

# **Collaboration as a Catalyst for Change: Reducing Commercial Tobacco Use Among American Indian Youth Through Dedication to Community, Youth-Led Interventions, and Tradition**

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## **Abstract**

*American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth have the highest commercial tobacco smoking rate of any group in the United States. Unified by the aim to reduce AI/AN youth commercial tobacco use, six separately funded tobacco prevention programs serving Southern California tribes formed the Southern California Tribal Tobacco Coalition (SCTTC). Since joining forces, the SCTTC has hosted various activities and events that encourage community involvement, youth leadership, and commitment to tradition. The SCTTC's pinnacle event, the annual Inter-Tribal Tobacco Prevention Youth Summit, is an inspiring example of the organization's collaborative efforts, as it features youth- and elder-led activities and presentations by local tribal members. These community events have grown in participation from year to year and are widely supported by the surrounding AI/AN communities. This paper includes narratives from several coalition members, including youth activity organizers, that showcase the power of collaboration through the SCTTC's partnership and its success to date. The purpose of this paper is to share the SCTTC's positive impact in Southern California tribes and encourage similar programs across the nation to amplify their program impacts by forming a coalition of their own and embracing youth-led interventions.*

## INTRODUCTION

Despite overall reductions in smoking in California, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people smoke more frequently than other population groups (Satter et al., 2012), and more AI/AN youth report commercial tobacco use than any other group (Vuong et al., 2019). For AI/AN and other Indigenous people, higher rates of smoking are directly related to the impacts of colonization on all aspects of life (Nez Henderson et al., 2022). Colonization impacts on California Natives intensified during the Spanish Mission period, escalated as a result of the “Gold Rush,” and continued through the Indian boarding school era; however, California tribes have worked hard to defend, reclaim, and strengthen their lands, languages, and cultures (Akins & Bauer, 2021). The majority of California AI/AN people who smoke begin to do so in early adolescence (Hodge & Nandy, 2011; Hodge, 2001); therefore, youth smoking prevention is a top priority for tribal tobacco programs. Tobacco prevention programs designed to be “universally” effective have been found to lack effects for Indigenous peoples, while better responses are shown for programs that are designed and directed by and for Indigenous peoples (Boudreau et al., 2016; Chamberlain et al., 2017; Hodge & Nandy, 2011; Lee et al., 2020; Maddox, Bovill, et al., 2022). Comprehensive, multi-level smoking interventions for AI/AN people are rare, and tribal health organizations may be limited in their ability to offer comprehensive programs and services.

Habitual and heavy smoking are attributed to a number of factors interacting at multiple levels, including psycho-behavioral traits (e.g., impulsivity), physical characteristics (e.g., dependence), family and peer contexts (e.g., acceptability and normativity of smoking), and social-political environments (e.g., physical and economic availability of commercial tobacco products). Therefore, comprehensive tobacco control programs, such as those implemented in the state of California, that combine health education, denormalization, taxes, and sales restrictions (Messer et al., 2007), as well as cessation services that offer brief interventions, counseling, and pharmacotherapy, are most effective in reducing rates of smoking at population levels (Raw et al., 2002). Exposure to California’s comprehensive tobacco program was associated with home smoking bans, which were in turn associated with better cessation outcomes among people who smoked (Norman et al., 2000).

In this paper we describe how separately funded tribal organizations in Southern California successfully partnered to collectively address many aspects of tobacco use to maximize their prevention work with AI/AN youth. Tribes and tribal entities were invited to compete for state

tobacco grants. The competitive funding structure represented a potential challenge to the collaborative way of life that has supported and sustained the tribes, and no single grant was sufficient for a comprehensive, Indigenous-led intervention. We describe how the tribal grantees have creatively combined resources to amplify program impacts in seeking to reduce harms related to commercial tobacco (mass-produced and mass-marketed) and to honor ceremonial tobacco (grown or harvested and used by AI/AN people for ceremonial or medicinal purposes). Our hope is to encourage similar tribal programs across the nation to form a coalition of their own to best support their community.

### **Southern California Tribes**

Tribes of Southern California have thrived on the coasts, mountains, valleys, and deserts for millennia (Heizer, 1978; Heizer & Elsasser, 1980; Sparkman, 1908). Since pre-colonial times, the tribes have relied on inter-tribal connections based on family and mutual aid to maintain social and customary relationships (Margolin, 1993; Phillips, 2014). Inter-tribal socialization was at the heart of the community that tied the strands of their traditional territories together (Bean, 1976). Today, the many different bands spread across Southern California possess a deep sense of community. In one way or another, there is a sense that everybody knows everybody through family or friend connections. It is pertinent that each young person knows where they come from and to whom they are related, so as to have that large network of connection, resources, and family throughout their life. Knowledge and resources are pulled together in this fashion of community living, which has protected the people from utter extermination under historic and on-going colonization (Lightfoot et al., 2013).

Today, these tribes exist as sovereign nations with working governments that orchestrate the unique intricacies and daily operations of their peoples. Between culture, family ties, and schools, individuals embrace their close-knit community in many ways. An excellent example of this is the ability to hold community gatherings. When one tribe holds an event, it is often advertised to other tribes in the surrounding area. A more formal example of collaboration between tribes is the Tribal Chairpersons Association. Just like any other community, there are challenges pertaining to health that affect the wellbeing of the people, wildlife, and the environment. Among these challenges are the negative health effects of commercial tobacco use on the reservations. Not only are people who smoke negatively affecting their health, use of commercial tobacco products also endangers the health of the people, wildlife, and natural public spaces around them. Recently,

several tribes in San Diego County, along with more tribes throughout the state of California, are taking the initiative to actively combat the tobacco industry and their negative impacts on these communities, their people, and land. Much of this is possible through sources of funding coming directly from the state.

### **State Tobacco Funds**

The California Tobacco Tax and Health Protection Act (Proposition 99) taxed tobacco products \$0.25 per pack (or equivalent for other tobacco products) and dedicates a portion of the revenues from this tax to support California's tobacco control efforts. Specifically, the Act provides grant funds to programs aiming to reduce smoking, provide health care services to those in need, support tobacco-related research, and resource programs for the environment. In 2016 voters approved Proposition 56 which imposed an additional \$2.00/per pack or equivalent tax on commercial tobacco products, with revenues again dedicated to tobacco control. There are three tobacco control funding streams:

- The *California Tobacco Control Program (CTCP)* through the California Department of Public Health strives to keep tobacco out of the hands of youth, help users quit, and create tobacco-free environments. Funds from this program had been typically granted to county health departments. Due to extensive feedback from tribal community stakeholders, CTCP created a separate program to grant funds directly to tribes. The *California Tribal Grants to Reduce Tobacco-Related Disparities* aims to address commercial tobacco-related disparities affecting the American Indian population by directly funding and assisting California Tribal Governments and Tribal Government Agencies (LA n Sync, 2020).
- The University Office of the President's *Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program (TRDRP)* funds research towards reducing commercial tobacco-use and tobacco-related diseases and informs public policy to benefit California's diverse populations (TRDRP, 2023).
- *Tobacco-Use Prevention Education (TUPE)* funds a California Department of Education program for youth that provides tobacco-specific instruction, reinforcement activities, special events, and intervention and cessation programs for students (TUPE, 2023).

These three funding streams support direct-to-tribe funding which allows control of programs and resources to the tribes who know best what their members need and want.

### METHODS

In partnership with a nonprofit public health research institute, a tribal health clinic serving a consortium of nine Southern California tribes applied for and was awarded funds under the TRDRP research award mechanism and proposed to include a Youth Advisory Council. Around the same time, four of these nine tribes applied for and were awarded California Tribal Tobacco Grants, all focusing on youth outreach and including youth groups. In addition, a youth education program operated by one of the nine tribes applied for and was awarded funds through the TUPE program.

Acknowledging the similarities of these programs, although via different funding streams, what started as conversations evolved into committed collaboration throughout the entirety of the programs. The connection that unifies these funded tribal grant programs is the commitment to tobacco prevention, especially in youth populations. Given that all programs had the same goal, a coalition was formed: the Southern California Tribal Tobacco Coalition (SCTTC). Coalition members serve as a support team, focusing on combined efforts to create a larger impact. The SCTCC established monthly meetings to review grant progress, share and discuss events and recruitment strategies, and help each other reach their respective goals and objectives. Just as the tribes work together in many other domains of life, the SCTTC works collaboratively to hold community activities and events for Southern California tribes.

Following wise and ethical practices in Indigenous tobacco research (Maddox et al., 2023), the authors represent coalition members and research partners, including members of tribal youth advisory groups. To report on this collective work, we first created a conference presentation, which was approved by all coalition members. We then organized ourselves into a writing team, discussed reporting goals, reviewed relevant literature and available data, and drafted a manuscript using the conference presentation as a framework. We met every other week intensively for several months to review and refine drafts. A final draft was reviewed and approved by the coalition members and by the Tribal Institutional Review Board overseeing the TRDRP-funded research study.

## RESULTS

As a result of joining together, the tribal communities benefit by the collective activities offered by each of the grantees. Together, their activities form a comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program for the nine tribes. The program elements include the following key areas.

### **Cultural or Ceremonial Tobacco**

Native people have had a spiritual and medicinal connection to tobacco since the beginning. For some, it is believed to be one of the first people who did its part in uplifting the tribe to what it is today. Native people have always known the many health benefits of tobacco when used as a remedy (Margalit et al., 2013). Furthermore, the spirituality of the plant dives even deeper, and the uses for ceremony and kinship are widespread among many tribal communities on Turtle Island, including California Natives (Cuthrell et al., 2016; Harrington, 1932; Lightfoot & Parrish, 2009). Even then, each tribe has their own unique reasons for the use of traditional Native tobacco (Boudreau et al., 2016; Struthers & Hodge, 2004). All of this goes to why the coalition members are committed to teaching youth this knowledge so as to instill inspiration for them to continue seeking that knowledge within their own communities. The education grantee, in particular, has focused on youth-centered and youth-led learning about the tobacco plant: the local varieties found in Southern California; the ceremonial, cultural, and medicinal uses of the plant by California Natives; and the intertwined histories of colonization on Turtle Island and the commercialization of the tobacco plant.

### **Commercial Tobacco Use Among AI/AN Youth and Teens**

United States youth and teens face several factors known to lead to commercial tobacco use, such as youth-targeted tobacco marketing campaigns (Hébert et al., 2017; Stanley et al., 2022) and peer influences (Kobus, 2003). Through advertisements, social media, and peer groups, youth and teens are increasingly susceptible to the idea of “everyone else is doing it,” adding additional stress to start using commercial tobacco at a young age. AI/AN youth and teens encounter additional factors that lead to commercial tobacco use. The tobacco industry exploits AI/AN tradition and ceremonial tobacco, using AI/AN imagery and symbolism to market their products (Carroll et al., 2020; D’Silva et al., 2018; Maddox, Kennedy, et al., 2022). Although California voters have approved higher taxes on commercial tobacco products, these products are nevertheless readily available in convenience and other small stores on and near tribal lands (Begay

et al., 2020; Smiley et al., 2020). The education grant has prioritized combatting the marketing of tobacco products to youth, including social media and other youth-specific forms of marketing. By educating youth on misleading marketing tactics employed by the tobacco industry, they become better equipped to resist these marketing efforts. The clinic-based research grantee has been working with local tribal leaders to sign tribal resolutions in support of a Reward and Reminder program which aims to enhance compliance with underage tobacco sales restrictions in stores that sell these products on and near tribal lands.

### **Impacts of Adult Smoking on Youth**

Given high rates of commercial tobacco use among AI/AN adults, AI/AN youth and teens are more likely to be exposed to commercial tobacco use by adult family members than other youth. Family member tobacco use may signal to youth that smoking is acceptable and normal (Kegler et al., 2000), as well as provide access to tobacco products in the home. The tribal health clinic has been developing the capacity of its staff to provide smoking cessation services, including expanded screening and referrals to treatment for commercial tobacco use in all clinics (e.g., dental, primary care). The aim of this adult cessation program is two-fold: to improve the lives of adult community members and to support denormalization of tobacco product use for youth. Coalition members refer and recommend this clinical service to community members in their outreach materials. Given high rates of adult smoking, AI/AN youth are also more likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke in their homes. Some studies have found high support for smokefree home policies among AI/AN people (Berg et al., 2012; Kegler et al., 2019), while a study of attitudes among AI/AN people in California showed little or no support for such policies (Soto et al., 2022). The tribal tobacco grantees have all included smokefree home goals in their workplans, including voluntary smokefree home pledges for tribal members and their families to adopt.

### **Commercial Tobacco Waste Clean-Ups**

Tobacco waste products—cigarette butts, wrappers, and packages—are the most common form of litter in coastal and urban areas (Novotny & Slaughter, 2014). Tobacco waste products include highly toxic chemicals which can leach into the environment, poisoning water and earth, as well as the plants and animals that exist there (Novotny & Slaughter, 2014; World Health Organization, 2017). Caring for the earth and the lands that the AI/AN community calls home, members of the coalition found it necessary to pay respect by clearing up toxic commercial tobacco

products littering it. Some of the first SCTTC collective activities were co-organized and co-sponsored commercial tobacco product clean-ups at community facilities on tribal lands. At the first Summit, the SCTTC organized a commercial tobacco waste clean-up. This effort not only emphasized the environmental dangers of commercial tobacco waste but allowed attendees to honor tribal lands. This tobacco waste clean-up covered over 30,000 square feet. A total of 483 various tobacco waste products were collected and appropriately disposed of or recycled. This demonstrated to youth the palpable impacts of commercial tobacco waste and steps to reduce its environmental harms.

### **Collective Efforts: Annual Inter-Tribal Tobacco Prevention Youth Summits**

The 2021 Summit was organized as a daylong event, hosted by a participating tribe outdoors on their land. A total of 67 people attended, including youth, parents, project staff, and community elders. Convening on tribal land contributed to the importance of the presentations and activities based on the sacredness of traditional plants and their differences with commercial tobacco. Practicing culture where culture was born enabled youth to understand that Native people and culture is still very much alive and local to where they live. With this understanding, youth were able to more efficiently absorb the knowledge provided by tribal leaders, elders, and culture bearers in higher education and within their communities. Presentations ranged from the traditional uses of plants native to Southern California to the chemical breakdowns of what is contained in cigarettes and vaping products. Also, alarming statistics of tobacco and nicotine use within youth communities was mentioned to acknowledge the importance of having the Summit. A goal of the Summit was to create a sense of understanding that tribes are united knowing the importance of traditional plants, making the harms of commercial tobacco more discernible for youth.

The 2022 Summit was again organized as a daylong event, hosted by another of the participating tribes and, again, outdoors on tribal land. A total of 96 people attended, including youth, parents, project staff, community elders, and staff from affiliated agencies and programs. Like the first annual Summit, the focus was to create a more significant cultural impact on youth, hence it being hosted on tribal land. The day started early with a 5K Run and Walk, which also promoted physical activity and togetherness. Afterwards, the space was opened with a blessing. The opening prayer was meant to acknowledge ancestors, elders, and youth that are continuing to uphold Native traditions. Youth groups that were participating then presented unique perspectives, each about commercial tobacco and how it relates to bodily harm, addiction, or environmental

damage. This permitted those in attendance to see the more encompassing dangers of commercial tobacco and that it affects more than just the body. The Summit also included Bird Singers (California Native traditional singing group), who sang and offered an opportunity to build unity and support amongst the community for those participating in tobacco prevention as well as those in attendance going through their own tobacco cessation journeys. Lessons about traditional and commercial tobacco were beautifully told by groups of youth themselves, elevating the presentations to a more personable and impactful statement. These teachings were also meant to empower all of the youth, so they know they are sacred, and they are the bearers of the great people whose knowledge and connection to the Earth is immeasurable.

Through both collaboration and diligent individual work, each youth coalition equally contributed to the planning of the Inter-Tribal Tobacco Prevention Youth Summit; work and ideas were equally spread across the coalitions, preventing one coalition from taking on all of the work. Examples of the SCTTC collaboration efforts are listed below:

- Logo design and theme: The SCTTC logo represents tribal lands and respect to cultural tobacco ways. A theme for each Summit was decided. The theme of the 2021 Summit was “Creator - Customs - Culture.” The theme of the 2022 Summit was “Native Tradition is Wellness.”
- T-shirts: Each program was responsible for selecting and purchasing shirts for their own tribal members. Each program selected a unique color, creating a mosaic of shirt colors worn on the day of the Summit.
- Giveaways: Each coalition member contributed one or more items to the youth giveaway backpacks. Youth participants received promotional flyers, wristbands, water bottles, resource materials, and more.
- Tabling health topics: Coalition members invited other organizations to table and promote resources. Allied organizations also offered information on a wide variety of topics. During Summit breaks and lunch, youth participants explored tabling attractions and received additional giveaways. This example of collaboration provided youth with a well-rounded and informative Summit experience.
- Raffle items: Youth participants were automatically entered into a raffle. From gift cards to local handmade items, each coalition contributed items to be raffled.

- Food: At the first annual Summit, one coalition partner provided food while other coalition partners helped serve and clean up. At the second annual Summit, the host coalition partner donated supplies and local firefighters grilled burgers, while other coalition partners helped serve and clean up.

### **Content of Summit Activities and Presentations' Focus on Youth and Tobacco**

Activities, presentations, and keynote speakers from the 2021 Summit and the 2022 Summit are listed in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively. We provide some detailed examples of activities organized by coalition members.

#### *Refusal Skills Activity*

One presentation that looked to promote conversation among Native youth across tribes was focused on strategies on how to refuse commercial tobacco. Refusal strategies are methods to say “no” to something when put in a situation where peer pressure can affect decision-making (Elder et al., 1993; Katz et al., 1989). These strategies are often verbal but involve important body language to effectively refuse any given thing. Part of refusing something is being able to have a firm tone of voice, a reason to refuse, and a rejection of the offer that is clear (Katz et al., 1989). Refusal strategies do more than saying “no,” as suggestions for alternative activities or withdrawal from the subject can be ways to soundly refuse something as well (Elder et al., 1993). During the presentation at the Summit, youth leaders acted out different scenarios where one could refuse tobacco, providing the opportunity for a refusal strategy for each one to be explained to youth. This process was enhanced by a mnemonic called STARS, which was essential to fostering better memory and use of the strategies among youth. The STARS mnemonic was created prior to the Summit and was specifically tailored to AI/AN youth. The mnemonic represented five key scenarios as follows:

1. Say “no”
2. Tell a joke
3. Avoid the conversation
4. Remind others of harms
5. Share other plans

After the presentation was over, youth were equipped with the mnemonic to remember and given a chance to practice refusal strategies themselves. In addition to the presentation, organizers of this activity prepared cards with scenarios for youth to be able to refuse tobacco using the strategies they learned. Youth paired up with partners and practiced back and forth, going beyond just listening to actually practicing the strategies and interacting with one another in realistic situations. The creation and presentation of these strategies by young adults within the local California Native community proved essential, as there was positive feedback from attending youth via pre- and post-program surveys.

### *Modern Marketing Presentation*

In preparation for the Youth Summit, staff members of one of the tribal tobacco programs were motivated to talk about the ways in which tobacco and vaping companies market their products online and on social media, places where youth are largely present and active. This came after a real-life experience in which a young family member of the staff saw an ad on the popular platform Instagram promoting use of a melatonin vape for its purported ability to help those who have a hard time falling asleep. This was just one instance of a young person seeing such content online, but it was enough to make it clear that it is ubiquitously being exerted onto the youth. A presentation was made to list some of those marketing tactics and what it could look like online. Some of the topics that were mentioned in the presentation were:

- Greenwashing: a devious tactic used by some large companies to appear environmentally conscious when in reality their production further pollutes the environment (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Houghton et al., 2018).
- Melatonin vapes: a device purported to help with insomnia, but in a way that could be damaging to the lungs, as melatonin is normally ingested (King, 2020).
- Social media influencers and brand deals involved in advertising vaping and smoke devices, especially flavored ones, to their mostly young audiences (Kong et al., 2019; Vassey et al., 2022).

Other brief topics included emerging health consequences of tobacco use, what tobacco products are and are not approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and the misleading information about vapes on product websites. Gladly, much of the audience seemed to be engaged, especially regarding the topics about which they didn't know much previously.

**Table 1**  
**Youth Summit 2021 activities**

<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<b>Coalition Member #1 Youth Advisory Council</b>	Ice breaker	◆ Prepare participants for the day through activities to increase engagement and comfortability with other participants	◆ Youth were more engaged during other coalitions' presentations
<b>TUPE</b>	Guest speaker	◆ Educate participants about medicinal plants	◆ Traditional forms of plant healing and ceremony
<b>Elder of Coalition #2</b>	Cultural activity	◆ Share the cultural importance of traditional medicine pouches	◆ Youth created their own medicine pouch
<b>Coalition Member #3</b>	Tobacco waste pick-up	◆ Educate youth and volunteers on what tobacco waste products look like ◆ Demonstrate safe pick-up procedures and conduct waste pick up	◆ Covered 30,146 square feet ◆ Found 483 various tobacco waste products
<b>Coalition Member #4 Youth Program</b>	Youth skit	◆ Inform participants about the dangers of smoking	◆ Displayed poster demonstrating toxins found in cigarettes

**Table 2**  
**Youth Summit 2022 activities**

<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<b>Coalition Member #1</b>	Guest Speaker	◆ Commercial vs. ceremonial tobacco	◆ Cultural understanding, modern use implications
<b>Coalition Member #4</b>	Youth skit, traditional tobacco use	◆ Share Southern California tribal stories about traditional tobacco	◆ Cultural education through storytelling
<b>Coalition Member #5</b>	Modern marketing tactics	◆ Inform how tobacco companies market their products and image online	◆ Increased awareness and judge tobacco or vaping related content anywhere online
<b>Coalition Member #1 Youth Advisory Council</b>	Refusal strategies	◆ Share refusal strategies specific to youth conversations or interactions ◆ Lead activity that allows youth participants to meet youth from other areas and try using refusal strategies	◆ Provided handout for future reference with refusal strategies ◆ Youth participants met new peers and used refusal strategies given different scenarios
<b>Coalition Member #3</b>	Environmental tobacco waste	◆ Educate youth and parents about specific tobacco waste products and their harmful effects on our environment	◆ Provided handout for future reference of tobacco waste products and their harmful effects on our environment

## Accounts from Youth Activity Leaders

Joseph, a Youth Advisory Council member, and Refusal Strategies Activity organizer, shares his remarks about the Refusal Strategies Activity:

As a member of the team that drafted and presented these strategies, I found it important that Native youth hear/learn about important issues in their community from individuals they can relate with. Creating these strategies took time and effort, but needfully so as targeting an audience of Native youth was the main goal. Moreover, being in a position of leadership and collaboration with other programs at the Summit made me hopeful for the direction our communities are heading.

Anthony, a community engagement coordinator, and leader of the Modern Marketing presentation, shares his thoughts on the presentation's impact:

I was glad I was able to open that door for them so they can do more research on their own and become well versed in how these companies operate for money. It's important that youth and everyone else are aware of these tactics so they can identify and disengage from them.

Justin and Joseph, Youth Advisory Council members, provide their feelings and appreciation for the first Summit:

As members of the Youth Advisory Council, we saw the importance of allowing younger people to implement education on tobacco prevention. Doing this work establishes early on that using commercial tobacco is harmful, and it helps prevent more youth like us from going down that path. We enjoyed the Summit's sentiment on keeping tobacco sacred, and with that, that we as Natives are sacred. On that topic, we learned about other plants that Native Americans have traditionally used, giving us a great sense of pride in the traditional ways of our ancestors and relatives today, allowing us to see the great disparity it has with commercial tobacco. We also enjoyed the closing activity where attendees participated in cleaning up cigarette butts and other trash from the land. It was a moment to take care of the land and acknowledge it with respect as the home of Indigenous peoples since time immemorial.

Justin and Joseph, Youth Advisory Council members, share their contributions to the second Summit:

I felt great about a second Summit happening, showing me that the work over the years has made it possible for an impactful event like this to happen annually. Themes that were touched on in the first Summit, such as the bodily harms of tobacco or environmental damage of tobacco products, were important to address again. I found value in other ways to address commercial tobacco, such as stories on the traditional use of tobacco that tie youth closer to their identity as Natives and the relationships we share with plants of this Earth. It makes traditional tobacco more accessible to youth who have otherwise been saturated with media advertising commercial products. I felt that the presentation to educate youth about ways to learn strategies to refuse commercial tobacco and an activity to practice themselves was beneficial. As an older youth, it made me smile to see younger ones be able to know about this so early on, hopefully making the Summit even more impactful.

## DISCUSSION

The SCTTC members all recognized that informing youth about tobacco-related harms and actively working to reduce and prevent those harms are essential to maintaining resilient and healthy AI/AN communities. With limited funds, and the potential for competing programs, the coalition members wisely chose to combine their efforts. Healthy community-based coalitions bring people together, expand resources, and achieve better results than any one organization could achieve (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2012). Coalitions have been shown to be effective in promoting tobacco prevention and cessation (Kuhn et al., 1999), in particular managing funding challenges (Carver et al., 2007) and conforming to and reflecting values, structures, and social-political contexts unique to specific communities (Lee et al., 2012). While there are reports of tribally specific coalitions addressing other domains of health and wellness [e.g., emergency response (Tall Chief et al., 2014), food sovereignty (Frank-Buckner & Coalition, 2019), and physical activity (Pargée et al., 1999)], there are few public reports on ways that tribal tobacco coalitions meet the unique interests and circumstances of their communities.

By working together, the coalition in our report has been able to establish and build momentum for a comprehensive, tribally specific tobacco prevention program. Like the State of California's comprehensive tobacco prevention program, the coalition actively works toward denormalizing smoking and vaping, restricting the availability of smoking and vaping products,

and educating the community about harms related to smoking and vaping. Different from the state's tobacco prevention program, the SCTTC members collectively provide unique emphases and interests in differentiating ceremonial and cultural tobacco from commercial mass-produced tobacco by affirming and educating the community about the value of ceremonial cultural tobacco, while also educating about and rejecting the commercialization of the sacred tobacco plant. The coalition also educates and takes action to affirm the value of reclaiming and strengthening the tribal communities' connections to the earth and water by meeting on tribal lands and taking steps to learn about and reduce environmental harms caused by commercial tobacco products. Bringing the people together on the sovereign lands of the member tribes recognizes and affirms tribal sovereignty, as well as strengthens the ties among and between tribes that have sustained the people over time and through many challenges. The coalition focuses on youth as the most critical age group in efforts to prevent tobacco uptake as well as uplift youth as members of the community to be cherished, supported, and guided into leadership with the help of elders and other adults from the community. The coalition members all recognize the importance of families in potentially contributing to the smoking and vaping risks for youth, but are also a part of the solution to the commercial tobacco epidemic. Coalition programs invite family members to make their homes smokefree and to take steps to reduce and quit smoking for the sake of their children as well as their own health and wellbeing. Finally, the coalition activities engage with tribal leaders in recognition of sovereignty, on tribal lands, and connecting youths to their cultures and histories. In these ways, and unlike other local or state tobacco programs, the coalition's tobacco prevention is not only comprehensive but also holistic, tribal-family-centered, assets-based, and strengths-building.

With programming and events designed for Native youth, it is beneficial and proactive to include the knowledge of youth themselves in the planning and overall delivery of education on the topic of commercial tobacco. Commercial tobacco has potential to harm them more substantially than other age groups. Through the coalition and with the help of older members of the community dedicated to commercial tobacco prevention, youth are able to uniquely participate in teaching youth like themselves about commercial tobacco and in turn receive different perspectives from collaborating youth organizations. This creates a strong relationship that builds the more that coalitions work together, developing a precedent for Native youth to engage in commercial tobacco prevention that is for their benefit when it is enhanced by their valuable perspectives. Collaborating with Native youth across tribes also contributes to an overall sense of

unity that allows youth to foresee collaborations in the future regarding community health and wellness. Youth participation is a step in the right direction that keeps Native nations in productive conversation in a noteworthy regard, that is, among their generations of youth that will take charge and responsibility for their tribes in the future.

## CONCLUSION

The SCTTC joined forces and organized various community activities and events, effectively mobilizing Southern California Indigenous communities to reduce commercial tobacco use. The multiple programs that are part of this larger effort ensure that our networking and visibility in the community is growing. Although each program within the coalition may have slight differences in project aims, this unique alliance is united by their dedication to community-based efforts and youth-led interactive interventions. Given the success of the first and second annual youth Summit, the SCTTC proudly views youth as a catalyst for positive change in Indigenous communities.

The results of the SCTTC's collaborative events like the youth Summit serve as an example and guide for other tribal communities across the country. Forming a coalition like the SCTTC would foster new connections, expand outreach efforts, and create larger community impacts. The SCTTC's commitment to youth-led activities and programming is another recommendation for other tribal communities. From its creation, the coalition relied on youth advisory councils and youth leadership for input on programming. This method of youth designing programming for youth ensures a sense of heightened ownership and higher youth engagement, which in turn instills confidence in their own understanding, comfort in learning from their peers, and most importantly, the domino effect of sharing their knowledge with others in their community. Coming together as a community and understanding the multiple relationships with commercial tobacco, whether youth learn how to refuse commercial tobacco or adults begin their journeys to stop using commercial tobacco, is crucial to healing together. Collaborating on commercial tobacco prevention is important because the harms of commercial tobacco span many generations, with the most profound impacts being on future generations.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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