

# Status of Alaska Natives 2004

Institute of Social and Economic Research • University of Alaska Anchorage • May 2004



The Alaska Federation of Natives asked ISER to report on social and economic conditions among Alaska Natives. We found that Natives have more jobs, higher incomes, and better living conditions, health care, and education than ever. But they remain several times more likely than other Alaskans to be poor and out of work. Alcohol continues to fuel widespread social problems. Native students continue to do poorly on standard tests, and they're dropping out in growing numbers. Rates of heart disease and diabetes are rising. In the face of all these challenges, subsistence remains critical for cultural and economic reasons. And there are more challenges to come. In the coming decade, when economic growth is likely to be slower than in the past, thousands more young Alaska Natives will be moving into the job market.

- Alaska Natives are increasingly urban. About 42 percent live in urban areas now, and that share could reach more than 50 percent by 2020.
- The fastest Native population growth since 1970 has been in urban areas, boosted by thousands of Natives moving from rural places.
- Populations of remote Native villages continue to grow, despite the migration to urban places.
- At current trends, the Native population will grow from 120,000 in 2000 to 165,000 by 2020.
- Natives are a young people. Those 19 and younger make up 44 percent of all Natives, compared with about 29 percent among all Americans. But the elder population has also been growing fast.
- Natives gained more than 8,000 jobs between 1990 and 2000. But only about 35 percent of all Native jobs are full-time and year-round.
- Native women held more jobs than Native men by 2000. Working-age women are also the most likely to live in urban areas.
- Despite job gains, the number of unemployed Natives increased 35 percent from 1990 to 2000.
- Demand for jobs will continue to grow, with 25 percent more Alaska Natives entering the work force between 2000 and 2010.
- Incomes of Natives remain just 50 to 60 percent those of other Alaskans, despite gains. Transfer payments are a growing share of Native income.
- All the economic problems Natives face are worst in remote areas, where living costs are highest.
- Natives are three times as likely as other Alaskans to be poor. Half the Native families below the poverty line are headed by women.
- Many Alaska children are growing up in families headed by women, but the share is about a third larger in Native families.
- Alcohol continues to fuel high rates of domestic violence, child abuse, and violent death in the Native community. But two thirds of small villages have imposed local controls on alcohol.
- Current Native health problems—like the spread of diabetes and heart disease—are linked more to the modern American way of life than to poor living conditions, as problems were 30 years ago.
- Native education levels continue to rise, but haven't yet reached those among other Alaskans. Native women are significantly more likely than men to attend college.
- Native students are more likely to drop out of school and less likely to pass standard tests.

## A WORD ABOUT THE 2000 CENSUS

The 2000 U.S. census reported nearly 120,000 Alaska Natives living in Alaska, including 21,000 who were Native and some other race. That was the first census to give people the option of specifying more than one race. Before that, everyone had to choose just one primary race to describe their heritage. The change in 2000 means:

- More people were probably counted as Native in 2000 than would have been under the old system. At least some people who were Native and some other race would likely have named the other race, if they had to choose.
- Since most Native people of mixed race live in urban areas, urban growth is the most likely to be overestimated.

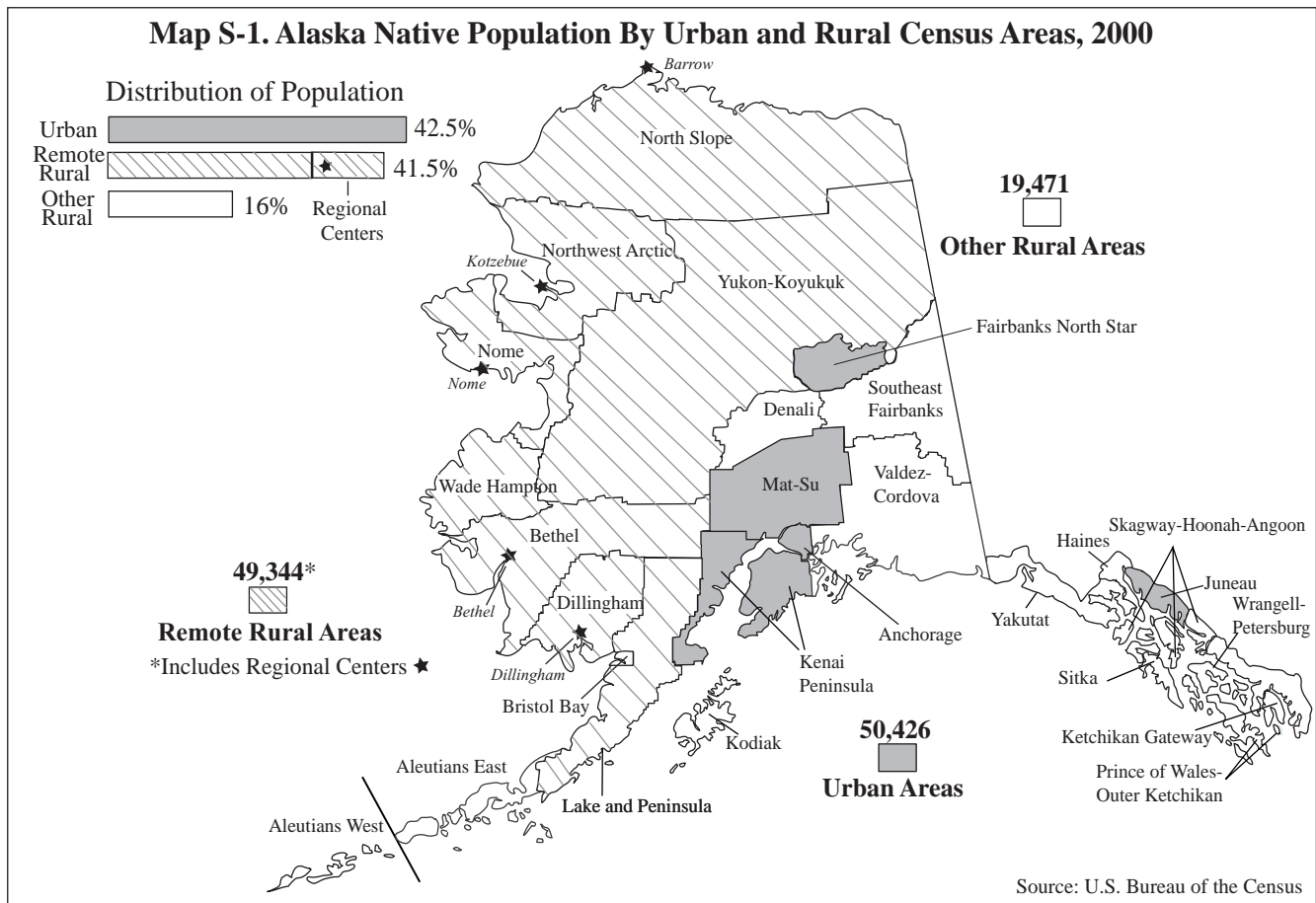
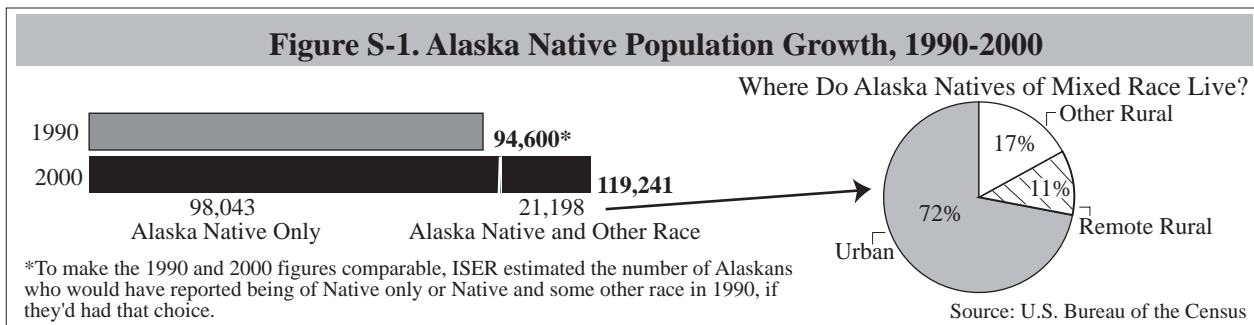
Still, the U.S. census is the best information available on conditions among Natives (and all other Americans), and it reliably shows trends and patterns.

## POPULATION GROWTH AND TRENDS

- *Alaska Natives are only about half as likely as Native Americans nationwide to be of mixed race.* The 18 percent of Natives who are of mixed race are mostly young people living in urban areas (Figure S-1).

- *Today Alaska Natives are just as likely to live in urban areas as in remote rural places* (Map S-1). In 2000, nearly 43 percent of Alaska Natives lived in the urban areas of Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and the Mat-Su and Kenai Peninsula boroughs. Close to 42 percent lived in remote places in northern, interior, and western Alaska, including several regional centers. The remaining 16 percent lived in less remote rural areas.

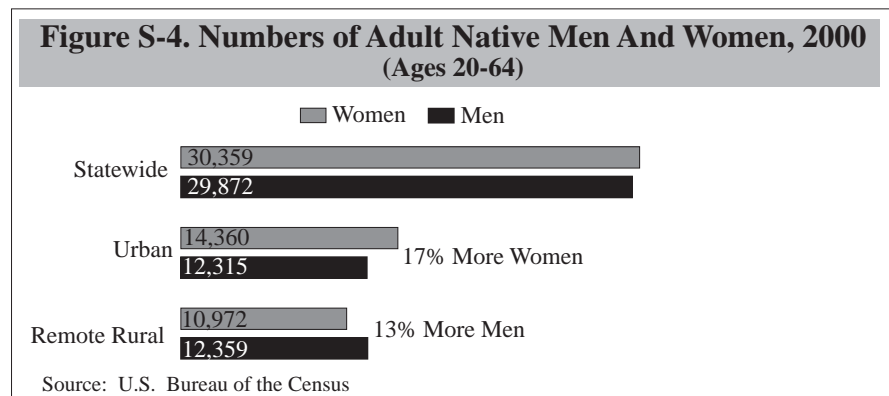
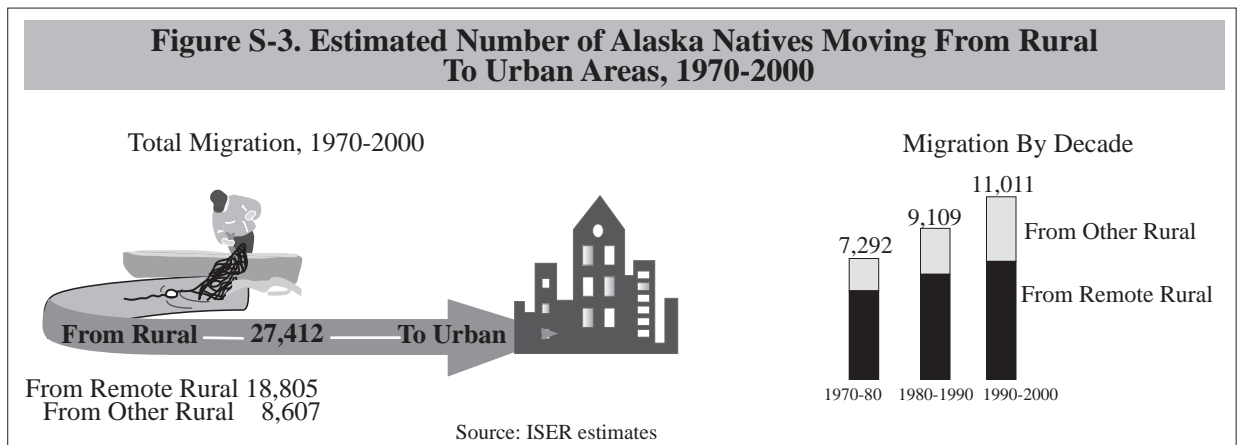
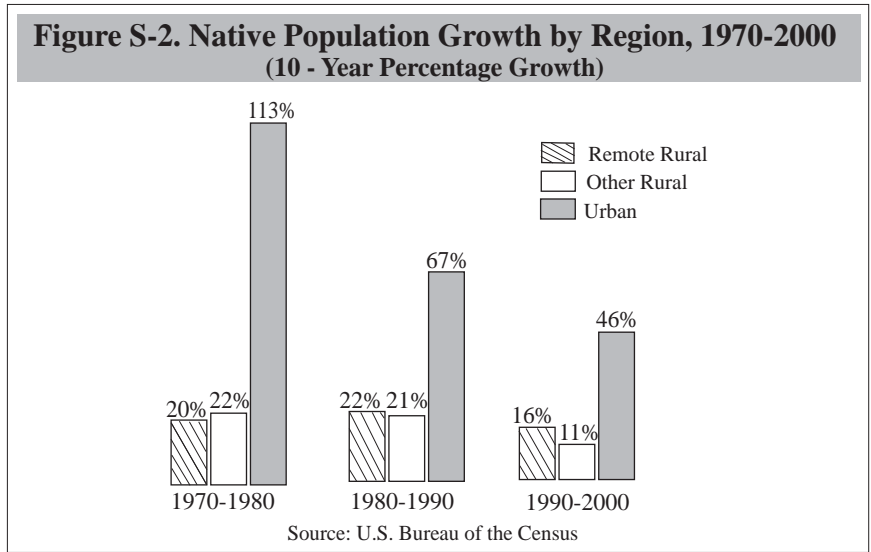
- *The Native population grew in both urban and rural areas in the 1990s, but the fastest growth was in urban areas—as it has been for the past 30 years* (Figure S-2).



- *Much of the fast growth in urban areas has been due to the thousands of Natives moving from rural to urban areas.* An estimated 27,400 Natives moved from rural places to urban areas from 1970 through 2000. Most of those people moved from remote rural areas, as Figure S-3 shows. Roughly 11,000 rural Natives moved to urban areas just in the 1990s.

- *Despite the movement out of rural areas,* the rural Native population still grew in every decade since 1970.

- *Native women of working age are especially likely to live in urban areas.* As Figure S-4 shows, numbers of adult Native men and women (ages 20 to 64) were close to equal statewide in 2000. But adult women outnumbered adult men in urban areas by 17 percent. By contrast, adult Native men in remote rural places outnumbered women by about 13 percent.



## HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES

- *Native households are far less likely to be married couples and much more likely to be headed by women today than 40 years go, as Figure S-5 shows. In 1960, 69 percent of Native households were married couples, compared with 40 percent in 2000. Women without husbands headed 11 percent of Native households in 1960, but double that share—22 percent—by 2000. Similar trends happened in households nationwide, but the changes in Native households were more dramatic.*

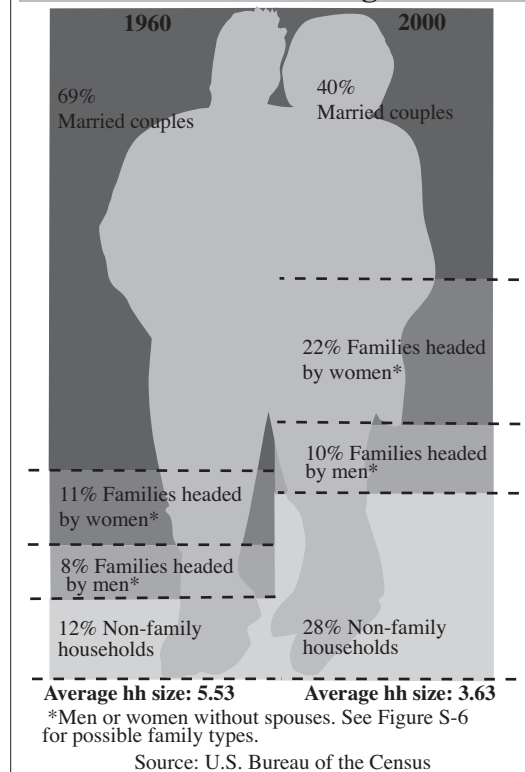
- *Households that aren't families also make up a much bigger share of Native households today, up from just 12 percent in 1960 to 28 percent by 2000. Most non-family households have just one person.*

- *Native households are also considerably smaller today, dropping from an average of 5.5 persons in 1960 to 3.6 in 2000.*

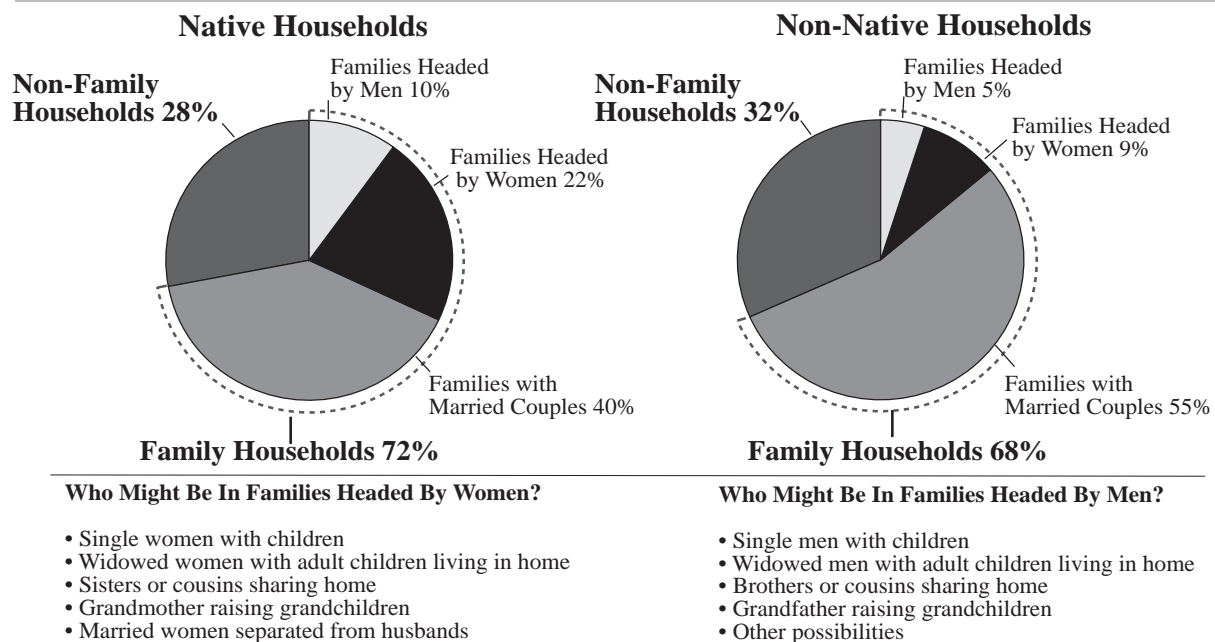
- *Native households are twice as likely as non-Native households to be headed by women without husbands—22 percent, compared with 9 percent for non-Natives (Figure S-6). Keep in mind that while many women who head households are raising children alone, not all are. Some families headed by women could be, for instance, sisters sharing a home or widows whose adult children live with them. Extended family households are common in the Native community.*

- *Native men without wives are also far more likely than non-Native men to head households—10 percent versus 5 percent. But again, not all these men are raising children alone; they could also be adult cousins or other relatives sharing a home.*

**Figure S-5. How Have Alaska Native Households Changed?**



**Figure S-6. Composition of Native and Non-Native Households, 2000**  
(Native Households: 31,675 • Non-Native Households: 189,925)

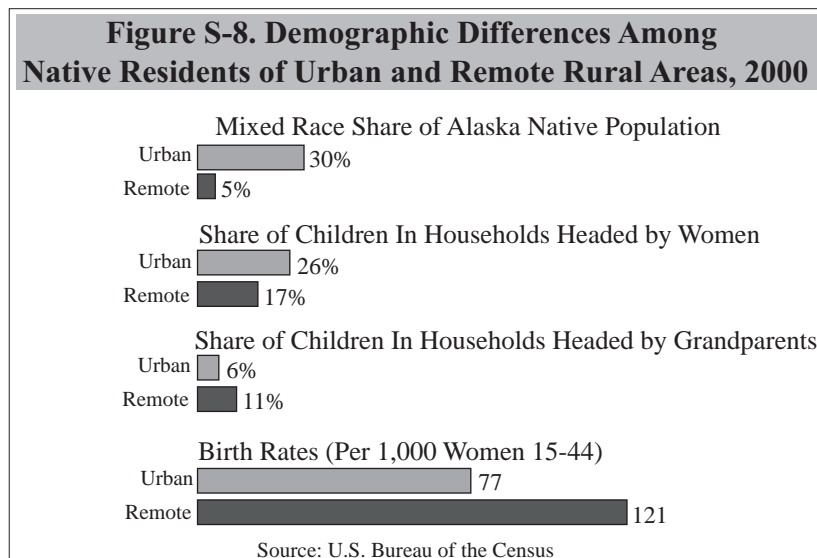
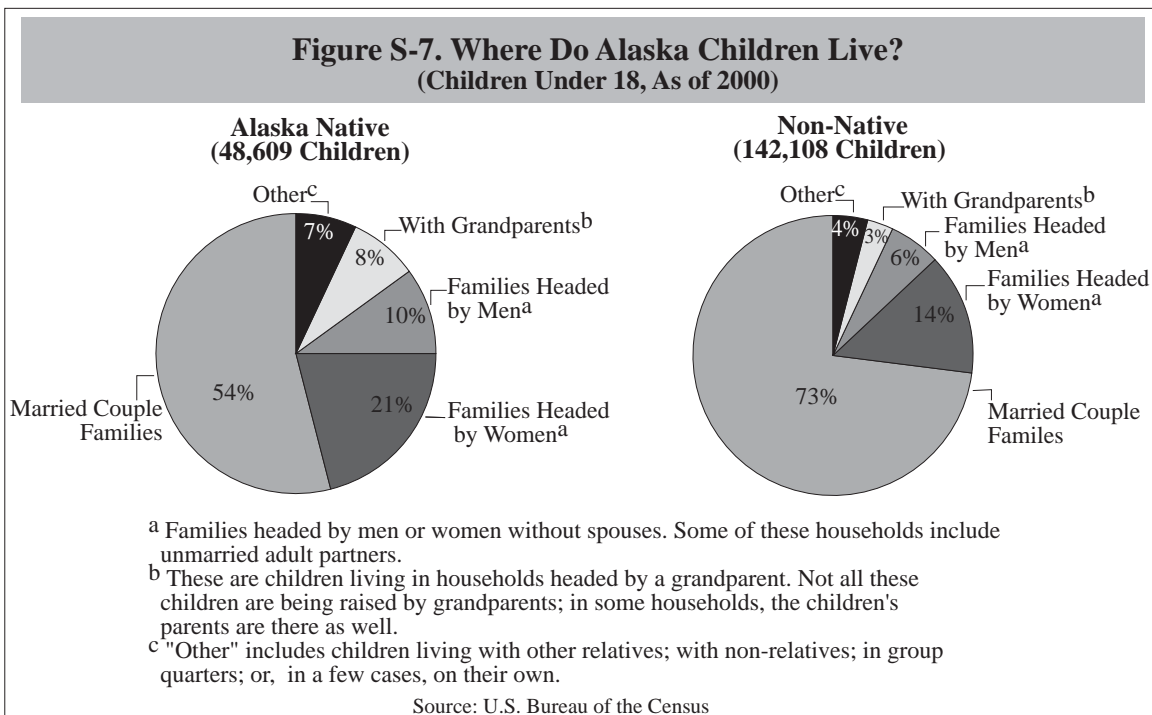


- *Just over half of Native children live in married-couple families*, compared with nearly three quarters of non-Native children (Figure S-7).
- *One in five Native children and one in seven non-Native children are growing up in households headed by women*. These households are by far the most likely to be poor (as Figure S-28 on page 13 shows).
- *Nearly 10 percent of Native children live in households headed by their grandparents*, compared with about three percent among non-Native children. But again, keep in mind that grandparents aren't raising all these children. The children's parents also live in many of these multi-generational households.

### URBAN-RURAL DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Not only are there demographic differences among Natives and non-Natives, there are also significant differences among Natives living in urban places and in remote rural areas (see Map S-1 on page 2). As Figure S-8 shows:

- *Natives in urban places are about six times more likely to be of mixed race.*
- *Native children in urban places* are more likely to live in households headed by women.
- *Native children in remote rural places* are almost twice as likely to live in households headed by their grandparents.
- *Birth rates among Native women in remote areas are about 50 percent higher* than those among women in urban areas.



## LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENTS IN LIVING CONDITIONS

When Alaska became a state, most Alaska Natives—especially in the western, northern, and interior regions—lived in remote villages without safe ways to get water or dispose of sewage. Houses in the villages were mostly small, crowded, dilapidated, and without electricity. Basic medical care was typically available only when public health nurses or doctors visited.

Alaska Natives died young and suffered high rates of tuberculosis, hepatitis, and other illnesses caused or aggravated by their living conditions.

But since the 1970s, the federal and state governments have sharply improved sanitation, housing, and health care in Native villages. As a result, Alaska Natives are living longer, fewer babies are dying, and many infectious diseases have been eliminated or sharply curtailed. Table S-1 shows a few results of better living conditions—lower infant mortality and death rates and increased life expectancy.

The figures here and on the facing page show the broad picture of improvements in sanitation, housing, and health care since the 1970s.

- **More than 75 percent of rural houses had sanitation systems by 2003**, according to figures from the Alaska Village Safe Water Program. That's up from about 40 percent in 1990 and around 20 percent in 1980 (Figure S-9).

- **Nearly 90 rural communities got new sanitation systems between 1975 and 2003.** Map S-2 shows locations of places, by Native regional corporation boundaries, where new systems serving at least 30 percent of houses have been built since 1975. Most of the new systems are in the remote areas of the state; many communities in southcentral and southeast Alaska had public sanitation systems in the 1970s. Many existing systems have also been improved over the years.

- **As of 2003, 32 communities in interior and western Alaska still lacked** public sanitation systems, and in another 23 communities less than 30 percent of houses had such systems.

**TABLE S-1. SIGNS OF IMPROVED LIVING CONDITIONS**

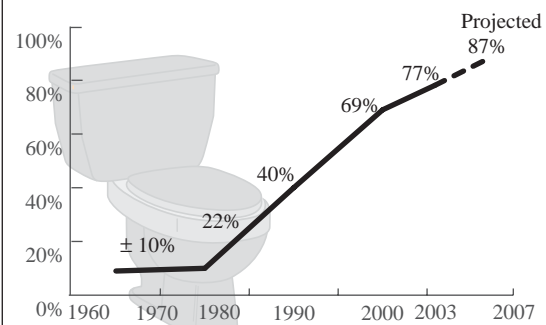
	1960	1990	2000
<b>Infant Mortality Down</b> (Deaths per 1,000 Births)			
Native	87.0	15.1	9.5 <sup>a</sup>
U.S. Average	25.7	9.2	7.0 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Total Death Rate Down</b> (Deaths per 1,000 from all causes)			
Native	9.4	5.8	5.6
Non-Native	4.8	3.3	4.4
<b>Life Expectancy Up</b> (Years expected at birth)			
Native	61.1	68.8	69.5 <sup>b</sup>
U.S. Average	69.7	75.4	76.5 <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Average, 1998-2000

<sup>b</sup> As of 1997

Sources: Alaska Area Native Health Service; Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics; U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Figure S-9. Share of Rural Houses With Sanitation Systems, 1960-2007**



Source: Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation Village Safe Water Program

**Map S-2. Communities Where New Public Sanitation Systems Were Built, 1975-2003\***

(Piped or Flush/Haul Systems Serving at Least 30% of Community in 2003)



\*By boundaries of Native regional corporations. Does not include communities (1) that had public sanitation systems before 1975 or (2) have individual wells and septic tanks. A number of communities in the Cook Inlet, Sealaska, Chugach, Aleut, Bristol Bay, and Koniag regions had public systems before 1975, but only a handful of places in NANA, Bering Straits, Doyon, and Calista had systems. The Arctic Slope had none. Today a number of communities still rely on individual wells and septic tanks, especially in Ahtna, Cook Inlet, Doyon, and Bristol Bay.

Sources: U.S. Census, 1980 and 1990; Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Village Safe Water Program

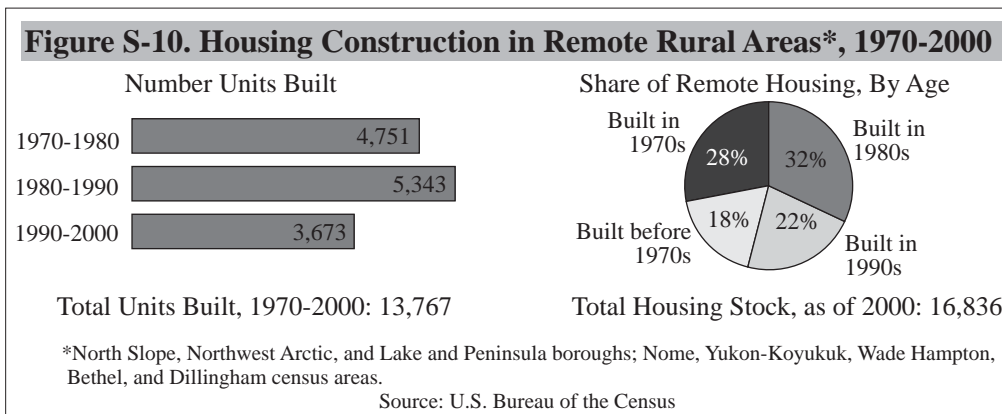
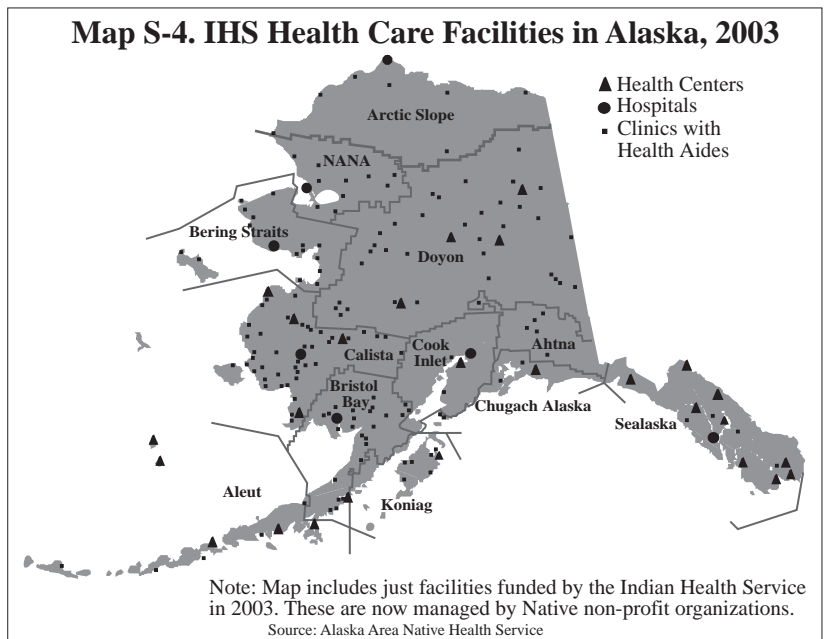
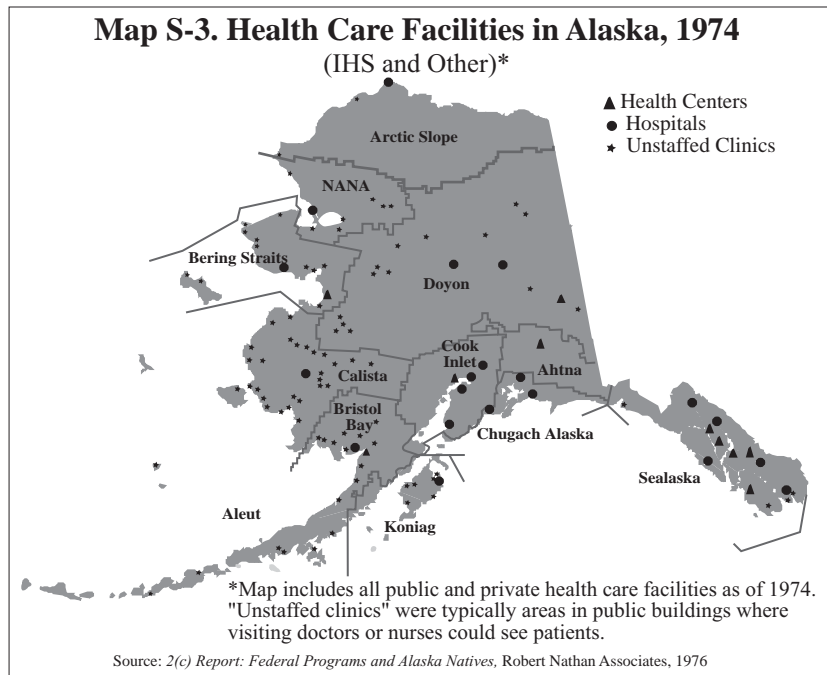
Maps S-3 and S-4 show expansion of basic health clinics and centers in rural areas since the 1970s. (Hospitals are mainly in the same locations where they were in the 1970s, but hospital facilities have been improved.)

Only a couple of health centers (which were usually staffed by at least some medical person) existed in remote western Alaska in 1974. A number of villages in the interior, western, and northern regions had unstaffed health clinics—these were usually areas of public buildings where visiting doctors or nurses could see patients.

By 2003, around 170 villages had health clinics staffed by local health aides, and a number of new health centers had been established in western, southwestern, and interior areas. Many places also had access to the telemedicine system, which allows health aides in villages to transmit electronic images of patients to consultant doctors in larger communities.

However, rural residents report that in 2004 many clinic facilities still need improvement. The federal Denali Commission (established to help improve rural facilities) has worked with communities and identified about \$235 million in needed improvements to basic facilities.

A third major improvement since the 1970s is in rural housing. Figure S-10 shows that close to 14,000 new housing units were built in remote rural areas between 1970 and 2000, including about 3,700 units in the 1990s. Only about 18 percent of the housing in remote places today was built before 1970.



## HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The last two pages showed how better living conditions have helped Alaska Natives lead longer, healthier lives than in the past. But today they face other health and social problems. Experts link many of these problems to the modern American diet and way of life and to widespread alcohol abuse.

- **Rates of diabetes among Alaska Natives doubled in just 15 years**, as Figure S-11 shows. By 1999, diabetes had become more widespread among Natives than among Americans as a whole.

- **Natives today share the two leading causes of death—heart disease and cancer—with other Alaskans** (Figure S-12). Natives die of cancer at higher rates than any other Alaskans and from heart disease at just over the rate among white Alaskans. Twenty years ago, Natives were much less likely to die from heart disease.

- **Accidents are among the top five causes of death for all Alaskans**, but rates of accidental death among Natives are more than twice those among other Alaskans and three times those in the U.S. as a whole.

- **Still, rates of accidental death among Natives fell nearly 40 percent from the early 1980s to the late 1990s** (top half of Figure S-13). Experts credit the drop at least in part to widespread safety campaigns by Native organizations and government agencies. The bottom half of the graph shows the most recent figures, which are not directly comparable with the earlier figures because they are adjusted on a new basis.

- **Trends in homicides and suicides are less clear**, although rates at least aren't increasing. The figures from the late 1990s appear to be lower than in the 1980s. But

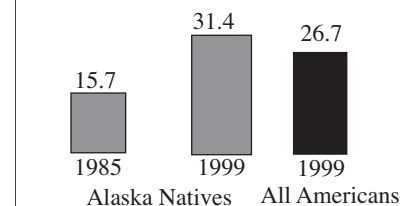
a relatively small increase or decrease in suicides or homicides in a given year can change the rates substantially. Again, the bottom half of Figure S-13 shows the most recent figures, which are not directly comparable with the older ones because they are adjusted on a new basis.

- **Alcohol continues to take a heavy toll** on Native people. Experts link most of the high rates of crime, violent death, and social problems among Natives to alcohol abuse.

- **Use of inhalants by Native high-school students declined by half between 1995 and 2003**, according to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. About 10 percent of both Native and non-Native students report ever sniffing gasoline fumes or other inhalants. But Native students have become more likely to smoke marijuana, with the share reporting current use up from about 29 percent in 1995 to 36 percent in 2003.

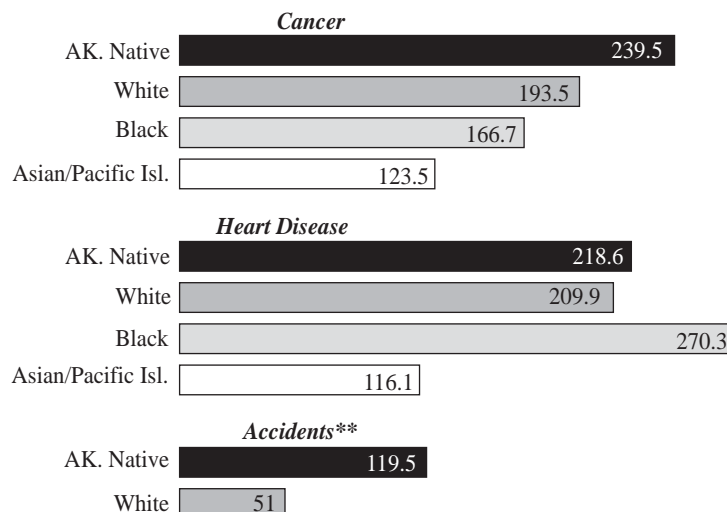
- **Native children suffer half the child abuse in Alaska**, although they make up only one quarter of all children. Native women suffer more than a third of reported domestic violence, while making up about a fifth of Alaska women.

**Figure S-11. Rates of Diabetes**  
(Cases Per 1,000 People)



Source: Alaska Area Native Health Service

**Figure S-12. Death Rates From Cancer, Heart Disease, and Accidents**  
**Among Alaskans, 1999-2001**  
(Age-Adjusted Rates per 100,000)\*

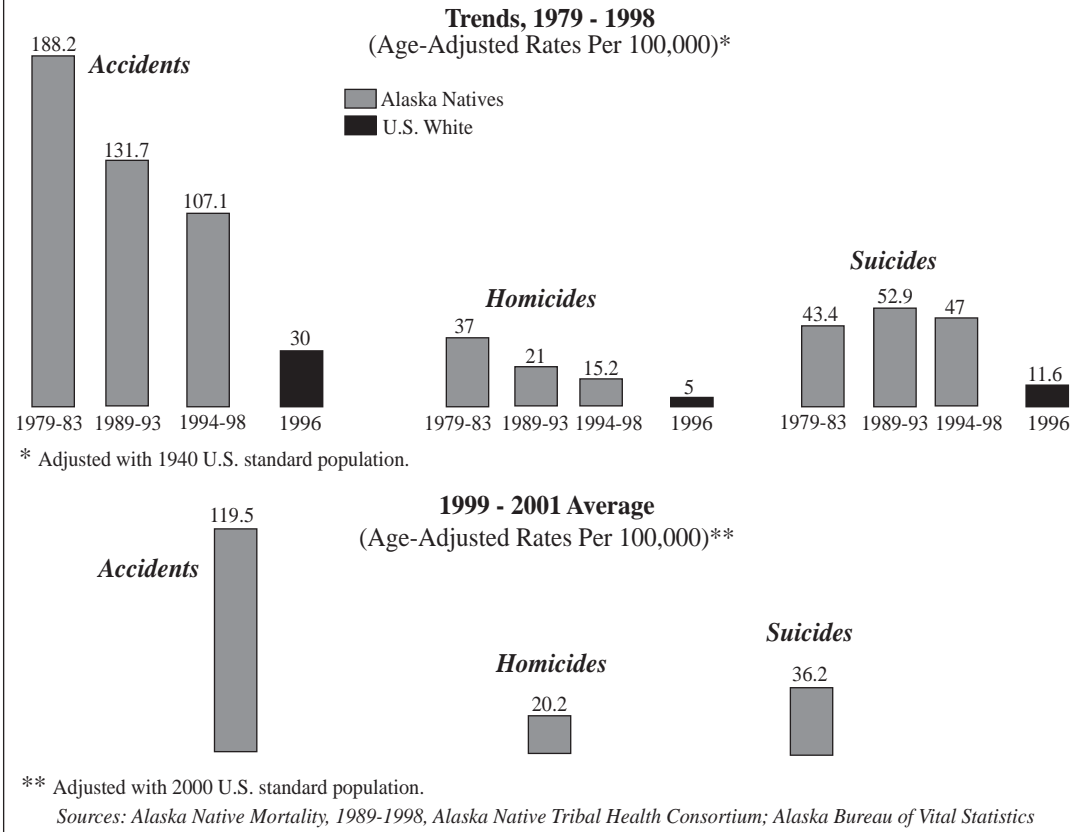


\* Adjusted with U.S. 2000 standard population

\*\* Numbers of accidental deaths among Black and Asian Alaskans during this period were small, making rates statistically questionable.

Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

**Figure S-13. Violent Deaths Among Alaska Natives and U.S. White Population**

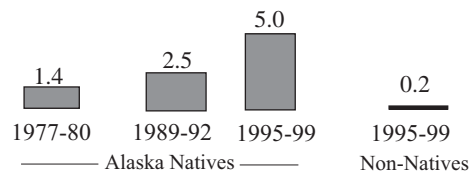


- *The rate of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder among Native babies doubled* in the 1990s. Part of that increase may be due to improved diagnosis in recent years. Still, rates among Native children are many times higher than among other children.

- *The number of Native prisoners in Alaska jumped 50 percent* from 1993 to 2002 (Figure S-15). Natives make up more than a third of prisoners but less than a fifth of the population.

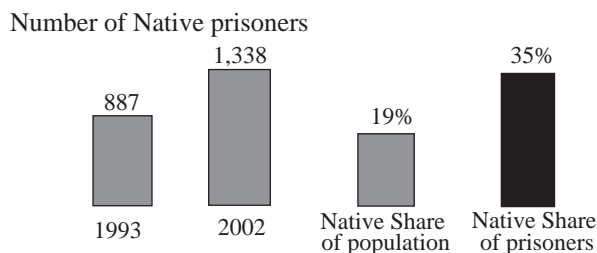
- *Native communities are fighting back against alcohol*, with about two thirds of small villages controlling alcohol under state law. Research has shown that local control of alcohol has helped prevent as many as one in five violent deaths that would otherwise have occurred.

**Figure S-14. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**  
(Cases per 1,000 Births)



Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

**Figure S-15. Native Inmates in Alaska Prisons, 1993-2002**



Source: Alaska Department of Corrections

**Figure S-16. Alcohol Control in Native Communities, 2001\***



\*ISER calculations for 168 small rural places, based on records of Alcoholic Beverage Control Board

## THE CHANGING JOB PICTURE

- *The number of Alaska Natives with jobs was 30 percent bigger in 2000 than in 1990 and six times bigger than in 1960 (Figure S-17).*

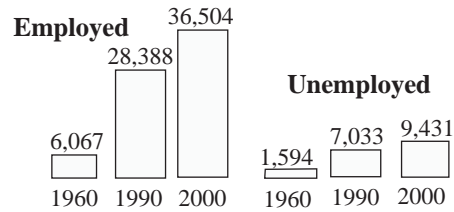
- *Native women in particular continued to gain jobs in the 1990s, and by 2000 they had a slight edge on Native men (Figures S-18 and S-19).*

- *But both Native men and women continue to be far less likely than non-Natives to have jobs.* Less than half of adult Natives have jobs, compared with 73 percent of non-Native men and 64 percent of non-Native women.

- *Native jobs are also more likely to be part-time or seasonal.* About 35 percent of Native jobs in 2000 were full-time, year-round, compared with close to 60 percent among non-Natives. But a growing share of Native women's jobs are full-time—40 percent, up from 27 percent in 1990.

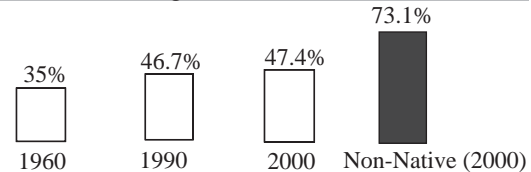
- *The number of Natives without jobs grew at about the same pace as those with jobs in the 1990s—because many more Natives moved into the labor force (Figure S-17).*

**Figure S-17. Numbers of Employed and Unemployed Alaska Natives, 1960-2000**



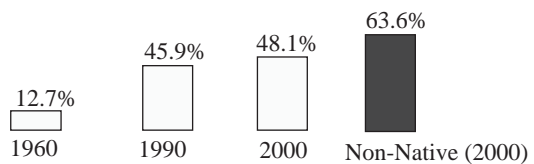
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Figure S-18. Share of Native Men with Jobs (Age 16 and Older)**



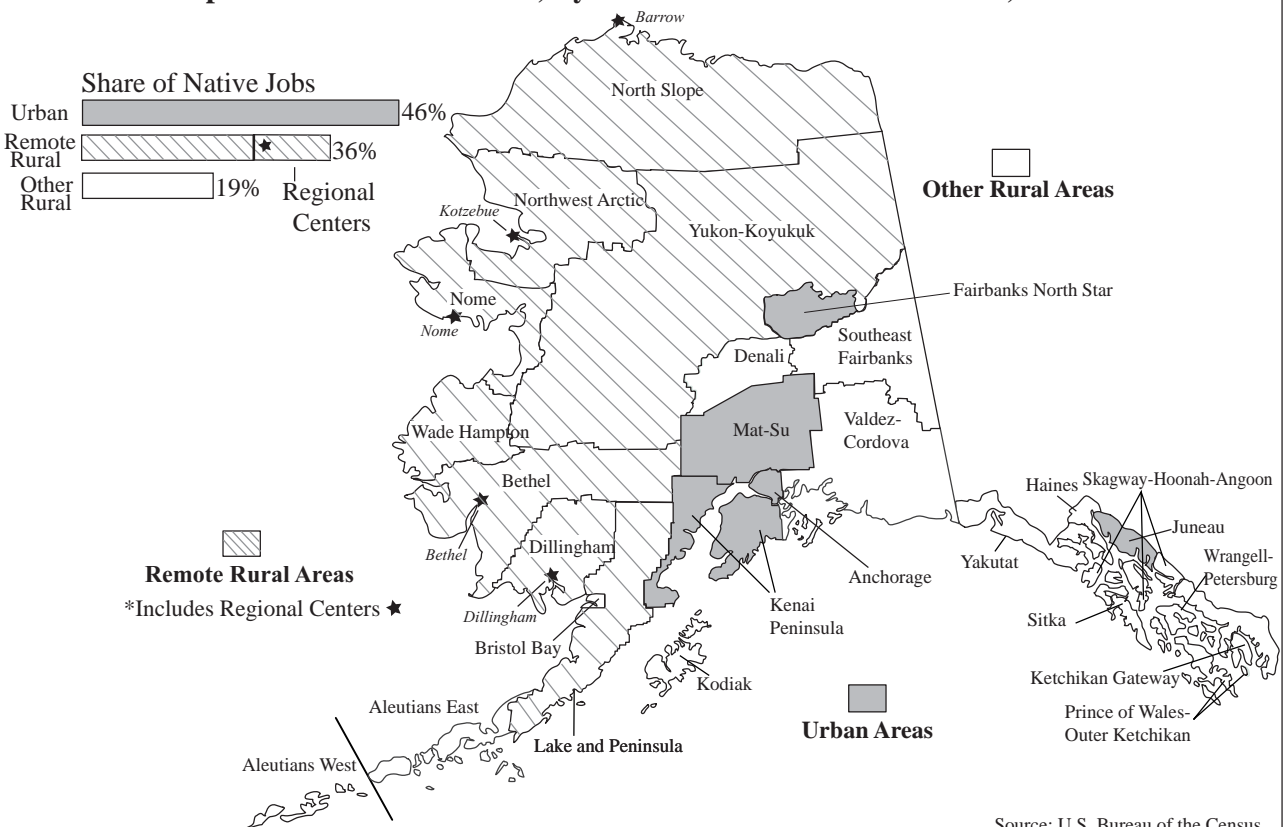
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Figure S-19. Share of Native Women with Jobs (Age 16 and Older)**

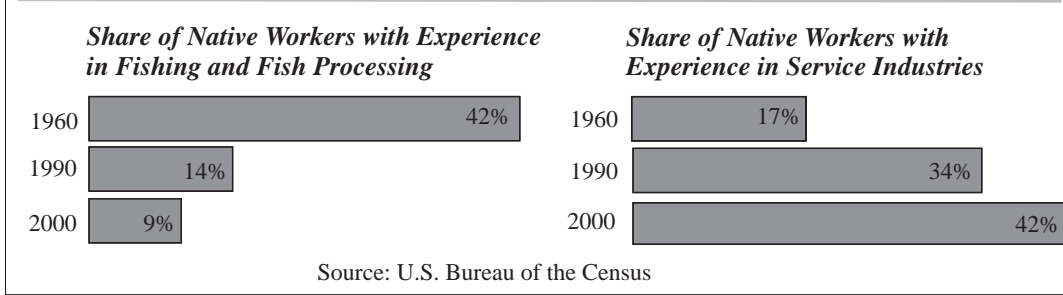


Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

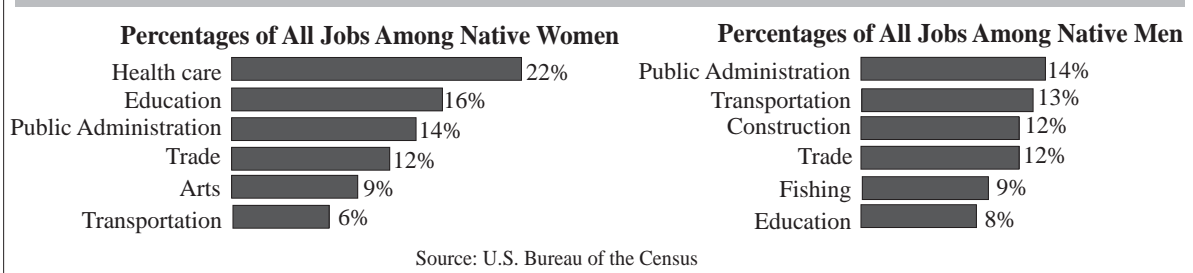
**Map S-5. Alaska Native Jobs, By Urban and Rural Census Areas, 2000**



**Figure S-20. Shift From Fishing To Service Jobs, 1960-2000**



**Figure S-21. Most Common Jobs Among Native Men and Women, By Industry, 2000**



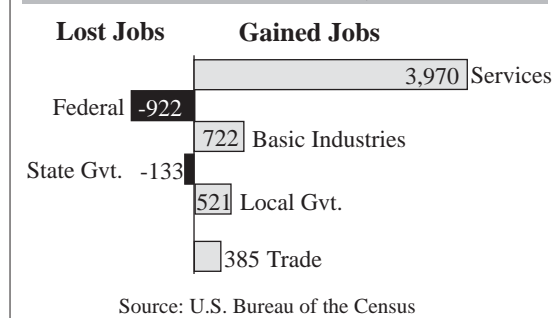
- *Jobs are much harder to come by in remote rural areas, especially outside the regional centers.* Map S-5 shows that just 36 percent of Native jobs are in remote areas and nearly a third of those are concentrated in regional centers. But Map S-1 on page 2 shows that 42 percent of the Native population lives in remote areas. Both urban areas and less remote rural places have bigger shares of jobs than of population.

- *The kinds of jobs Alaska Natives hold have changed over time.* In 1960, more than 40 percent of Native workers reported that their main experience was in commercial fishing or fish processing. Today, more than 40 percent say they've worked primarily in service jobs (Figure S-20).

- *The most common jobs among Native women now are in health care,* followed by education and public administration. Native men most commonly work in public administration, transportation, and construction (Figure S-21).

- *Service jobs are especially common in remote areas,* where Native non-profit organizations manage federal health care and other social service programs. Federal grants for such programs grew sharply in recent years. Figure S-22 shows that three quarters of the new jobs created in remote areas in the 1990s were in service industries. Remote areas gained some basic industry jobs (in mining and petroleum) in the 1990s, but many of these jobs are held by non-residents. The region also gained some jobs in local government (which includes school districts) and in trade, but lost state and federal government jobs.

**Figure S-22. Gaining and Losing Jobs in Remote Rural Areas, 1990-2000**



## INCOME AND POVERTY

• *Native income has increased every decade since the 1960s*, even after it is adjusted for inflation. Figure S-23 shows that real per capita Native income in 2000 was more than four times higher than in 1960. But the gain in the 1990s was much smaller than in earlier times—only about 7 percent.

• *Native incomes remain far below those of non-Natives*. In 2000, Native per capita income was just over half that of non-Natives—a slight improvement from 1990 (Figure S-23).

• *Half of Native families have incomes below \$30,000 a year*, compared with about one quarter of non-Native families (Figure S-24). And since we know that Native families are on average larger, those lower incomes often support more people.

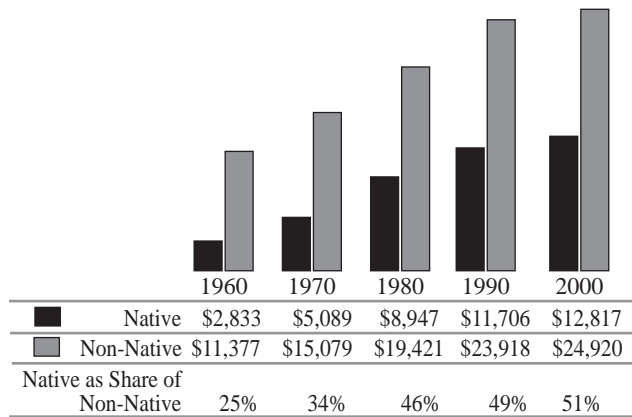
• *Incomes are especially low in remote areas*, due to a combination of fewer jobs and more part-time or seasonal work. Natives in remote rural areas have, on average, incomes about 60 percent those of Natives in other parts of Alaska.

• *The remote areas where incomes are lowest are also the places where costs are highest*. For example, electricity is two to three times as expensive in remote areas as in Anchorage, and food costs are 50 percent or more higher.

• *The entire personal income of the eight most remote areas in 2000 was barely larger than that of just the city of Juneau* (Figure S-25). That's a clear measure of the small size of the economy in remote areas. (See Map S-5 for regional boundaries.)

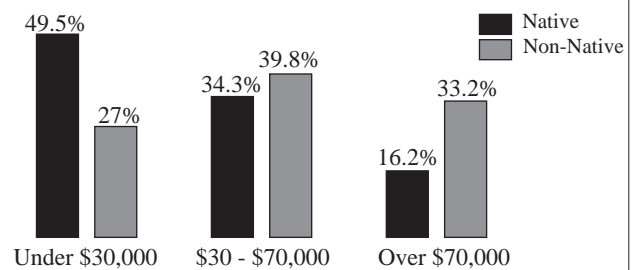
• *Subsistence hunting and fishing are important not only for cultural but also economic reasons* in Native communities, especially in the remote rural areas where incomes are lowest. Figure S-26 shows that wild food harvests in the 1990s averaged hundreds of pounds per person in the northern, interior, and western regions.

**Figure S-23. Real Alaska Per Capita Income, 1960- 2000**  
(In 2000 Dollars)



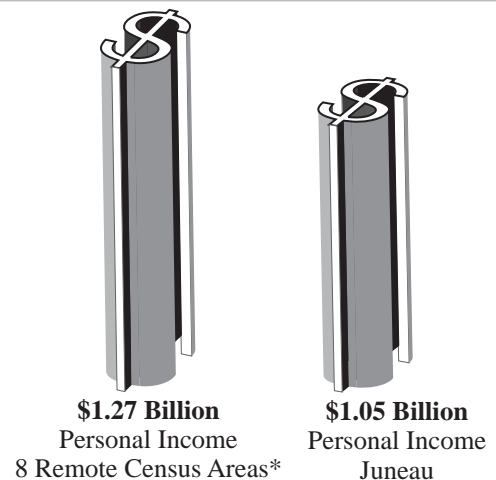
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Figure S-24. Alaska Annual Family Income Distribution, 2000**



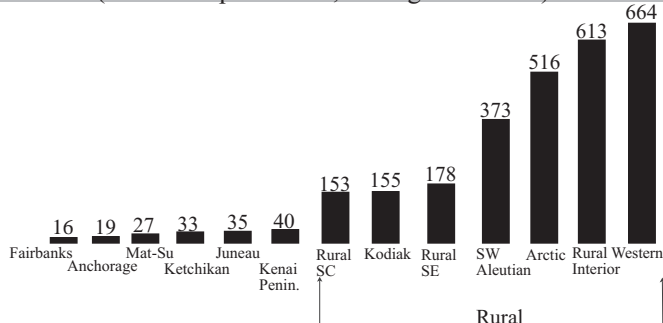
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Figure S-25. Personal Income in Remote Areas and Juneau, 2000**



\* See Map S-5. Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

**Figure S-26. Wild Food Harvest**  
(In Pounds per Person, Average for 1990s)



Source: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Subsistence in Alaska: A 2000 Update

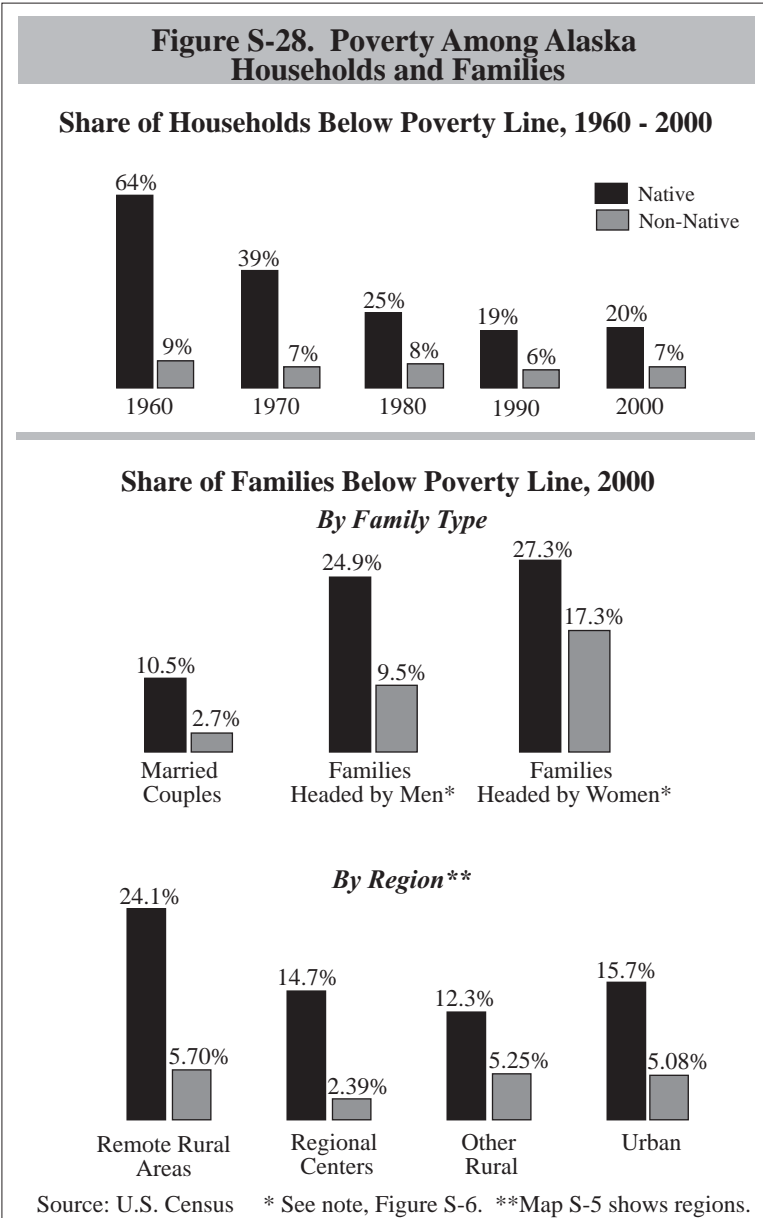
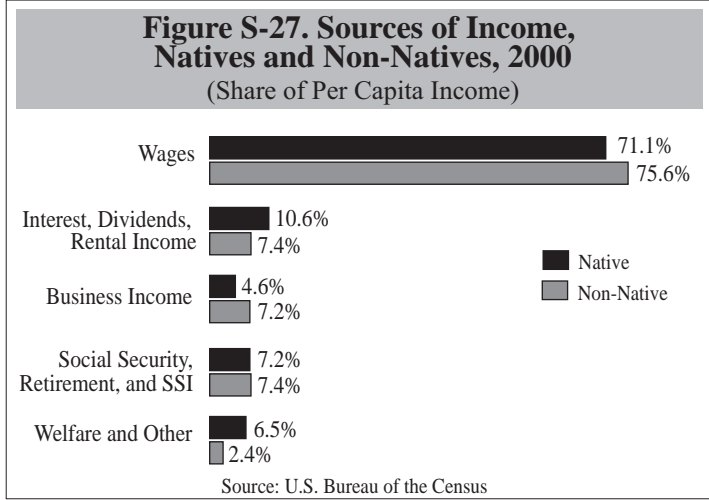
- **Almost all Native and non-Native households get some income from wages.** In 2000, about 85 percent of Native households and 90 percent of non-Native households got at least some income from earnings. But on average, Native household earnings are only about two thirds those of non-Native households.

- **Wages make up most income for all Alaskans, but other sources of income differ.** Alaska Natives get more of their non-wage income from interest and dividends and welfare payments, and non-Natives get a bigger share from business income (Figure S-27). Keep in mind that these are *shares* of income, not *amounts*. In almost every category, non-Natives have larger incomes than Natives.

- **Alaska Natives are three times as likely as other Alaskans to live in poverty.** Figure S-28 shows that 20 percent of Native households were below the federal poverty threshold in 2000, compared with 7 percent of non-Native households. Poverty levels among Natives dropped sharply from 1960 through 1990, but held steady from 1990 through 2000.

- **Families headed by women are the most likely to be poor, among both Natives and non-Natives.** More than one quarter of all Native families headed by women were below the poverty line in 2000, compared with about one in 10 among married couples (Figure S-28).

- **Native families in small remote places are more likely to be poor than families elsewhere in the state.** In 2000, nearly 25 percent of all Native families in remote villages lived below the poverty line—and that figure doesn't take into account the higher costs of living in remote areas. Native families in urban areas have the next highest rate of poverty, with about 15 percent below the poverty line.



## EDUCATION SUCCESSES

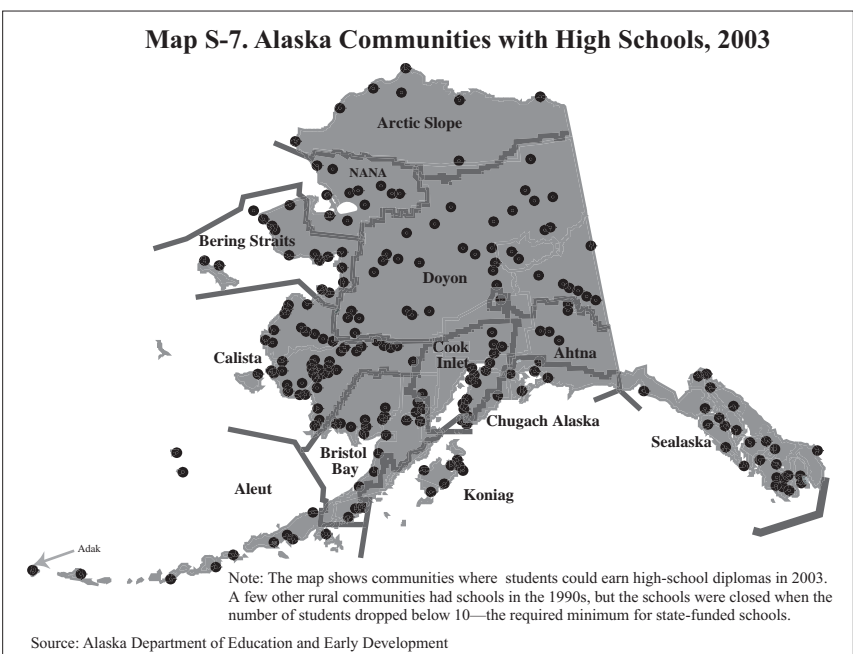
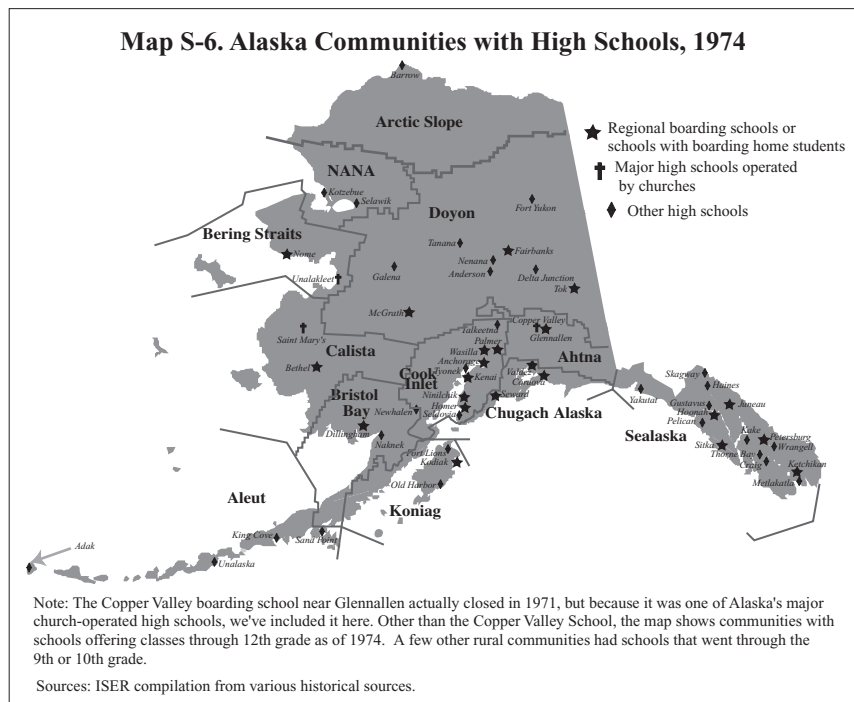
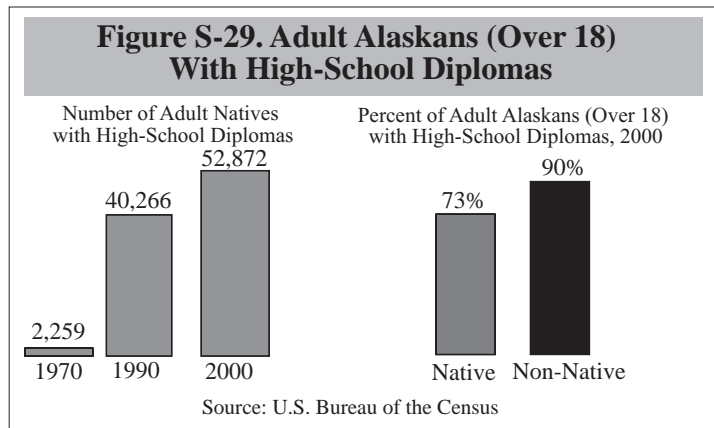
The biggest success in education among Native people in the past 25 years is that tens of thousands have graduated from high school. As recently as the 1970s, only a relative few had finished high school, as Figure S-29 shows.

- *The number of Alaska Natives who have graduated from high school has soared*, up from around 2,400 in 1970 to 40,000 in 1990 and 53,000 by 2000.

- *Nearly 75 percent of Alaska Natives over 18 had high-school diplomas by 2000*. That share still fell short of the 90 percent of other Alaskans with high-school diplomas—but the gap was much narrower than in the recent past.

The surge in high-school graduates is due in large part to the construction of high schools throughout rural Alaska since 1976. Before then, only a handful of the largest rural Native communities had high schools, as Map S-6 shows. Most Native students who wanted to go to high school had to attend boarding schools in Nome or a few other places, or board with families in large communities—like Anchorage—that had high schools. Churches also operated a handful of high schools for Native students.

Then a group of Native students went to court, charging that the state government wasn't providing them equal access to education. In a 1976 settlement of that case (*Tobeluk v. Lind*), the state agreed to build high schools in dozens of small rural communities. Map S-7 shows the result: in 2003, all communities with at least 10 students had local high schools.



Another success since 1970 is Native college attendance, as shown in Figure S-30.

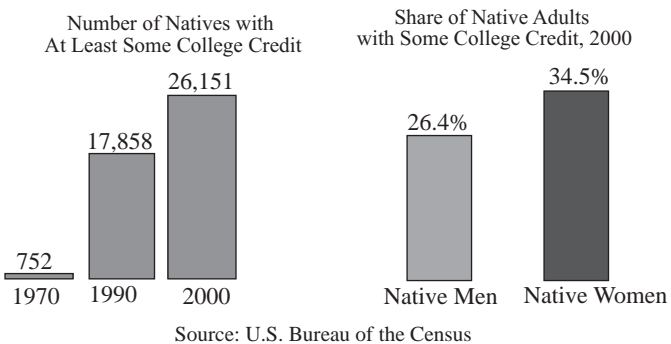
- **Over 26,000 Alaska Natives had some college credit in 2000**, up from about 18,000 in 1990 and fewer than 1,000 in 1970.

- **Native women are considerably more likely than men to have college credit.** In 2000, about 35 percent of adult Native women and 26 percent of men had college credit.

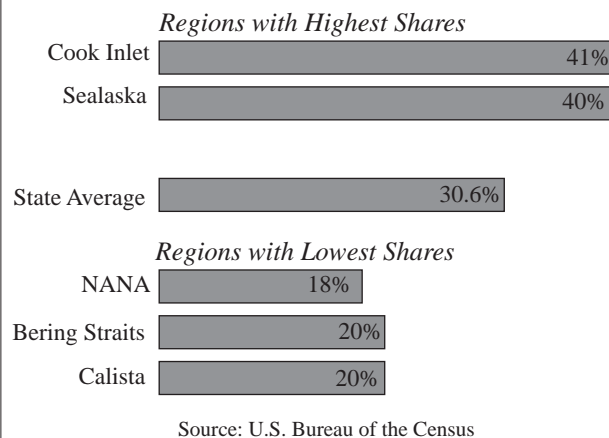
- **Natives living in the Cook Inlet and Sealaska regional corporation areas are the most likely to have college credit.** More than 40 percent in those regions had attended college as of 2000, compared with about 20 percent in the Bering Straits, NANA, and Calista regions (Figure S-31).

Keep in mind that Natives living in specific regional corporation areas aren't necessarily shareholders in those regions. For example, the Cook Inlet region includes Anchorage, where many Natives from other regions have come to work or to attend the University of Alaska. It isn't possible to use the data we have to determine the home regions of Native people who live in other regions.

**Figure S-30. Natives With Some College Credit**



**Figure S-31. Share of Native Adults with College Credit, By Region, 2000**



## CONTINUING EDUCATION CHALLENGES

Despite the growing rates of high-school graduation and college attendance, major challenges in Native education remain.

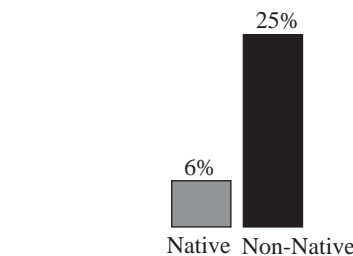
- *Even though college attendance among Alaska Natives is growing, only about 6 percent have four-year degrees*, compared with 25 percent among other Alaskans (Figure S-32). And recent figures from the University of Alaska show that Native college students have been only about half as likely as other students to complete four-year degrees at UA.

- *Native students drop out at higher rates than other students*—and those rates climbed sharply in recent years. As Figure S-33 shows, Native dropout rates held steady or even declined slightly during most of the 1990s. But between 1998 and 2001, Native dropout rates doubled, increasing from 5 percent to nearly 10 percent. That increase was largely in rural schools, which had previously enjoyed very low dropout rates.

- *Dropout rates also increased among non-Native students during the late 1990s*, growing from less than 3 percent to 5 percent. Still, those rates remain only half those among Native students.

- *Large numbers of Native students continue to fail standard tests of reading, writing, and math.* Figures from benchmark tests in elementary and middle school in recent years show on average anywhere from 40 to 60 percent of Native students passing the tests, compared with 70 to 80 percent among non-Native students. Figure S-34 shows the results from the 2003 High-School Graduation Qualifying Exam, which Alaska students have to pass to get diplomas. About half of Native tenth graders passed the reading and math sections and close to 70 percent the writing section. Among other tenth graders, about three quarters passed the reading and math tests and nearly 90 percent the writing test. (Students who fail the test in tenth grade can re-take it in their junior and senior years.)

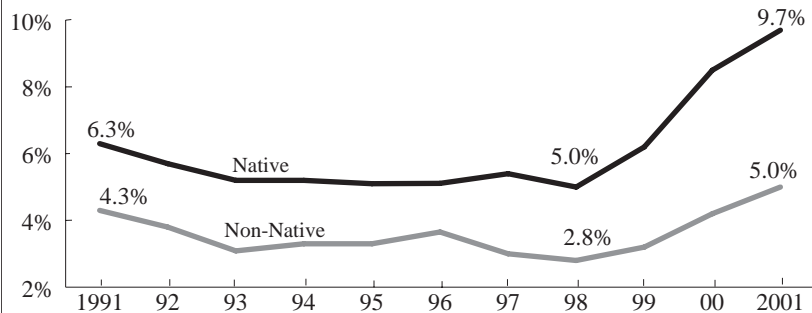
**Figure S-32. Percent of Adult Alaskans\* with Four-Year College Degrees, 2000**



\* Over age 25.

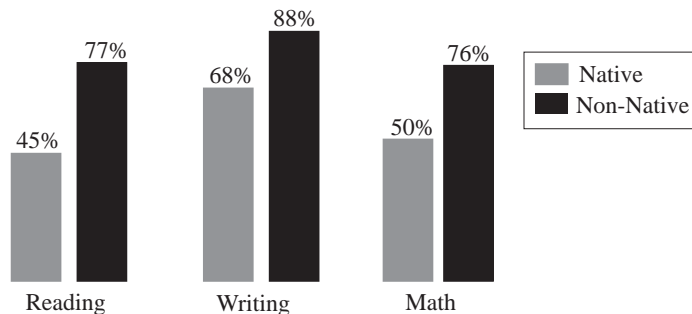
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Figure S-33. Dropout Rates, Alaska Native and Non-Native Students, 1991 to 2001**



Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

**Figure S-34. Share of Native and Non-Native Tenth Graders Passing the High-School Graduation Qualifying Exam, 2003**



Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

- *Few teachers in Alaska are Alaska Native.* Some analysts believe that having Native teachers—who share a common cultural heritage—would help Native students do better in school. In 2001, about 400 teachers statewide were Native. That's about 5 percent of Alaska teachers, with the share varying from none in some districts to nearly a third in a couple of rural districts. (However, in some districts with small numbers of teachers, a third might be only a handful of teachers.) At the University of Alaska, only 3 percent of those teaching are Native, and many of those are instructors rather than professors.

## SUMMARY OF CURRENT CONDITIONS

The story since 1990 for Alaska Natives is a mixed one. They gained thousands of new jobs and improved their incomes, as they have every decade since 1960. Native women in particular continued to move into the work force. But the gains in the 1990s were smaller, and thousands of Natives who wanted jobs couldn't find them. The modest income gains were not in wages but mostly in transfer payments, including the state Permanent Fund dividend.

Native incomes on average remain just over half those of other Alaskans, and Natives are still about a third less likely to have jobs. Native households are three times more likely to be poor; poverty is especially high among households headed by women. These economic problems are all worse for Natives in remote rural villages. Subsistence hunting and fishing continue to be crucial not only for cultural but also for economic reasons.

Basic housing, sanitation, and health care in Native villages also continued to improve in the past decade. With better living conditions and improved access to health care, more Native babies are surviving and Native people are living longer. Hepatitis and other illnesses linked to poor sanitation have dwindled.

But the effects of the modern American diet and way of living are becoming more apparent among Native people, who now die from heart disease and cancer at higher rates than other Alaskans. Climbing rates of diabetes are a growing worry for doctors and the Native community. Natives are also more likely to smoke, although rates among Native teenagers are dropping.

Natives continue to die by accident, suicide, or homicide much more often than other Alaskans. But rates of accidental death are down significantly.

Widespread alcohol abuse continues to fuel high rates of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, child abuse, domestic violence, and other crimes. But Native communities are fighting back, with two thirds imposing some local controls on alcohol. More Natives also entered alcohol-treatment programs in the 1990s.

More Alaska Natives are graduating from high school and going on to college, especially women. But Native students are also more apt to drop out of school, and many fail standard tests. Native students' knowledge of their own cultures and languages is also an important gauge of education, but we currently have no way to measure such knowledge.

## FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The social and economic challenges of the future for Native people are in many ways different from those of the past.

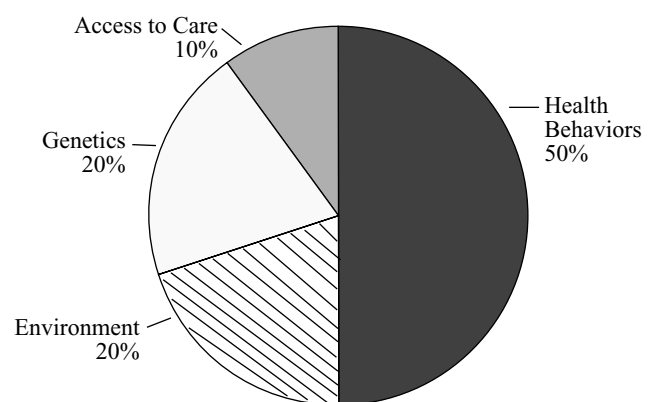
Improving village living conditions has been a long process that isn't finished yet—but the federal and state governments have made major progress. Today, the health problems among Alaska Natives are—like those of other Americans—related more to behavior than to living conditions.

Figure S-35 shows the factors that affect life expectancy. Genetics, living conditions, and medical care together account for about half of life expectancy. The other half—as much as all the other factors combined—is behavior. And as all of us know, changing behavior isn't easy.

Eating too much of the wrong kinds of foods, smoking, and not getting enough exercise have helped spread diabetes, heart disease, and other problems among Americans for decades. Such health problems are now also widespread among Alaska Natives.

We've also reported the high rates of child abuse, domestic violence, and other crimes among Alaska Natives—as well as high rates of violent death. Experts link about 80 percent of violence and crime to alcohol. The Native community and public health officials are trying to curb alcohol abuse. But finding ways of dealing with these problems is not as straightforward as—for instance—building better houses or improving water supplies.

**Figure S-35. What Determines How Long You Live?**



Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control

And in economic conditions there are also looming challenges. For much of the 1970s and 1980s, Alaska enjoyed fast economic growth that helped create jobs and income for all Alaskans, including Alaska Natives. State spending of billion-dollar oil revenues in particular fueled economic growth in the first half of the 1980s.

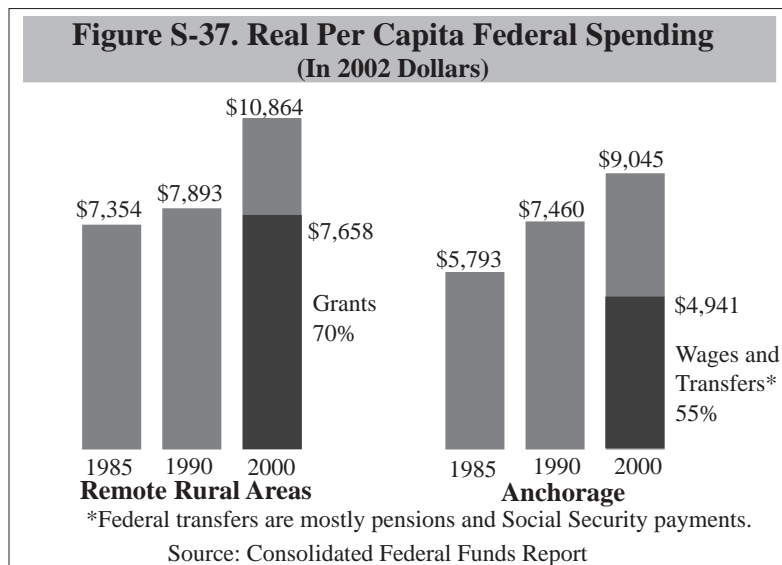
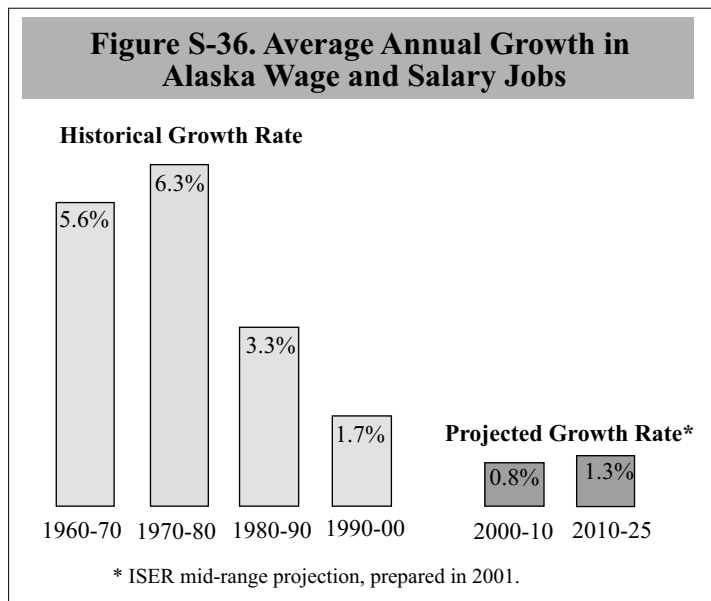
In the 1990s economic growth was slower, as Figure S-36 shows. The state oil revenues responsible for so much economic growth dropped as North Slope oil production declined, and the state faced budget deficits during much of the decade. The Community Development Quota (CDQ) system for fisheries and the Red Dog zinc mine provided some economic gains in the remote rural areas.

But the biggest source of new money in the 1990s was the federal government. All of Alaska—but especially the remote rural areas—came to depend more on federal spending. As Figure S-37 shows, per capita federal spending in remote rural areas increased about 35 percent between 1990 and 2000. Per capita spending in Anchorage was also up more than 20 percent during the same period. (Map S-5 shows which regions are “remote rural.”)

Grants make up most of the federal spending in remote areas, and grants in particular increased in the 1990s as Native non-profit organizations took over management of federal health care and other social services for Alaska Natives. In Anchorage, by contrast, wages and transfers make up the bulk of federal spending.

Future levels of federal spending in Alaska are not predictable. But given the federal government’s own budget problems and other factors, it seems unlikely that spending in the coming decade will increase as it did in the 1990s.

Unless there is some big surprise—and the state’s history is full of surprises—economic growth in the state will likely be slower in the coming decade than it has been most of the time since statehood (Figure S-36). And at the same time, the Native population and labor force are expected to grow sharply.



**PROJECTED POPULATION  
AND LABOR FORCE GROWTH**

At current rates, the Native population will increase from 120,000 in 2000 to 140,000 by 2010 and 165,000 by 2020. Unless there is a big influx of non-Natives (which happens when there are big economic developments), Natives could make up 22 percent of Alaskans by 2020, up from about 19 percent today.

And if current patterns continue, much of the Native population growth will occur—as it has since 1970—in urban areas. So by 2010 the share of the Native population in urban areas could be 48 percent, compared with about 43 percent in 2000. By 2020, the urban share could grow to 53 percent (Figure S-38).

The number of Natives in remote rural areas will also continue to grow, but more slowly. So the share living in remote places could drop from the current 41 percent to 38 percent by 2010 and 35 percent by 2020. The share in other, less remote, rural places could drop from 16 percent to 14 percent by 2010 and 12 percent by 2020.

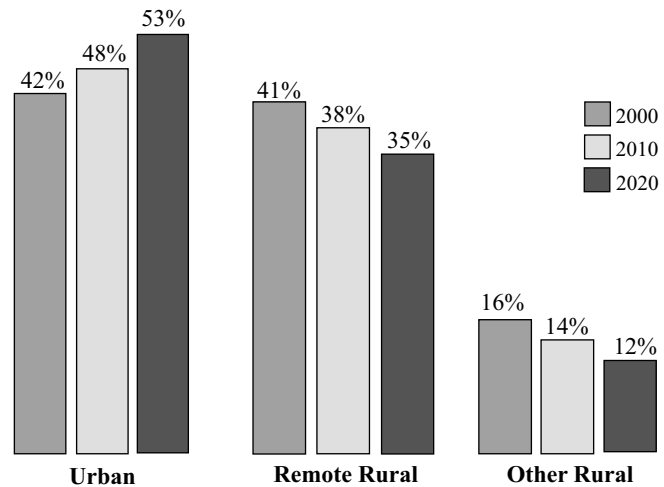
The age composition of Alaska Natives in 2000 offers some other demographic clues about trends for the coming decade (Figure S-39).

Because of the large numbers of Natives who were 10 to 14 in 2000, young adults will be the fastest growing part of the Native population in the coming years.

Also, the relatively large numbers of Natives who were mature adults in 2000 will be approaching retirement age in 2010. And the young adult population will begin having children of their own, so the number of school-age children will begin growing rapidly after 2010.

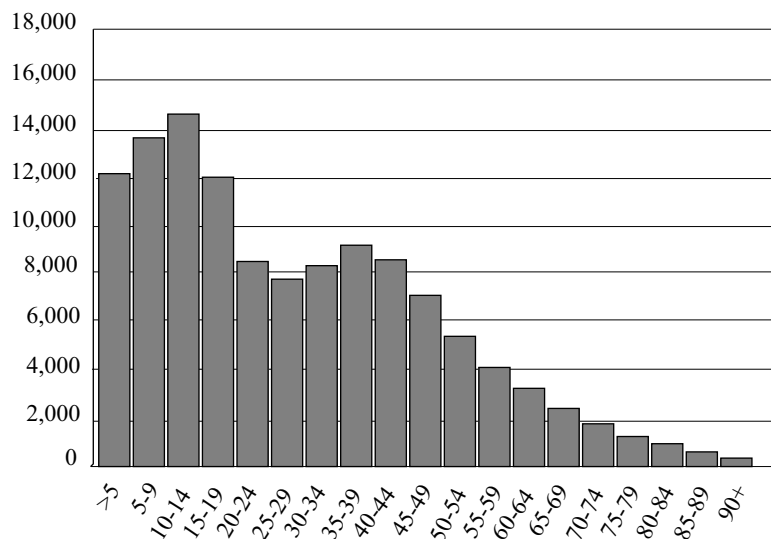
About 11,700 Natives are expected to move into the labor force between 2000 and 2010, and another 6,700 between 2010 and 2020. Those numbers translate into a 26 percent increase in the Native labor force by 2010 and another 11 percent between 2010 and 2020 (Figure S-40).

**Figure S-38. Actual and Projected Distribution of Alaska Native Population, by Region, 2000, 2010, and 2020**



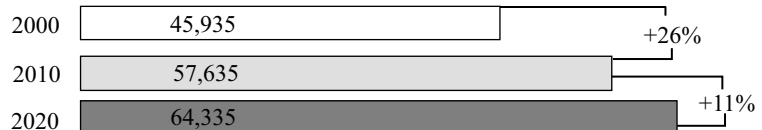
Sources: U.S. census and ISER projections, based on current migration trends

**Figure S-39. Age Distribution of Alaska Native Population, 2000**



Source: U.S. census

**Figure S-40. Growth in Native Labor Force, 2000-2020**



Source: ISER projections

## WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

This report paints a broad picture of social and economic conditions among Alaska Natives today, based on the best sources of information we could find. But it isn't perfect and raises questions it can't answer.

To begin with, existing information doesn't tell us everything we'd like to know. One of our major findings is that rural Natives by the tens of thousands have moved to urban areas since 1970: they are moving where the jobs are. But we don't know how that movement from rural to urban areas is affecting Native health and well-being. Does better access to health care make urban Natives healthier? Is the widespread problem of alcohol abuse worse in urban or in rural areas? And so on: we don't know those answers.

Another problem is that we don't have any good way of measuring some things. For instance, as we pointed out in the section on education, we can't assess how much Native students know about their own histories and cultures—which is an important measure of education.

And we can't analyze all the issues implicit in some of the changes we describe. For instance, we report that most villages now have modern sanitation systems, with more being built every year. Those systems are making village life healthier—but we also know that many small places have trouble paying for and maintaining them. How the costs of sanitation and other utility systems will affect communities over time is a major economic issue.

Finally, keep in mind that this report comes at a time of major changes in the way information is collected and reported. We've talked about the change in the 2000 U.S. census that allowed people to choose more than one primary race. That change made our analysis much more complicated. Beyond this analysis, the change means that recent data are more detailed—which is an improvement—but at the same time, it opens the question of how information by race will be reported in the future, since so many people describe themselves as multi-racial.

Also, the federal government in 2000 adopted a new "standard population" for computing rates of death and other measures. Statisticians use this standard population, with specific percentages of people in each age group, to compare across populations that have different age breakdowns. This may not seem an important change—but it is, because rates calculated with the new standard aren't comparable to those calculated under the old standard. So, for example, if you see that rates of heart disease jumped between 1995 and 2000, the change may be due to the use of the new standard population rather than to a sudden increase in heart disease.

Still, despite all that, the report has a wealth of information. We hope Native people will find it useful as they make decisions for themselves and their communities.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Scott Goldsmith** was the principal investigator for the project and also did the analysis of economic conditions. Dr. Goldsmith is ISER's director and a professor of economics. He has nearly 30 years' experience analyzing Alaska's economy. He is widely recognized for his projections of population and job growth and his analyses of state fiscal policy issues.

**Lance Howe** did the demographic analysis for the report. Dr. Howe is an assistant professor of economics who joined ISER in 2002. Much of his work has been in analyzing rural economic issues and changes in rural settlement patterns.

**UAA's Institute for Circumpolar Health Studies (ICHS); Jane Angvik**, an Anchorage consultant; and **Linda Leask**, ISER's editor, all contributed to the description of Native health and well-being. The Alaska Legislature created ICHS in 1988 to help find solutions for health problems in Alaska and the rest of the circumpolar north. Ms. Angvik has more than 30 years' experience in Alaska public policy development and in working with Native communities and organizations. She was formerly the president of the Alaska Native Foundation and vice-president of the Alaska Native Heritage Foundation.

**Alexandra Hill**, a research associate at ISER, did the assessment of education issues. She has been with ISER for 15 years, analyzing a wide range of education and other public policy issues.

The full report, *Status of Alaska Natives 2004*, is in three volumes—the main body of the report, which is about 400 pages, and two volumes of detailed tables from the 2000 U.S. census. It is available at cost from ISER (907-786-7710) or the Alaska Federation of Natives. The report is also at: [www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu](http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu)

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Special thanks to the First Alaskans Institute for help throughout the study; FAI also provided photos.