

National Indian Health Board Health Policy Fellowship



Tia Yazzie

Navajo Nation

2018-19 National Indian Health Board
Health Policy Fellow

Hometown: Fort Defiance, AZ

Current residence: between Gallup, New Mexico and Salt Lake City, Utah

Education: Dartmouth College (will graduate in the Spring of 2019)

Double major: Psychology and Native American Studies

Ultimately, it was my people and my family that motivated me to apply to be an NIHB Health Policy Fellow. Growing up on the reservation, I have seen and experienced firsthand the repercussions of colonialism and the institutionalized racism and oppression of my people and family. I have also seen the way the current healthcare system in Indian Country handles such oppression and historical trauma of our Native peoples.

I believe it is time for a change. The NIHB Health Policy Fellowship gives me an opportunity to use my voice, experience, and perspective. Plus the values and mission that the NIHB strives for is exactly what I want to do for my people.

In the Fellowship program, I hope to grow as an academic, Native American woman, and community member. I also hope to create change within the current healthcare system in Indian Country by changing the conversation around sexual assault, domestic violence, and other forms of lateral violence by enforcing more Indigenous forms of services and methods of healing. Even if I can only help one victim, I would say that is an accomplishment in itself.

One obstacle I have faced and overcome was leaving my family and community to attend college. As one of the many women of our family and as the eldest daughter, it was my duty to

be the caretaker for many of my siblings and family members. When I got accepted to college, I was filled with joy, but also sadness. How could I leave my people and family when they needed help with getting to the hospital or cooking food for themselves? Was I being selfish and simply leaving them behind? I was troubled with this moral dilemma, but in the end attending college has done nothing more than solidify the fact that I will be returning home after I graduate to give back to my Tribal nation and community. Although this obstacle may seem insignificant or minor in the grand scheme of everything, this obstacle has shaped me significantly and helped me realize that my time away from home is not selfish, but rather my time away from home is for the future of my people.

One long term goal of mine would be to dismantle the current healthcare system framework and rebuild it upon an Indigenized structure that encompasses Native values, beliefs, perspectives, history, and worldviews. The current healthcare system has healed many of our Native peoples for the better, but the framework and foundation upon which it is built on is a carbon copy of the Western healthcare framework that only fits the dominant population. To holistically heal our Native people, the healthcare system in Indian Country must be tailored specifically to each of the 573 federally recognized Tribes, because every Tribal nation is sovereign and can determine what is right for their people.

I also want traditional forms of healing and traditional forms of common law to be used as the first line of defense. Tribal nations walk a fine line, because they must balance Western values and practices and traditional values and practices. Ultimately, using our own traditional methods should not be looked down upon. Rather this should be celebrated and seen as the first method to use, because that is what our ancestors have done for centuries and before contact.

An elder once told me, "When I was your age, we had to forget who we were, where we came from. We lost our language, and our hair was cut. We were afraid to speak up against anyone, because we were already lost and scared. So we lost our voice. But you have a voice. My generation gave you the hard work, and we left you little room to have fun because you have a voice now. You can stand up and be proud of who you are and fight for what you want and fight for your people."

I think this has given me motivation, and now I view things a bit differently, because I realize that I have the opportunity to use my voice in ways that my grandma, grandpa, or even my mom and dad could not. Many of our people were hurt, killed, or traumatized, and they were never healed correctly. But me and you- the younger generation- can change this. We can begin to heal our people in the way they are meant to be healed if we just use our voice.