

For thousands of years, Native American tribes have culturally practiced farming and hunting while utilizing natural resources to sustain life. With this lifestyle, many Native peoples upheld a high standard of physical health. However, due to the rapid development of modern technology and the severe increase in the human population, the world climate has taken a drastic hit. We are now noticing unsafe levels of air pollution and extreme weather events including droughts, floods, and wildfires, to name a few. With these unfortunate climate events affecting the community, the health of the individuals is at significant risk which is my greatest concern. As an aspiring Native physician, I find great interest in helping maintain the health of the people who I want to serve.

In my experience growing up on the Hopi reservation, I have learned the importance of planting and farming corn. Corn is a vital source of food to the Hopi community and serves a significant role in many cultural activities. I began planting with my grandfather when I was age 9. He taught me how deep to plant the corn on years when rain was plentiful and when years were tortured with drought. I continued this tradition of planting with him up to this day, and together we have noticed significant changes to the moisture levels of the soil. As dry farmers, we rely solely on the rain to provide moisture to the fields. Every year my grandfather claims that it has been the driest he has ever seen in his 60+ years of experience. It saddens me to witness this tragedy but we continue to have hope for our crops. This event does not only affect my family's corn harvest, but also the harvest of others in the community. Only a few farmers are able to maintain a successful harvest and now many members of the community are forced to purchase corn from these individuals in order to provide food and continue cultural activities requiring the use of corn.

This unfortunate event can only be traced back to the rapidly increasing negative effects of climate change. The only way to combat this downward spiral of environmental health begins with us; the original caretakers of the world. According to traditional stories, it is the responsibility of Native Americans to steward the land and ensure that the health of the earth is maintained. However, with the utilization of cars, increased demand for food production, and deforestation issues, we have neglected our role as stewards of the land which we need to claim responsibility for once again.

Thankfully, the matter of climate change is becoming recognized at a federal level once again, It is now possible for universal change to occur. Such as starting to make significant efforts to bring the matter to the public view. For many years the issue of climate change has been brushed under the rug and covered with matters deemed more important. Now, we can begin to create a discussion on how to fix the disaster that we have created.

On a local level, I hope to begin to serve as an advocate requesting lifestyle changes in individuals who are unaware of habits that may be adding to the downfall of the global climate. I want to use my developing knowledge of health and medicine to provide information on why Native communities need to be more concerned about the issues affecting climate. For example, I can provide education to Native communities on the importance of reducing garbage production in order to prevent the eventual use of gases that are harmful to air quality. Likewise, I want to help improve education on methods to combat the depletion of water sources. Oftentimes, individuals are unaware of unnecessary water use and by providing proper education gallons of water could be saved for future use. By implementing this type of education into Native communities, we can make progress in guaranteeing a better life for future generations. Not to mention we can return to traditional practices such as planting in the Hopi community with better outcomes in crop production due to maintaining and managing drought conditions. This in turn can allow for improved nutrition to address health issues affecting Native communities such as diabetes and obesity.

By working together with Native American communities we can collectively make a difference in our habits that affect climate. If each Native American community is aware of the issues that need to be addressed relating to the climate we can develop methods that could be shared with neighboring communities to eventually begin the shift to bettering global climate health. There is change waiting to happen and it begins with us now.