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THE MICA GROUP



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CONTACT:

Peggy Mainor, [peggy@MICAGroup.org](mailto:peggy@MICAGroup.org)

Douglas Whalen, [htl@endangeredlanguagefund.org](mailto:htl@endangeredlanguagefund.org)

**Language Study Review Finds “Language as Treatment” Produces Positive Health Outcomes Among Indigenous People;** Funds, resources, and further research are needed to optimize healthy outcomes from language use and revitalization.

**BALTIMORE, MD** | A new review of 130 language studies concludes that language use and language revitalization in Indigenous communities results in significant, positive health outcomes. The review, *Health effects of Indigenous language use and revitalization: a realist review*, published in the peer-reviewed *International Journal of Equity in Health*, calls these languages “the vessel that most efficiently carries these cultural lifeways.” The review provides overwhelming evidence that learning and speaking one’s Indigenous language confers positive health benefits for issues such as obesity, diabetes, mental and behavioral health, suicide prevention, and educational performance.

During the Multi-Indigenous Collaborative for Action (MICA) Group’s Pathways to Fluency gathering in 2016, more than 230 Indigenous people from 88 Tribal Nations identified challenges to language revitalization. The consensus was that new funding and resources for language restoration were top priorities for Indigenous communities. But efforts to seek federal funding and support were repeatedly dismissed due to the lack of data to support the efficacy of Indigenous language preservation.

“MICA’s mission is to support the needs of Tribal Nations so they are truly able to exert their sovereignty and achieve self-determination in ways they know will nurture their communities,” said Della Warrior, (Otoe-Missouria) and President and CEO of the MICA Group. “Tribal communities thrive when they are able to practice the unique cultures and traditions that have sustained them following the devastating effects of colonization. Speaking and learning our Indigenous languages decolonizes our minds. Supporting Indigenous people in their health and well-being is a major part of the U.S. trust responsibility to American Indian and Alaska Native people. But because Indigenous people are generally missing from the data and research, we found it difficult to convince policymakers that language is a must-have budget item. Now we have data to prove what we already knew, that language and cultural restoration are healing to Native peoples on every level. We plan to use the study to open up new sources of funding for the restoration of our precious languages.”

Study co-author Douglas Whalen, PhD said, “The study emphasizes that Indigenous culture and community are centered around common practices.

We've seen it over and over in our Endangered Language Fund grantees: When Tribal Nations have the resources to create sustainable language and cultural revitalization programs, those programs feed physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. In the studies we reviewed, we see common positive health outcomes such as connection with traditional lifeways, increased physical activity, better school performance, and increased community involvement."

Four of the six authors of the study are Indigenous, and throughout the review they offered their lived insights and information on critical social determinants of health within Indigenous communities. The researchers noted that suicides are three times higher among Native people compared to other communities. The study review's purpose is to normalize Language Revitalization/Restoration funding and grantmaking as a legitimate, scientifically proven response for Native physical and mental health interventions. "The study findings further support our continuous arguments that language is not just a 'good-to-have' discretionary item," says Dr. Whalen. "Dedicated and ongoing funding must be put toward language restoration as a solution for mental and behavioral health issues and suicide prevention."

The authors are optimistic that the results from the review will help Tribal Nations to justify their requests and grant submissions for further resources to improve language use and development in Tribal communities. The sponsoring groups encourage funders, government, and philanthropy to take a closer look at how they may support further research and increase funding opportunities to aid language use and revitalization for Indigenous People domestically and globally. The study is available to view online at: <https://rdcu.be/c0weq> and is free to the public.

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**About the Endangered Language Fund:** The Endangered Language Fund (ELF) is a 501(c)3 founded in 1996 to support endangered language preservation and documentation projects. Its main mechanism for supporting work on endangered languages has been funding grants to individuals, tribes, and language programs. ELF's grants have promoted work in over 60 countries and have funded a wide range of projects, from the development of Indigenous radio programs in South Dakota, to recording the last living oral historian of the Shor language of western Siberia, to the establishment of orthographies and literacy materials to be used by teaching programs all over the world. *For more information about The Endangered Language Fund, please visit:* <http://www.endangeredlanguagefund.org/>

**About MICA Group:** MICA Group is a nonprofit organization that shares their fundraising and programmatic expertise with over 300 Tribal Nations. MICA uses community-driven approaches that help build strong, culturally rich, sovereign Native communities. MICA is well-positioned to encourage Tribes and Tribal communities to dream big for their people and to support them in mobilizing resources to make these dreams achievable. *For more information about the MICA Group, please visit:* <https://micagroup.org/>



*MICA funded Nez Perce outdoor language classroom project.*