

FOREWORD

February 2020 our lives changed dramatically. The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc with our personal worlds. Over the ensuing years, false starts and stops, occasioned by newly emerging variants of the SARS virus, tempered our hopes for its abatement and led to lingering uncertainties. The same proved to be true of our professional work, here research on the health of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples. Ongoing studies initially ground to a halt. Partner communities struggled to ensure their survival; research became seen as less significant except as it shed light on COVID-19 risk, exposure, mitigation, testing, and eventually vaccine effectiveness. Prospective study participants declined recruitment for fear of exposure to the virus; programs and communities closed their doors to protect members. Universities suspended research for similar reasons, to protect participants and staff. We agonized how to retain critical staff and remain ready to restart this work. Sponsors debated approaches to ameliorating the consequences for the studies they supported; budgetary concerns threatened entire programs of research. The science and its implementation were thrown into turmoil as investigators wrestled with if they could continue their studies, what compromises would be required, and how to proceed, if possible.

But, just as the general response to the pandemic reminded us of the strengths in our communities, the resilience of our traditions, and the innovativeness of humankind, so too the creativity of investigators in collaboration with Native communities shone through in answering the challenges to their research. Deeply embedded in these circumstances, I came to appreciate how thoughtfully and nimbly colleagues and their partners pivoted to address the often daunting problems posed by the pandemic. Thus, when Drs. Elliot and Around Him approached us to assemble a special issue of the Journal that speaks to this task, I could not have been more pleased. The authors and they offer timely insights into the problems faced, the solutions that surfaced, and the strategies developed and carried out to advance their work. The lessons learned are instructive and testify to the possibilities when scientists and community join in common cause. Thank you!

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