

1 *Sovereignty, Rights, and the Well-Being of Indigenous Peoples living in the United States*

2 **ISSUE STATEMENT**

3 This policy statement focuses on Indigenous Peoples living in the United States, its territories,
4 commonwealths, and Micronesian nation states affiliated through the Compact of Free
5 Association (COFA): Native American/First Nations Peoples living within the geographical
6 boundaries of the continental United States; Alaska Native Peoples, Kanaka Maoli (Native
7 Hawaiians); Taino Indians (Puerto Rico); CHamorus of Guahan (Guam) (although both
8 “Chamorro” and “CHamoru” can be used, “CHamoru” is the preferred Indigenous spelling
9 referring to both people and language); Indigenous Peoples of the Federated States of Micronesia
10 (FSM), Republic of Palau (ROP), and Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI); and Samoans
11 (American Samoa). Indigenous Peoples from nations beyond those included in this statement
12 may not be recognized by the United States, but their stories are akin and powerful and are
13 acknowledged through this statement.

14 Because the terminology of Indigenous identification differs among individuals and
15 groups and places, it is common practice to use preferred names of the First Peoples who live in
16 a particular place. For the purposes of this policy statement and aligning with the United Nations
17 (UN), the term “Indigenous” is used to refer to all First Peoples.

18 Common to all Indigenous Peoples are cultural strengths of reciprocity, respect for the
19 land, inclusivity among all people, and a connection to a spiritual power. Simultaneously, these
20 Indigenous Peoples have parallel histories of colonization and dispossession of land and natural
21 resources that limited the inherent right to self-determination and sovereignty (UN, 2007).

22 NASW dedicates resources for redressing social injustices and oppressions wherever present.

23 NASW is actively engaged in hearing the voices of these populations through policy engagement

24 and advocacy efforts.

25 The issue of sovereignty and the rights to self-governance are continually debated to the
26 point of inquiry regarding what sovereignty means from personal perspectives, community
27 standpoints, and national outlooks. Indigenous populations confer that sovereignty is an
28 opportunity for decolonization—the repatriation of life and land, active self-governance, and
29 restoration of tribal government. Sovereignty implies precedence for reestablishment of hope and
30 healing not only for a tribe but a tribal nation. Reparative justice involves an Indigenous
31 decolonized mind-set that eliminates dependency and hierarchy. True national sovereignty raises
32 the constructs of equality, harmony, and balance in which a tribal nation inspires a just
33 movement toward restoration. A prime example of restoration is political advocacy to correct
34 historical inaccuracies such as repealing Columbus Day and renaming it National Honor of
35 Indigenous Peoples Day. Such movement of the Indigenous tribal nation could dissipate the
36 historical suffrages of oppression, discrimination, and trauma. Intentional dialogue recognizing
37 Treaties as the supreme law of the land rather than the misnomer that the U.S. Constitution holds
38 precedence is imperative toward decreasing social injustices. Such open communication is a
39 forward step for Indigenous rights and the intent of sovereignty.

40 Currently, sovereignty is a construct existent within the individual and community
41 narrative. With such presence, the Indigenous populations are setting markers toward their health
42 and well-being. An important factor for Indigenous sovereignty is reviving and cultivating a
43 generation of people deserving separation from disparity outcomes.

44 Resilience of Indigenous Peoples is expressed by their active participation and
45 involvement in traditional cultural norms and practices. The inclusion of the medicine wheel,
46 storytelling, natural healing and cleansing, environmental sustainment, powwows, hui, talking

47 circles, and Indigenous passports as an expression of sovereignty among the Haudenosaunee,
48 adds meaning and essence to life sustainment.

49 Indigenous Peoples have demonstrated resilience in overcoming many adversities. Today,
50 there are initiatives promoting cultural revitalization and celebration. For example, more and
51 more Indigenous languages are becoming official and are equal in status to the English language.
52 There are many Indigenous language programs in schools and communities for children.

53 Cultural events that celebrate the unique strengths among Indigenous Peoples are rich and
54 diverse. Among these are the annual World Championship Hoop Contest, annual World Eskimo
55 Indian Olympics, National/Flag Day, and Merrie Monarch Festival. These events are collective
56 celebrations to promote Indigenous cultural values and traditions.

57 Cultural celebrations reflect the circular perspective of wholeness, balance, harmony,
58 family, and community. In addition, there is the consolation of oneness with the “Mother Earth”
59 and thanksgiving to the “Great Creator.” Giving thanks and prayer for all that has been, is, and is
60 to come entails acknowledging the importance of equality in an ever-changing society. The
61 cultural celebrations are fundamental in the overall health and well-being of a people.
62 Consequently, these cultural celebrations, on a whole, reflect the mission of social work.

63 Combining the western (linear) and ecological (circular) models raises awareness of
64 policy issues, intervention practices, and cultural mindfulness (Willis, DeLeon, Haldane, &
65 Heldring, 2014). The understanding of the ecological perspective mirrors the circular approach
66 wherein culture, family, community, and land are precedent; this view of inclusion is vital to the
67 overall well-being of the Indigenous Peoples.

68 The social work profession highlights critical thinking in discourse salient to societal
69 concerns. Such concerns give impetus to fill professional knowledge gaps. For instance, social

70 work programs have included social work curricula focusing on practice with Indigenous
71 populations. In addition, some social work textbooks provide specific information on Indigenous
72 Populations, including their histories, cultures, social issues, and expansive strides in resilience.

73 Indigenous Peoples are accorded legal recognition as social, cultural, and political
74 communities under international human rights law. The UN Declaration on the Rights of
75 Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) recognizes “that Indigenous Peoples possess collective rights,
76 which are indispensable to their existence, well-being, and integral development as Peoples”
77 (UN, 2007, p. 4). UNDRIP advanced from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which
78 was adopted by the UN in 1948.

79 Indigenous Peoples endured historical trauma through colonization by the United States
80 and other nations. These colonial histories reflect a multiphase phenomenon. First, “the dominant
81 culture perpetuates mass trauma on a population in the form of colonialism, slavery, war or
82 genocide”; second, “the affected population shows physical and psychological symptoms in
83 response to the trauma”; and, third, “the initial population passes these responses to trauma to
84 subsequent generations” (Pember, 2015, pp. 8–9). Intergenerational trauma accounts for
85 epigenetic changes among future generations of Indigenous Peoples (Pember, 2016).

86 Being historically deprived of the right to self-governance, to cultural practices and
87 traditional language and lifestyles, to protection of resources essential to their holistic health and
88 well-being, and oppression in their own lands have resulted in overall burden of disproportionate
89 poor health and compromised well-being. According to the UNDRIP (UN, 2007), Indigenous
90 Peoples have the equal right to enjoy the highest standard of health. This includes, but is not
91 limited to, the ability of Indigenous Peoples to have full management of their lands and natural
92 resources as well as possess all the rights inherent in that management.

93 Land and the environment are intrinsic to the health of Indigenous Peoples. The
94 environment provides the foundation on which Indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and
95 social institutions are based. Management of these resources by Indigenous Peoples enables the
96 preservation and strengthening of Indigenous knowledge, practices, and institutions as well as
97 the promotion of health and well-being. Indigenous Peoples are best positioned to make their
98 own choices in accordance with their own values and beliefs (UN, 2007).

99 In spite of the multifaceted challenges, robust advocacy efforts reveal progression toward
100 understanding the historical complexities experienced by Native American/First Nations People
101 (Berger, 2019). Furthermore, despite these ongoing challenges (such as criminal justice system
102 involvement, substance use, child welfare, domestic violence, education, poverty, and identity
103 deconstruction) efforts toward decolonization have intensified across Indigenous populations.
104 For example, research among native elders (Rowe, Baldry, & Earles, (2015) and youths (Yuen,
105 Linds, Goulet, Schmidt, Episkew, & Rittenburg, 2013) reveals ongoing resilience for survival
106 despite the continuing social injustices. As a whole, regaining indigeneity is a strength factor for
107 this population.

108 The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) held its 18th session in April
109 2019. This session focused on Indigenous Peoples nationally and internationally. The UNPFII
110 (2019) reported ongoing health concerns and disparities, specifically stating that “scant attention
111 has been paid to the health issues of Indigenous Peoples, and the occasional studies on the
112 subject have focused on mental health and maternal and child health” (p. 3). Overwhelming
113 concerns are unremitting global suffering of disproportionate social issues.

114 **Native Americans (First Nations Peoples)**

115 Since the earliest contact with Europeans at the end of the 15th century, Native Americans were

116 subjugated to the laws of colonization and denied tribal sovereignty that is the basis of tribal
117 government (Wilkins, 2009). The number of Native Americans, estimated at about 10 million in
118 1500, gradually decreased as their food sources disappeared and they fell victim to diseases such
119 as measles, smallpox, and influenza. By 1800 the Native American population was about
120 600,000, and by 1900 it had been reduced to less than 250,000. Native tribes differed
121 substantially in regard to religious beliefs and practices, language, dress, hairstyles, political
122 organization, social structures, gender roles, worldview, and living conditions in response to the
123 environment, which varied from forests, deserts, mountains, plains, and coasts to subarctic and
124 arctic areas (Hall, n.d.).

125 U.S. policies ranging from the Indian Removal Act in 1830, various treaties negotiated
126 with individual tribes, the 1887 Dawes Act (or General Allotment Act), the Indian
127 Reorganization Act of 1934 (P.L. 73-383), and the Termination Act of 1953 further stripped
128 away much of the history, geography, political life, and traditions from Indigenous Peoples to
129 produce an abstract perception (Konkle, 2008) of the immensely significant cultural, family, and
130 spiritual life that defines Native Americans. Each policy was designed to achieve progressive
131 acculturation and final assimilation of the Native American into the “white” culture. Influenced
132 in part by the Pan-Indian movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the passage in 1978 of both the
133 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) (P.L. 95-608) and the American Indian Religious Freedom
134 Act (P.L. 94-341), and later the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990
135 (P.L. 101-601), were attempts to make some reparation for the mistreatment of Native Peoples
136 over the previous 500 years.

137 Today, the estimated 5.2 million Native Americans (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011) are
138 still burdened with extensive unemployment and health and mental health disparities including

139 diabetes, cancer, substance abuse, and suicide (Indian Health Service, 2007) and remain one of
140 the poorest races as a direct result of the U.S. policy (and subsequent interventions) toward
141 Native Americans (Rodgers, 2008).

142 Reparation attempts such as ICWA have shown decreased numbers of children removed
143 from their biological families and placements outside of their native culture. The Guidelines for
144 the ICWA, released in 2016, speaks to policy initiatives needed for clarification and applicability
145 of the ICWA process. Unfortunately, important stakeholders were left out of the proceedings of
146 the amended guidelines (American Academy Adoption Attorneys, 2015). The Religious
147 Freedom Act brought positive results as well. Regrettably, the Native American Graves
148 Protection Act of 1990 lacks enforcement in providing full protection of said sacred lands.

149 The historical experiences of grief and trauma are realities for all Native American/First
150 Nations people regardless of tribal territory and federal recognition, private lands, and state
151 recognition (or lack thereof). Social injustices exist nationally and internationally; time, place, or
152 native affiliation holds no partiality in reference to inequalities and imbalances. Research is on
153 the horizon for further study on the depth of inherited resilience (Pember, 2016). The resilience
154 concept, as coined by Oré, Teufel-Shone, and Chico-Jarillo (2016) echoes the circular
155 perspective, which is woven with internal and external meaning of families, communities,
156 culture, environment, and spirituality. There is growing awareness among professional service
157 providers and researchers that Native American healing embraces the traditional Indigenous
158 model of the medicine wheel. The integration of traditional healing practices demonstrates
159 cultural competence and humility (Flint, 2015).

160 **Alaska Native Peoples**

161 Beginning in the 1750s, the exploitation of natural resources in Alaska first began by the

162 Russians, then in the 1850s by the Americans. In 1867, Alaska was purchased by the United
163 States from Russia and the exploitation continued. The “first European contact in 1492 brought
164 diseases to the Americas which devastated the native population” (Koch, Brierley, Maslin &
165 Lewis, 2013). The Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act of 1971, PL 92-203, established a
166 capitalistic structure through which U.S. and international corporations established access to oil
167 deposits in the northern region. The act provided the title of 14 million acres to state-chartered
168 Native corporations, required Native people to set up village and regional corporations, and
169 transferred land ownership to corporations and not individual Alaska Native Peoples. Despite
170 these significant improvements regarding legal and land rights, decisions on sovereignty and
171 subsistence often pit Alaska Native Peoples against state and federal authorities (Hunhdorf &
172 Huhndorf, 2011).

173 Discrimination and racism still remain, despite gains made through the past four decades.
174 Although 16 percent of Alaska’s population identifies as solely Alaska Native, 84 percent of the
175 state’s population are primarily U.S. citizens, often from the lower 48 states (Thompson, 2008).
176 Similar to Native Americans in other U.S. states, four generations of Alaska Native children
177 were forced to attend mission and government-run boarding schools. The U.S. policy at that time
178 was to remove their cultural identity and make these children a viable workforce for the
179 populations coming into Alaska.

180 In 2008, 28 percent of Alaska Natives Peoples reported not completing high school as
181 compared with less than one out of 12 (7.5 percent) white people in the United States.
182 Unemployment rates are up to three times higher among Alaska Native Peoples (21 percent in
183 some regions) compared with the white population (6.6 percent). The poverty rate is estimated at
184 22 percent among the Alaska Native population as compared with 13 percent of all Americans

185 (Martin & Hill, 2009).

186 Health disparities continue among Alaska Native Peoples, and even though they have a
187 lower rate of diabetes than the U.S. non-Hispanic population. Between 1997 and 2003, the
188 prevalence of diabetes increased by 41 percent in the population served by the Indian Health
189 Service. Fetal alcohol syndrome cases have been reported at a rate of 5.6 per 1,000 in Alaska,
190 well above the rate for other races or ethnicities. Other health conditions associated with
191 mortality rates among Alaska Native Peoples include heart disease (236.2 in 100,000), malignant
192 neoplasms (183.5 in 100,000), and unintentional injuries (90.1 in 100,000) (Indian Health
193 Service, 2007).

194 **Taino**

195 The Taino Peoples are the Indigenous people of the Caribbean, tracing their origins to South
196 America. In the 15th century, Taino people migrated and broke into different groups throughout
197 the Caribbean islands of Cuba, Hispaniola (the Dominican Republic and Haiti), Jamaica, Puerto
198 Rico, the Bahamas, and northern Antilles. Upon Christopher Columbus's arrival in 1492, the
199 Taino people were thriving with a rich history and appreciation of artistry, a cultural identity,
200 spiritual and religious beliefs, harvesting of the land, and a thriving society. However, with this
201 arrival of the Spaniards, the Taino people suffered warfare and enslavement by these colonists,
202 much like the experiences of other Indigenous Peoples (Collazo, 2018).

203 Despite a history of near extinction, over the past four decades there has been a
204 regeneration and revitalization of Taino identity within the racially mixed and culturally blended
205 Indigenous people of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican societies both here and in the
206 continental United States.

207 **Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians)**

208 Kanaka Maoli are the aboriginal people of Hawai‘i. The first foreigners to establish themselves
209 in Hawai‘i in 1778 were western traders seeking commercial gain, then Christian missionaries
210 seeking religious conversion. In the first 150 years of contact, Kanaka Maoli faced physical
211 extinction from foreign diseases and cultural genocide from laws and practices that favored
212 foreign interests. Laws were enacted that subverted the traditional system of land tenure from
213 collective stewardship to private property, dispossessing Kanaka Maoli from their source of
214 sustenance and well-being. In 1893, American industrialists and U.S. Marines overthrew the
215 lawful Hawaiian government, gave lands to the United States without compensation, and
216 imprisoned and dethroned Hawai‘i’s last ruling monarch, Queen Lili‘uokalani (Kaholokula,
217 Nacapoy, & Dang, 2009; Kamau‘u, 1989). In 1898, Hawai‘i was annexed as a U.S. territory.
218 Consequently, for Kanaka Maoli overwhelming loss of land, language, and cultural traditions
219 followed. These many devastating losses caused cultural trauma and influenced many of the
220 socio-economic problems experienced by Kanaka Maoli in contemporary times (Ka’opua,
221 Braun, Browne, Mokuau, & Park, 2011; Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2010).

222 Today, Kanaka Maoli continue to struggle with the outcomes of denied stewardship over
223 ancestral land which nurtures wholeness, well-being, and spiritual connection. Consequential
224 harms for Kanaka Maoli include prevalence of homelessness in their own land; higher rates of
225 cancer, heart disease, and diabetes than those of the general U.S. population; higher rates of
226 substance abuse and domestic violence; lowest life expectancy in the State of Hawai‘i; and
227 higher number of children in foster care for longer periods and reentry rate (Martin, Paglinawan,
228 & Paglinawan, 2014).

229 Despite the devastating consequences of historical trauma, Kanaka Maoli possess cultural
230 strengths that can inform policy, practice, and education which includes aloha ‘āina, strong

231 family or ‘ohana, prominent place of children, respect for the elders or kupuna and experts or
232 kahuna, and a resilient, reciprocal and interdependent worldview of spirit, people, and
233 environment as core for wellness. For the benefit of future generations, Kanaka Maoli continue
234 to engage deeply in culture revitalization relative to Indigenous language, values, practices,
235 skills, knowledge (Martin, Paglinawan, & Paglinawan, 2014), and the protection of land and
236 sacred spaces such as Mauna Kea.

237 **CHamorus**

238 CHamorus of Guahan have experienced the longest history of colonization without recognition
239 of sovereignty. In 1521, Magellan’s arrival on Guahan marked CHamorus’ first contact with the
240 western world. Over the next 200 years, as a result of the introduction of western diseases and
241 warfare, Guahan suffered a population collapse from 50,000 to 3,500 (Hattori, 2004).

242 Guahan was a spoil of the Spanish-American War given to the United States in the Treaty
243 of Paris in 1898. At this time, CHamorus were politically divided, with those living in the
244 Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) falling under the administration of the
245 Germans. Hattori (2004) reported that on Guahan, language and health reform policies that were
246 implemented adversely affected CHamorus’ lives and culture. Japan occupied Guahan from 1941
247 to 1944, then the United States took control again, seizing 42 percent of the landmass that
248 displaced the CHamoru people. The 1950 Organic Act of Guam granted the CHamorus a limited
249 form of U.S. citizenship.

250 The proposed U.S. military buildup on Guahan threatens further dispossession of
251 CHamorus and continual denial of their inalienable right to self-determination. CHamorus in the
252 CNMI have lived under Spanish, German, Japanese, and American colonial rule. Their current
253 political status is that of a commonwealth of the United States, which was created in 1976. In

254 CNMI, U.S. sovereignty is acknowledged, but certain federal laws have only limited
255 applicability. The federalization of the CNMI's immigration policies in 2009 has resulted in the
256 further colonization of CHamorus living in the CNMI. CHamorus have become a political
257 minority in their homeland, comprising 21.3 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau,
258 2000).

259 Current status of grave health disparities, altered identity, extreme poverty, and political
260 disempowerment among CHamorus is the result of these historical attacks. Decolonization
261 efforts continue to be challenged by historical disregard for Indigenous beliefs and practices and
262 elimination of Indigenous health practitioners; militarization; environmental degradation and
263 exposure to radiation without redress; and health issues including cancer (second leading cause
264 of death), diabetes, mental illness, and suicide (Natividad & Lizama, 2014).

265 Nonetheless, the resilience of CHamorus, adaptability to change, and endurance in
266 perpetuating cultural values and practices have not led to extinction but rather the beginning of
267 revitalization of the Indigenous culture. Cultural strengths include a healing process that connects
268 the Indigenous spirit to Indigenous identity; matrilineal hierarchy in which women are an integral
269 part of the decision-making process; spirituality and connection to the land; language as part of
270 one's identity; critical role of the family; and core values of reciprocity and respect. After 4,000
271 years as Indigenous people of Guahan, CHamorus are revaluing, rediscovering, and reconnecting
272 to their Indigenous ways (Natividad & Lizama, 2014).

273 **Peoples of Nations Affiliated with the United States through COFA**

274 The islands now known as FSM, RMI, and ROP, or the Freely Associated States (FAS) cat-
275 apulted into U.S. view during World War II and confirmed the value of the islands' location to
276 U.S. defense (Hezel, 1995; Ka'opua & Holden, 2010). In 1947, the United States became

277 administrator of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), committing to prepare the
278 Indigenous people for self-governance and improve their health status. During this period, the
279 United States executed nuclear testing of 84 bombs over Bikini and other atolls. Tests resulted in
280 mass deaths, contamination of land and waters, radiation-related cancers, and birth defects
281 (Ka'opua, 2007; Keever, 2004). Canned food and tobacco were introduced, increasing risk of
282 chronic disease and resulting in mass outmigration to Hawai'i for health care and education
283 (Ka'opua & Holden, 2010). TTPI informed development of COFA, defining U.S. relations with
284 FAS. In exchange for exclusive military access to these nations, the United States provides
285 economic aid and access to health grants. FAS citizens have U.S. citizenship status comparable
286 with that of legal immigrants. In 1996, the Welfare Reform Act (Personal Responsibility and
287 Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996) (P.L. 104-193) made FAS citizens ineligible for
288 public assistance, and their access to Medicaid is uncertain.

289 Military oversight and forced shift in identity disconnected relationships among the
290 person, family, and community, thus forcing an individualistic worldview that is counter to a
291 collective subsistence lifestyle. Western influence disregarded Indigenous healing, spiritual
292 practice, forms of art, role of elders as navigators of the family and community, and supported
293 land development among foreigners. As new immigrants to the United States, these Indigenous
294 Peoples must grapple with new location, trauma of relocation, isolation from family and support
295 system, acculturation, economic stresses, and disproportionate health disparities (Hasugulayag,
296 2014; Howard & Kreif, 2014;).

297 Nonetheless, strengths of the people were evident in their resilience and ability to
298 preserve Indigenous cultural identity, values, customs, and traditions while adapting to new life
299 and space. They were the greatest ocean navigators in the Pacific, which facilitated seeking new

300 opportunities. Likewise, they are a very spiritual people with Indigenous medicines that have
301 spiritual powers protected in the family. Women have important roles in these cultures. The
302 identity of the people and their very survival is deeply rooted in the land, which is inclusive of
303 the sea and everything in it, linking together family and community, and roles and
304 responsibilities. Respect, cooperation, trust, reciprocity, collectivity, and relationship are core
305 values to these cultures (Hasugulayag, 2014; Howard & Kreif, 2014).

306 **American Samoans**

307 Dutch explorers made initial contact with Samoans in 1722. Business and military expansion by
308 other western powers followed, with social disruption of the Indigenous cultural order and
309 warfare. In 1827, the U.S. Navy occupied and began to use Pago Pago (Tutuila Island) as a
310 fueling station. The United States, Germany, and Britain came into conflict during the Second
311 Samoan Civil War, which resulted in the 1899 Treaty of Berlin and established the colony of
312 American Samoa in the eastern Samoan archipelago. In 1929, the colony was annexed as U.S.
313 flag territory. Through the covenant agreement binding the United States and American Samoa,
314 the latter is subject to U.S. federal laws and has a nonvoting representative in the U.S. Congress.
315 Currently, there are about 68,000 American Samoa residents, 96 percent of whom are of Samoan
316 ethnicity. Economic activity remains strongly linked to the United States. Although culturally
317 rich, American Samoa is resource poor, with about 73 percent of the Indigenous population
318 living at or below the U.S. federal poverty level (American Samoa Office of the Governor,
319 2007).

320 A long and devastating history of colonization, military presence, and experiences of
321 discrimination have led to a complex and complicated struggle to reconcile between a collective
322 Indigenous culture and individualistic contemporary culture among Samoans. Although

323 migration to the United States was primarily for educational and career advancement, Samoans
324 disproportionately experience health disparities and economic disparities, especially among new
325 immigrants to the United States. Today, cancer is the leading cause of death among Samoans and
326 they disproportionately suffer from chronic obesity, diabetes, anemia, and other health problems
327 (Gabbard, 2014).

328 Samoans are a proud and family-oriented people. In spite of historical trauma, Samoans
329 have preserved and perpetuated their traditional culture of *fa'a Samoa* in which respect,
330 mutuality and reciprocity, spirituality, strong work ethics, family ties, and community solidarity
331 are at the core and heavily invested in by all (Gabbard, 2014). Indigenous Peoples are among
332 designated health disparity populations in the United States (Agency for Healthcare Research
333 and Quality, 2017). Achieving health equity will require a multidimensional approach that
334 addresses not only individual factors (Alvidrez, Castille, Laude-Sharp, Rosario & Tabor, 2019)
335 but also systems such as health care, social welfare, criminal justice, and education (Alegría,
336 Araneta, & Rivers, 2019).

337 Social work and human services professionals acknowledge the necessity of sensitivity
338 and unique approaches in understanding and addressing structural inequities. Professional
339 approaches consisting of culturally and linguistically sensitive interventions and measurements
340 are indicative of best practices. Ensuring ethical guidelines across diverse Indigenous
341 individuals, groups, communities, and organizations strengthens capacity for health and well-
342 being. The NASW policy standards call for scale-balancing on behalf of those who need
343 advocacy from pandemonium to stability.

344 ***POLICY STATEMENT***

345 NASW acknowledges the uniqueness and strengths among Indigenous Peoples and communities.

346 Indigenous communities have distinct place-based histories, languages, and cultural values and
347 practices that span across diverse geographies and have contributed positively to the world.
348 NASW recognizes the struggle of Indigenous Peoples for sovereignty and freedom from
349 oppression, and that their struggle has origins in past practices of genocide and ethnic cleansing
350 implemented as policies of the U.S. government and others around the globe. NASW condemns
351 oppressive acts (for example, land acquisition with the use of eminent domain, environmental
352 neglect, and degradation) by administering powers of government that exploit Indigenous
353 Peoples.

354 NASW supports the following:

- 355 • A sense of place often defined by land, people, language, and identity for Indigenous Peoples
356 through inclusion at the center of national conversations
- 357 • The development of social policies and practices that promote the health, land and human
358 rights of Indigenous Peoples living within U.S. boundaries and beyond
- 359 • Securing of resources for more effective policies on health care and education for the current
360 generation of transnational, transcultural Indigenous Peoples
- 361 • The rights of Indigenous Peoples in their efforts to gain health and self-determination and
362 sustain the physical, emotional, and spiritual health that are consistent with the principles, values,
363 and roles of social work
- 364 • Education and training of all social workers on cultural competence and cultural humility,
365 specifically with regard to value differences between the dominant culture and the cultures of
366 Indigenous Peoples
- 367 • Education and training of all social workers on the various social determinants that influence
368 the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples

- 369 • The preservation of traditional spiritual, health, and cultural strengths and practices of
370 Indigenous Peoples
- 371 • Culturally and linguistically relevant practices and models that integrate Indigenous and
372 contemporary knowledge
- 373 • Funded efforts for decolonization and cultural revitalization among Indigenous Peoples in
374 terms of language, ceremonies, practices, healings, and strategies
- 375 • National Institutes of Health vision on minority health and health disparities research to
376 promote health equity among Indigenous Peoples

377

378 “If, however, civilization meant an economic system in which there was no relative poverty, but
379 rather adequate food, shelter, physical security, and a social system in which all participate
380 equally and actively in the material and aesthetic standards of community life, then the people of
381 Micronesia were indeed civilized and had much to teach the rest of the world” (quoted by
382 Hanlon, 1998, p. 47)

383

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535 *Policy statement approved by the NASW Delegate Assembly, Month 2020. This statement*
536 *supersedes the policy statement on Sovereignty, Rights, and the Well-Being of Indigenous*
537 *Peoples approved by the Delegate Assembly in August 2011. For further information, contact the*
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