



We use photography to celebrate Alaska Native communities making positive changes towards health and wellness.

Population health data comparisons convey important information about disparities and inequities. This information is useful for determining health priorities, program evaluation, and funding. However, this information can be disheartening. In an effort to balance discouraging statistics with community success stories, the [Alaska Native Epidemiology Center \(EpiCenter\)](#) at the [Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium \(ANTHC\)](#) initiated the [Healthy Portraits](#) project. This innovative project shares health success stories occurring in Alaska Native communities through the art of photography.

“The saying ‘A picture is worth a thousand words’ is so meaningful in this case,” said Christine Tait, Senior Marketing Media Specialist at ANTHC’s EpiCenter. “Photography is an engaging and understandable way to tell the story of how a community is actively working to improve health.”

The EpiCenter team travels to a selected community to document their story. At the final visit, the EpiCenter team presents the community with large prints of their Healthy Portraits to permanently display in the community as a source of inspiration for current and future generations. The photo stories are also shared on the ANTHC campus, and in ANTHC’s publications, social media, and website as a source of health inspiration for other communities across Alaska.

“Displaying these Healthy Portraits in the community instills a great sense of pride in everyone and shows others what can be accomplished by working together,” said Tait.

Funded through an Office of Minority Health’s Reducing American Indian/Alaska Native Health Disparities grant, the Healthy Portraits project has produced two stories, to date,

and a third story is planned for next year. The first story was completed in 2013, highlighting youth in the northwest arctic region of Alaska who participated in NANANordic's learn to cross-country ski program. NANANordic is all about healthy lifestyles, which includes staying active year-round. The photos are proudly displayed in the community schools.

The second story which features the Tyonek garden was completed in 2015 in partnership with the [Tyonek Tribal Conservation District \(TTCD\)](#). The 1.5 acre, off-the-grid garden was established by the Native Village of Tyonek to improve food security and healthy eating habits by growing fresh organic produce. Youth were heavily involved with a variety of tasks ranging from taking care of the garden to distributing produce. Photos captured unique points in time, including the garden blessing, cooking demonstrations, and harvests. The Tyonek community proudly displays their prints in the Tebughna School. "The Tyonek garden is a place of wonder, respect, community, hard work, and reward. It is a place where a shy young girl digging up potatoes exclaims with excitement, 'This is a miracle!'" said Nicole Swenson, TTCD Garden Manger.

"The Healthy Portraits project is a fresh approach to talking about health, and it has been well received by the communities," said Tait. "Through this project, we have learned that positive behavior can perpetuate positive behavior, and it can be contagious in a good way."