



American Indian Health Commission for Washington State

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Tribe

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May 21, 2010

Honorable Christine Gregoire
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor:

We are writing on behalf of the American Indian Health Commission (AIHC) and Association of WA Tribes (AWT) to request a meeting of AIHC Tribal representatives and members of your Health Care Cabinet in honor of the government-to-government relationship outlined in the Centennial Accord. AIHC, a tribally-driven organization, has been working successfully in collaboration with state health agencies on policy and systems-level issues that impact Indian health and contribute to Indian health disparities for more than fifteen years; it serves on behalf of many Washington Tribes in this capacity.

In addition, we advocate for the state to work with Tribes for dedicated implementation resources in order for Tribes to be proactive and strategically engaged in state reform decisions and plans. Washington Tribes need to be a partner with state government in implementing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) in order to expand and enhance health care access for American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) in Washington.

With passage of the PPACA (P.L. 111-148), which includes permanent reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, it is vital Tribal health expertise be included at every level of state planning and implementation of federal health reform mandates as early as possible. PPACA includes critical provisions to protect AI/AN people. The legislation also includes important protections for the Indian health care delivery system. As the new Health Care Cabinet begins its process to evaluate state agency functions and structures in the course of implementing health reform requirements, it is imperative that this process include consultation with Tribes and the AIHC.

Congress intended to address the unique circumstances of Indian people served by the Indian health care delivery system. The federal Act authorizes states great latitude in implementing health reform; any changes that Washington State considers in health reform implementation must uphold this Congressional intent.

Our goal for a meeting is to establish the role of Tribes with the Health Care Cabinet in this historic effort. Tribes are aware most implementation planning and decisions will be addressed at the agency level, and AIHC intends to work with individual agencies as well in this reform implementation. State-Tribal collaboration cannot be successful, however, when Tribes do not have the resources to come to the table with a strategic, collective voice. We must have opportunity and appropriate funding to work productively on health reform, reform that will fundamentally change the health care delivery system in this state and have significant impacts on Indian health.

As AIHC and AWT work in partnership with the state to successfully implement health reform for all residents of the state and pursue opportunities together, we respect individual Tribal decisions to work on health reform as sovereign nations, independently of the AIHC collaboration.

We do look forward to our work together. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this request. It is with utmost importance we receive a response in a short timeframe to allow Tribes to designate appropriate tribal representatives to the tasks at hand.

Sincerely,



Marilyn Scott, Chair
American Indian Health Commission



Brian Cladoosby, Chair
Association of Washington Tribes

Cc: Honorable Claudia Kauffman, State Senator
Honorable John McCoy, State Representative
Honorable Karen Keiser, State Senator; Chair, Senate Health & Long-Term Care Committee
Honorable Eileen Cody, State Representative; Chair, House Health Care & Wellness Committee
WA State Tribal Chairs
AIHC Tribal Delegates
Susan Johnson, Regional Director, HHS Region X
Doug Porter, Administrator, Health Care Authority/Director, State Medicaid Office
Mary Selecky, Secretary; Department of Health
Susan Dreyfus, Secretary; Department of Social & Health Services
Steve Hill, Director, Department of Retirement Systems
Marty Brown, Director, WA State Office of Financial Management
Jonathan Seib, Health Policy Advisor, Governor's Office of Executive Policy
Director, Governor's Office of Executive Policy
Craig Bill, Executive Director, Governor's Office of Indian Affairs