

National Indian Health Board



The Red Feather Of Hope And Healing

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Contact: Lynette Willie
Communications Director
202.420.8579

Town Hall meeting at the National Museum of American Indians with Dr. Yvette Roubideaux about Indian Health Services

Washington, DC – Approximately 180 American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) leaders attended a town hall meeting with Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, Director of Indian Health Service at the National Museum of American Indian this morning.

The National Indian Health Board (NIHB) hosted the event to provide an opportunity for tribes to have an open dialogue to discuss the IHS Tribal Consultation Process and Internal Indian Health Service Reform

“We want to improve the way to do business,” said Dr. Roubideaux. In her opening statement Roubideaux explained that recently received input from tribal leaders has been uploaded to a new website www.ihs.gov/Reforms/. This website features current health reform initiatives that IHS is facing and provides an opportunity for people to contact IHS with comments or questions as it relates to reform initiatives.

Reno Keoni Franklin, Chairman of the NIHB co-hosted the town hall meeting. He stated that IHS needs to continue having transparency in consultation with tribal governments. In his opening remarks, Franklin expressed appreciation to the many representatives from various tribes in attendance for the meeting.

Among the first speakers was Cathy Abramson of Sault Ste. Marie Chippewa Indians, who suggested that tribal consultation policy should include a requirement for all IHS staff to receive mandatory training about the trust responsibility that the U.S. has to AI/AN populations. She expressed that once people truly understand the relationships of sovereignty, then they begin to honor the need for consulting with tribes.

Margaret Baha-Walker, Vice Chairwoman of the White Mountain Apache Tribe said, “IHS needs to understand that each tribe is unique. Our cultures are different from one another, and our health care needs are also different. We are not all the same.”

Andrew Joseph, Jr. of the Confederate Tribes of the Coleville Reservation said, “At one time, our tribes had true consultation. It was back when our tribes sat down and signed the treaty at the same table with the U.S. government. That was when the U.S. government promised health care.” Joseph also shared that his aunt won’t go to IHS for health care services because they want her to sign a paper.



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He said that she questions why she should sign papers when her ancestors have already signed the papers. Joseph said his aunt is afraid to sign the papers at the IHS facility because it will ultimately bring bills to her door, and she doesn't want a credit bureau to start coming after her like they do with other tribal members.

One by one, tribal leaders shared their thoughts and recommendations for IHS reform such as improving the procurement purchasing process, decreasing waiting time for medical treatment, and the desire to have IHS issue one hospital card that would be accepted by any IHS facility. Some tribal leaders expressed the need for increased funding in critical areas like behavioral health services to decrease substance abuse and assist with suicide prevention.

Roubideaux listened intently to the comments that were shared during the three hour meeting. The majority of those in attendance seemed supportive of Dr. Roubideaux's efforts to reach out to Indian Country.

Margaret Baha-Walker best summarized the hope she has in IHS reform stating, "in past times we were invited to tribal consultation where IHS made their comments first about what they were going to do and then asked us for a response. Today Dr. Roubideaux, you asked us to speak first and then listened to us. Today the medicine wheel starts spinning again for better healthcare for all Indian Country."

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The National Indian Health Board advocates on behalf of all Tribal Governments and American Indians/Alaska Native in their efforts to provide quality health care. Visit www.nihb.org for more information.



926 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE | Washington, DC 20003 | 202-507-4070 | 202-507-4071 fax | www.nihb.org

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