

National Indian Health Board



TO: TRIBAL LEADERS
AREA HEALTH BOARD EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS
TRIBAL HEALTH CENTER DIRECTORS

RE: AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE NATIONAL
REGIONAL EXTENSION CENTER
MEANINGFUL USE & PROVIDER SIGN UP

Dear Respected Tribal Health Leaders,

As many of you know, National Indian Health Board (NIHB) received an award from the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) to establish the operations of the American Indian/Alaska Native National Regional Extension Center (AI/AN National REC). The AI/AN National REC will assist our Tribal health providers with achieving meaningful use of Electronic Health Records (EHRs). The project is the *first and only project of this magnitude*: NIHB is expected to reach into *all of Indian Country* to support EHR deployment and meaningful use implementation, with an objective impacting approximately 3,000 providers in 35 states at over 500 individual tribal provider sites.

As the Indian Health System is very unique in organizational structure and geographic location, NIHB has worked diligently with the ONC staff to educate them regarding the types of service sites we utilize, our challenges geographically and certainly the variance in available information technologies that exist site to site, including manpower, connectivity and electronic health record utilization. We have learned a great deal in our discussions with ONC over the past several months and the time spent has been *critical* to NIHB's efforts to make the project a success for our Indian Country providers.



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NIHB recognizes while these discussions were taking place, our Indian Country Tribal leaders, providers, and especially our proposal partners have been waiting for answers to important questions;

What is the implementation plan? How do areas and Tribes access funds to assist with meaningful use implementation? Will there be training opportunities? How do the providers engage in this project?

Here is what we have learned:

The project award of \$15.6 million was calculated based on our proposal to sign up and provide technical support services for the use of EHRs for 3,000 providers in Indian Country. Of that amount, **\$14.1 million is restricted and access to draw down the funds is directly tied to meeting three milestones identified by ONC.** The three milestones for this project and their relationship to the availability of technical support funds are as follows:

Milestone #1. NIHB must sign up 3,000 providers in the Indian Health System and complete ONC report requirements to secure the release of approximately 1/3 of the funds, estimated \$4.7 million;

Milestone #2. NIHB must verify the implementation of certified EHR software among those 3,000 providers and complete ONC report requirements to secure release of the next 1/3 of the funds, estimated \$4.7 million;

Milestone #3. NIHB must verify the meaningful use of EHRs among those 3,000 providers and complete ONC report requirements to secure the release of the last 1/3 of the funds, estimated \$4.7 million.

All of these milestones must be met by December 31, 2012, the end of the project funding award period.

The project scope has *not* changed. Though our original funding support request was for \$30 million to implement all of the planned activities (provider sign up, training and workforce development, Tribe-State collaboration support, area partner support), we received *half* of the requested funds to accomplish the *same amount of work*. We have been advised by ONC that their expectation is for NIHB to accomplish sign up of 3,000 providers and implement meaningful use criteria at those provider sites. NIHB believes Indian Country will take full advantage of this challenge to demonstrate what we *can do*.



NIHB will need the help of Indian Country to meet the milestones. We now have a clearer path and full understanding of the expectations before us, but we can't accomplish this alone. To meet Milestone #1, we ask that **all Tribal health providers sign a participation agreement to work with the AI/AN National REC and receive technical support and training to achieve meaningful use of EHRs. We will need the full assistance of the Area Health Boards, Tribal health clinics and service units to accomplish this milestone mark – 3,000 providers.** NIHB is unable to begin full implementation of the training and partnership agreements until we meet the requirements of this first milestone. Once this milestone is met, 1/3 of the granted funds can be released to NIHB so we may better serve the Tribes, and more importantly, NIHB will be able to engage in sub awards to support the full implementation of meaningful use of EHRs. NIHB will work diligently to secure sub award proposals, but cannot pay the awardees without the funds; *we need to meet Milestone #1 requirements as quickly as possible.* With the assistance of ONC, we have developed Provider Agreement Forms, and will make them available on the NIHB website at www.nihb.org, under the tab “National REC.” Upon availability of the provider agreement form on the NIHB website, we request that you have your providers complete the form and get it back to NIHB before December 1, 2010. Once Milestone #1 requirements are completed with your help, we anticipate availability of funds to dedicate to sub-awardees contracts and the implementation of additional work involved in this project.

NIHB is grateful for the assistance provided by the United South and Eastern Tribes (USET), California Rural Indian Health Board (CRIHIB), Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB) and Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) in the development of our AI/AN National REC proposal. NIHB would like to acknowledge these organizations as partners in our successful application, and look forward to engaging with them in efforts to support EHR deployment and meaningful use implementation across Indian Country. NIHB has also reached out to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) to assist with workforce development and training efforts for our providers and sites as this project unfolds. We are pleased to announce that AIHEC fully supports our efforts and we look forward to a fruitful collaboration. NIHB recognizes



that the Indian Health Service (IHS) also has a role in our collaborative efforts and will be seeking assistance from their Office of Information Technology as we secure provider sign ups, and create a sustainable implementation strategy for meaningful use, including assisting NIHB with meaningful use training opportunities.

NIHB is very pleased to announce that we have been successful in recruiting a Director for the AI/AN National REC; Mr. Tom Kauley of the Kiowa Nation will be joining our staff to spearhead the project. Mr. Kauley has several years experience in health care information technologies, project management and working with external agencies and entities on technologies based projects. We believe he will provide leadership and vision regarding further development of health information technology assistance for NIHB and Indian Country. NIHB is also pleased to announce that Mr. Shawn Leckey has accepted our offer to become the Information Technologies Specialist for the AI/AN National REC. Mr. Leckey is from the Rosebud reservation, has been a consumer of the Indian Health Service health care delivery system, and is a veteran of the Marine Corp. He has several years of work experience in information technology implementation, support, training and help desk development that we believe will be an asset to the National REC and the developing role of NIHB in health information technologies technical assistance and advocacy.

NIHB is actively engaged in the development of web-based resources to support the implementation of meaningful use of EHRs. We are excited to have secured the technical expertise on staff to further this development. We are in the beginning stages of creating web-based technical assistance, meaningful use informational resources and most importantly, the linkages to secure provider agreement sign up and milestone data collection, required under our project. We respectfully ask for your continued patience and support as we continue to bring Indian Country the information and tools needed to assure our providers have access to electronic health record and meaningful use implementation information.

In closing, stay tuned to our website and meeting announcements. We have been working diligently with ONC to ensure your voice and the needs of the Tribes are represented through the implementation of EHR meaningful use



nationally, we ask that you assist us with your questions, concerns, support and especially your success stories. NIHB is looking forward to demonstrating with your assistance, Indian Country's capability to get the job done through the implementation of EHR meaningful use, making it meaningful for our people evidenced by improved health data and reduction of health disparities for our people.

Yours in Health,

Stacy A. Bohlen
Executive Director

Tom Kauley
AI/AN National REC Director



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