

Press Release



October is National Pedestrian Safety Month

Honoring Our Pathways, Protecting Our Communities

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As October marks National Pedestrian Safety Month, the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB) calls upon drivers to slow down, be alert, and protect our most vulnerable community members — pedestrians. Walking is a key part of life in many of our tribal communities and urban areas, where we honor the traditional value of traveling lightly on the land. Ensuring safe pathways for walking is essential for the health, safety, and well-being of our people.

In 2022, 7,522 pedestrians tragically lost their lives in traffic crashes across the U.S., an alarming increase from 2021. The safety of those walking in our communities is sacred, and these statistics remind us of the urgency to act. In Indigenous cultures, we believe in the importance of taking care of one another — slowing down and being mindful of pedestrians is one way we can protect each other.

Walking is not just a mode of transportation but a way of reconnecting with the land and our environment. It promotes healthier lifestyles and strengthens the bonds within our communities, helping to preserve cultural ties. As stewards of the Earth, we must prioritize safety, especially for our elders, children, and those who walk between villages and neighborhoods.

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This October, we urge drivers to be particularly mindful. On Halloween, there will be more families out trick-or-treating, with children who may be unaware of the dangers of traffic. In our communities, Halloween and other community gatherings reflect our emphasis on intergenerational connections. Drivers: Please take extra care, slow down, and protect the lives of our future generations.

At NPAIHB, we believe that walking through our homelands, urban neighborhoods, and along traditional routes should be a peaceful experience, connecting us to the land and to each other. Our goal is to ensure that everyone, regardless of where they live, can walk safely and without fear. By prioritizing pedestrian safety and encouraging drivers to slow down, we honor our ancestors and protect the well-being of the seventh generation.

We encourage tribal and urban Native communities to adopt a Safe System Approach to protect pedestrians. This comprehensive plan aligns with our values of collective responsibility and respect for life. The approach includes:

- **Safer People:** Promoting respect and responsibility for all road users, with a focus on ensuring pedestrians' safety as they travel through our homelands and cities.
- **Safer Speeds:** Slower, mindful driving reduces harm. We encourage road designs and community programs that reflect traditional values of care for others, making walking safer for everyone, especially the most vulnerable.
- **Safer Roads:** Roads should be places where all community members — whether walking, biking, or skateboarding — can travel without fear. We advocate for safe routes and roadway designs that support the preservation of our ways of life.
- **Safer Vehicles:** Technology should work in harmony with human effort to prevent crashes and minimize harm. We support the expansion of safety technologies that protect drivers and pedestrians alike.
- **Post-Crash Care:** In our close-knit communities, swift access to care can mean the difference between life and death. Improving access to medical care and ensuring that first responders are supported is vital in rural and urban Native settings.

For more information about pedestrian safety and how we can protect our communities, please visit <https://www.npaihb.org/home/injury-prevention-program/> or the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/pedestrian-safety>.