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COWBOYS COMBAT DIABETES

It's no coincidence that the month of November recognizes both National Native American Heritage and American Diabetes month.

Fact: American Indians (and Alaska Natives) have the highest rates of Type 2 diabetes in the U.S. --- a likelihood of 2.2 times higher that Native Americans will develop diabetes. In addition to those who are now diabetetic (in some Native communities, one in two adults has diabetes), Indian Health Service officials say another 30 percent are pre-diabetic.

In 1997, Congress established a Special Diabetes Program for Indians with community-based programs that offer treatment and prevention support based on scientifically-proven Best Practices. "We now know it is possible to reduce diabetes risk factors in native communities," according to the American Diabetes Association's *Awakening the Spirit* program.

Diet and exercise are two keys to preventing, reducing, or reversing Type 2 diabetes with all sorts of runs, walks, and athletic competitions in place as part of the exercise portion of the equation. ADA sponsors *Step Out --- Walk to Stop Diabetes*. The National Basketball Association hosts a *Dribble to Stop Diabetes* campaign "designed to encourage fans to live an active, healthy lifestyle."

"As a professional basketball player, I know how important it is to take care of your health," says Carlos Boozer of the Chicago Bulls. "Living a healthy lifestyle --- including getting regular exercise --- is important for those who have or who are at risk of developing what is called the silent killer."

And that's where Native American rodeo cowboys come in with sponsorship of several awareness events promoted by the Indian National Finals Rodeo. Last year Pro Rodeo Hall of Famer Joe Beaver, holder of 8 world titles, showed up to help raise funds for research. "We can't completely change the lifestyle of a 70-year-old who wears a 3XL shirt and eats French fries on a regular basis, but we can focus on educating people about the disease, what causes it, and what steps can be taken to combat it," he said.

There are several awareness events at the 2012 INFR gathering (November 6-10, South Point Equestrian Center, Las Vegas), coordinated by arena physician Dr. Steve Williamson (Blackfeet). “The connection between Indian cowboys and diabetes is simple. I don’t think there’s a Native American in the country not affected in some fashion, either directly or through a family member or friend,”

At every daily performance, the INFR booth will conduct blood pressure and blood sugar testing and record-keeping protocol. Friday, November 9th, has been designated Diabetes Awareness Day to be kicked off by an hour-long walk to stress the importance of exercise and its role in fighting diabetes. And Native American cowboys from PRCA World Championships are committing items to be auctioned off each night during the go-round presentation.

Look for auction items and autographed tee-shirts bearing names like Derrick Begay (Navajo) Arizona; Erich Rogers (Navajo) Arizona; Dustin Bird (Blackfeet) Montana, and others.

“Our mission is to remind all Native Americans, whether or not they have diabetes or are undiagnosed, that INFR is supportive of all efforts helping Indians deal with the disease in their own personal lives,” says Dr. Williamson. “We want everyone to know that INFR is involved in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of diabetes as it affects Indian communities.”

