



# Literature Review of the Traditional Use of Tobacco as a Cultural Practice and Harm Reduction Effort for Indigenous Communities

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## Introduction

- Higher rates of commercial tobacco use has been reported from Indigenous communities compared to other racial/ethnic groups<sup>1</sup>
- Higher smoking rates among Indigenous communities result in significant tobacco-related health inequities<sup>2</sup>
- Traditional use of tobacco plant has suffered from the influence of acculturation<sup>3</sup>
- Unlike traditional tobacco, commercial tobacco refers to a product (i.e., cigarettes, chewing tobacco) containing thousands of added chemical compounds associated with cancer-related disparities
- The need for distinction is facilitated by the issue arising with smoking initiation, loss of respect for the sacred plant, and lack of empirical support for traditional practice<sup>4</sup>
- This review aims to highlight cultural strengths and protective health factors associated with traditional/ceremonial tobacco use among Indigenous communities

## Method

- Publications for this literature review were pulled from academic websites including:
  - Google scholar
  - PsycInfo
- Keywords included: **Tobacco, Cultural Strengths, American Indians, Alaskan Native, Indigenous, Ceremonial, Traditional, and Commercial Tobacco**

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## Table 1

Characteristics Associated with Tobacco Use		
	Traditional Tobacco	Commercial Tobacco
<b>Preparation</b>	Cultural guidelines and protocols govern preparation	None, purchased ready to use
<b>Scientific names</b>	Nicotiana tabacum Nicotiana rustica Cornus sericea (Lakota)	Nicotiana tabacum
<b>Meanings associated with use</b>	Ancestral significance Sacred, respect of natural resources Spiritual, healing Generous, giving Hope	Social pressure Stress relief
<b>Setting</b>	Ceremonially	Recreationally Ceremonally (in modern times)
<b>Ways it's used</b>	Smoked (not inhaled) in ceremonial mourning Given as a gift Smudged Sprinkled in sick persons bed Burned as a spiritual offering	Smoked in cigarettes/cigars Chewed
<b>Impacts</b>	Not addictive Positive mental and physical health outcomes Community, connectedness, strengthen cultural identity	Addictive Negative mental and physical health outcomes High rates of health disparities

## Results

- Culturally inclusive efforts are needed to reduce tobacco-related health disparities among Indigenous communities.
  - It is important to acknowledge the unique differences between using traditional tobacco and commercial tobacco use<sup>6</sup>
    - Commercial tobacco is sold for capital gains and contain cancer causing additives.
    - Traditional tobacco can include preparing plants for ceremonial use in a variety of ways that varies between tribes.
- Protective factors\*:** spirituality, respect, health and wellness, humility, and thoughtfulness<sup>7</sup>
- Risk factors\*\*:** crime, loss of control and self-esteem, lack of respect to self and others, sickness and death
- \*Meaning the use of non-commercial tobacco in a traditional setting
- \*\*Meaning the use of commercial tobacco in or outside of a traditional setting; primarily recreationally

## Discussion

- Limitations:**
- Each tribe has different practices regarding tobacco use. The table includes only the results from what can be cited from academic literature, and they are likely not generalizable to all Indigenous communities<sup>8</sup>
- Future Directions:**
- To support cultural practices, further research is needed to explore the potential benefits of promoting traditional tobacco use and reduce the harm of commercial tobacco among Indigenous communities

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