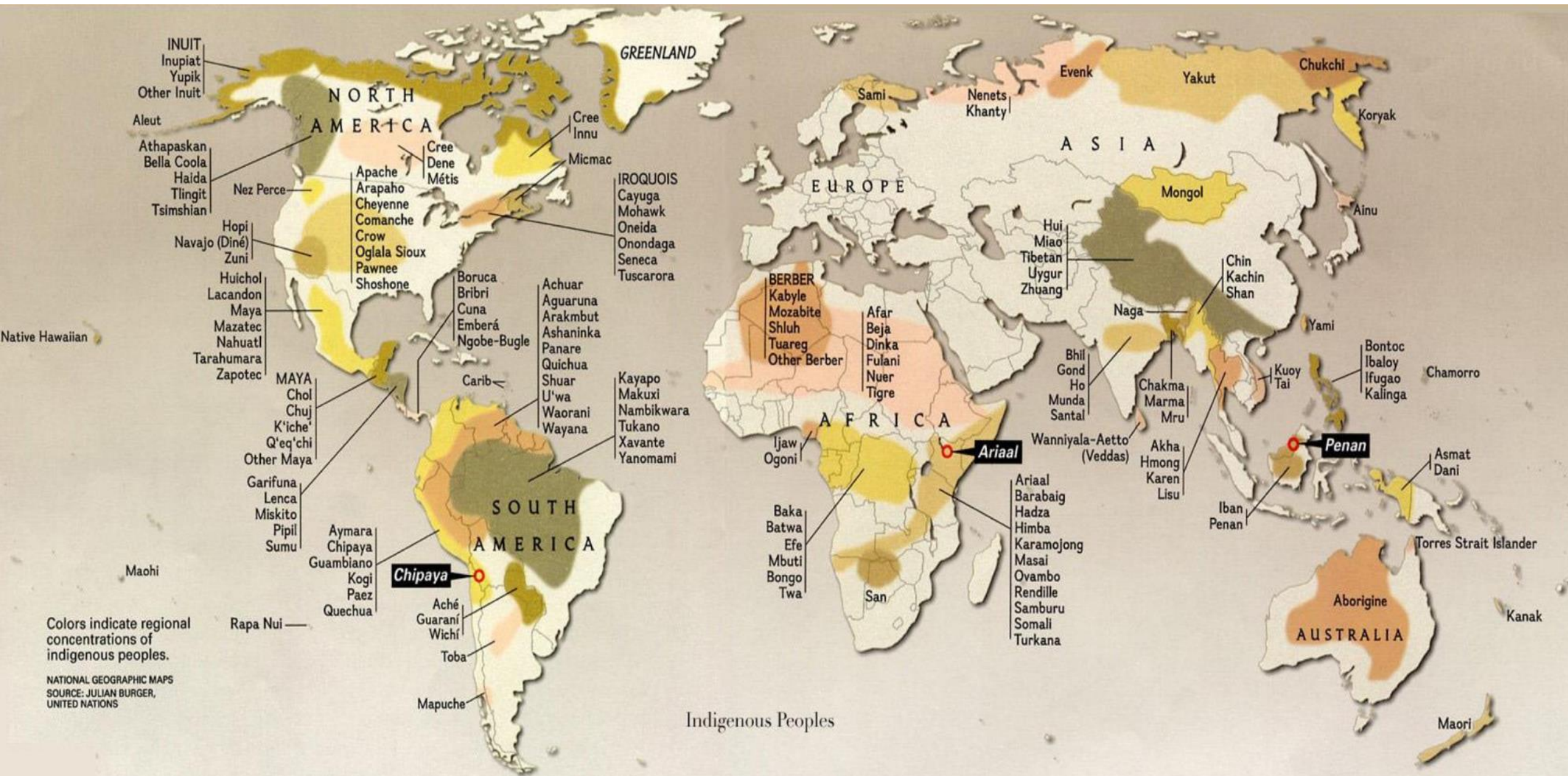
- Has evolving definitions that depend upon varying history of populations
- Requires awareness and is intersectional and interdependent
- Health and healthcare are informed by social and structural determinants of health
- Individuals and institutions reinforce constructs that perpetuate systems
- Requires individualized approach for systems and communities

Decolonization of Medicine

- Systems are currently in place, economic, social, political
- Indigenous systems have existed historically and currently co-exist
- Restores indigenous world view
- Restores culture and traditional ways
- Includes Indigenous perspectives of history and practices
- Requires dialogue, belonging, inclusivity awareness and more

Indigenizing Medicine

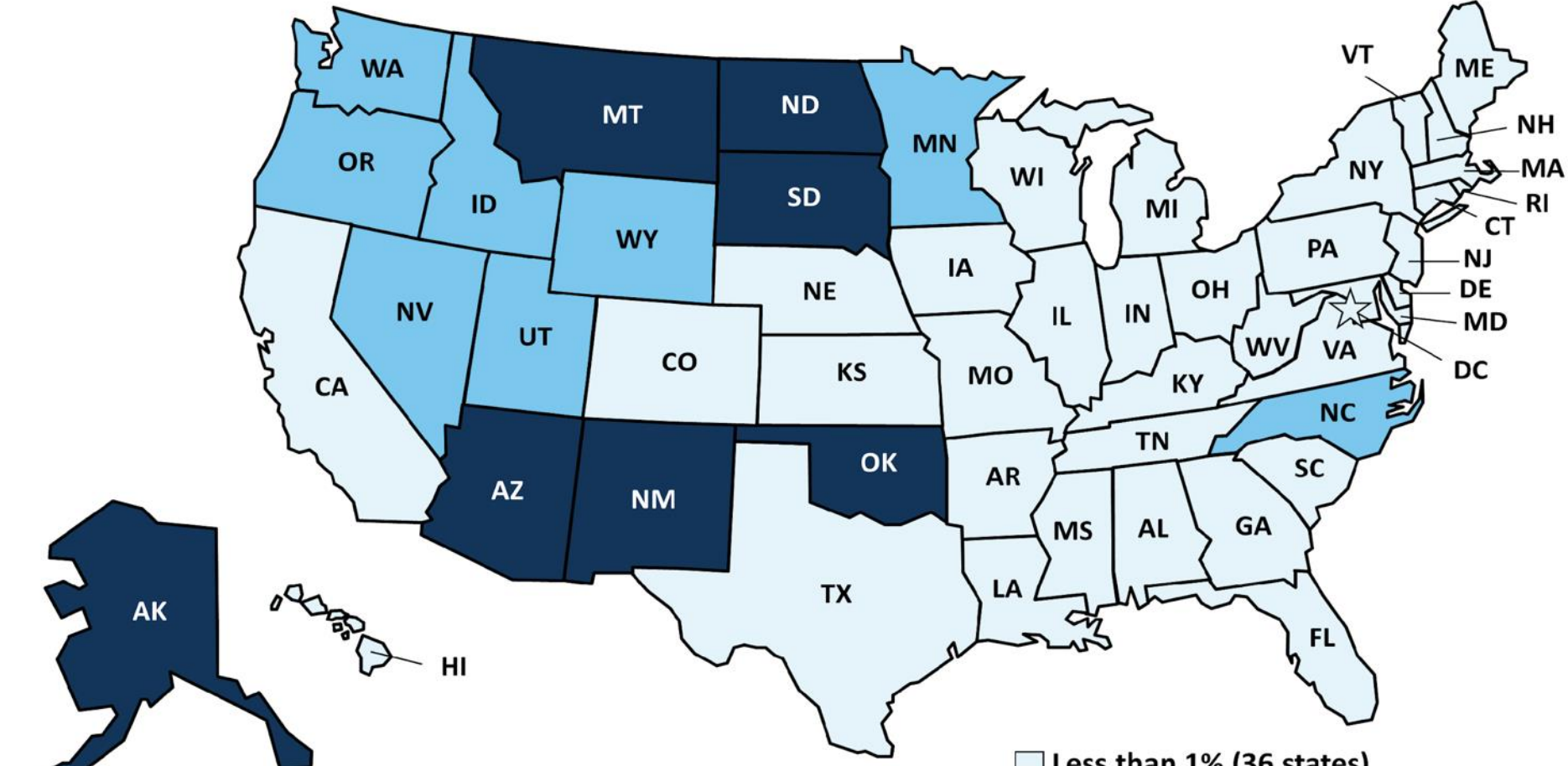
- Inclusion of Indigenous voice and cultural perspectives
- Programs are currently developing
- Indigenous Health as Academic Discipline
- Indigenous Medicine as a Clinical Science
- Indigenous Professional Leadership development
- Need to establish Indigenous School of Health Sciences



Colors indicate regional concentrations of indigenous peoples.
 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAPS
 SOURCE: JULIAN BURGER, UNITED NATIONS

Indigenous Peoples

American Indians and Alaska Natives as a Share of the Total Population, by State, 2009-2011



Total: 2.5 million = 1% of U.S. Population

- Less than 1% (36 states)
- 1-3% (8 states)
- More than 3% (7 states)

American Indian and Alaska Native includes people of Hispanic origin.
 SOURCE: KCMU analysis of 2009 - 2011 ACS.



American Indian and Alaska Native Medical Technology

- Surgical tools originally developed by Indigenous Americans
 - Bulb Syringe essential for lavage and visualization
 - Bird Bone needles cutting edge in their time
 - Bio-identical sutures from the hair of the injured individual
- Bone Setting
- Internal reduction of tight nuchal chord
- Skull/Brain Surgery- trepanation, ancient methodology
- Osteopathic Manipulation
- Botanicals

Botanicals

- There are many that have been developed into pharmaceuticals and many continue to be utilized as herbals/botanicals
- Quinine (Chinchona Bark), Aspirin (Willow Bark), Oral Contraceptives (Wild Yam), Taxol/Paclitaxel (Pacific Yew)
- Ethics: How do we include knowledge and pursue science in a meaningful and respectful way

Blueberries

- Are related to huckleberries, bilberry, cranberry
- Have importance in Alaska Native Traditional Healing
- Thus it is practiced that plants that grow near the earth are powerful medicine
- Blueberries and the blueberry plant are used as a tonic in the form of tea for prevention
- <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/287710>



Traditional Diets

- Traditional diets had all the essential components for a balanced diet including essential fatty acids, antioxidants, calories and protein and many health benefits such as protection from diabetes, cardiovascular disease, improved maternal nutrition and neonatal and infant brain development.



US Colonization History

- Often the story of the colonizers and those with power has been considered the “truth”
- Remedy requires sharing perspectives, participation, inclusion at the highest levels of decision making, and healing
- It is difficult to bear the tension of uncomfortable truths
- The story of Indigenous Americans is important to understand in order to care for and create culturally safe space for AI/AN patients

US Colonization History - Awareness

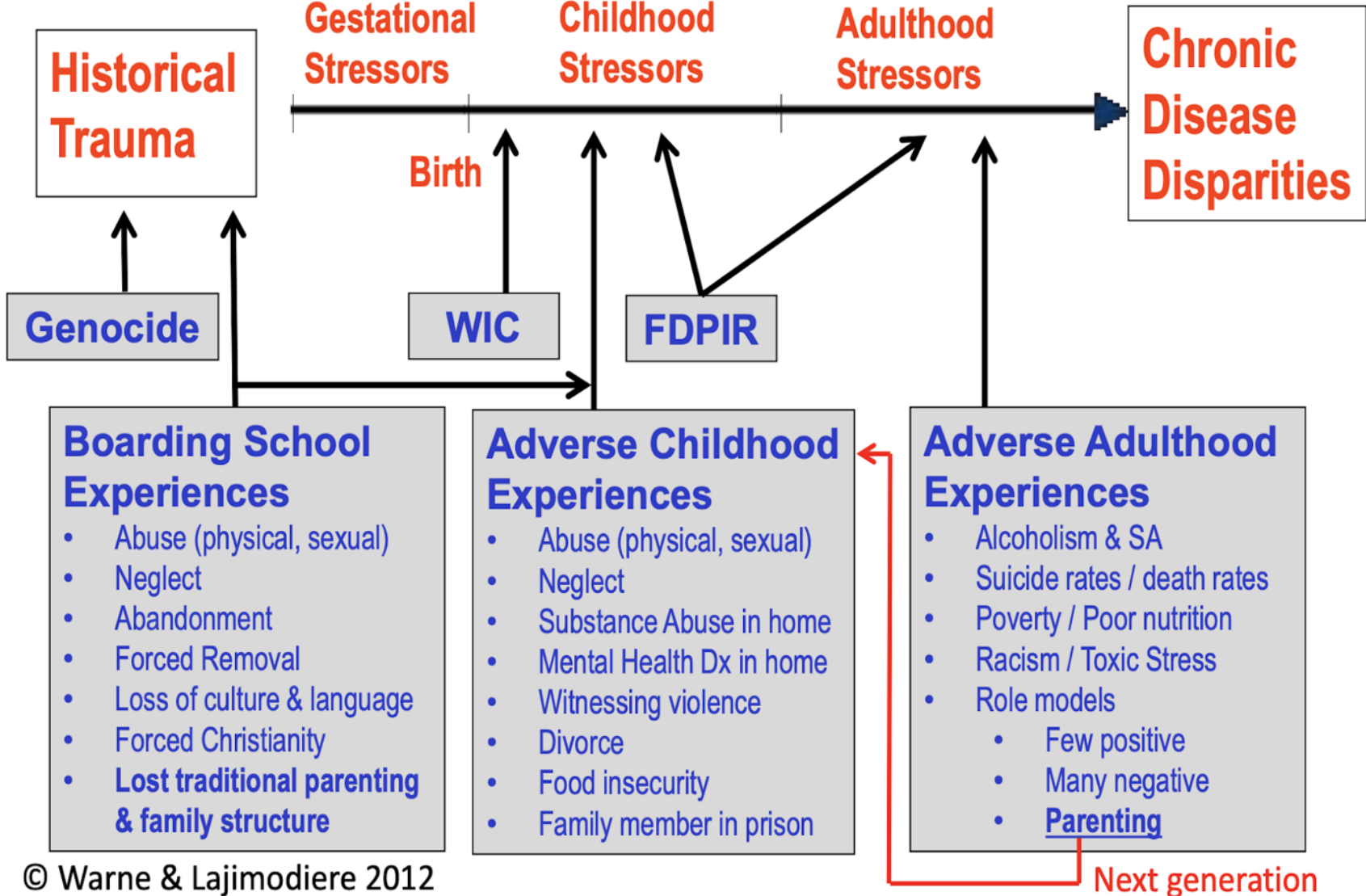
Examples of Genocide

- Colonization: USA, waves of disease, enslavement, loss of culture, language
 - Indian Removal Act 1830 → Trail of Tears
 - Gold Rush 1860- Bounty for killing AIs
 - Boarding Schools: “Kill the Indian and save the man” policy
 - Bioterrorism: Smallpox Blankets
- Tremendous effects across Tribal Nations sometimes killing 100% of families, bands or tribes

A Time of Darkness for AI/AN People

- “The Great Death” was a series of waves of illness influenced by contact with new diseases and included the 1918 Spanish Influenza
- Those who survived after scourges of illness were left with great challenges of the trauma of losing their loved ones and the realization that the new powers (rather than their former traditional ways) were valued greater in the new world of America

Inter-Generational Basis for Chronic Disease Disparities Among American Indians and Alaska Natives



Indian Health Service Mortality Disparities

	AI/AN Rate 2009-2011	U.S. All Races Rate – 2010	Ratio: AI/AN to U.S. All Races
ALL CAUSES*	999.1	747.0	1.3
Diseases of the heart (heart disease)	194.1	179.1	1.1
Malignant neoplasm (cancer)	178.4	172.8	1.0
Accidents (unintentional injuries)*	93.7	38.0	2.5
Diabetes mellitus (diabetes)	66.0	20.8	3.2
Alcohol-induced	50.5	7.6	6.6
Chronic lower respiratory diseases	46.6	42.2	1.1
Cerebrovascular disease (stroke)	43.6	39.1	1.1
Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis	42.9	9.4	4.6
Influenza and pneumonia	26.6	15.1	1.8
Drug-induced	23.4	12.9	1.8
Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome (kidney disease)	22.4	15.3	1.5
Intentional self-harm (suicide)	20.4	12.1	1.7
Alzheimer's disease	18.3	25.1	0.7
Septicemia	17.3	10.6	1.6
Assault (homicide)	11.4	5.4	2.1
Essential hypertension diseases	9.0	8.0	1.1

* Unintentional injuries include motor vehicle crashes.



Practical Approaches to Working with Indigenous People

- Be willing to adapt your behavior to the needs of the community
- Listen and observe more than you speak
- Engage in casual conversation
- Don't look at your watch or rush through the interview
- Express that you do not know about the tribal customs and leave yourself open to learn

Practical Approaches to Working with Indigenous People

Acknowledge the legacy of colonization and its ongoing adverse effects on Indigenous health and medical practice.

- Persistent socioeconomic disadvantage that limits healthy choices
 - diet, physical activity, adherence to medication
- Increases levels of stress, and decreases capacity for self-care and healthy behavior change

Practical Approaches to Working with Indigenous People

- Acknowledge the legacy of colonization and its ongoing adverse effects on Indigenous health and medical practice.
- Perpetuates a toxic social environment for the individual, family, and community with pervasive and accumulated psychosocial adversities throughout the life-course
 - Stirs experiences of shame and stigma with a diagnosis of “X”=diabetes
 - May recall residential school-like conditions with health-care provider and institutional setting

Engage & Connect with Indigenous Community

- Implement prevention efforts and screening, with special attention to children and pre-gestational women, as well as the building of culturally safe interprofessional teams, diabetes registries and surveillance systems
- Foster positive relationships at the individual, family and community levels that advocate for family and community resources for Indigenous peoples
- Include traditional and cultural leadership to learn about local beliefs practices and healing resources

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