

# National Indian Health Board



## National Indian Health Board Resolution 18-05

### **SUPPORT FOR PROMOTING AND EXPANDING MATERNAL ORAL HEALTH CARE FOR PREGNANT AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES**

**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**, NIHB has established the Tribal Oral Health Initiative to bring together stakeholders including Tribal leaders, Tribal health directors, Area Indian Health Boards, Tribal Epidemiology Centers, and public health leaders to explore solutions and develop recommendations to address oral health disparities and lack of access to oral health treatment and prevention services in Indian Country; and

**WHEREAS**, oral health disparities exist between American Indian/Alaska Native people and the national average, with over 41% of AI/AN children under eight years old suffering from dental decay compared to 10% nationally, and with an average of 6 decayed teeth in AI/AN children under five years old compared to 1 decayed tooth on average nationally; and

**WHEREAS**, the National Indian Health Board conducted a survey of Oral Health in Indian Country in 2016 and found that 64% of respondents had encountered barriers to access oral health care in their communities; and

**WHEREAS**, approximately 4 in 10 pregnant women have tooth decay and gum disease, and women are more at risk for gingivitis during pregnancy, where changes in hormone levels allow bacteria to grow in the mouth and gums more easily; and

**WHEREAS**, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has found that from 2007–2009, 56% of women did not visit a dentist during pregnancy (Committee Opinion 569, August 2013); and

**WHEREAS**, a 2009 survey of obstetrician-gynecologists found that most OB-GYNs seldom ask pregnant patients whether they have recently seen a dentist (73%), ask about current oral health (54%), or provide information about oral care (69%); furthermore, most respondents (77%) reported having patients be declined dental services because of pregnancy (Morgan, M 2009); and

**WHEREAS**, the Medicaid program is a vital tool for the federal government to fulfill its trust responsibility to provide health care to Tribal communities, and the program mandates coverage for dental services for beneficiaries under the age of 18 but does not mandate coverage for adults, including pregnant women; and

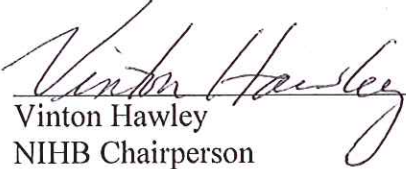
**WHEREAS**, the health and wellbeing of pregnant women helps ensure the health and wellbeing of their developing children; and

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, the National Indian Health Board further encourages the Indian Health Service and other federal health providers to incorporate oral health screenings into all maternal and child health visits provided to IHS beneficiaries.

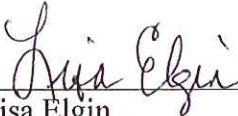
**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, the National Indian Health Board encourages the Indian Health Service to include specific proposals and outreach to pregnant American Indians and Alaska Natives in its IHS Dental Strategic Plan for 2018-2027.

**CERTIFICATION**

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the Board, with quorum present, on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2018.

  
Vinton Hawley  
NIHB Chairperson

**ATTEST:**

  
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Lisa Elgin  
NIHB Secretary