DATA DASHBOARD POPULATION UPDATE

In July 2026, the State of Alaska released revised Alaska Native/American Indian (AN/AI) population estimates for years 2020-2025 with an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 population increase compared to previous estimates. The increased AN/AI population estimates shifted a variety of indicators on the Alaska Native Epidemiology Center's (EpiCenter's) Data Dashboard from 2020 onward. For example, an increase in the AN/AI population size with no change in the number of deaths resulted in a decrease in the mortality rates and the decrease in mortality rates led to gains in life expectancy at birth, as mortality rates are used in the calculation for life expectancy.

Each year, the Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development (AK DOL&WD) provides population estimates for the State of Alaska and updates prior years' estimates back to the start of the decade. The population estimates are broken out by age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and various levels of geography.

The population estimates begin with data from the last decennial census (e.g. Census 2020 for the 2025 estimates). For each year following the last census, administrative data (including birth and death records, Permanent Fund Dividend applications, and data from military and group quarters surveys and other research) are used to create the estimates. Information about race and ethnicity are provided by the U.S. Census Bureau and are added into the population estimate calculations in order to provide population numbers by race.

Due to delays at the U.S. Census Bureau, the demographers at the AK DOL&WD did not receive race data derived from the 2020 Census until 2026. Therefore, the revised population estimates for 2020-2024 and the 2025 estimates were all released in July 2026 and are the first population estimates to use race data from the 2020 Census. All prior estimates published prior to 2025 used race data from the 2010 Census as that was what was available.

Using the race inputs from the most recent 2020 U.S.Census, the AN/AI population estimates now more accurately reflect the AN/AI population in the state. The revised population numbers impacted all measures on the EpiCenter's dashboard that use the population counts as part of the calculation. This includes nearly every rate available on the dashboard. For mortality measures in particular, this positively impacts the rates reported for AN/AI people. The trends over time remain the same, so the story the data tell has not shifted. However, with the addition of 10,000 to 15,000 AN/AI people now accurately included in the total AN/AI population from 2020-2024, many mortality rates have decreased. An increase in the population estimates also results in a gain in life expectancy at birth as the calculation uses mortality rates. The smaller mortality rates increase the average number of years someone can expect to live from birth.

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