

American Indian Health Status in Minnesota

30-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE – DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

This report is the first in a series that will provide a 30-year retrospective view of American Indian health (1989-2018). This series updates the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) 20-year retrospective of American Indian health related data, published in 2012. The reports in this series cover information on American Indian demographics and social/economic factors, as well as trends in birth, death, health conditions that occur alone, and health conditions that occur together and impact each other.

This initial report focuses on the demographic trends for the American Indian population in Minnesota.

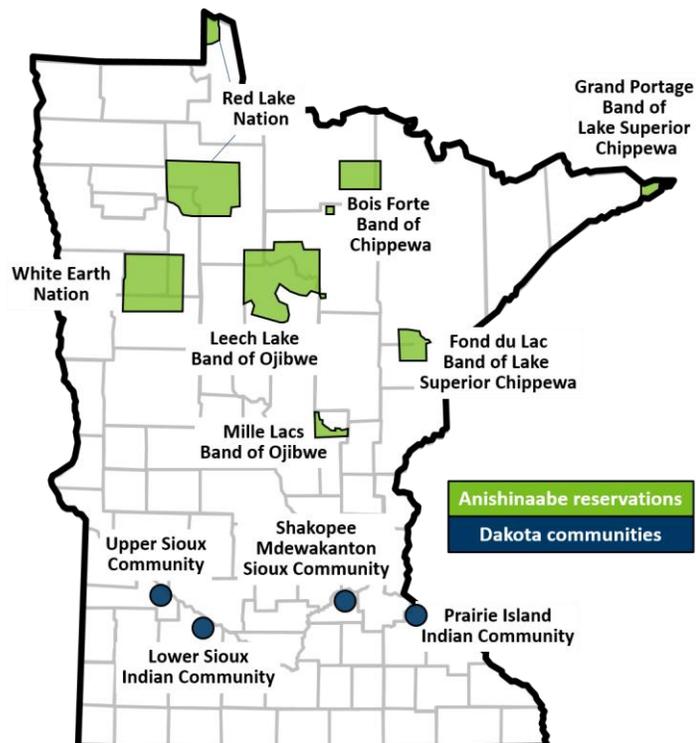
You can view all the reports in this series online, as they are released, at: [Minnesota Center of Health Equity Initiatives and Projects](http://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/projects/) (www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/projects/).

Introduction

As MDH developed this series of reports, it established a set of guidelines on presenting data: ensure that data is meaningful and useful to the communities described, use an asset-based approach that includes a community’s practices and culture, provide analyses from a community perspective where possible, and clearly and accurately present the data with useful context for community audiences. Data tells a story and words do matter; in presenting data people must be conscious of the story they are telling, or risk reinforcing prejudices in the public narrative.

With these guidelines in mind, this document is the first in a series focusing on the health status of American Indians in Minnesota. While some Minnesotans hail from Anishinaabe/Ojibwe/Chippewa, and Dakota/Sioux tribal nations, the demographics described in this report includes American Indians in Minnesota who have tribal heritage that is different or in addition to these two large groups. This report focuses on demographic factors including age, location, and growth of the American Indian population in Minnesota. MDH hopes that reports in this series provide data that can be used to strengthen the public health work tribes and American Indian communities are doing in conjunction with MDH or as a community.

Figure 1. American Indian reservations in Minnesota



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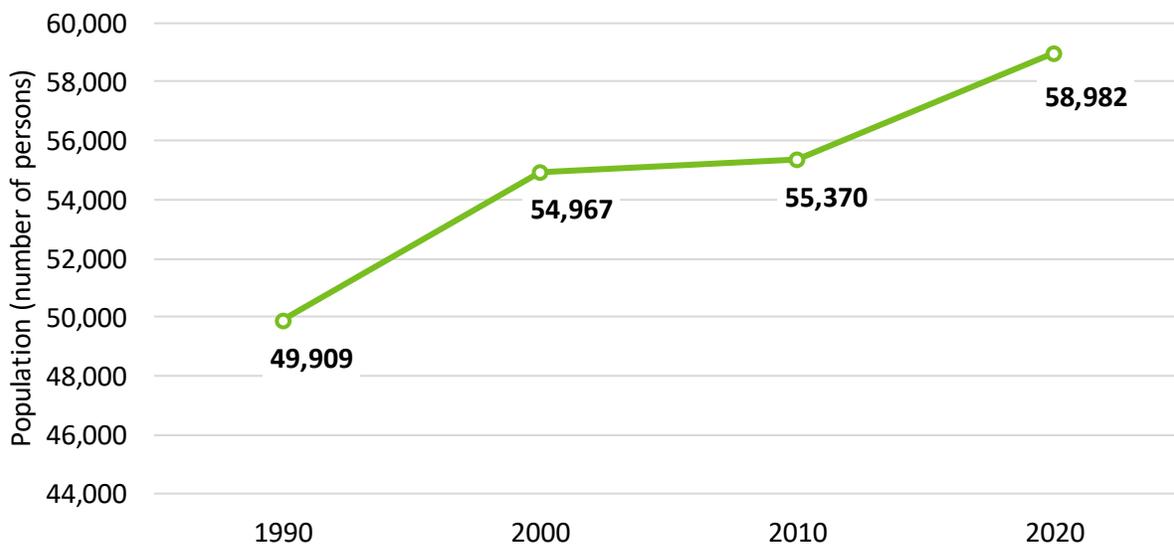
Recent census data (2018) indicates that American Indians make up 1.1 percent of Minnesota’s total population. While some of the population live on one of the eleven American Indian reservations throughout the state (**Figure 1**), the population is also spread across Minnesota. Using data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS), this report focuses on demographic trends, describing where American Indians live and the growth of the American Indian population in Minnesota. This information will contribute to an understanding of the health needs and assets of tribal nations, urban American Indian communities, and state agencies.

American Indian “alone” versus “multiracial”

In the past, MDH has used both American Indian “alone” (meaning respondents identified their race only as American Indian) and American Indian “multiracial” in reports. Using American Indian “alone,” however, portrays this population too narrowly; in reality many of these individuals have a multiracial background. As such, it is important to discuss the demographic trends of **all** American Indians in Minnesota, whether they identify themselves as American Indian alone or American Indian plus one or more races. In this report, multiracial individuals who identify as American Indian plus one or more races will be labeled “American Indian in combination with one or more races.”

The number of Minnesotans who identify as American Indian alone has steadily increased from 1990 to 2008 (**Figure 2**). In 2018, the number of American Indians residing in Minnesota increased to 58,982. This is an 18.2 percent increase since 1989, and a 7.3 percent increase from 2010.

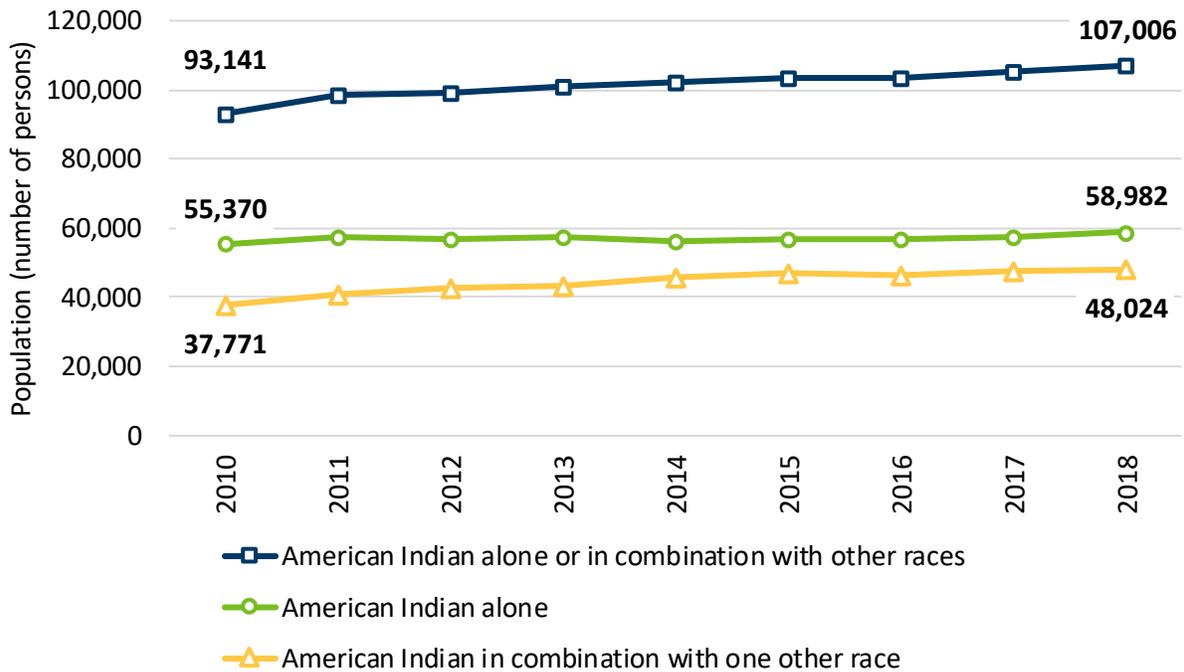
Figure 2. Population of American Indians alone in Minnesota, 1989-2018



Source: U.S. Census (Series DP05), American Indian alone

The number of people in Minnesota who identify as American Indian in combination with one or more races has also increased since 2010 (**Figure 3**). When adding together all individuals who identify as American Indian alone and American Indian in combination with one or more races, the population of American Indians in Minnesota in 2018 reaches 107,006 people.

Figure 3. Population of all American Indians in Minnesota, 2010-2018



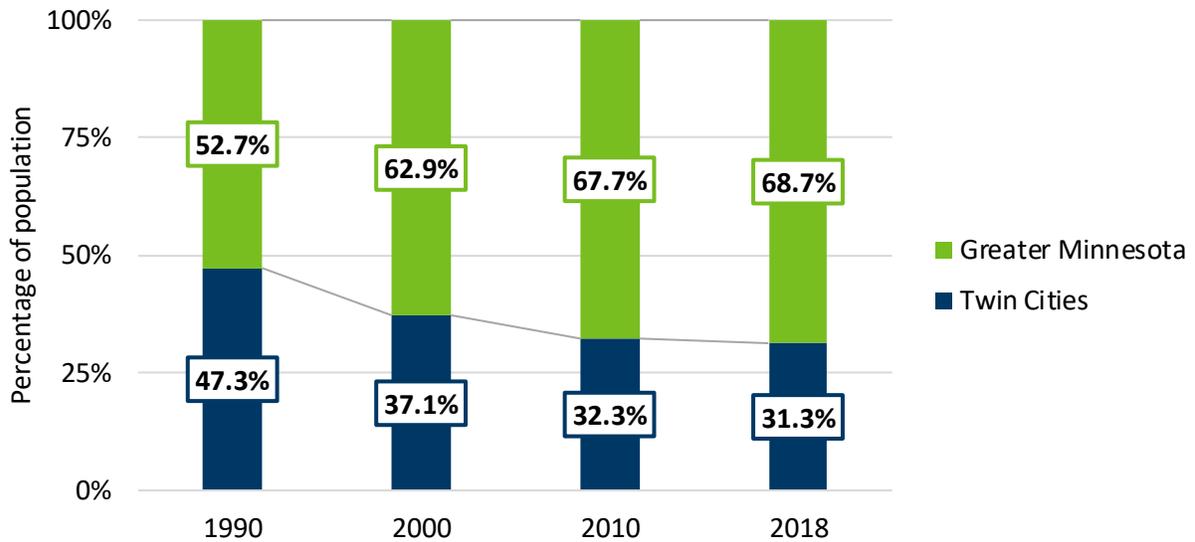
Source: U.S. Census (Series DP05)

Twin Cities metro area versus Greater Minnesota

American Indians are the only racial/ethnic group in the state where most of the population lives outside of the seven-county Twin Cities metro area.¹ While one reservation is located within the seven-county metro area, most are located outside. Of those who identify as American Indian alone, only 31.3 percent live in the Twin Cities metro area (**Figure 4**); 68.7 percent live in the remaining 80 counties in Greater Minnesota, where Minnesota American Indian reservations are also located. In addition, the percent of people identifying as American Indian alone living in the Twin Cities metro has decreased by 33.8 percent since 1990.

¹ The Metropolitan Council defines the Twin Cities metro area as Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties.

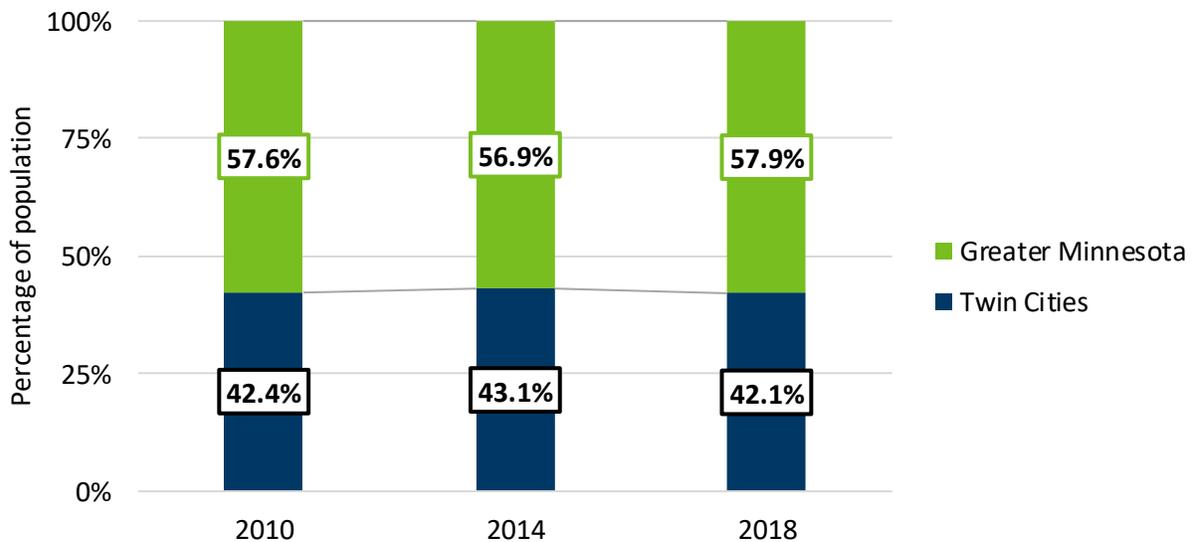
Figure 4. Percentage of American Indian alone population in Twin Cities metro versus Greater Minnesota, 1990-2018



Source: U.S. Census (Series DP05), American Indian alone

Among those who identify as American Indian alone or in combination with one or more races, 42.1 percent live in the Twin Cities metro area (**Figure 5**). In comparison, 57.9 percent of those who identify as such live in Greater Minnesota. These data suggest that the majority of American Indians alone or in combination with one or more races live outside the Twin Cities metro area.

Figure 5. Percentage of American Indian population alone or in combination with one or more races in Twin Cities metro versus Greater Minnesota, 2010-2018



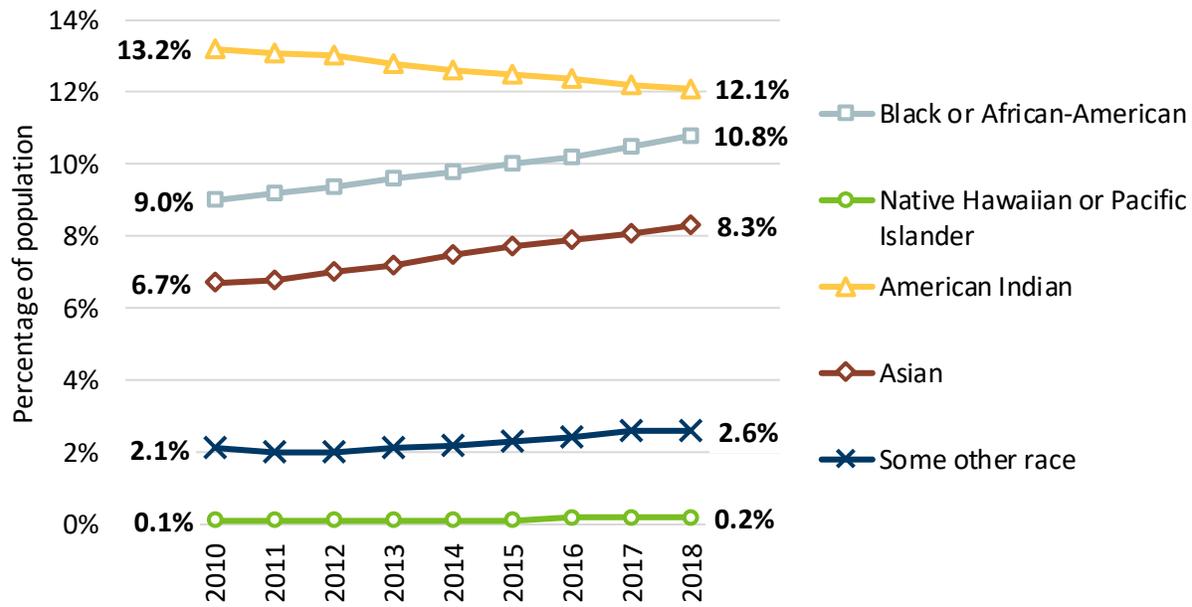
Source: U.S. Census (Series DP05), total population (American Indian alone or in combination)

When we measure the urban-rural difference between the percent of multiracial American Indians who live in the Twin Cities metro area (31.3 percent) versus those who live in Greater Minnesota (68.7 percent), this difference is bigger than it is for other races/ethnicities in urban versus rural Minnesota

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(Figure 6). For example, the population of white residents in the Twin Cities metro area is 51.1 percent compared to 48.9 percent in Greater Minnesota.

Figure 6. Percent of populations living in the Twin Cities metro by race/ethnicity and year, 2010-2018



Source: Source: U.S. Census (Series DP05), Total Population, Race alone or in combination with one or more races

County population trends

The demographic changes in the state’s American Indian population are complex; we see this in trends among individual counties in Minnesota (Table 1, Figure 7). Among those who identify as American Indian alone, Greater Minnesota contains four of the five counties that have seen the greatest increase in the number of American Indian residents. Among those identifying as American Indian plus one or more races, four of the five counties seeing the largest growth are in the Twin Cities metro area.

In both categories, Beltrami County in Greater Minnesota (which includes the Red Lake Reservation), has seen the largest increase during the past 10 years. Hennepin County, in the Twin Cities metro, saw a large decrease in American Indian alone residents, but once those who identified as multiracial were included, Hennepin county saw the third-largest increase over the same 10-year period—this could mean newborns identified as American Indian in Hennepin County are more diverse than they were 10 years ago.²

² Due to the termination policy enacted by U.S Congress in 1953, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) began a voluntary American Indian Urban Relocation program. For more information, visit: [National Archives: American Indian urban relocation](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/indian-relocation.html) (www.archives.gov/education/lessons/indian-relocation.html).

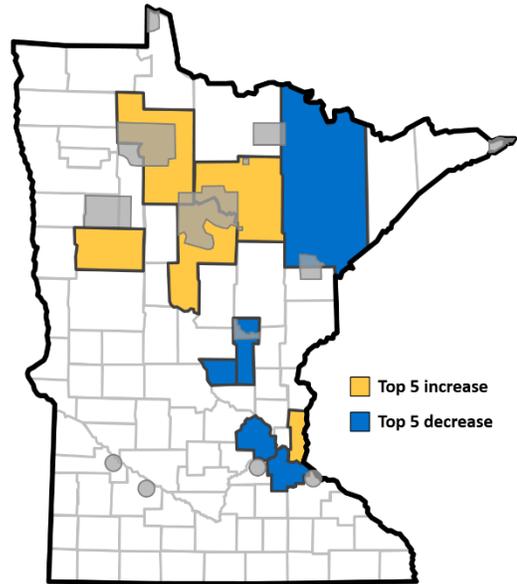
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Table 1. American Indian population changes by county, 2010-2018

County	# change	% change
American Indian alone		
Top five increase		
Beltrami	1,572	19.7%
Cass	508	17.8%
Washington*	452	78.9%
Becker	374	17.5%
Itasca	269	19.3%
Top five decrease		
St. Louis	-1,013	-21.5%
Hennepin*	-524	-5.6%
Benton	-233	-87.9%
Dakota	-178	-12.1%
Mille Lacs	-154	-10.6%

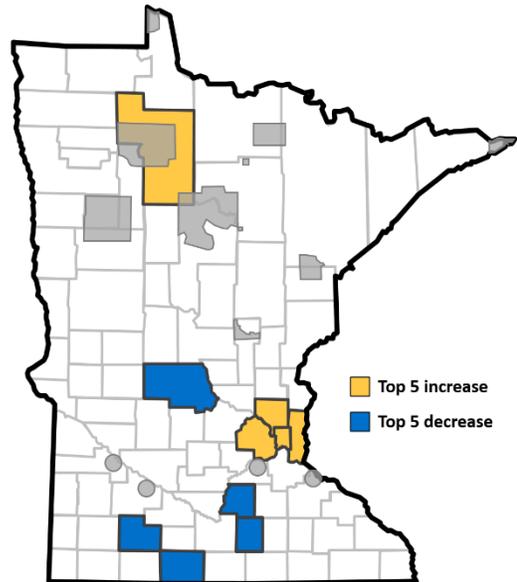
Figure 7. Greatest American Indian population change by county

American Indian alone:
Top five increase and decrease in population



County	# change	% change
American Indian alone or in combination		
Top five increase		
Beltrami	1,929	21.0%
Ramsey*	1,593	19.1%
Hennepin*	1,270	6.9%
Washington*	964	46.4%
Anoka*	938	21.2%
Top five decrease		
Waseca	-215	-53.5%
Martin	-127	-61.4%
Stearns	-118	-11.3%
Le Sueur	-95	-32.1%
Cottonwood	-76	-60.8%

American Indian alone or in combination:
Top five increase and decrease in population



* Counties in the Twin Cities metro

Source: U.S. Census (Series DP05), total population (American Indian alone or in combination)

Reservation population trends

This report also seeks to help us understand the population of individuals living on Minnesota’s American Indian reservation trust lands as a whole, as well as trends by race and age for the five reservations in the state with available data. These population estimates include individuals, like staff working for a tribal nation, regardless of racial identification. Bois Forte Reservation saw the largest general population increase of 23 percent in its population over the last 15 years. Leech Lake Reservation, Lower Sioux Indian Community, and Red Lake Reservation population change has been minimal. Prairie Island Indian Community saw a 51 percent decrease from 2006 to 2019 (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Total population living on reservations in Minnesota, 2010-2019

Tribal nation	2006-2010	2010-2014	2015-2019
Bois Forte Reservation*	693	946	1,213
Leech Lake Reservation*	10,270	10,848	10,976
Lower Sioux Indian Community	497	381	582
Prairie Island Indian Community*	267	112	130
Red Lake Reservation	5,684	5,907	5,815

*Includes off-reservation trust land³

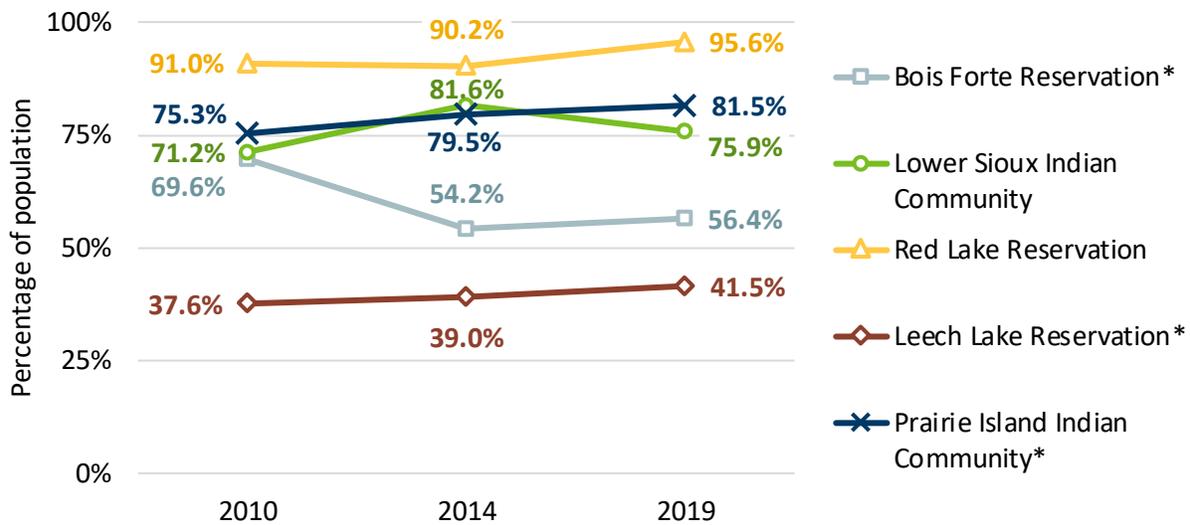
Source: U.S. Census, Minnesota State Demographer

Race on reservation

Four of the five reservations noted below have seen population growth among those who identify as American Indian alone (**Figure 8**) although these growth rates have not been constant. While these data may indicate population growth, more individuals may choose to identify as American Indian alone which would increase percent of population on reservations.

³ Off-reservation trust land is real estate outside a reservation. It is land that is held by the Interior Department for the benefit of a tribe or a member of a tribe. For more information, visit: [National Conference of State Legislatures: Trust Land \(https://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislators/quad-caucus/trust-land-overview.aspx\)](https://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislators/quad-caucus/trust-land-overview.aspx).

Figure 8. Percent of American Indian alone population on reservations in Minnesota, 2010-2019



* Includes off-reservation trust land

Source: U.S. Census, Minnesota State Demographer

Three of the five reservations noted below saw an increase in those identifying as American Indian in combination with one or more races (**Table 3**). Bois Forte Reservation, which saw the only decrease in its American Indian alone population, saw the biggest growth in its population of American Indians in combination with one or more races.

Table 3. Percentage of American Indian population in combination with one or more races on reservations in Minnesota, 2010-2019[†]

Tribal nation	2006-2010	2010-2014	2015-2019
Bois Forte Reservation*	3.8%	16.9%	23.7%
Leech Lake Reservation*	3.8%	6.2%	4.8%
Lower Sioux Indian Community	10.3%	4.5%	9.5%
Prairie Island Indian Community*	2.2%	7.1%	4.6%
Red Lake Reservation	2.0%	2.7%	1.7%

[†] Excludes American Indian alone population

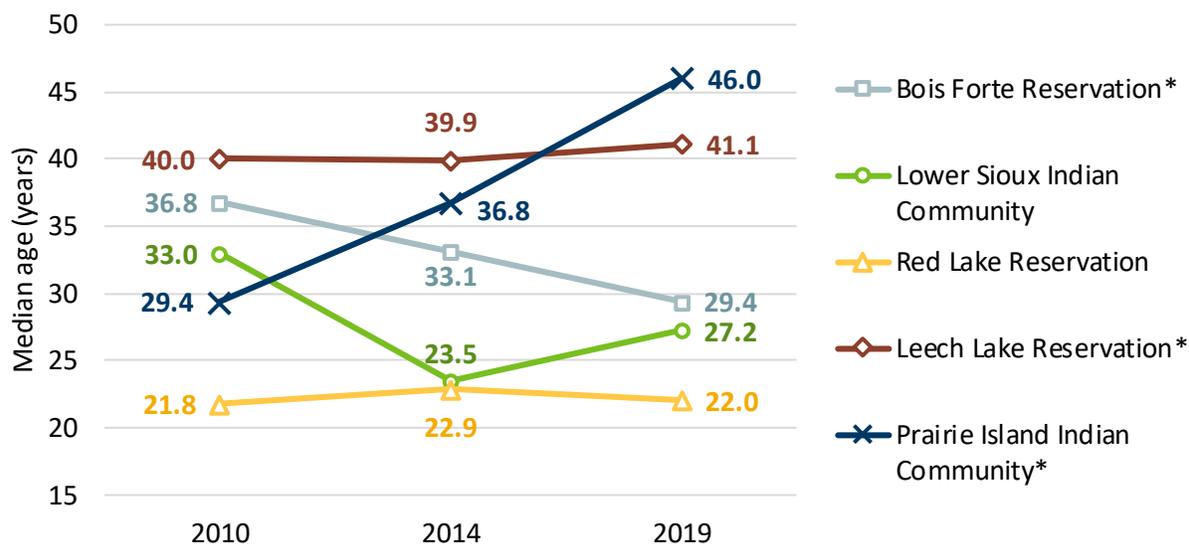
* Includes off-reservation trust land

Source: U.S. Census, Minnesota State Demographer

Age on reservation

The populations of Bois Forte Reservation and Lower Sioux Indian Community indicating that they reside on the reservation have become younger (**Figure 9**) for different reasons, as demonstrated by median age data. Bois Forte saw an increase in its population size overall, including those under the age of 5. Lower Sioux's overall population size remained constant but its population under 5 years old decreased, and its largest growth was in groups 5 to 17 years and 25 to 44 years old.

Figure 9. Median age on reservations in Minnesota, 2010-2019



*Includes off-reservation trust land

Source: U.S. Census, Minnesota State Demographer

While the median age of the populations of Leech Lake Reservation and Red Lake Reservation increased slightly (one year) while the median age of the population of Prairie Island Indian Community increased by 16.4 years from 2010 to 2019. It’s possible that a decrease in overall population has caused Prairie Island’s median age to increase sharply, or it could be due to a large decrease in Prairie Island’s population under 5 years old; this might signal a lowered birth rate.

These varied trends in median age show that a reservation’s age demography is unique to that reservation.

Summary

From 1989 to 2018, the population of people identifying as American Indian alone in Minnesota increased by 18.2 percent to 58,982. For those who identify as American Indian plus one or more races, the population growth is even greater over the same 30-year period, to 107,006. This highlights the increased diversity within the American Indian population in Minnesota.

From a demographic perspective, American Indians living in Minnesota in 2018 are more likely to be living in Greater Minnesota than the Twin Cities metro area; this is true for those who identify as American Indian alone (68.7 percent in Greater Minnesota versus 31.3 percent in the Twin Cities metro), as well as for all self-identified American Indians (57.9 percent in Greater Minnesota versus 42.1 percent in the Twin Cities metro).

Since 2010, populations on and off reservation trust land differ throughout the state. There are more individuals who identify as American Indian alone living on reservations and off-reservation trust land, compared to those who identify as American Indian in combination with one or more races. Median age varies by reservation for a variety of reason specific to each population.

Within this context of population growth, change, and movement from the seven-county Twin Cities metro area and Greater Minnesota, future reports in this series will describe social and economic factors

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affecting American Indians in Minnesota, as well as trends in birth, death, health conditions that occur alone, and health conditions that occur together and impact each other.

A word from the Director of American Indian Health

Boozhoo. In recent years, we have recognized the critical need for data that is accurate and reliable for American Indian communities. In the past, groups including MDH, have presented data reports that include race/ethnicity but have excluded the American Indian population, often due to small numbers. Communities have responded to this exclusion with comments such as—they believe that we don't exist anymore, we are invisible, or we feel insignificant. Additionally, when data for the American Indian population is presented, it is troubling when the significant disparities or poor health outcomes evident in this population are attributed to individual behaviors and practices. We now know from *Advancing Health Equity in Minnesota: Report to the Legislature* (2014) that there are many factors that impact the health of populations, including systemic problems, structural racism, historical trauma, health behaviors, biological differences, and social determinants of health (poverty, employment, housing)—we would like to recognize that all of these factors are a part of the story of health in American Indian communities.

– Jackie Dionne, Director of American Indian Health

Suggested citation: Dionne J, Cooney M, Fernandez-Baca D. 30-Year Retrospective – Demographic Trends, American Indian Health Status in Minnesota. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Center for Health Statistics, Minnesota Department of Health, 2021.

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