

# National Indian Health Board



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Contact: Stacy A. Bohlen, Executive Director  
[sbohlen@nihb.org](mailto:sbohlen@nihb.org) or 202-507-4070

## **National Indian Health Board Calls for Indian Health Service Accountability and Creation of an Oversight Task Force**

*Washington, DC.* In response to a health care delivery crisis among Tribes in the Great Plains, the National Indian Health Board's Board of Directors unanimously approved resolutions to investigate, evaluate and offer reform strategies to the Indian Health Service (IHS). This move came in response to the reports by Members of the Omaha, Winnebago and Rosebud Sioux Tribe Tribal Councils attending the Board meeting, held January 20 and 21, 2016.

These tragedies include the preventable deaths of at least five Tribal members under the care of trained medical professionals at the IHS-operated hospitals in the Great Plains Area. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) rescinded its accreditation of the Winnebago-Omaha IHS hospital in July 2015, limiting the chronically under-funded hospital's ability to bill for essential services. In November 2015, CMS notified the IHS that they would rescind the Rosebud Indian Hospital's CMS accreditation, because they determined the hospital was not in compliance with regulatory requirements, and patient care was being severely impeded. IHS since submitted a satisfactory corrective Action Plan for the Rosebud Hospital, but the emergency room remains closed. Reports from across Indian Country confirm that poor quality of care at IHS facilities that prompted these CMS findings is not limited to the Great Plains Area. Several at the board meeting also shared their stories of how IHS care has negatively impacted them or their loved ones.

Moved by the gravity of facts, NIHB Board Member, President Russell Begaye of the Navajo Nation initiated the action by asking, "How long are we going to tolerate this? What about those who don't have a voice?" He acknowledged that NIHB is the voice of the Tribes' health and made a motion that NIHB undertake a two-pronged approach to the problem:

- 1) NIHB will seat and conduct a special Task Force to examine and document an investigation into the mismanagement and poor care at IHS-run hospitals, and;
- 2) NIHB use the findings of the Task Force to create a strategic action plan that will address the shortcomings highlighted in the aforementioned investigation and recommend a plan of action for IHS to provide quality healthcare to all patients within one year.

The board unanimously approved these resolutions. In September 2015, NIHB passed a resolution that expressed support for the Winnebago and Omaha Tribes as they work to find a resolution for this situation. It also called on both Congress and the Administration to take steps necessary to ensure that care improves at the Winnebago Hospital. This latest action takes a dramatic step for Tribes to hold federal actors accountable for maintaining a quality healthcare system for American Indians and Alaskan Natives as charged in the federal trust responsibility. "This is a bold, daunting and necessary step," said NIHB's Executive Director, Stacy A. Bohlen. "American Indian and Alaska Native Peoples deserve the best health care America has to offer and we will find a path forward toward securing it." Tax deductible donations needed to fund the Task Force are being sought. NIHB is also seeking experts to serve on the Task Force. "We want to include the expertise and insights of experts in health systems, hospital and health professions accreditation and certification as well as rural health and economic advisors willing to serve on the Task Force," said Bohlen. If interested in donating or serving on the Task Force, please send

donations or queries to NIHB, t 910 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003, Attention: NIHB IHS TASK FORCE.”

NIHB 1<sup>st</sup> Quarterly Board of Directors meeting was held in Washington, DC on January 20 and 21, 2016. The quarterly meetings are a venue for the nation’s Tribes, American Indian and Alaska Native, through twelve elected representatives from throughout the country to address Tribal health care and policy issues and set a course for action at the national level. The Board is responsible for ensuring that NIHB honor’s its mission to achieve one voice affirming and empowering American Indian and Alaska Native Peoples to protect and improve health and reduce health disparities. It is also an opportunity for the Board to meet with Tribal leaders and Tribal members from throughout the country to discuss the current state of Indian health and prioritize targeted actions to improve it.

*Founded in 1972, NIHB is a 501(c) 3 not for profit, charitable organization providing health care advocacy services, facilitating Tribal budget consultation and providing timely information, and other services to all Tribal governments. NIHB also conducts research, provides policy analysis, program assessment and development, national and regional meeting planning, training, technical assistance, program and project management. NIHB presents the Tribal perspective while monitoring, reporting on and responding to federal legislation and regulations. It also serves as conduit to open opportunities for the advancement of American Indian and Alaska Native health care and public health with other national and international organizations, foundations corporations and others in its quest to build support for, and advance, Indian health care issues.*

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