



Serving Tribes and Indian Organizations within the service area of the Oklahoma City Area Indian Health Service since 1972

RESOLUTION NO. 2021-002

PURPOSE: **Support for Dental Therapy as a Solution to Indian Country’s Oral Health Challenges**

WHEREAS, the Southern Plains Tribal Health Board (SPTHB) since 1972 serves as a unified voice for health-related interests for 43 federally recognized Tribes situated in the Oklahoma City Area Indian Health Services region encompassing portions of the states of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, and

WHEREAS, the Southern Plains Tribal Health Board (SPTHB) is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a non-profit foundation identified as a 501 (c) (3), and

WHEREAS, the SPTHB is dedicated to assisting and promoting the health needs and concerns of Indian people; and

WHEREAS, there is a present high unmet need for dental care among many Americans, particularly within the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) population, due in part to the lack of enough dentists available to serve Tribal reservations and the off-reservation AI/AN populations; and

WHEREAS, American Indians and Alaska Natives have a higher prevalence of dental caries and untreated tooth decay in all age groups compared to the general United States population, with many Native children experiencing dental caries before the age of two; and

WHEREAS, Poor oral health issues persist disproportionately for the AI/AN Oklahoma City Area Indian Health Services (hereafter OKC Area) population such as:

- Only 31% of AI/AN patients received dental services in 2019
- 73% of children aged 6-9 years had a history of decay in their primary or permanent teeth, compared to 52% of children in the general U.S. population
- 28% of 6–9-year-old AI/AN children had untreated decay, compared to 15% of 6–9-year-old children in the general U.S. population
- 37% of AI/AN adolescents (13-15 years old) had untreated dental decay, compared to 14% of the general U.S. population
- 59% of AI/AN adults had untreated dental decay compared to 27% of the general U.S. population

- 73% of AI/AN adults have lost teeth due to decay or gum disease

WHEREAS, these disparities can be attributed to a lack of enough dental health professionals in the Indian health system in which there is:

- One dentist per 3,210 AI/AN patients in the OKC Area
- One dentist per 2,830 AI/AN patients in IHS overall
- One dentist per 1,638 patients in general U.S.

WHEREAS, in treaties, health care was guaranteed by the federal government in perpetuity in exchange for Tribal land and peace; and

WHEREAS, poor dental care is often a life sentence to poverty, as it is accompanied with a decline in self-confidence and often a loss of academic and economic opportunities due to social perceptions of poor dental hygiene, contributing to cyclical generational impoverishment in Indian Country; and

WHEREAS, Dental Therapists have been in existence in Alaska Native communities since 2004 and thoroughly evaluated for safety, quality, and appropriate scope of practice with the Alaska Native patient population in collaboration with the IHS; and

WHEREAS, Dental Therapists working in Tribal health care settings practice under certification from the federal government after completing a dental therapy education program; and

WHEREAS, the primary education program training Dental Therapists working in Tribal settings is the Alaska Dental Therapy Education Program, which trains a predominantly AI/AN cohort of students and is accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation, which is the nationally recognized entity accrediting dental education programs; and

WHEREAS, Dental Therapists work as part of the dental team under the supervision of dentists and have received high results and accolades from patients, health care professionals, and community leaders in the U.S. and in over 50 other countries; and

WHEREAS, Although IHS, which fulfills the treaty obligation to provide health services to Tribes, is a federal agency, current federal law states that IHS can only utilize dental therapists working under the Community Health Aid Program (CHAP) if a state legislature agrees; and

WHEREAS, Oklahoma passing legislation to allow for the hiring of Dental Health Aide Therapists would permit federal U.S. Indian Health Service funding to be used by Tribes to utilize Dental Therapists as part of the dental team; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the SPTHB in support of and service to the 43 federally recognized Tribes fully supports Dental Therapists in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas in order to empower Tribes and the Indian Health Service to provide desperately needed dental care to our communities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, Tribes should exercise their inherent sovereignty to provide solutions that best serves their communities aside from state approval; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Southern Plains Tribal Health Board hereby affirms its full support as evidenced by the official signatures affixed below.

Signed:

Marty Wafford Jul 14, 2021
Marty Wafford (Jul 14, 2021 20:33 CDT)
Chair Date

em Jul 13, 2021
Todd Hallmark (Jul 13, 2021 20:38 CDT)
Vice-Chair Date

Becky Johnson Jul 13, 2021
Becky Johnson (Jul 13, 2021 14:08 CDT)
Secretary Date

Joseph P. Rupnick Jul 14, 2021
Joseph P. RUpnick (Jul 14, 2021 13:08 CDT)
Treasurer Date












Resolution 2021-002

Final Audit Report

2021-07-15

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 Agreement completed.

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