

National Indian Health Board



The Red Feather Of Hope And Healing

Press Release
March 21, 2010
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Lynette Willie
Communications Director
202.420.8579

America Reaffirms Health Care for Indian Country

Washington, DC – The United States’ 564 federally-recognized tribes claim victory with today’s historic passage of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*. The House passed the Senate’s health care reform bill by a vote of 219 to 212 which includes the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA), placing in effect health care legislation that American Indians and Alaska Natives have been requesting from Congress for the past ten years.

The IHCIA was originally enacted in 1976 by Congress to address the deplorable health conditions occurring in Indian Country. The law provides the key legal authority for the provision of health care to American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people. Over the past decade, tribes have worked endlessly to reauthorize the IHCIA in order to expand, improve, and modernize the health delivery and services in tribal communities. In recent months, the House and the Senate pledged to support the IHCIA by including its provisions within the overall health care reform legislation.

“No one can deny the intense political climate that has been present in the debates regarding health care reform. However, there is one issue that has remained consistently agreed upon: Indian Country is in dire need of health care reform,” said Reno Keoni Franklin, Chairman of the National Indian Health Board. “Today, we thank the diligence and persistence that President Obama and Congress demonstrated to Indian Country in making sure that the Indian Health Care Improvement Act was included in the overall health care reform bill,” said Franklin.

“This inclusion of the IHCIA reaffirms the government’s trust responsibility to provide health care to our people,” said Rachel Joseph, a member of the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe of California and Co-Chair of the National Steering Committee (NSC) on the Reauthorization of the IHCIA. Joseph has worked on the IHCIA for more than a decade. “Today they have honored our ancestors, and have acknowledged that through the cessation of over 400 million acres of land, tribes have secured a de facto contract that entitles us to health care. American Indian and Alaska Native people will view this legislation not only as it pertains to health care, but will also celebrate it as an important policy statement that has been enacted into law by the United States,” said Joseph.

No other segment of the American population experiences greater health disparities than the AI/AN population. In 2003, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that American Indian youth are twice as likely to commit suicide; AI/ANs are 630 percent more likely to die from alcoholism, 650 percent more likely to die from tuberculosis, 328 percent more likely to die from diabetes, and 204



926 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE | Washington, DC 20003 | 202-507-4070 | 202-507-4071 fax | www.nihb.org

The Red Feather of Hope and Healing

National Indian Health Board



The Red Feather Of Hope And Healing

(pg 2 – America Reaffirms Health Care for Indian Country)

percent more likely to suffer accidental death when compared with other groups. The disparities have largely been attributed to a serious lack of funding sufficient to advance the health care infrastructure, and the level and quality of health services for AI/AN.

“It is important to note the provisions which have been included will greatly improve Indian Country’s health care system. For instance, this landmark legislation brings the establishment of a comprehensive behavioral health system for Indian Country. Tribes will finally have a way to address a myriad of behavioral health problems such as substance abuse, suicide (especially among the youth), and domestic violence,” said Buford Rolin, Vice Chairman of the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) and Co-Chairman of the National Steering Committee for the Reauthorization of the IHCA.

The new legislation brings substantial developments for Indian Country’s health care through the following ways: improving workforce development and recruitment of health professionals in Indian Country; providing funds for facilities construction as well as maintenance and improvement funds to address priority facility needs; creating opportunities for access to and financing of necessary health care services for AI/AN; and assisting with the modernization in the delivery of health services provided by the Indian Health Service.

“We thank all the American Indian and Alaska Native tribes; the Honorable President Obama and his administration; the membership of the House and the Senate; the National Congress of American Indians; the National Council of Urban Indian Health; the National Indian Gaming Association; the National American Indian Housing Council; and the National Indian Education Association. And, we give thanks to the countless friends and advocates of Indian Health who have helped to ensure health care for all Americans. I especially want to thank the members of the National Steering Committee and the staff members of the National Indian Health Board,” said Reno Franklin, “While we celebrate this historic event in bringing hope to our communities, we look forward in working together to start a new legacy for the Indian health care system.”

###

The National Indian Health Board advocates on behalf of all Tribal Governments and American Indians/Alaska Natives in their efforts to provide quality health care. Visit www.nihb.org for more information.



926 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE | Washington, DC 20003 | 202-507-4070 | 202-507-4071 fax | www.nihb.org

The Red Feather of Hope and Healing