

“Native American Embodiment of Chronicities of Modernities” by Dr. Dennis Wiedman analyzes why diabetes and metabolic syndrome (MetS) have been significantly more prevalent in the Native Americans population than the general American population and why diabetes only began to be an issue in the 1940s. Wiedman found that metabolic diseases (including diabetes and other MetS) are the long-term results of everyday behaviors shaped by societal and cultural influences. Beginning in the mid-1800s, Native American lifestyle has been significantly shaped by Federal regulation. Native Americans were forcibly moved onto reservations, losing their independent, nomadic lifestyle which promoted cardiovascular health and metabolic fitness. Industrialization reduced the number of people involved in farming and other more physically arduous occupations and made a sedentary lifestyle commonplace. The Federal government, looking to reduce the cost of rations for Native Americans provided cheap, industrially-made foods, typically energy dense, unhealthful, and often in poor condition upon arrival at reservations. During this time, there were also heavy chronic stresses due to changing environments, lifestyles, restrictions of traditions (such as dancing), and outside influences (including Americanization and Christianization). This oppression is commonly classified as structural violence. The confluence of these changes and oppression over years came to a climax in the 1930s-1940s when tribes were compelled to stop farming (due to the Dust Bowl and Great Depression in the 1930s) and resort to leasing their land and seeking waged labor and federal assistance. This resulted in a stark rise in diabetes, which had not been known among the Native American population theretofore.

*Why were Native Americans one of the first populations to manifest the epidemic of chronic illness?*

Since the mid-1800s, Native Americans were forcibly moved onto reservations, where they lost their traditional, healthy lifestyle. The federal government began offering rations, and they became some of the first to transition to a sedentary lifestyle and steady diet of processed foods. Due to this modernization (which happened prior to the modernization of most of America) and accompanying chronic stress, Native Americans began contracting diabetes and metabolic syndrome in significantly higher proportions than their neighbors.