

# WE KNOW, I KNOW

A Dance to the Medical Visit

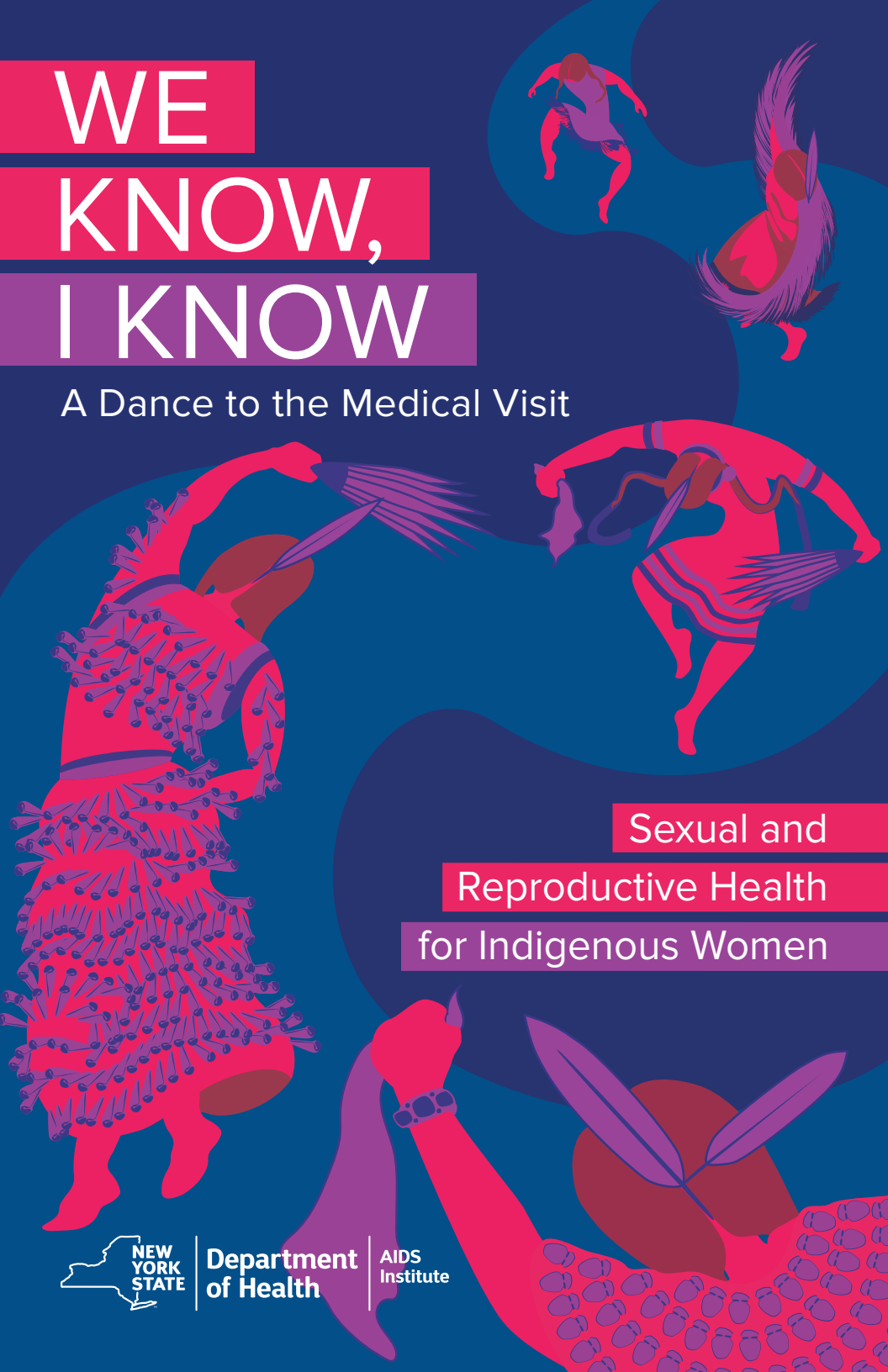
Sexual and  
Reproductive Health  
for Indigenous Women



NEW  
YORK  
STATE

Department  
of Health

AIDS  
Institute





## Moving Together, Healthy Together

We are a diverse community, with many stories rooted in the land, our communities, and our own personal experiences. We often hear about the violence Indigenous women have endured, and we may have experienced this violence ourselves. The harm we experience is connected to and impacts our sexual and reproductive health. Our access to sexual and reproductive health information and services has been limited, and our participation in decision-making is too often ignored. Our health needs are also made invisible, especially the health of our transgender, gender-expansive, two-spirit, and queer families, young, and old. That is why it is important to help each other navigate our movement towards health.

## We Know Our Experience, We Know Our Bodies, and We Know Our Pain

We know many Indigenous people who have overcome mistreatment from the medical institutions they visit. We know that standards of health often take after the white-male experience, and our experience is interpreted within these standards. There needs to be a balance between trusting the knowledge we hold, and the knowledge our health care providers have. Above all, you should feel empowered to find a provider who is sensitive and receptive to the health needs you share with them.

The knowledge of your body and pain can be the start of your health journey. It's okay to not know much about sexual and reproductive health. Your health care provider's purpose is to help you. There is no shame in talking about your body and visiting a health care provider when you need help or have concerns. Open communication about sex, your body, and mind – topics as true as life – will help you find what is most healthy for you.

Now, let's find out what a sexual and reproductive health visit entails.



## We Move to the Same Song: Partners in Health

To get the most out of your sexual and reproductive health appointment, there is *A Dance to the Medical Visit*.

If you take the lead, your health care provider can join you in a health dance. In all directions they move, in all directions you move, together in harmony. You can feel the drumbeat bind the next steps between you two. This is the rhythm of communication with your health care provider, to ensure that they are meeting your health needs.

### Entering the Circle: Communicate as a Team

Like the communal spirit of powwow, attending a health care appointment is an opportunity to come together, listen, and exchange. It is important to express issues related to sexual and reproductive health that are of concern to you. You have the right to bring up your concerns and guide the discussion. You can also decide who you are comfortable having as your health care provider. For example, it is OK to ask to be seen by a woman or femme-identifying health care provider if that would make you more comfortable. Also consider if you can bring a trusted sister, auntie, or family member to the appointment.

For you and your provider to best work as a team, come prepared for your visit:

- Keep a log of dates related to your period (menstrual cycle). This will help you and your provider understand your menstrual cycle and gauge other aspects of your health, such as underlying health conditions, fertility, and mood changes, among many others.
- Keep notes about changes in your health or symptoms you might be experiencing, especially any discharge, rashes, sores, pain or itching of the genitals or anus, or burning when you pee.
- Share updates on prior requests your health care provider made, such as lab tests, medications, other referrals they gave you, etc.

Other items you can share with your provider:

- Overall mental health
- Other health care providers you've seen
- Changes in living environment/housing situation
- Substance use



- Medication side effects
- Any specific needs that you have
- Anything else you think is important

Keep in mind, even though your provider may not be able to address all these items, you can ask for a referral to someone who can.

## **Moving Within the Circle: Call Out to Your Health Partner**

While on your visit, you and your health care provider each have a role in giving life to the healing space. It may seem like they ask a lot of questions, but you can ask questions too. It can be hard to remember the questions you may have while at your visit, which is why it is helpful to write down your questions before the visit.

During a sexual and reproductive health visit, you may ask questions like:

- How can I protect myself and others from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?
- How do I talk about sexual health with my partner(s)?
- How often should I get tested for HIV or STIs?
- Tell me more about PrEP, should I take PrEP?
- What vaccinations should I consider having?
- What are the most effective forms of birth control?
- What screenings do I need to maintain my reproductive health?

## **Harmony Within the Circle: Prepare Yourself**

Although every provider is different, there are certain things to keep in mind that your provider could ask you about. Your provider may ask you about details that are intimate or that you may think are private. This can catch you off guard, but you have a right to speak up if you feel uncomfortable. It is perfectly within your rights to ask your provider why they are asking about certain information. Overall, it is important to remember that your provider is just trying to get to know you and provide you with the best health care plan possible. Some examples of questions they might ask are:

- What are your preferred gender pronouns?
- What type of sex are you having? (Some providers will ask more questions about this.)



- How many sexual partners have you had? Have you had any new sexual partners recently?
- Do you have any experience with trauma, violence, or intimate partner violence?
- Which birth control methods are you using?
- Are you a person who uses drugs? If so, what type of drugs? How are you using them?
- Have you ever been diagnosed with an STI in the past, or have you recently had sex with someone who has an STI?

Being honest and open with your provider is the best way to get the proper treatment and diagnosis to ensure your overall health.

## Closing the Circle

Now, with open communication between you and your health care provider, you are in a better place to advocate for yourself and ensure that your health needs are being met. If you begin to feel that your health needs and concerns are not taken into consideration, you have every right to file a complaint and find another health care provider who will listen and give you the care you need.



## Resources

### General Resources

*Note: Please visit these websites to check if resources are available to you.*

American Indian Health Program in New York State (NYS Department of Health)  
[https://www.health.ny.gov/community/american\\_indian\\_nation/](https://www.health.ny.gov/community/american_indian_nation/)

Lockport Service Unit (Indian Health Services)  
<https://www.ihs.gov/nashville/healthcarefacilities/lockport/>

New York Indian Council, Inc. Healthcare Services  
<https://www.newyorkindiancouncil.org/>

### Sexual Health Information and Resources

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Homepage (NYS Department of Health)  
<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std/>

Sexual Health Campaign (NYS Department of Health)  
<https://campaigns.health.ny.gov/SexualHealth>

NYSDOH STI Fact Sheets  
[https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std/fact\\_sheets.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std/fact_sheets.htm)

CDC STI Fact Sheets  
[https://www.cdc.gov/std/healthcomm/fact\\_sheets.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/std/healthcomm/fact_sheets.htm)

### FAQs:

- ***How often should someone get tested?***
  - Should I get tested for STDs? (Planned Parenthood)  
<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/stds-hiv-safer-sex/get-tested>
  - This Is How Often You Need To Get Tested For STDs, Based On Your Relationship Status (National Coalition for Sexual Health) <https://nationalcoalitionforsexualhealth.org/media-center/ncsh-in-the-news/this-is-how-often-you-need-to-get-tested-for-stds-based-on-your-relationship-status>
- ***What STI tests should someone receive?***
  - Which STD Tests Should I Get? (CDC)  
<https://www.cdc.gov/std/prevention/screeningreccs.htm>



- ***Where to get tested and/or treated for STIs:***

- NYCDOHMH Sexual Health Clinics and Services Information  
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/services/sexual-health-clinics.page>
- NYSDOH AIDS Institute Provider Directory  
<https://providerdirectory.aidsinstituteny.org/>

## **Resources for Prevention**

- ***Where to find PrEP:***

- PrEP and PEP Resource Page (NYS Department of Health)  
<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/general/prep/consumers.htm>

- ***Where to find condoms:***

- Condoms in NYC Area and Resources (NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene)  
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/condom.page>
- NYS Condom Program (NYS Department of Health)  
<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/consumers/condoms/nyscondom.htm>
- Condom Effectiveness and Resources (CDC)  
<https://www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/index.html>
- How do I get condoms? (Planned Parenthood)  
<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/birth-control/condom/how-do-i-get-condoms>

- ***Information on safe sex:***

- Safer Sex (Planned Parenthood)  
<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/stds-hiv-safer-sex/safer-sex>

## **Reproductive Health Resources**

- ***Where to find birth control and pregnancy tests:***

- Comprehensive Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care Services Program (NYS Department of Health)  
[https://www.health.ny.gov/community/pregnancy/family\\_planning/](https://www.health.ny.gov/community/pregnancy/family_planning/)
- Family Planning Program Sites (NYS Department of Health)  
[https://www.health.ny.gov/community/pregnancy/family\\_planning/program\\_sites.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/community/pregnancy/family_planning/program_sites.htm)



- **What should you be doing to maintain health, i.e., Pap smears, breast exams, when to start going to a women’s health provider (gynecologist)?**

- Women’s Health

<https://www.health.ny.gov/community/adults/women/>

## **Healthy Relationships and Consent**

- **Information on healthy relationships and intimate partner violence:**

- Sexual Violence Prevention Program

[https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/sexual\\_violence/](https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/sexual_violence/)

- **Information on consent during sex:**

- Sexual Health Campaign – Consent

<https://campaigns.health.ny.gov/SexualHealth/Consent>

## **Patient Support**

- **Information on patient’s rights:**

- Patient’s Bill of Rights

[https://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/patients/patient\\_rights/](https://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/patients/patient_rights/)

- **Where to find insurance if uninsured:**

- NY State of Health – The Official Health Plan Marketplace

<https://nystateofhealth.ny.gov/>

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