

Acknowledging Challenges, Authoring the Future for Indian Country

Today marks the close of the first official day of the National Indian Health Board's (NIHB) National Tribal Nations Health Conference, also known as the 33RD Annual Consumer Conference. NIHB is pleased to report that more than 800 Tribal leaders and health professionals



joined us for our official opening ceremony! Taylor Talbi'Denzhoone Susan, Miss Indian Arizona, began the events for the day with a blessing and song, wishing all attendees a productive and safe time while attending the conference.

Over the course of the opening plenary, several ground breaking announcements were made, such as Principal Deputy Director of the Indian Health Service, Mary Smith, [announcing a telemedicine contract for the Great Plains Area with Avera Health](#). Avera will provide care across 10 different specialty areas for all 19 service units. The announcement was met with a standing ovation from the NIHB Board of Directors and Great Plains Tribal leaders in attendance. Patrick Marcellais, the NIHB Great Plains Representative and Councilman of the [Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians](#), said, "This is a terrific move that will make a huge difference to the Tribes in the Great Plains."

While acknowledging the health challenges facing American Indians/Alaska Natives, the tone of the plenary was one of making progress and creating solutions. As Ms. Smith stated, "If we are not talking about the difficult things, then we are not moving forward."



The National Indian Health Board, in partnership with the Indian Health Service, officially released a new toolkit and film focusing on the Affordable Care Act and concepts of health insurance coverage for Native youth. Because as Native youth from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, Ms. Taylor Moya, stated in front of an engaged audience, "if we don't do it for ourselves, who's going to do it for us?" This toolkit and video is [now available](#) for viewing, download, and distribution across Indian Country.

In addition to these great milestones during the opening plenary, The National Indian Health Board of Directors took the platform to highlight and discuss six top priorities for advancing the health and wellness of Indian Country through the next administration. These are:

- Increasing resources for Workforce development in Indian Health
- Holding the Indian Health Service budget exempt from sequestration
- Fully funding Indian Health Service at 30.8 Billion dollars over the next 12 years

- Developing and implementing Health IT services across Indian Country
- Upholding the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Indian Health Service and the Veterans Administration
- Building public health capacity in Indian Country

The National Indian Health Board proposes a focus on these areas by Tribal leaders, health professionals, and government officials across the board is vital for the health of all American Indian and Alaska Natives. Stacy Bohlen, Executive Director the National Indian Health Board summoned the audience to “Enter this conference as a new beginning of authorship. Let us lock arms and walk in and define what that future will be for us.