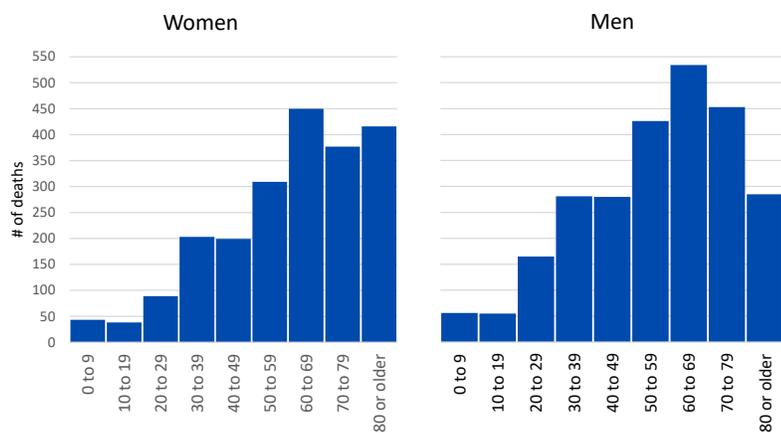


Common Causes of Death among American Indian people in Montana

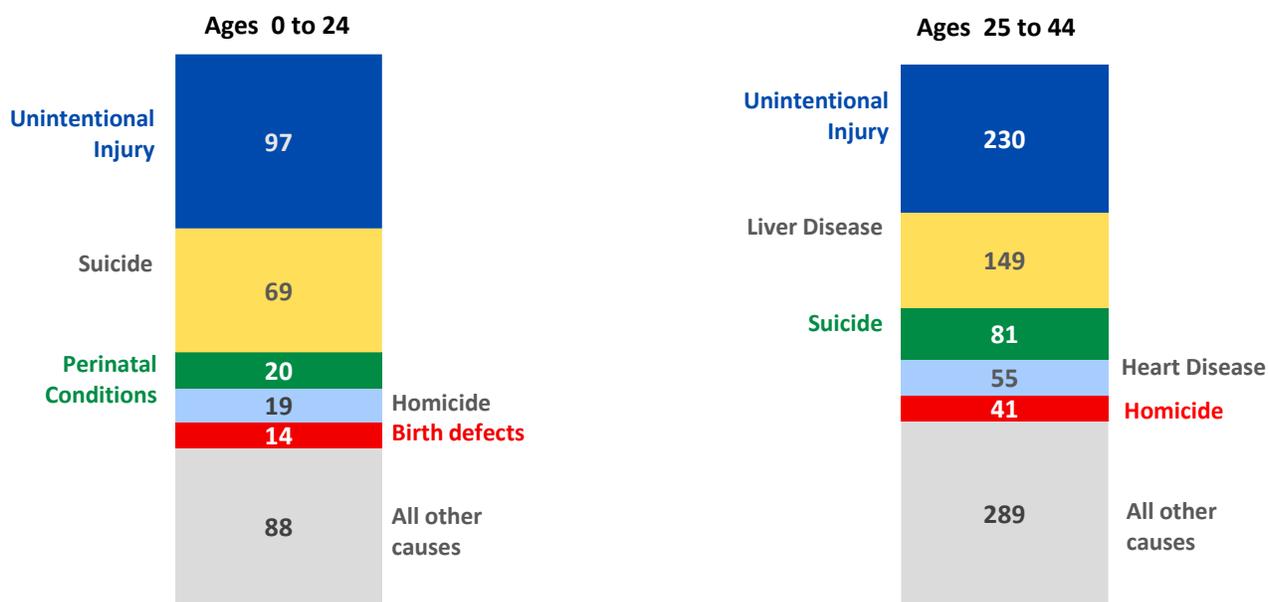


Age at Death among American Indian (AI) Montanans, 2019 to 2023¹



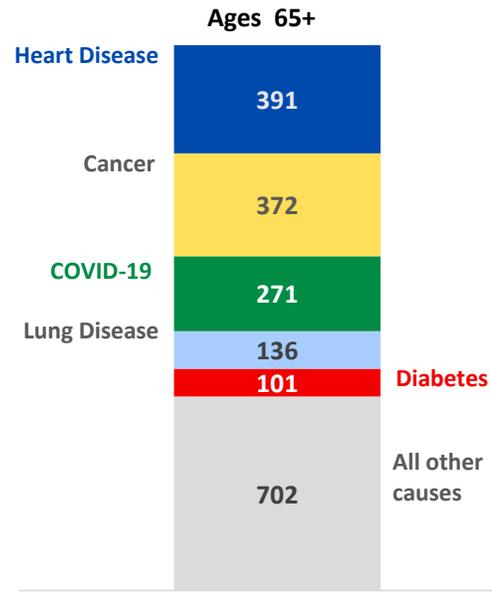
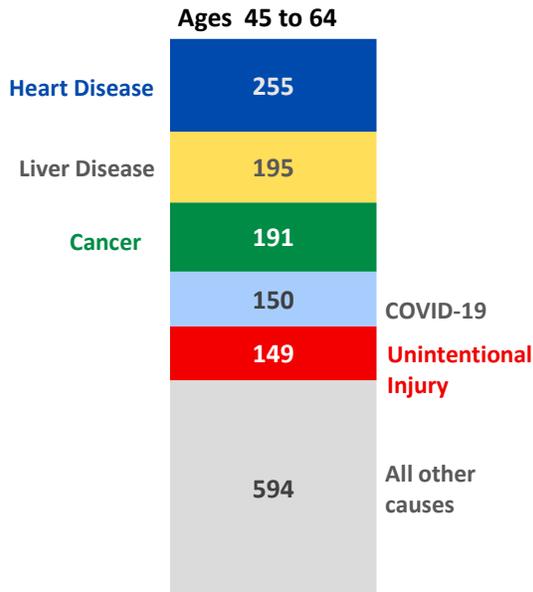
- There were **4,659** deaths among AI Montanans from 2019 to 2023 for an average of about **932 deaths each year**.
- The median age at death was **60 among AI men** and **63 among AI women**. That is 15 years younger than non-AI men and 18 years younger than non-AI women in Montana.
- Most deaths occurred between ages 60 and 69 among both men and women.

Most Common Causes of Death among AI Montanans by Age at Death, 2019 to 2023¹



- There were **307** deaths among AI youth aged 0 to 24 years old from 2019 to 2023.
- About **61 deaths each year**
- Unintentional injury and suicide account for more than half of deaths among AI youth in Montana.
- Perinatal conditions were the third most common cause of death and account for most infant deaths. They include conditions that arise anytime from 22 weeks gestation to 7 days after birth. The most common perinatal conditions are related to birth trauma and consequences of preterm birth.
- There were **845** deaths among AI young adults aged 25 to 44 years old from 2019 to 2023.
- About **169 deaths each year**
- Unintentional injury was still the most common cause of death among young adults but suicide dropped to the 3rd most common cause of death.
- Chronic liver disease is the second most common cause of death among AI young adults.
- Heart disease is the fourth most common cause of death among young adults.



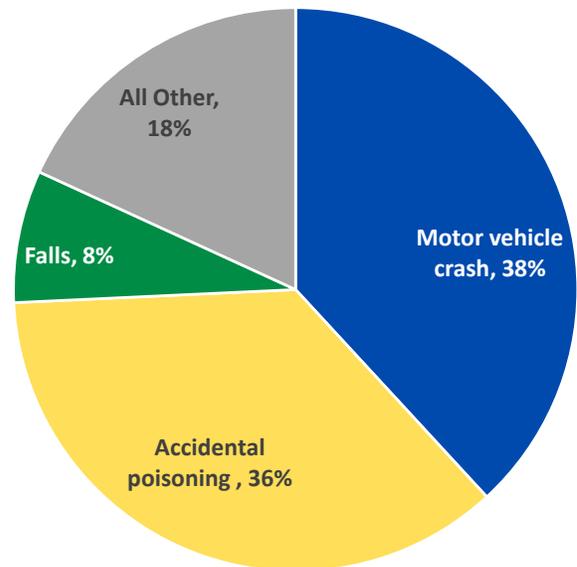


- There were **1,534** deaths among AI middle aged adults, aged 45 to 64 years old from 2019 to 2023.
- About **307 deaths each year**
- Chronic conditions: including heart disease, chronic liver disease, and cancer account for almost half of death among middle aged AI adults.
- COVID-19 was the forth most common cause of death.

- There were **1,973** deaths among AI elders aged 65 years or old from 2019 to 2023.
- About **395 deaths each year**
- Chronic conditions: including heart disease, cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease, and diabetes, account for more than half of death among AI elders.
- COVID-19 was the third most common cause of death.

Causes of Unintentional Injury Deaths¹

- Unintentional injury is one of the 5 most common causes of death for all age groups less than 65.
- There were **540** unintentional injury deaths among AI Montanans of all ages, about **108 each year**.
- Motor vehicle crashes (MVC) where the leading cause of injury deaths and accounted for 38% of unintentional injury deaths.
- Poisoning was the second most common cause of unintentional injury deaths with nearly all poisonings being caused by drug or alcohol overdoses.



Common contributing factors to AI MVC deaths²

- **Pedestrians**
Twice as many AI people killed in a MVC were pedestrians compared to all Montanans killed in MVC (13% vs 8%)
- **Young Drivers**
About 1 in 4 (26%) AI people killed in an MVC were killed in a crash with a young driver (aged 15 to 20)
- **Alcohol-impaired drivers**
56% of AI people killed in a MVC were killed in a crash that involved an intoxicated driver (BAC of .08+ g/dL)

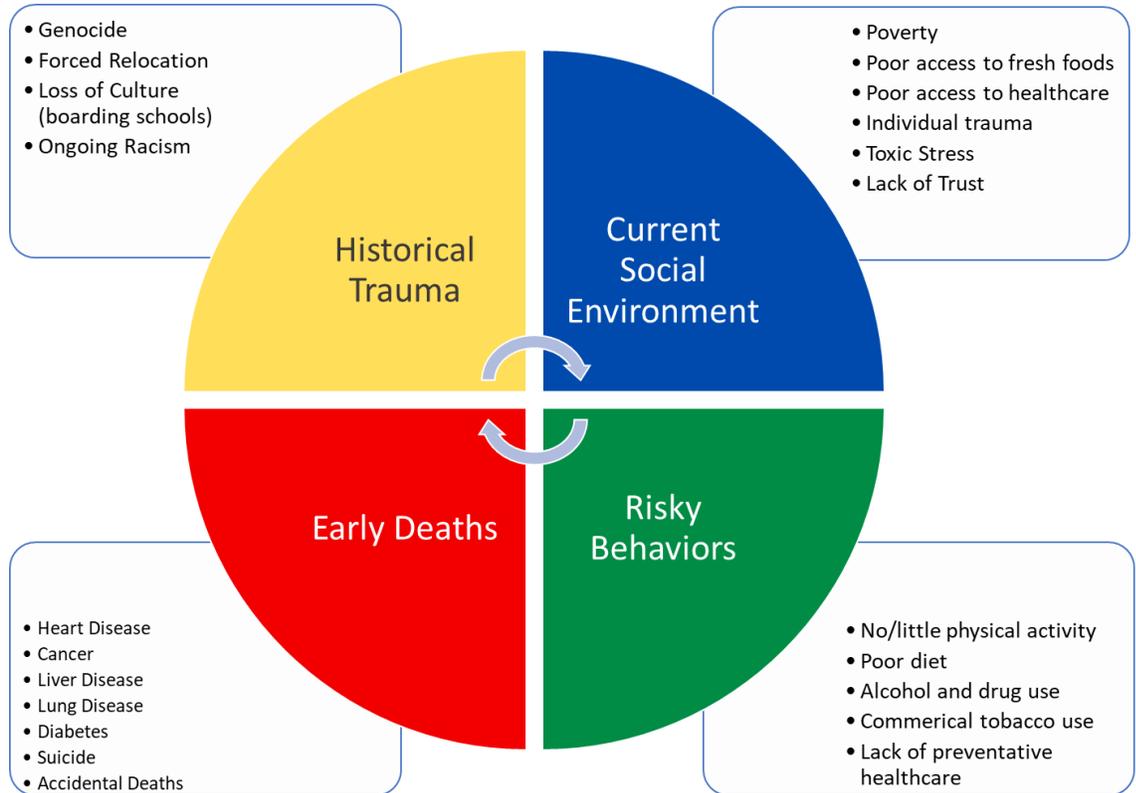
Limitations

Cause of death is based on reported cause from either the attending healthcare provider or the county coroner. Not all deaths have further testing or examination, such as autopsy, to confirm cause of death. Race of the decedent should be reported by next of kin but may be misclassified by the death reporter when family is not available. Deaths counted in this report are based on reporting American Indian race either alone or in combination with another race and living in Montana at the time of death.



Preventing Deaths Among AI Montanans by Addressing the Foundations of Health Disparities³

The most common causes of death in all age groups are primarily caused by risk behaviors that can be changed: commercial tobacco use, alcohol use, substance use disorder, poor diet, little or no physical activity, and lack of preventive healthcare such as: vaccines, cancer screening, or treating high blood pressure. **Changing these risky behaviors requires correcting the current social environment and acknowledging the historical trauma that lead to it.**



3 Actions to Support American Indian Communities

1) Protect children and integrate traditional tribal practices into everything we do. This will improve their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health for their whole life.

45% of AI adults in Montana reported high HOPE (health outcomes from positive experiences), often or always: feeling safe, feeling like they belong at school, having support from family and friends, and participating in community traditions.⁴

52% of AI adults reported less than 4 adverse childhood experiences (ACE): living with someone with mental health or substance abuse problems, living with someone who was incarcerated, having parents who were divorced or separated, witnessing domestic violence, and experiencing physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.⁴

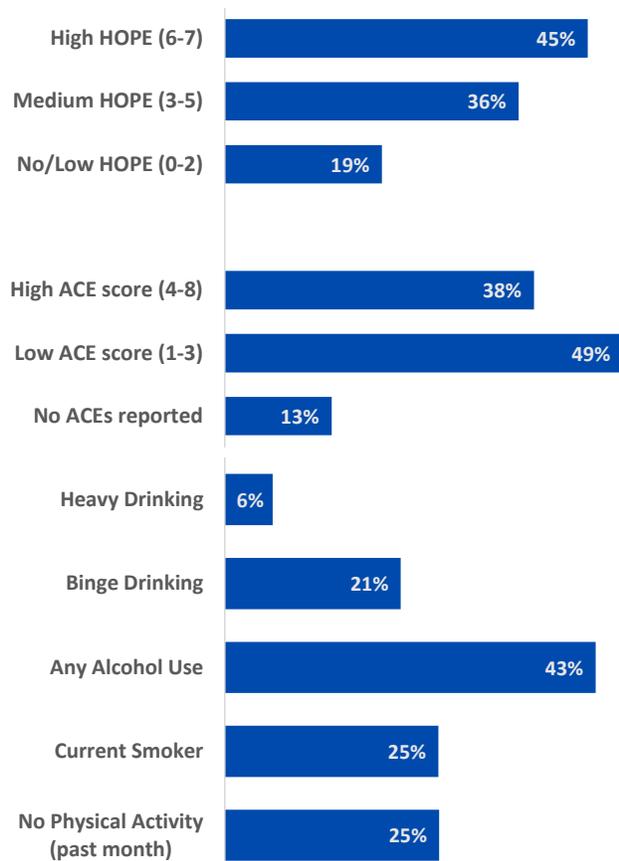
2) Reduce use of alcohol and commercial tobacco products.

21% of AI adults reported binge drinking in the past month.⁴

25% of AI adults reported currently smoking cigarettes.⁴

3) Promote healthy lifestyles through access to fresh whole foods and safe physical activity.

25% of AI adults reporting no physical activity in the past month.⁴



Binge drinking is 4+ drinks for women and 5+ drinks for men on one occasion. Heavy drinking is an average of 8+drinks for women and 15+drinks for men in a week.



References

- 1) Montana Department of Health and Human Services, Montana Office of Vital Statistics, death data 2019 to 2023.
- 2) National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Fatality Analysis Reporting System, 2019 to 2023. Accessed at <https://cdan.dot.gov/query> in May 2025.
- 3) Warne, D., & Lajimodiere, D. (2015). American Indian health disparities: Psychosocial influences. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 9(10), 567-579.
- 4) Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, Montana Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), data from 2019, 2020, and 2023.

