

# FAQ

## How many American Indian tribes are there?

There are approximately 567 federally recognized American Indian tribes and Alaska Native Corporations and Villages with a total population of about 1.9 million. According to the [Office of Minority Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), “as of 2012, there were an estimated 5.2 million people who were classified as American Indian and Alaska Native alone or American Indian and Alaska Native in combination with one or more other races. This racial group comprises 2 percent of the total U.S. population.”

## What is a federally recognized Indian Tribe?

Federal recognition establishes a formal government-to-government relationship between a tribe and the U.S. government and recognizes that a tribe exists politically as a “domestic dependent nation.” Once federally recognized, a tribe has access to federal benefits and programs, and is generally exempt from state and local jurisdiction. [Federally recognized tribes](#) possess “certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States.” The [Federal Register Vol 82/No 10/January 17, 2017](#) provides a listing of “Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services from the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs.” The [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#) is charged with upholding the federal government’s end of this agreement. The National Congress of American Indians provides a helpful [Introduction to Indian Nations in the United States](#).

## What is the relationship between Native Hawaiians and the U.S. Government?

At present, a unified Native Hawaiian government is not recognized by the U.S., though procedures are underway to enable federal recognition. In 1993, President Clinton signed [the Apology Resolution](#), which acknowledged transgressions by the U.S. in the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani and the Kingdom of Hawaii. In 2016, the U.S. Department of the Interior announced a [final rule](#) (see also [frequently asked questions on the final rule](#)) describing procedures to reestablish [self-governance](#) and to enter into a formal government-to-government relationship with the United States, much like federally-recognized American Indian tribes. Although the Office of Hawaiian Affairs supports the final rule, it [lacks unanimous support from Native Hawaiians](#).

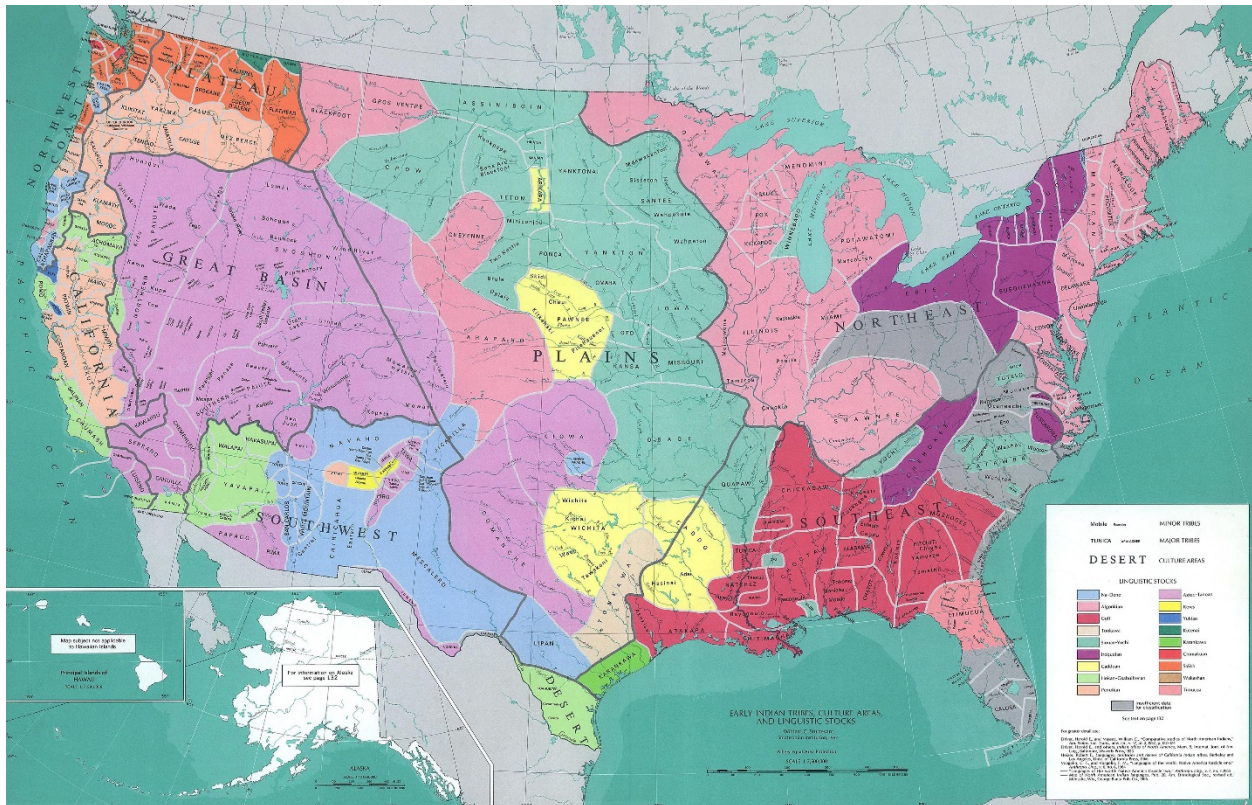
## How many Native American languages are there?

Estimates vary from 150 to 250 Native American languages spoken in the United States and Canada today. The Census Bureau provides data on the American Indian and Alaska Native population’s [languages spoken at home](#) as of 2006-2010. Of the 169 Native American languages that it codes, approximately 372,000 (±5,000) persons are speakers.

The [Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas](#) (SSILA) provides reference materials for the North American Indian languages or groups of languages. “The [Alaska Native Language Center](#) (ANLC) was established by state legislation in 1972 as a center for research and documentation

of the twenty Native languages of Alaska. It is internationally known and recognized as the major center in the United States for the study of Eskimo and Northern Athabaskan languages.”

A [Map of Early American Indian Tribes and Linguistic Stocks](#) within the present limits of the United States.



## What is an Indian reservation?

According to the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#) (BIA), “a federal Indian reservation is an area of land reserved for a tribe or tribes under treaty or other agreement with the United States, executive order, or federal statute or administrative action as permanent tribal homelands, and where the federal government holds title to the land in trust on behalf of the tribe. Approximately 56.2 million acres are held in trust by the United States for various Indian tribes and individuals. There are approximately 326 Indian land areas in the U.S. administered as federal Indian reservations (i.e., reservations, pueblos, Rancherias, missions, villages, communities, etc.). The largest is the 16 million-acre Navajo Nation Reservation located in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The smallest is a 1.32-acre parcel in California where the Pit River Tribe’s cemetery is located. Many of the smaller reservations are less than 1,000 acres.”

Aside from one federal Indian reservation in Alaska, Alaska Natives’ land agreements with the U.S. Government are different from the reservation system of the lower 48 states. Alaska Native lands are designated as village, urban, or regional corporations, as opposed to reservations. The [Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act](#) (ANCSA), signed in 1971, created the [Alaska Native Regional Corporations](#). This was the largest Native land claims settlement in U.S. history. It transferred title to twelve Alaska Native Corporations, approximately 200 local village corporations, and a thirteenth region representing Alaska

Natives who were no longer residents of Alaska. The corporations are organized under the State of Alaska as being a business for profit or nonprofit corporation to hold, invest, manage and/or distribute lands, property, funds, and other rights and assets for and on behalf of members of a Native group or village. The corporations received approximately 45 million acres of land transferred from federal to private ownership and \$962 million as a cash settlement.

## Who are Native American Veterans?

Native American Veterans are American Indians, Alaska Natives, Hawaiian Natives and Pacific Islanders who have served in the United States military. They have a proud tradition of military service and sacrifice and [are consistently over-represented](#) among enlisted soldiers in the U.S. Military Services relative to the general population. This pattern of over-representation holds for female and male Native American Veterans.

## How many Native Americans are Veterans?

Of the civilian adult population identifying as American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) alone or in combination with other races, [8.1% \( \$\pm\$  0.2%\) were Veterans in 2016](#), or approximately 318,000 ( $\pm$  8,000) AIAN Veterans.

Of the civilian adult population identifying as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone or in combination with other races, [7.5% \( \$\pm\$  0.4%\) were Veterans in 2016](#), or approximately 69,000 ( $\pm$  4,000) Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Veterans.

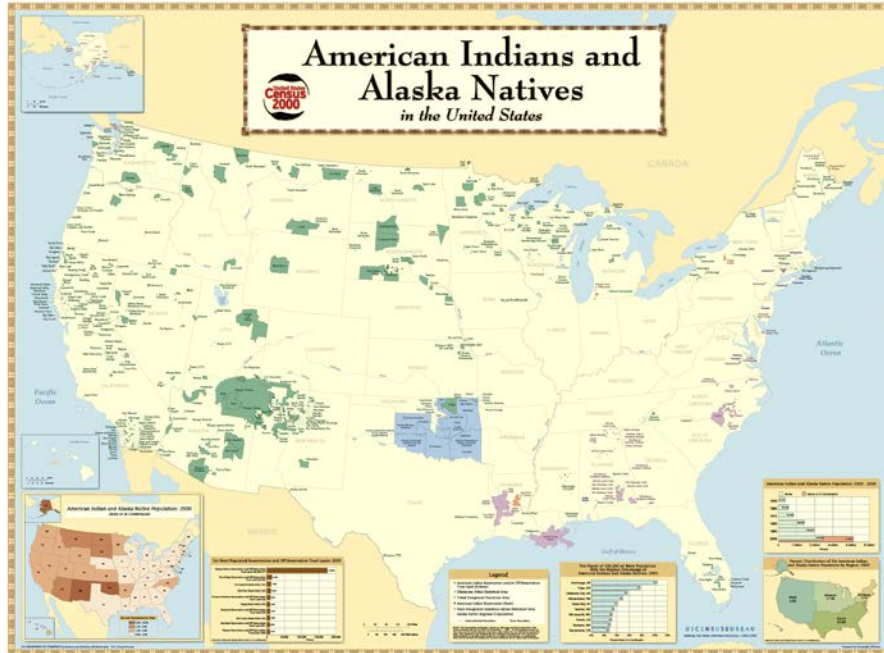
The U.S. Army website details the contributions of [American Indians](#) and [Pacific Islanders](#). The [Naval History and Heritage Command site](#) has information on Native Americans and the U.S. Military. The VA report on [American Indian and Alaska Native American Veterans: 2015 American Community Survey](#) shows the distribution of American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans by period of service, state, and social determinants of health.

## What percentage of Native American Veterans are from rural areas?

American Indian and Alaska Native American Veterans are over-represented in rural areas relative to Veterans of other races. Among Veterans who endorse American Indian or Alaska Native as their sole race, roughly 39% live in rural areas, often on geographically dispersed reservations or tribal lands which are often remote, isolated and considered highly rural. This is proportionately higher than any other racial or ethnic group, with 29% of Whites, 12% of Latinos and 9% of Asian Veterans living in rural areas.

The Census Bureau Website provides [maps of American Indian and Alaska Native Areas](#) (often rural) in the United States, as reported from the 2010 Census.





Most Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islander Veterans do not reside in areas that are officially considered rural; however, they encounter the same challenges faced by rural Veterans, such as lack of nearby resources and limited transportation options. To meet needs requiring resources in other states or territories, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders would have to travel huge distances over large bodies of water.

### What are some of the challenges faced by rural Native American Veterans?

All Veterans who live in rural settings have lower health-related quality of life than their urban counterparts. Higher poverty and uninsured rates, hospital closures, travel distances, limited broadband internet are [barriers to services for many rural residents](#). These barriers are exacerbated for rural Native Americans, who tend to live in even more remote areas. In addition, rural Native American Veterans have higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder than white non-Hispanic Veterans, a difference explained by rural Native American Veterans' [greater exposure to war-zone stress](#) (e.g., combat). In focus groups, rural Native American Veterans have cited compounding challenges to receiving services and benefits from the US Department of Veterans Affairs, [lack of outreach to Native American Veterans](#), [distrust of the VA system and staff](#), [a cumbersome benefits process](#), [lack of culturally competent care](#), and [difficulties qualifying for care](#). American Indian women Veterans identify [similar barriers](#).

These challenges are offset in part by rural Native American Veterans' [strong respect for Veterans](#), [family commitment to navigating care services](#), [dedicated spaces and advocates for Veterans](#) in the community, and [recent efforts to facilitate Veterans' access to health care](#).

### What is the VA's Office of Rural Health?

Located within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the [Office of Rural Health](#) (ORH) works to improve health care for the 3 million enrolled Veterans living in rural areas, which accounts for approximately [37% of enrolled Veterans \(and 54% of enrolled American Indian and Alaska Native American Veterans\)](#). ORH recognizes access to adequate health care as one of the biggest challenges

facing rural Veterans. ORH “implements enterprise-wide initiatives that help improve the health and well-being of rural Veterans by increasing their access to care and services. These national programs stem from the Office's model to "study, innovate, and spread" new innovations to support the 3 million rural Veterans who are enrolled in and rely on the U.S. Department Veterans Affairs' (VA) health care system.” ORH also supports [programs for special populations of rural Veterans](#), including American Indian, Alaska Native, and Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander Veterans.

## What are the Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers?

Located within the Veterans Health Administration’s (VHA) Office of Rural Health (ORH), the [Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers](#) support and improve the VHA’s care for rural Veterans. These Centers were established through a congressional act to:

- “Improve understanding of the challenges faced by Veterans living in rural areas;
- Identify disparities in the availability of health care to Veterans living in rural areas;
- Formulate practices or programs to enhance the delivery of health care to Veterans living in rural areas; and
- Develop special practices and products for the benefit of Veterans living in rural areas and for implementation of such practices and products in the Department system wide.”

In response to the various challenges faced by rural Native American Veterans, the ORH supports the Veterans Rural Health Resource Center – Salt Lake City to serve as a national resource on issues associated with healthcare for rural Native American Veterans.

## What are the eligibility requirements and process for getting VA services?

Each of the three branches of the VA provides different benefits for Veterans:

- [VHA – Veterans Health Administration](#)
- [VBA – Veterans Benefits Administration](#)
- [NCA – National Cemetery Administration](#)

Veterans need to apply to the right branch depending on the benefit or service they need. One such benefit, called Service-Connected Compensation, is administered by the Veterans Benefits Administration. The [Community Provider Toolkit](#) details the eligibility and application guidelines for obtaining Service-Connected Compensation.

The [Veterans Benefits Administration Native American Veterans webpage](#) describes other benefits available and how to apply. It is now possible to apply for many benefits [online](#). The Veterans Benefits Administration also provides [Fact Sheets](#) on specific benefits, including home loans, insurance, education and training, vocational rehabilitation and employment, military sexual trauma, dependents and survivors, and burial and memorial.

### Health care benefits

In general, any person who served in the active military, naval or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable [may qualify](#) for VA health care benefits. Reservists and National Guard members may also qualify for VA health care benefits if they were called to active duty by a federal order and completed the full period for which they were called or ordered.

To apply for enrollment into the VA health care system, Veterans must complete VA Form 10-10EZ, Application for Health Benefits. This form may be obtained from any VA health care facility or regional benefits office, [online](#) or by calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387). Once enrolled, Veterans can receive health care at VA health care facilities anywhere in the country.

A [Federal Benefits Booklet for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors](#) is also available for additional information.

### How do I get information about policy and legislative issues that affect Native American Veterans?

The [Native Domain Policy](#) web page provides a synopsis of federal legislation that affects rural and Native American Veterans, and provides a variety of resources and references on policy issues.