

Relocation



Relocation has been endemic to modern American Indian history

During the U.S. expansion of the 19th century, for instance, large numbers of American Indians were forced to relocate further west. In 1830 the Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. The Act authorized the President to conduct treaties to exchange native land east of the Mississippi River for lands west of the river. As a result, as many as 100,000 American Indians eventually relocated in the west.

Modern Relocation- Urbanization of Indians

Prior to the 1950s, most American Indians lived on reservations, in nearby rural towns, or in tribal jurisdictional areas such as Oklahoma. From 1948 and well into the 1980s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established a Relocation Program. This program was seen by many as an attempt to assimilate American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) into city life, thereby removing their practice of native culture and traditions as well as drastically undermining the reservation system.

The result was mass migration. Between 1953 and 1961 approximately 30.5% of the existing American Indians/Alaska Natives were relocated to cities, where they quickly joined the ranks of the urban poor. Today, the descendants of these Indians are still in the cities.



The Federal Trust Responsibility

The federal government's trust responsibility towards American Indians/Alaska Natives entails a legal obligation to look out for the welfare of tribal members. The trust responsibility was created by the many treaties entered into by the tribes and the U.S. government, and was for the large part guided by a paternalistic outlook on native life.

Over the years, the trust responsibility has been solidified in law and policy. Supply of and access to health care remains one of the central tenets of the trust relationship. Although the significant American Indian urban migration has changed the geographical infrastructure of the population, the federal trust responsibility remains unquestionable and has long been recognized by Congress.





“The responsibility for the provision of health care, arising from treaties and laws that recognize this responsibility as an exchange for the cession of millions of acres of Indian land does not end at the borders of an Indian reservation. Rather, government relocation policies which designated certain urban areas as relocation centers for Indians, have in many instances forced Indian people who did not [want] to leave their reservations to relocate in urban areas, and the responsibility for the provision of health care services follows them there.”

Senate Report 100-508, Indian Health Care Amendments of 1987,
Sept. 14, 1988, p. 25

The Effect/Influence of Historical Trauma on Health

The haunting memories of forced relocation and broken promises on the part of the federal government have affected the overall well being of the American Indian community. This has resulted in high rates of severe mental and physical health disparities.

Contemporary health and social issues include poverty, alcoholism, heart disease, diabetes, and unemployment.

For further information on Urban Indians and the Urban Indian Health Programs please visit NCUIH's webpage at: www.ncuih.org

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