

National Indian Health Board



National Indian Health Board Resolution 22 – 01

Boarding School Healing Resolution

WHEREAS, the National Indian Health Board (NIHB), established in 1972, serves all Federally recognized American Indian/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 serves all federally recognized Tribes, constituting a diverse service population with wide-ranging perspectives, opinions, and values; and

WHEREAS, the governing body of the NIHB is its Board of Directors, comprised of a representative elected from the Tribes in each Indian Health Service Area; and

WHEREAS, AI/ANs have suffered physical, mental, emotional and spiritual harms resulting from historical and intergenerational trauma that began with European colonialism and imperialistic policies implemented by the United States government and encouraged by United States Supreme Court judgments that embraced the Doctrine of Discovery, whereby Tribal lands could be seized and rightfully claimed by European Christian governments under the auspices that Tribal lands were “discovered” by Europeans and thereafter under European ownership; and

WHEREAS, European colonialism includes a history of genocide against AI/AN people, and the United States government’s westward expansion under Manifest Destiny contributed to genocide, along with forced removal and relocation of numerous Tribes under the Indian Removal Act of 1830; and

WHEREAS, after committing physical genocide of AI/AN people, the United States government shifted its focus to cultural genocide and the control and regulation of Tribes through a series of systemic and programmatic initiatives; and

WHEREAS, the United States Congress passed the Civilization Fund Act of 1819, which provided funding for religious institutions to create schools to “civilize” AI/AN children through educational curricula designed to require the adoption of the English language, Anglo-American customs and cultural expressions, and the Christian religion; and

WHEREAS, in 1869 the United States government, as a part of deliberate and coercive efforts to assimilate AI/ANs into non-Native culture, adopted the Indian Boarding School Policy with systemic and programmatic designs to eradicate AI/AN language, culture, and identity through forced separation and removal of AI/AN children from their families and Tribal communities; and

WHEREAS, between 1869 and the 1960s, more than 100,000 AI/AN children were removed from their family homes and placed in any of over 350 schools operated by the federal government and both Protestant and Catholic churches; and

WHEREAS, AI/AN children in boarding schools were punished for speaking their Native languages, banned from expressing traditional or cultural practices, stripped of traditional clothing and hair, and experienced physical, mental, emotional and spiritual abuse, including malnourishment, sexual assault, and medical experimentation; and

WHEREAS, many AI/AN children died at boarding schools while separated from their families and Tribal communities, the true number of which is currently unknown due in part to suppression and inaccessibility of both government and church records; and

WHEREAS, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland ordered the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative on June 21, 2021, under the supervision of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, and described as a “comprehensive review of the troubled legacy of federal boarding school policies,” with emphasis on cemeteries and potential burial sites of AI/AN children who died while attending Indian Boarding Schools; and

WHEREAS, the over 100-year implementation of cultural genocide at Indian Boarding Schools is not relegated to distant memory but exists in the living memory of many Tribal members today, and the legacy of unresolved historical and intergenerational trauma caused by the schools has created health inequities and disparities, detrimental physical and behavioral health outcomes, and lack of meaningful connection to Native identity for many Tribal members; and

WHEREAS, research links AI/AN historical and intergenerational trauma to increased rates of depression, suicidal ideation, substance use disorders, domestic violence and sexual assault, and a lower life expectancy than any other group in the United States; and

WHEREAS, AI/AN communities are in need of support for Tribal-specific healing and trauma-informed care that addresses the unique history of the AI/AN experience as a path to processing grief and resolving historical and intergenerational trauma resulting from Indian Boarding Schools; and

WHEREAS, neither the United States nor Christian institutions have offered meaningful or adequate apology, nor an offer of redress for the generations of harm caused by programmatic cultural genocide against AI/AN children, families, communities, and Tribes; and

WHEREAS, the NIHB has performed and documented significant work related to addressing the harm of historical and intergenerational trauma and the efficacy of Tribally led and culturally appropriate healing in relation to the holistic health outcomes for AI/AN people; and

WHEREAS, on September 30, 2021, Congress introduced the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act, which establishes the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States to “investigate the impacts and ongoing effects of the Indian Boarding School Policies,” and to protect unmarked graves and support repatriation and identification of Tribal nations and children who were removed.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Directors of the National Indian Health Board does hereby encourage the United States government to accept responsibility for boarding school policy and the continuing impact of historical and intergenerational trauma, and to take meaningful steps to provide redress for these harms; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the National Indian Health Board does hereby encourage the United States government to provide direct, non-competitive funding for Tribal Nations in recognition of Tribal sovereignty and in honor of federal trust and treaty responsibilities, to assist with healing from historical and intergenerational trauma caused by Indian boarding school policy, to provide Tribal Nations with necessary resources to create systemic and programmatic services that encourage reclamation and revitalization of AI/AN language, culture and identity that boarding school policy was designed to eradicate; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the National Indian Health Board does hereby support all congressional efforts to pass legislation approving the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act and similar initiatives; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the National Indian Health Board does hereby encourage Christian churches involved in the establishment and implementation of boarding school policy to accept responsibility for their roles, to formally apologize for their roles, and to support efforts for healing work in their communities and in the reclamation and revitalization of AI/AN identity.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the Board, with quorum present, on the 24th day of February, 2022.



Chairperson, William Smith

ATTEST:

Lisa Elgin

Secretary, Lisa Elgin