



FACTS ABOUT NATIVE AMERICAN FUNDING

Let's talk about money. Many Americans believe that all Native Americans live for free and that they are taken care of by the government. In part, this stems from a belief in the treaties, although over 500 treaties were made and over 500 were broken. In part, it also stems from misinformation about funding sources, the use of funds allocated for Native America, and funding available to individuals. But let's take a closer look at what is true or false.

- T F Native Americans get free housing?
- T F Native Americans get government checks every month?
- T F Native American tribes don't help each other?
- T F Native American tribes are rich from casinos?
- T F Native Americans are lazy and don't want to work?
- T F Native Americans don't pay taxes?
- T F Native Americans get free education?

Free Housing

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is responsible for contracts, grants, or compacts to over 560 Federally-recognized tribes with nearly 2 million tribal members (including Alaska Natives). While the last 30 years have placed a greater emphasis on self-governance and self-determination for the tribes, Indian Affairs is still responsible for a broad spectrum of services, including some housing improvement, social services, job training, and an education "system" (meaning schools, tribal colleges, dorms, and repairs). The BIA is also responsible for a host of other services (land management, law enforcement, tribal courts, roads and bridges, dams, and irrigation systems). The BIA funding goes to these kinds of services to help improve the quality of life for tribal members. The BIA does not disburse cash to individuals.

The BIA has been stated to be the least effective government agency and the most mismanaged. Apparently, about 45% of BIA funding goes to operate 260+ BIA offices located on reservations and throughout the country. About 55% of BIA funding is directly used in behalf of tribes and tribal organizations, much of which takes the form of the services noted above. Outside of these contracts, it is said that 10 to 15 percent of BIA spending is thought to actually reach the tribes, the portion they can self-determine how to use. This, coupled with a lack of jobs and unemployment reaching as high as 85%, mean that tribal lists for housing needs are long, the waits for tribal housing are long, and there is a housing crisis in Indian country. The BIA has helped families with housing, and it is common for those families to make housing payments to the BIA. HUD (Housing and Urban Development) has also funded some housing and housing repairs. Still, according to the National American Indian Housing Council, some 90,000 American Indian families are homeless or under-housed, and 40% of on-reservation housing is considered inadequate.

Government Checks

Contrary to what many Americans believe, the Government does not mail out basic assistance checks to people just because they are Native American. Many Native Americans are veterans or disabled or both, and they receive V.A. or disability checks from the government. Other Native Americans receive social security income from years of working on the railroad, as artists and educators, in tribal jobs, or in general labor. In NRC's service area, the main forms of governmental aid seem to be energy assistance

and food commodities, although many Elders say it is hard for them to wade through the line to receive the commodities. TANF is available for single mothers but often requires them to volunteer for 40 hours a week in a supervised program. Other social programs such as WIC and Food Stamps are available on the reservations. These are the same programs are available to all Americans, and allocations are made based on demonstrated need.

Under the treaties, some government payments do get disbursed directly to the tribes. The funds are used for housing, social programs, energy assistance, health care, and other basic needs to serve their people. The monies allocated by the government are split among more than 560 tribes. The fact that these monies are insufficient to meet the need is readily apparent online and in the papers.

Tribes Helping Tribes

Tribes have no more obligations to help one another than any nation has to help another. Some tribes that are faring well do assist tribes that are struggling. This is well reported, and it's nice when it happens.

Casino-Rich Tribes

When unused casino profits are evenly split among tribal members and distributed to them for their individual use, this is called a payout. Having a casino, however, does not automatically make a tribe rich or mean that its tribal members receive casino payouts. The National Indian Gaming Association reports 562 tribes in the U.S. Only 223 of them have casinos, and of those, only 73 give per capita payouts. In fact, the research shows that casinos need to be within 50 miles of a metro area (with 10,000 or more residents) to be highly profitable. In our experience, the rural casinos do not have enough traffic to generate large profits — they do create a few tribal jobs. Some of the tribes with profitable casinos do help other tribes, but even this is regulated by the government.

Native Americans and Work

The existence of available jobs on the reservations is low, forcing unemployment of 35% to 85% (varies by reservation). At the same time, many Native Americans who do work full-time (on or off of the reservation) still fall below poverty level. It is not for lack of exuberance or effort on the part of Native Americans that these conditions arise. Many of the hardest working folks we know are Native American. Rather, big business is reluctant to invest in small, remote, and rugged reservation communities, which would help create jobs. Most jobs on the reservations are tribal, government, or state jobs – with restrictive budgets and historic budget cuts that limit opportunities for growth. A history of oppression also limits the possibilities that reservations can envision for themselves.

Native Americans and Taxes

Like All Americans, Native Americans pay federal income tax on any money they earn, including casino earnings. They do not pay state tax for income earned within reservation boundaries.

Native Americans and Education

Under the treaties, an education was promised to all Native Americans. Budget cut after budget cut has limited that possibility. Today, when even more Native American students hope to go to college, the competition for available scholarships is fierce, and Native American students are half as likely as non-Natives to have a college degree in this country.

We hope these facts help dispel the beliefs that lead Americans to think Native Americans live for free. We hope they also shed more light on the true meaning behind our Reservation Facts in the Press Room.

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