

# National Indian Health Board



## National Indian Health Board Resolution 19 - 01

### Support for Coverage of Oral Health Care Services under Medicare

**WHEREAS**, the National Indian Health Board (NIHB), established in 1972, serves all federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Tribal governments by advocating for the improvement of health care delivery to AI/ANs, as well as upholding the federal government's trust responsibility to AI/AN Tribal governments; and

**WHEREAS**, the NIHB has a strong history of advancing the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native people through the support of regulatory and Congressional action, advocacy for increased funding for healthcare in Indian Country, creation of national venues to discuss health issues, and creation of educational and programmatic materials for Tribal public health professionals; and

**WHEREAS**, Congress created Medicare in 1965 as a public health insurance program to guarantee health care availability to all American seniors; and

**WHEREAS**, Medicare currently covers nearly 49 million Americans over age 65, including 450,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives, and nearly 9 million Americans with disabilities, including 200,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives; and

**WHEREAS**, Medicare originally offered coverage only for hospital and medical care; and

**WHEREAS**, Congress has periodically revised Medicare to include coverage for benefits such as speech, physical, and chiropractic therapies as well as hospice care and prescription drug benefits; and

**WHEREAS**, Medicare does not currently offer coverage for non-medical oral health services; and

**WHEREAS**, 98 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native elders (55 or older) have at least one tooth removed because of decay, trauma, or gum disease; and

**WHEREAS**, oral health is intricately linked to overall health, with significant amounts of research pointing to connections between poor oral health and increased risk of heart disease, lung disease, stroke, and diabetes; and

**WHEREAS**, at the direction of the Tribes, NIHB has long supported legislative action to improve consistent quality oral health access among American Indians and Alaska Natives;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that NIHB calls for Congress to create a comprehensive dental benefit under all public health insurance programs, including Medicare; and

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that NIHB calls for Congress to ensure eligible American Indians and Alaska Natives receive said benefit at no additional cost in pursuance of the trust responsibility.


**CERTIFICATION**

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the Board, with quorum present, on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2019.



**Vice-Chair, Bill Smith**

**ATTEST:**



**Recording Secretary, Lisa Elgin**