

**APPENDIX G:**  
**COGNITIVE EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS**

# **Highlights From Report on Cognitive Evaluation of the Alaska Native Adult Tobacco Survey**

## **Interviews Conducted:**

**April 6–17, 2005  
Barrow, AK  
Kotzebue, AK**

**May 14–27, 2006  
Anchorage, AK  
Fairbanks, AK  
Juneau, AK  
Kodiak, AK  
Dillingham, AK  
New Stuyahok, AK**

## **OVERVIEW**

This report describes findings of the project to evaluate the Alaska Native Adult Tobacco Survey (AN ATS) for the Office of Smoking and Health. Cognitive interviews were conducted in eight sites in Alaska. In total, 72 interviews (9 interviews in each location) were conducted. All interviewers were trained by the National Center on Health Statistics (NCHS) in the method of cognitive interviewing. All cognitive interviewers were members of indigenous populations and were accompanied by hosts who were members of the Alaska Native communities in which interviews were conducted. Community hosts contributed heavily to the initial analysis of interviews, specifically in identifying question response problems and patterns of interpretation within cultural contexts of the various communities.

A critical objective of the cognitive evaluation project was to identify any underlying problems or difficulties in the response process that could potentially lead to measurement error. Examples of these potential problems include technical terms or jargon; conceptual difficulties; overly complex words, phrases, or questions; inadequate response options; and participants' inability to accurately recall information. Because of cultural nuances and mores prevalent among this population, interviewers also were advised to watch for unintentional influences, such as participants' wishes to please the interviewers.

Ultimately, the cognitive testing is used to examine how the ATS functions among Alaska Native participants. Consequently, the following criteria informed the evaluation of questions:

- that the questions and responses reflect an appreciation of participants' personal understandings and respect the potential cultural sensitivity of subject matters,
- that the questions and responses reflect the contextual realities of the participants' relationship to tobacco in all of its forms, and
- that words and concepts be understandable and accessible to a broad range of educational levels, age cohorts, and income groups.

## **METHODS**

Seventy two in-depth, semistructured cognitive interviews were conducted in eight Alaska Native communities. Participants were recruited to represent the demographic profiles of the communities. The sample consisted of 72 Alaska Natives, 9 from each location.

### **Interviewing Protocol**

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a public facility located in the particular community. The average length of time per interview was 1 hour. The protocol for the cognitive interviews was consistent with the protocol that the interviewers learned from NCHS staff. First, interviewers read an Informed Consent form to the participant.

Participants were then asked to sign the form and were given a copy. Interviewers then asked participants the proposed survey question as it was written on the questionnaire, and participants responded to the question. Interviewers then asked in-depth, emergent probe questions to enable them to fully understand the participant's approach to understanding, interpreting, and placing the question in context and the processes by which participants constructed their responses. In the cases in which participants were unable to provide, or had difficulty providing, an answer, the interviewer asked questions that enabled the interviewer to understand the nature and cause of the difficulty. For this reason, the interviews are semistructured, in accordance with the particular circumstances of the participant and his or her perceptions of the proposed question. Data gathered from the interviews provide an in-depth understanding of the types of response patterns participants use, as well as potential response errors that may occur when they respond to each question.

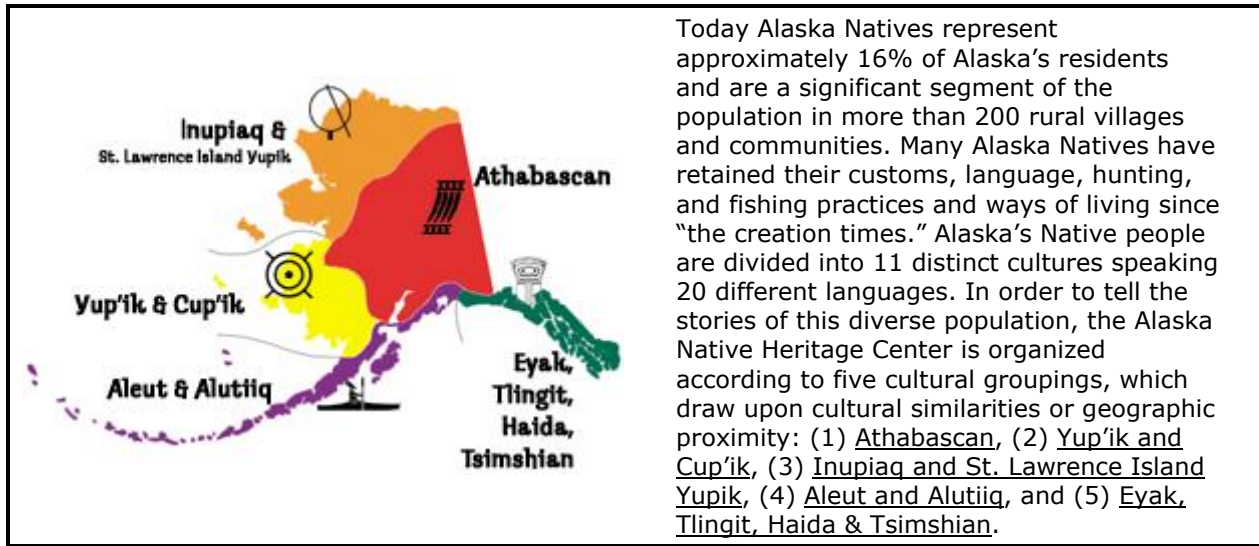
## **Analysis of Interviews**

Analyses were conducted from interviewer notes. Interviewer notes were collated by question so that comparisons could be made systematically across all participants in the eight sites. Two levels of analysis were then performed. First, distinct occurrences in which participants specifically expressed difficulty or confusion while answering were noted. Secondly, participants' interpretations of each question were examined. The constant comparative method, a standard method of analyzing qualitative data, was used to analyze the interpretive aspects of responses (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). By comparing across all cases, we were able to categorize individual responses according to a participant's particular interpretation of a question. From these categories, interpretive aspects (e.g., the consistency and degree of variation among participants) of each question were examined. Our concurrent recommendations derive from both levels of analysis.

## **FINDINGS**

Alaska Natives can be divided roughly into two categories: (1) those tribes or ethnicities that have had contact with Western cultures for a longer period of time and are more assimilated and (2) those tribes or ethnicities that have had contact with Western cultures for a shorter period of time and are more traditional. Typically, the tribes of Yup'ik, Cup'ik, Inupiaq, Aleut, and Alutiig fall into the latter, and the Athabascan tribes (i.e., Athabascan, Tglinkit, Haida, Eyak, and Tsimshian) fall into the former. The Athabascan territory lies closer to the larger cities of Alaska (Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau), and there is a great deal of movement back and forth between tribal communities and the larger cities by the Alaska Native populations living in what is called "the Interior" (Exhibit 1).

**Exhibit 1. Information About Alaska Native Cultures: The Five Ethnic Groups of Alaska Natives**



Source: Adapted from Alaska Native Heritage Center, <http://www.alaskanative.net/>.

The Yupik/Inuit territory, however, is not connected by roads to the larger cities of Alaska. The Yupik/Inuit people reside in either hubs such as Barrow, Kotzebue, Dillingham, or Nome, or native villages. Hubs are small towns averaging anywhere from 1,500 to 4,000 residents, while villages typically average 100 to 400 residents. Travel between Yupik/Inuit hubs and Alaska's larger cities can be accomplished only by air, barge, or dog teams, and then it is only when weather permits such travel. Yupik/Inuit villages can be accessed only by small aircraft or seaplanes, small boats, or skimobiles that are driven across the frozen ocean. Travel from Yupik/Inuit territory to Anchorage, Fairbanks, or Juneau is quite expensive and, given the poverty prevalent in the hubs and villages, frequent travel is cost prohibitive. Interviewers found it common to meet Alaska Native adult villagers who had been to Anchorage only once in their lifetimes.

The relative isolation and remoteness of the Alaska Natives to the rest of Alaska manifested itself in profound ways during the cognitive interviews. Typically, the Alaska Native populations are subsistence cultures that spend spring and summer hunting, fishing, and foraging so that they will have sustenance during the winter months. Because of their remoteness, these populations' resources may not be abundant as resources are in other areas (e.g., for residents of Kenai Peninsula and interior Alaska). This factor may play a role in educational attainment levels, access to health resources, and employment opportunities for those residing in this particular area.

**Noteworthy Findings**

- There was no sacred or ceremonial use of tobacco by either rural or urban Alaska Natives.

- The terms “traditional healer” and “medicine man” did not resonate with either rural or urban participants. Both sets of participants indicated that shamans existed pre-contact, but no longer exist. Additionally, “shaman” did not have the same connotation as “traditional healer” or “medicine man”—a shaman practiced both good and bad medicine.
- Chewing tobacco and snuff were significant methods of tobacco use, or abuse, among both urban and rural Alaska Native populations, but perhaps even more so among the Yupik/Inuit (rural) populations. Reasons for this pattern are either geographic or economic in nature: (a) since any type of tobacco must be either flown or barged into Yupik/Inuit territories, and because cigarettes are “burned up” faster than chewing tobacco is chewed, chew or snuff is used when cigarettes are gone; (b) cigarettes cost more than chew; and (c) chew can be mixed with the ash that results from cooking the fungus that grows on birch trees, creating iqmik. This mixing allows the user to use less tobacco, which provides access to tobacco for a longer period of time.
- The majority of the participants, both rural and urban, linked tobacco use to alcohol use.
- Both urbans and rurals conceptualized tobacco use, in whatever form, as a social activity much more than an individual habit.

## Considerations

- The rates of literacy and the levels of comprehension varied. The literacy level of participants should be considered when survey materials are designed. (Efforts have been made to make sure the survey materials provided in the *Guidance Document for Administating the Alaska Native Adult Tobacco Survey* are accessible to participants with different levels of literacy. For example, the Informed Consent form provided in the *Guidance Document* has been written at an eighth-grade reading level. Survey protocols are similarly sensitive to different literacy levels. For example, the protocol calls for the Informed Consent to be read to the participant unless the participant requests otherwise. Interviewers are instructed to notice if participants seem to have trouble understanding and to make an effort to explain the Informed Consent form and other instructions in understandable terms.)
- Some participants are more likely to be familiar with technical or medical terms or jargon than others. Terms like “cessation classes” were understood by those who were familiar with them, but others had no understanding of “cessation classes.”
- Sharing tobacco among friends and family members was not uncommon, especially in rural areas.