

November 13, 2012

## NIHB Chairperson Cathy Abramson Speaks Up for Indian Programs



On October 26<sup>th</sup>, National Indian Health Board (NIHB) Chairperson Cathy Abramson (Board Member, Treasurer, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians) provided remarks and chaired the Health Subcommittee meeting at the 69<sup>th</sup> Annual National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Convention & Marketplace in Sacramento, California. The focus of NIHB Chairperson Abramson’s remarks was to provide an update on NIHB’s efforts to secure the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) reauthorized by Congress and the importance of protecting Indian programs from sequestration.

NIHB Chairperson Abramson provided an update on the successful impact that SDPI funding is having across Indian Country. NIHB Chairperson Abramson stated, “As you know, SDPI has led to significant advances in diabetes prevention, education, and treatment in putting Indian Country on a path to a diabetes-free future. SDPI is making a real difference in the lives of people who must manage diabetes on a daily basis. Indian Country is experiencing dramatic reductions in diabetes risk factors such as blood pressure, weight, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels.”

NIHB continues to provide educational materials that show the tremendous impact SDPI is having on improving the health of Indian Country through SDPI grantee success stories, health outcome statistics and photos on the SDPI Resource Center website. NIHB has remained focused on ensuring that Congress reauthorizes SDPI this year. As NIHB Chairperson Abramson remarked, “Now is an important time for our education and advocacy efforts on SDPI. It is going to take all of us working together and sharing information. NIHB will continue to visit Congressional offices and meet with key Congressional Members and Hill staff. NIHB asks that you do the same and visit with your Congressional Members. Share your success stories of your community SDPI program and ask your Member to support reauthorization of SDPI this year.”

Established by Congress in 1997, the SDPI was a response to the diabetes epidemic among American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). The program has become our nation's most strategic and effective federal effort in combating diabetes in Tribal communities. Today, SDPI is funded at a level of \$150 million annually and supports 404 diabetes treatment and prevention programs in 35 states. This federal investment in community-driven, culturally appropriate programs has led to significant advances in diabetes education, prevention, and treatment. It is making a real difference in the lives of people who must manage diabetes on a daily basis.

Another important issue addressed by NIHB Chairperson Abramson was the possibility of sequestration and its impact on Indian Country. Federal programs and services, including health programs for AI/ANs, will see significant, potentially devastating, automatic budget cuts if sequestration goes into effect on January 2, 2013. NIHB Chairperson Abramson stated, "The impact of sequestration on the Indian Health Service (IHS) budget would be deeply destructive to the ability of American Indians and Alaska Natives to access quality health care. Any budget cut translates into lost funding for primary health care and disease prevention for Indian Country, which is certain to produce tremendous negative health effects."

Pursuant to the Budget Control Act of 2011, Congress tasked the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (Super Committee) with developing a plan to reduce the federal deficit by \$1.2 trillion over a ten-year period. Because the Super Committee failed to complete this task, a process known as "sequestration" was triggered that calls for \$1.2 trillion in automatic across-the-board cuts in federal spending over the next decade starting on January 2, 2013. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) submitted a Report to Congress in September stating that the Indian Health Service (IHS) will be subject to an 8.2% across-the-board cut, resulting in a total estimated cut to the IHS budget of \$356 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013. Congress plans to address legislation that will make a sequestration of funds unnecessary when it returns in November. If Congress fails to approve a plan to reduce the federal budget deficit by \$1.2 trillion before January 2, 2013, the automatic cuts will go into effect and continue through FY 2021.

Last month, NIHB requests Congress to protect funding for Indian programs by holding such programs harmless from sequestration. NIHB Chairperson Abramson said, "We must urge Congress to agree to a balanced plan to achieve the required deficit reduction, thus allowing for the cancellation of the sequestration. This is Indian Country's opportunity to speak up about the importance of protecting Indian programs. Let your voice be heard."

NIHB continues to follow the sequestration issue and will provide further details as they develop. For more information on the Special Diabetes Program for Indians and November Diabetes Awareness Month celebration events, please visit the SDPI Resource Center at [www.nihb.org/sdpi](http://www.nihb.org/sdpi)