

# Drawing on Old and New Traditions to Prevent Commercial Tobacco Use within the CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF WARM SPRINGS



The goal of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Tobacco Prevention & Education Program (TPEP) is to increase the holistic health of each tribal member by:

- Sharing knowledge about the traditional/sacred use of tobacco and promoting respect for it,
- Educating people about the health risks of tobacco use, and
- Creating an environment where tribal members can be as healthy as possible.

TPEP Coordinator, Scott Kalama, promotes tobacco prevention by building on community strengths, like Native American spiritual values and traditions, and strong community partnerships. But Kalama, who is a musician, also employs hip hop to carry tobacco prevention messages to youth and works to pass tribal policy that supports tobacco-free environments.

According to Kalama, all of it works together to promote *“a healthy environment and healthy people.”*

## BUILDING ON TRADITION

Many Native communities have traditionally used tobacco for prayer, offerings, gift giving, cleansing, and medicine. According to Keep It Sacred, the National Native Network, *“traditional tobacco is a gift from Mother Earth. It should be respected ... [It provides] spiritual strength, guidance, discipline, and protection. You should never abuse such a gift.”*

However, Kalama says that people sometimes confuse traditional and commercial tobacco use, particularly members of the younger generation: *“I try to educate the community about*

*the differences because that is what an elder told me, about the old story of tobacco and that it was a tool to communicate with the creator. When you roll that tobacco and light it, it’s like a landline to the creator. You’re not supposed to inhale it because it belongs to him. When you do inhale it, you abuse it, and that’s why it abuses you.”*

Kalama helps tribal youth understand how they can use tobacco in a respectful and sacred way, rather than in ways that are harmful to their health and the health of other community members. He says these conversations about tobacco use can help young people gain greater insights: *“it’s a pathway for them to find their own spirituality and be able to figure out how they can take care of themselves: their mind, their body, their spirit.”*

“ Across the nation, for Indian country, we can be one of the leaders for tobacco prevention. ”



## POLICY CHANGE TO PROMOTE HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENTS

Kalama is also working with community members to adopt and implement policies to help discourage commercial tobacco use on tribal property. In 2013, he recommended that the tribes update their smokefree workplace policy to prohibit smoking within 25 feet of tribal buildings. He spent many months meeting with various community leaders, explaining the issues and obtaining their blessings, before presenting the proposal to Tribal Council. Kalama stressed the healthy environment/healthy people message, and the proposal passed 7-1: *“To me, getting that resolution—the 25 feet from the entry way—that was the first step to creating that environmental change. To me, I feel like I am making a good stride in the right direction.”* The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs is among the first tribal nations to implement a 25-foot ban on tribal properties.





## USING BEATS AND LYRICS TO REINFORCE THE MESSAGE

Kalama draws on both traditional and modern means to promote tobacco prevention messages. In addition to his work as TPEP Coordinator, Kalama is a hip hop artist and mentor for youth participating in the Beats Lyrics Leaders, a program that helps youth develop as both artists and leaders. Kalama helps the kids learn to make music, but he also helps them think critically about tobacco: *“I talk about how the industry is targeting new consumers and how youth are their new target. I explained to them that when I was a kid, the teachers smoked in the teacher’s lounge and how we used to smoke on airplanes and in restaurants. They’re like, ‘what? That’s crazy!’ I said ‘Yeah, that’s how it was when I was young, but then people like me who work for human services departments created policies to make this change, so you guys could have a healthy environment!’ Some of them didn’t even know what secondhand smoke was. So, I was like, ‘who is educating you guys? You’re in middle school.’ I said, ‘you’ve got Google, google it. You got your phone.’ From there, they just kept inviting me back to do more presentations.”*

In addition to ongoing presentations, Kalama is planning to create a tobacco-themed hip hop song that promotes the Oregon Tobacco Quit Line, so he can share the healthy environment/healthy people message with a larger proportion of the younger generation, in a way that speaks to them.

“ The younger ones are kind of looking at me like, ‘well, how do you know?’ And I tell them: ‘well, I listen to my elders.’ If you abuse tobacco, it abuses you. ”

## WHOLE INDIVIDUAL, WHOLE COMMUNITY

From the Native perspective, health requires balance in every sphere of one’s life, from the most personal inner world to lifestyle and social connections. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs’ Tobacco Prevention & Education Program approaches tobacco prevention in this holistic way, working in multiple spheres to create healthier people and a healthier environment.

