National Indian Health Board
Resolution 21–07

Using the University Land Grant System to Address
Indian Health Service Physician Vacancies

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 federal trust responsibility is a legal obligation under which the federal government “has charged itself with moral obligations of the highest responsibility and trust” toward AI/AN tribes; and

WHEREAS, The federal trust responsibility establishes the basis for a variety of services provided to federally recognized AI/AN Tribes and Villages, including the provision of physicians; and

WHEREAS, The Government Accountability Office reports that 29 percent of federal Indian Health Services’ (IHS) physician positions on average are vacant, with some Areas operating with up to 46 percent of their physician positions vacant; and

WHEREAS, There are 52 land-grant universities built on public land transferred to states from the federal government with passage of the Morrill Act of 1862; and

WHEREAS, Land-grant universities have raised nearly half a billion adjusted 2020 dollars from use or sale of 10.7 million acres of public land expropriated from 245 Tribes; and

WHEREAS, Land-grant universities collectively enroll less than half a percent AI/AN students across their undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs; and

WHEREAS, Land-grant universities enroll AI/AN medical students far below their national representation of 3 percent according to the 2020 US Census (1.23% AI/AN medical students at allopathic (MD-granting) and 0.58% AI/AN medical students at osteopathic (DO-granting) land-grant medical schools); and

WHEREAS, Land-grant universities are active recipients of federal funding; and
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the National Indian Health Board calls upon the US Congress to amend the Morrill Act of 1862 to reconcile the expropriation of Indigenous land and educational inequities present for AI/AN undergraduate, graduate, and professional students; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the National Indian Health Board calls upon 1862 land-grant universities operating medical schools to identify and eradicate policies and practices that create functional barriers preventing the enrollment of AI/AN medical students; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the National Indian Health Board calls upon the Indian Health Service and Health Resources Services Administration to develop new clinical and educational funding opportunities encouraging partnerships between Indian/Tribal/Urban facilities, Tribal governments, and 1862 land-grant medical schools; and

THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NIHB until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the Board, with quorum present, on the 3rd day of November, 2021.

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Chairperson, William Smith

ATTEST:

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Secretary, Lisa Elgin

References

5. Table B-5.1: Total Enrollment by U.S. Medical School and Race/Ethnicity, 2020-2021, Association of American Medical Colleges.