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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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NEW DOCUMENTARY SHOWS ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT HIGH RATES OF DIABETES AMONG PIMA

LINCOLN, Neb.—March 19, 2009—Before 1930, only one case of diabetes was found among the Pima. But 30 years after the Coolidge Dam was built in Arizona health officials recorded more than 500 cases of diabetes.

Bad Sugar, a new documentary premiering during the ***Unnatural Causes: Is Inequity Making Sick?*** on PBS in most cities on **March 27**, explores environmental and political issues behind high rates of type II diabetes among the Pima and shows how these and other historical events are significant factors in the rampant disease.

"Things didn't happen by chance," said **Jim Fortier**, (Metis/Ojibway), ***Bad Sugar*** producer and director. "These things are based on decisions that somebody else made and they are now having horrible consequences on Indian people."

In the 1890s after a series water projects were built, essentially all water supply to the Pimas was cut off. Although federal officials built a dam named after President Coolidge in 1930, the project was to provide some water to the Pima but it instead changed their livelihood. The president's promise was broken after these desert dwellers, who traditionally relied on local game and farming, received little water.

"Living along the river meant our life," said Henrietta Lopez of the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project. "Having the river flowing through our community meant having natural vegetation along the river, the willow, mesquite (and) cottonwood trees."

Research has also found that people under severe stress produce cortisol or other hormones that can build up over time and increase blood sugar. The Pima are among the poorest residents in the nation-about half of the tribe's residents live in poverty in one of the most extremely arid areas in the United States.

But in 2004, after the Pima signed the Arizona Water Settlements Act, there is new hope among tribal members. In addition to providing food to their community, the Pima now grow wheat to sell to pasta producers and are looking at other ways to develop new business opportunities.

"We can't think of diabetes and colonization just simply from the roll of the victim," said **Dr. Donald Warne**, president and CEO of the **American Indian Health Management and Policy**, who has been treating Native people in Arizona for years.

"Disease patterns like diabetes occur over many years so we're not going to see dramatic change overnight. But I think in the long run, as we see more success in economic development and workforce development, we're going to see improvements in health care systems, educational systems and social policy.

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"We have to take more control over own community," he said.

The series, *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?*, is scheduled to air in most cities on **consecutive Thursdays** starting **March 27**. The series explores the economic, physical and social backgrounds among multicultural communities, and the poor and middle-class to see how these factors affect health.

"Improvement in our neighborhoods, the living wage and jobs are as much health issues as diet and exercise," said Larry Adelman, *Unnatural Causes* executive producer. "Social policy is health policy."

Unnatural Causes is produced by **California Newsreel with Vital Pictures, Inc.** It is being presented for PBS broadcast by the **National Minority Consortia of Public Television**, which includes **NAPT**, and the Public Impact Campaign. It is also being showing in association with the Joint Center Health Policy Institute.

For more information about the series, go to: www.unnaturalcauses.org. **For PBS air times** and dates, go to: www.pbs.org/stationfinder/index.html.

NAPT shares Native stories with the world through support of the creation, promotion and distribution of Native media. NAPT support makes it possible for public television audiences to view such quality programs as *A Native American Night Before Christmas*, *Way of the Warrior* and *The Oneida Speak*, a new documentary about the Oneida in Wisconsin who took part in a federal writing project. Other **NAPT** products include the American Indian online radio network, **AIROS.org**, and **VisionMaker Video**, distributor of *A Native American Night Before Christmas*, *The Way of the Warrior*, *The Oneida Speak* and other documentaries by and about Native Americans.

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