



2013 Annual Convention Worley, ID

RESOLUTION #13 - 71

“ADDRESSING DENTAL CRISIS IN INDIAN COUNTRY”

PREAMBLE

We the members of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants rights secured under Indian Treaties, Executive Orders, and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and constitution of the United States and several states, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise to promote the welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution:

WHEREAS, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) are representatives of and advocates for national, regional, and specific tribal concerns; and

WHEREAS, ATNI is a regional organization comprised of American Indians/Alaska Natives and tribes in the states of Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, and Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the health, safety, welfare, education, economic and employment opportunity, and preservation of cultural and natural resources are primary goals and objectives of the ATNI; and

WHEREAS, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people have a higher prevalence of dental caries and untreated tooth decay in all age groups compared to the general United States population, with many AI/AN children experiencing dental caries before the age of two, yet there are few dental caries prevention programs that target AI/AN children and other

oral health issues persist for the AI/AN population such as:^{1 2}

- Seventy-nine percent of AI/AN children aged 2-4 years have dental caries;
- Majority of AI/AN children have tooth decay with 78 percent of the 6-14 year olds and 91 percent of the 15-19 year olds had a history of decay;
- Despite a trend toward a reduction in tooth loss in the U.S. population, older data indicate 25 percent of AI/AN people aged 35 to 44 years have fewer than 20 natural teeth;
- Among all persons aged 55 years and older, nearly 75 percent have fewer than 20 natural teeth;
- Fifty-nine percent of AI/AN adults have periodontal (gum) disease;
- Seventy-eight percent AI/AN adults 35-44 years and 98 percent of elders (55 or older) have at least one tooth removed because of decay, trauma, or gum disease; and

WHEREAS, these disparities are directly attributed to a lack of dental health professionals in the Indian health system in which IHS dental providers have a patient load of 2,800 patients per provider, while general population providers have approximately 1,500 patients per provider and the IHS experiences a very high dental provider vacancy rate, with estimates that 26 percent of the dental positions within the IHS are vacant, which contributes to the lack of access to dental health services; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Native Villages determined the most expedient and successful approach to resolving their dental crisis was to send their Members to New Zealand to learn how to provide dental care to their communities as Dental Health Aide Therapists (DHATs) and presently provide DHAT training through the two-year educational program managed by the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium; and

WHEREAS, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) directed the formation of a Task Force on New Dental Team Members to develop standards for dental therapy that seeks to restrict Dental Therapist training to a four-year training program, even though the Alaska DHAT Program has been found in several research studies to be highly successful based on the two-year training program; and

WHEREAS, it is the desire of Northwest Tribes to support a two-year training model as demonstrated by the Alaska DHAT and would like to express their views by nominating a tribal representative to serve on the CODA; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee held a hearing on the national dental crisis on September 12, 2013, where testimony was offered noting the interest of Tribal Governments to expand the DHAT program nationally; and

¹ Indian Health Service, *Oral Health Survey of American Indian and Alaska Native Dental Patients: Findings, Regional Differences, and National Comparisons*, 1999.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: HHS, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, 2000.

WHEREAS, Tribal Governments are seeking to expand the oral health workforce to address unmet needs; now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that ATNI does hereby support a two-year standard for dental therapy education as demonstrated by the Alaska Native DHAT Program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that ATNI requests that the Indian Health Services Director immediately rescind the letter dated February 20, 2009 addressed to the American Dental Association informing them that the IHS is NOT supportive of an initiative to expand the Dental Health Aide Therapist Program beyond the Alaska Area; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that ATNI supports Title V of the Comprehensive Dental Reform Act of 2013 that will be introduced by U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders that seeks to support a Demonstration program on training and employment of alternative dental health care providers for dental health care services under the Indian Health Service.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted at the 2013 Annual Convention of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, held at Coeur d'Alene Resort Hotel & Casino, Worley, Idaho on September 16 - 19, 2013, with a quorum present.



Fawn Sharp, President



Norma Jean Louie, Secretary