

B1: Epidemiology 101: Grappling with Data

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Epidemiology is defined as “the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events (including disease) in specified populations, and the application of this study to control of health problems.” The word epidemiology consists of the Greek words epi (among), demos (people), and logos (doctrine).

Epidemiology allows us to study factors affecting both the health and illness of populations. It serves as the foundation behind interventions undertaken in the interest of public health and health promotion. It is considered the cornerstone of public health research, and is an important methodology in evidenced-based medicine for identifying risk factors for type 2 diabetes and determining optimal treatment approaches to diabetes care in clinical practice.

As a public health discipline, epidemiologic evidence is often used to advocate personal health improvement such as increased activity and wise food choices. Studies findings, such as the Diabetes Prevention Program, are disseminated to the general public in order to help people to make informed decisions about their health. Often the key findings of such studies are not communicated well to health care providers or people in the community.

Therefore, a understanding of the basic principles of epidemiology, a knowledge of some simple terms and concepts, and how and when to apply them, are essential for health professional working in AI/AN diabetes prevention and care to appreciate the impact of this disease on the population they serve. This knowledge helps them share important epidemiologic data and findings in a clear and concise manner. This information can then be used to help direct programming and pursue funding opportunities for IHS, Tribal and Urban programs (I/T/Us).

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