



International Association for Indigenous Aging

NEWS RELEASE

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IA² Assists with First-Ever Training on Investigating Infant Deaths in Indian Country

More than 60 Navajo and Pueblo police, FBI, law enforcement officers attend

More than 60 Navajo and Pueblo police officers, FBI agents and other law enforcement officials have completed a two-day training conference to investigate infant deaths in Indian Country. The conference—the first of its kind for Indian Country—was produced by the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) in collaboration with the International Association for Indigenous Aging (IA²).

The training on Indian Country Child and Infant Death Investigation, held April 25-26 at the University of New Mexico Gallup Campus, provided criminal investigators, police officers, and other first responders with hands-on practice sessions. Interactive presentations were led by the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator and the National Center for the Review and Prevention of Child Deaths. Discussions highlighted the differing circumstances between infant and adult deaths, and the importance of empathetic communication between first responders and families who have lost a child.

American Indian babies die from SIDS and other Sudden and Unexpected Infant Deaths (SUID) at rates at least three times higher than white and Hispanic babies. The causes of these deaths, which can be difficult to identify, may include child abuse. Often an autopsy will not identify circumstances affecting how the child died. Only a high-quality scene investigation can reveal the true story. Both medical and law enforcement investigators need answers for the family, for prevention and, if abuse occurred, justice for the child.

IA² assisted MPHI with planning activities for the event and assisted at the training sessions. IA² Executive Director Dave Baldrige met with Navajo Nation Health and Public Service leadership to establish their endorsement and support and to identify training participants.

The two-day training program provided investigators with the skills to better investigate and recognize deaths of children from child abuse and sudden and unexplained deaths. Investigators were coached on techniques including scene evaluation, evidence collection, scene recreation, and doll re-enactments, while honoring the child and the family. Participants working with tribal investigations received a scene investigation kit.

The project was funded by the CDC Division of Reproductive Health, Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) initiative in partnership MPHI's Review and Prevention of Child Deaths and Indian Health Service Injury Prevention.

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