

# HEALTHY START EPIC CENTER

## Social Determinants of Substance Use During Pregnancy in Tribal Communities

Alcohol and Substance Exposed Pregnancy (AStEPP) Initiative



Developed by JSI for the Healthy Start EPIC Center

### SOCIETAL

Intersections of Determinants

Criminalization of Substance Use

Historical and Intergenerational Trauma

Economic Inequality

Structural Racism/Discrimination

Family Planning Resources/Education

Clinics/Hospitals/Healthcare

Jobs/Careers

Community Programs and Resources

Valuing the Next Generation

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Neighborhood

### INTERPERSONAL

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Strength and Hope

Culture, Identity, and Spirituality

Intimate Partner Relationships

Interpersonal Connections

Connection to Children

Intergenerational/Familial Substance Use

The social determinants of substance use during pregnancy shown in this infographic are informed by discussion groups and video interviews conducted in Tribal communities in North and South Dakota. Additional information is sourced from an article about Aboriginal women in Canada: Shahram, Sana Z. et al. "Mapping the Social Determinants of Substance Use for Pregnant-Involved Young Aboriginal Women." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being* 12.1 (2017): 1275155. PMC. Web. 22 May 2018.

# Social Determinants of Substance Use During Pregnancy in Tribal Communities



Where we live, work, play, and pray are significant to our well-being. These personal and environmental factors, known as social determinants of health, impact our behavior and health outcomes, including substance use during pregnancy.

In this infographic, we outline the social determinants of substance use during pregnancy that are found in several Tribal communities into the Social Ecological Model (SEM) levels of influence: individual, interpersonal, community and societal. The SEM is a theory-based framework ([adapted from CDC](#)) for understanding the multifaceted effects of social determinants. These determinants can negatively or positively influence substance use during pregnancy, which we have noted in each of the descriptions. In depicting the SEM levels of influence on substance use during pregnancy, we highlight the importance of broadening our focus on social determinants beyond the individual level. Community and Tribal leaders must work together to prevent substance use during pregnancy through offering creative and comprehensive solutions that address social determinants at the community and structural level.

## SOCIETAL

The societal level refers to the policies and systems, including those that have been influenced by historical contexts, that affect a person's likelihood to use substances during pregnancy. These include societal level norms, laws, policies, and structures.

- **Historical and Intergenerational Trauma:** Tribal communities have endured historical systems of oppression and genocide, which have had lasting effects. Historical trauma is defined by Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2003) as "Cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over one's lifespan and across generations, stem from massive group trauma experiences". The effects of this trauma can put affected participants at-risk for substance use if it is not understood and addressed.
- **Intersections of Determinants:** Tribal communities and people continue to face oppressive systemic policies and structures. These affect the health and well being of Tribal communities and individuals.
- **Structural Racism/Discrimination:** Tribal communities and people continue to face oppressive systemic policies and structures. These affect the health and well being of Tribal communities and individuals.
- **Criminalization of Substance Use:** Individuals who are using substances often fear the legal consequences of seeking prenatal care and/or treatment while they are pregnant. The legal requirements vary depending on location, but Tribal communities have multiple jurisdictions to consider.
- **Income Inequality:** Income inequality is the difference in economic well-being between individuals and communities in a society, and can be caused by structural and historical factors, such as racism, historical trauma, etc. Tribal communities and the individuals that live in them are at a high risk of poverty, and may lack basic necessities such as food, clothing, and safe and reliable housing. These factors of economic inequality can increase the risk of substance use.

## COMMUNITY

The community level refers to the community factors that affect a person's likelihood to use substances during pregnancy. These include the availability, quality, influence, support, and/or participation of institutions and resources within an individual's neighborhood or geographic area.

- **Transportation:** Adequate and reliable transportation services are fundamental to healthy individuals and communities. Transportation issues, such as lack of access to a vehicle, inadequate public transportation, poorly maintained roads, and lengthy times and long distances to reach services, can affect a person's access to health care and treatment and opportunities to connect with others.
- **Jobs/Careers:** Access to a job, safe working conditions, and a steady income can provide the benefits and stability critical to maintaining proper health and well-being. Lack of employment opportunities in communities negatively affects the community, its local economy, and the individuals that live there.
- **Community Programs and Resources:** Community programs and resources (such as WIC, Healthy Start, etc.) can be invaluable to a community, providing healthcare, education, social and other services to community members. Access to community programs such as Gathering of Native Americans (GONAs), resources, and supports can decrease community and individual risk of substance use.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/crccp/sem.htm>

## COMMUNITY (CONTINUED)

- **Extended Family Structure:** Tribal communities often have extended family structures where elders, adults, children and infants live, work and care for each other like a family. This extended structure can provide a positive and supportive environment for individuals to grow and thrive, and decrease risk for substance use.
- **Valuing Pregnancy and the Next Generation:** Tribal communities often put emphasis on the importance of children and the next generation. This value is shown through traditional beliefs, practices and norms related to healthy pregnancies, babies and children.
- **Community Activities:** Community gatherings, cultural activities and public spaces can have a large impact on the health and wellness of a community. These can include parks where children can play, traditional events, and other activities. When communities lack these events and spaces, individuals have fewer safe and healthy activities to engage in.
- **Rural Conditions:** Rural risk factors for health disparities can include geographic isolation, lack of infrastructure and transportation, and limited access to employment, quality and culturally competent healthcare, and public programs and services.
- **Clinics/Hospitals/Healthcare:** Access to healthcare services, such as clinics and hospitals, is important in maintaining both individual and community health. Individuals that live in communities that lack these services often times have poorer health, and are at a higher risk for substance use.
- **Traditional Wellness Practices:** Many Tribal communities have cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices that promote holistic wellness, such as traditional medicine, sweat lodges, and powwows. The availability of these practices can positively affect community and individual health and wellness, and decrease the risk of substance use.
- **Family Planning Resources/Education:** Reproductive health and family planning services provided in a culturally competent manner can give pregnant people and families agency in their family planning decisions. Providing these resources to communities and individuals allows them to choose when they start a family. Lack of these resources may increase the risk of substance use during pregnancy, as the rates of unwanted and unintended pregnancies are increased.



## INTERPERSONAL

The interpersonal level refers to the close relationships that the person has, including with friends, family, and intimate partners. These relationships affect a person's likelihood to use substances during pregnancy through social and cultural norms, support, and influence.

- **Connection to Children:** The connection between the parent and child/children was identified as a factor in substance use during pregnancy. This can include the baby to be born and/or other children that the person already has.
- **Interpersonal Connections:** The presence of positive social support and relationships is a factor in preventing or addressing substance use. This can include family, friend and/or intimate partner support.
- **Intergenerational/Familial Substance Use:** Substance use within the home or by family members, including among grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles or extended family, can affect substance use during pregnancy.
- **Intimate Partner Relationships:** Intimate partner relationships can affect substance use positively or negatively, depending on the relationship. Negative factors, such as intimate partner violence or substance use within relationships, can contribute to substance use, while close, nurturing, supportive and positive relationships can help combat substance use challenges.



## INDIVIDUAL

The individual level refers to a person's characteristics, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs that may affect their likelihood to use substances while pregnant.



- **Mental Health:** Mental health challenges can contribute to substance use. Positive mental wellness can help individuals to recover or abstain from using substances.
- **Strength and Hope:** Studies have shown that connection to Native identity, culture, and spirituality can have positive impacts on overall health and wellness, including substance use. This connection can include participating in such traditional activities as prayer, smudging and ceremonies.
- **Culture, Identity and Spirituality:** Feelings of self-empowerment, including strength and hope, were identified as factors that could prevent substance use during pregnancy. The lack of strength and hope are factors that can prevent substance use.