

American Indians and Alaska Natives Count in the 2020 Census.

Why the Decennial Census is Important

The U.S. Constitution requires an accurate count of the nation's population every 10 years, and the decennial census seeks to count every person in every household. An integral part of our nation's democracy, census data affects the ability of our government to ensure equal representation and equal access to important federal and private sector resources for all Americans. Census data is used to allocate seats and draw district lines for the U.S. House of Representatives, state legislatures, and local governing boards; to target at least \$800 billion annually in federal assistance to states, localities, and families; and to guide community decision-making affecting schools, housing, health care services, business investments, and much more.

"Hard-to-count" population groups are at higher risk of not being fully counted in the decennial census. While some groups have been underrepresented for decades; some may experience new or increased vulnerability due to major changes in census methodology: Using the Internet as the primary point of contact for the 2020 Census, or a reluctance to respond given concerns about data confidentiality. An undercount of the hard-to-count populations can lead to unequal political representation as well as unequal access to vital public and private resources for the people in greatest need.

Native households are at risk of being undercounted

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN or Native peoples) have been undercounted for decades. Roughly 26 percent live in hard-to-count census tracts.

Hard-to-count characteristics of the Native Community

- **Poverty:** Almost one-fourth of the Native community faces poverty. On federal Indian reservations, the rate jumps to 36 percent. Households in poverty are very hard to count.
- **Educational Attainment:** Areas with lower educational attainment are also hard to count, and Native peoples tend to have lower educational attainment compared with the U.S. average.
- **Housing Insecurity:** Close to half of Native peoples are renters, and a significant number were doubling up with others. Living in transitory housing increases the likelihood that the Census Bureau will not have correct addresses for Native peoples.
- **Age:** Young children are traditionally very hard to count. The median age of Native peoples is lower than that of the U.S. population by more than five years. For Native peoples on reservations, the median age is nine years lower than the U.S. average.

The consequences of undercounting the Native community

An undercount of the Native community will result in Native peoples and their communities being denied a full voice in policy decision-making because political boundaries and congressional reapportionments most likely will not be based on real numbers. As a result, their community's different needs may not be represented or prioritized according to their real share of the population. Native reservations are considered "communities of interest" in the redistricting policies of many states.

Undercounting Native peoples in the 2020 Census could also impact how federal funding is allocated to states and localities. There are 326 reservations and 567 tribes recognized by the federal government, each with distinctive health, housing, educational, and financial needs. Many programs that benefit the Native community are funded based, primarily, on census-driven data, including:

- Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies – \$13.9 billion
- Head Start Program – \$8.3 billion
- Native American Employment and Training – \$58.4 million
- Indian Health Service (IHS) – \$4.8 billion
- Medicaid – \$312 billion
- Urban Indian Health Program (UIHP) – \$40.7 million
- SNAP – \$69.5 billion
- Special Programs for the Aging Title VI, Part A – \$26 million
- Indian Housing Block Grant – \$650 million
- Indian Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) – \$70 million
- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers Program – \$19.1 billion

You can help – right now

Stakeholders (advocates, funders, and civic leaders) can improve the count of Native households in the 2020 Census by joining or supporting work on policy development, community organizing, and the “Get Out the Count” campaign for the 2020 Census:

- **Show members of Congress why they need to support adequate resources for the Census Bureau to conduct the 2020 Census and accurately count all Native peoples.** Several years prior to a decennial census, the Census Bureau needs a major annual funding ramp up to perform critical tests and build out a massive program infrastructure. Due to financial constraints, important activities crucial to ensure a fair and accurate census have been postponed or canceled, putting Native peoples at risk of a severe undercount.
- **Stay informed about key census policy and operational developments.** [The Census Project](#) provides regular updates on census-related activities in Congress and the administration. [The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#) also publishes many helpful resources.
- **Educate state, tribal, and local leaders about the challenges Native peoples face in the census.** Advocates and Native peoples can join Tribal Complete Count Committees to help ensure a complete census and include voices from the Native community.
- **Become a Census Bureau partner to help ensure the Census Bureau’s partnership program gets the resources it needs.** This important program is at risk due to budget shortfalls. Partners (organizations, associations, institution, etc.) get timely updates and promotional material from the Census Bureau. Tribal government department and agencies can also become partners in the 2020 Census.
- **Learn about, and participate in, the Census Bureau’s AIAN Program.** The Census Bureau will use a Tribal Governments Liaison Program in 2020 to educate tribal members, provide a trusted voice on the importance of the census, and offer training related to the 2020 Census.

If you would like to learn more about these or other ways you and your organization can be involved, contact Andrew Aurand, Vice President for Research of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, at AAurand@nlihc.org or Chris Harley, Census Counts Campaign Director, at harley@censucounts.org.