

National Indian Health Board



The Red Feather Of Hope And Healing

Press Release
June 25, 2009
For Immediate Release

Contact: Lynette Willie
Communications Director
202.420.8579

Indian Country Calls on Congress for Permanent Reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act

Washington, DC – Today representing the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) and the National Tribal Steering Committee (NTSC) for the Reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA), Rachel Joseph testified on H.R. 2708 before House Committee on Natural Resources. H.R. 2708 aims to reauthorize the Indian Health Care Improvement Act- the baseline for Indian health care.

In her testimony, Joseph strongly urged Congress to quickly pass H.R. 2708, called for the removal of “sunset” dates to the IHCIA and make it permanent. Rachel Joseph, a member of the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe of California and Co-Chair of the National Tribal Steering Committee for the Reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act has worked on this reauthorization for more than a decade.

Joseph requested full funding for contract health services and contract support costs. The last review of the IHCIA should have occurred in 2000, but did not happen which delayed the advancement and improvement of Indian health care delivery system.

“I urge Congress to properly fund the contract health services (CHS) program through which the Indian Health system is unable to supply directly and contract support costs (CSC) of Tribes who elect to exercise Indian self-determination rights provided by Federal law to take over direct operation of health program at the local level,” said Joseph.

“With the nation focusing on health care reform, American Indians/ Alaskan Natives are actively engaged in offering solutions and recommendations,” said Stacy A. Bohlen, Executive Director of the NIHB. “The passage of the new IHCIA bill, H.R. 2708, would modernize and improve the health care system for American Indians, but for the first time would include other critical needs such as an integrated behavioral health programming (substance abuse and mental health prevention and treatment services) and in-home care for Native elders,” said Bohlen.

American Indians suffer from some of the worst health disparities in the world and this is in no small part due to a lack of funding. “The needs are clearly evident when you look at the scope of problems occurring among this specific population,” said Bohlen. Indians are 630% more likely to die from alcoholism, 650% more like to die from tuberculosis, 318% more likely to die from diabetes, and 204 % more likely to suffer accidental health compared with other groups. “With the passage of this legislation, the overall health of American Indians and Alaskan Natives would improve,” said Bohlen.

###

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



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

The Red Feather of Hope and Healing