

# Placing Tribes at the Center of Advocacy: The Tribal Oral Health Initiative and State Legislatures

September 18, 2019

**Brett Weber, National Indian Health Board**  
**Candice Skenandore, Oneida Nation**  
**Alida Montiel, Intertribal Council of Arizona**

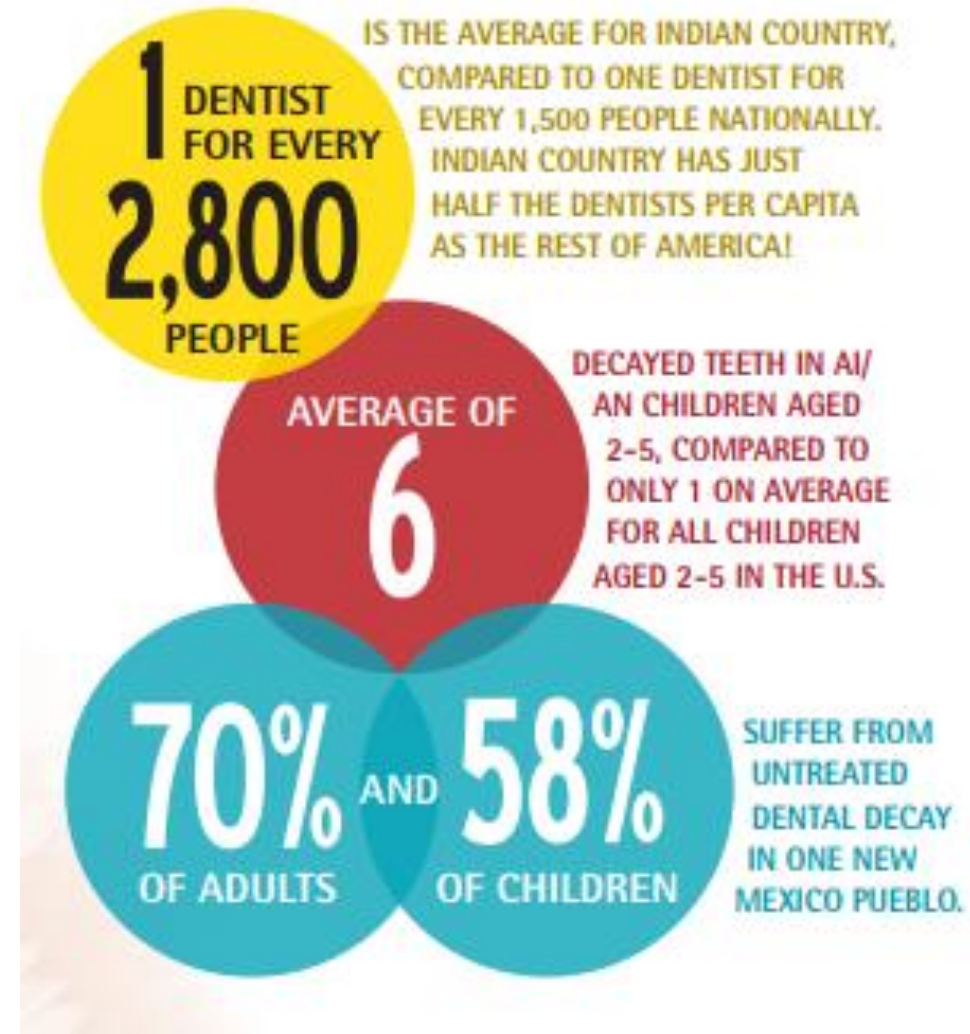
National Indian  
Health Board



National Indian Health Board  
Tribal Oral Health  
Initiative

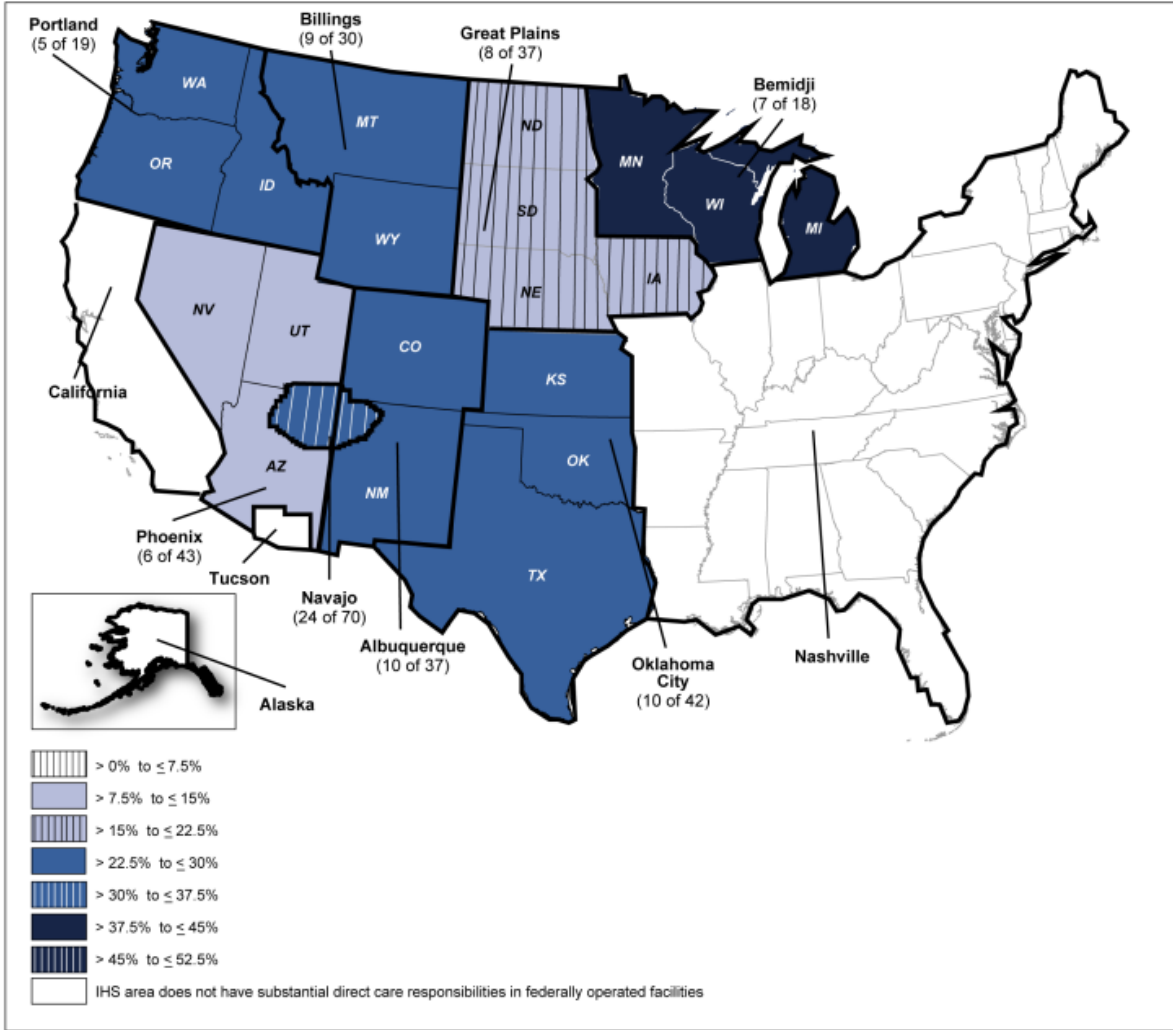
# Oral Health Crisis in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Communities

- AI/AN children are 5x more likely than average to have untreated cavities in *permanent* teeth
- 46% of AI/AN adults age 65+ had untreated dental caries
  - Compared to 19% of non-Native adults age 65+
- Lack of oral health care services in Tribal communities has impacted generations!



# Oral Health Provider Shortage in Indian Health System

Figure 9: Dentist Vacancy Rates in the Eight Indian Health Service (IHS) Areas with Substantial Direct Care Responsibilities, November 2017



Sources: GAO analysis of IHS data; Map Resources (map). | GAO-18-580

# A Tribal Solution: Dental Therapists



- Midlevel, focused providers
- Dentists can do ~500 procedures
  - DTs can do ~50 procedures
- But those 50 are most commonly needed
  - Meets between 1/2 and 2/3 of patient need
- Dental Therapists practice in remote settings with provider shortages
  - In Alaska since 2004
- Dentist is available for consultation



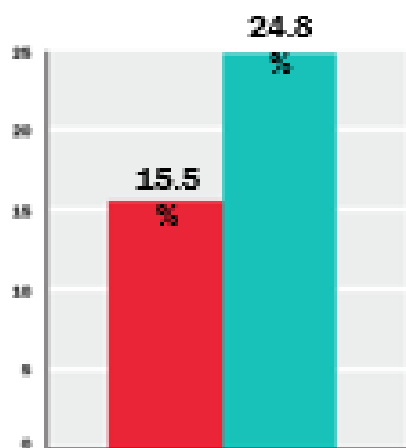
# How Did Dental Therapy Come to the US?

- Practiced in 54 countries
- Starting in 2004, Alaska Tribes trained students in New Zealand
  - Tribes in Alaska run their own health care services through the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
- Students came back and worked with ANTHC in their home communities
- Dr. Mary Williard and Valerie Davidson were leading forces



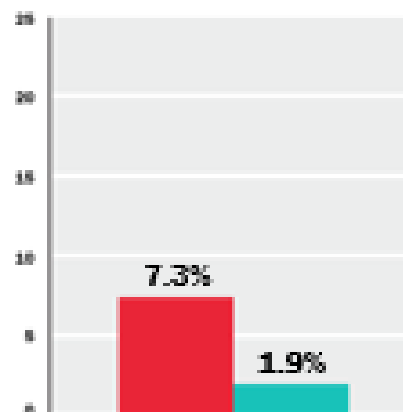
# In Communities with Dental Therapists

**More kids get preventative care.**



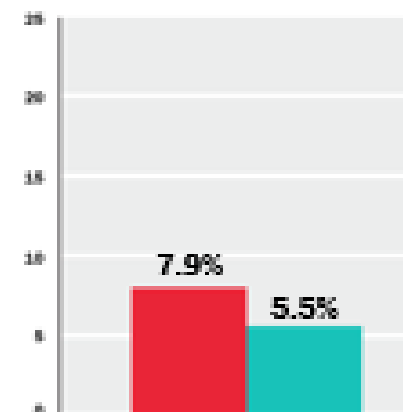
Child Preventative Care

**Kids need fewer front teeth extractions.**



Child Extraction Rate

**Fewer kids need general anesthesia.**



Child General Anesthesia Rate



No DT Communities

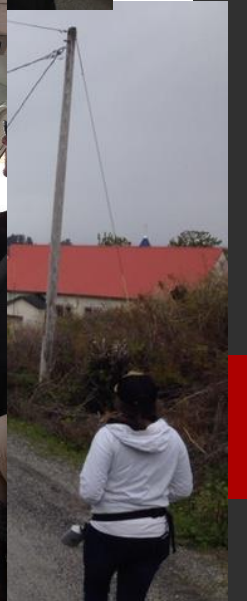


High DT Communities



# Oral Health Delivery in Alaska Before DTs

- Many communities had no dental care at all!
- Others had only periodic visits from a dentist
- Valerie Nurr'araaluk Davidson
  - Former Lt. Governor of Alaska
  - Worked with ANTHC to bring DTs to Alaska
- Lincoln Bean's son
  - Former NIHB Board Member
  - Son had a Dental emergency
  - Had to fly from Kake to Sitka during a storm
  - Had his condition been caught earlier, emergency services would not have been necessary



# Alaska's Dental Therapists

- 40 Dental Therapists serve over 45,000 Alaska Natives in 81 communities
- Provide culturally competent care with high patient satisfaction rates
  - 78% of DTs practice in their home village or region
- Based in larger towns that also have dentists (Bethel, Sitka, Nome)
- Travel to smaller Alaska Native communities on a regular schedule
  - Dentist follows up if necessary
- NIHB filmed video in May 2017 on DT's impact on Alaska Native youth

## Alaska Dental Therapy Educational Program (ADTEP)



# Growing Our Own

- Tribes need program closer than NZ
- Alaska training program is 3 academic years/2 calendar years
  - One year of classroom learning in Anchorage
  - One year of clinical learning in Bethel
- More than 90% of students are AI/AN
  - Dentistry is disproportionately white
- Dental Therapy is an accessible profession with steady work



# How Can Tribes Hire Dental Therapists?

## Three Avenues:

- Swinomish Route: Licensing DTs at the Tribal level
- State Legislation: Complying with state requirements for DTs
  - Only because of IHCIA Restriction
- CHAP Implementation: Employing federally certified providers
- Indian Health Care Improvement Act (25 USC §1616l(d))
  - Once CHAP expands to Lower 48
  - Tribes cannot use DTs under national CHAP unless their state gives them permission
  - Extremely problematic!



# How Swinomish Did It

- In January 2016, Swinomish hired a Dental Therapist using its sovereignty
- The Tribe decided to create its own licensing board with processes and standards outside of CHAP
- Developing this process took years of sustained Administrative support
- Three years later, dental therapy has brought in revenue to support the expansion of the Tribe's dental clinic
- Reciprocity agreements may make Swinomish licensed DTs able to practice at other Tribes



# Dental Therapy at Swinomish

- Swinomish hired Dental Therapist in 2016
  - The Tribe created its own licensing board with processes and standards
  - Developing this process took years of sustained Administrative support
- Since then:
  - 20% increase in patients seen
  - Dentists doing almost 50% more crown, bridge, and partials
  - Dental therapy has brought in revenue to support the expansion of the Tribe's dental clinic



# Other DT Tribes in the Pacific North West

- Port Gamble S’Klallam has a Dental Therapist since 2017
  - Washington State passed a dental therapy law
- In Oregon, Tribes are using Dental Therapists under a state pilot program
  - Dentists dedicate more time to treating complex needs.
  - One Tribe added two chairs to its clinic to see more patients.

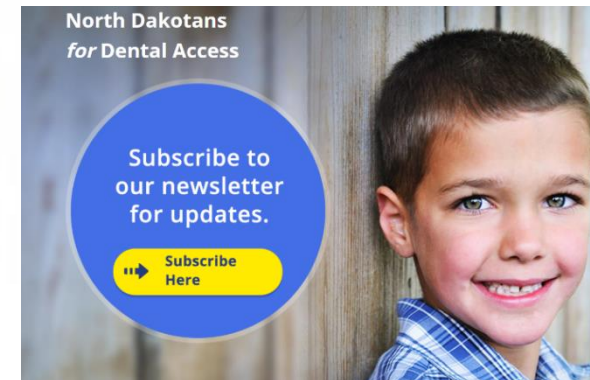


# Advocating in State Legislatures

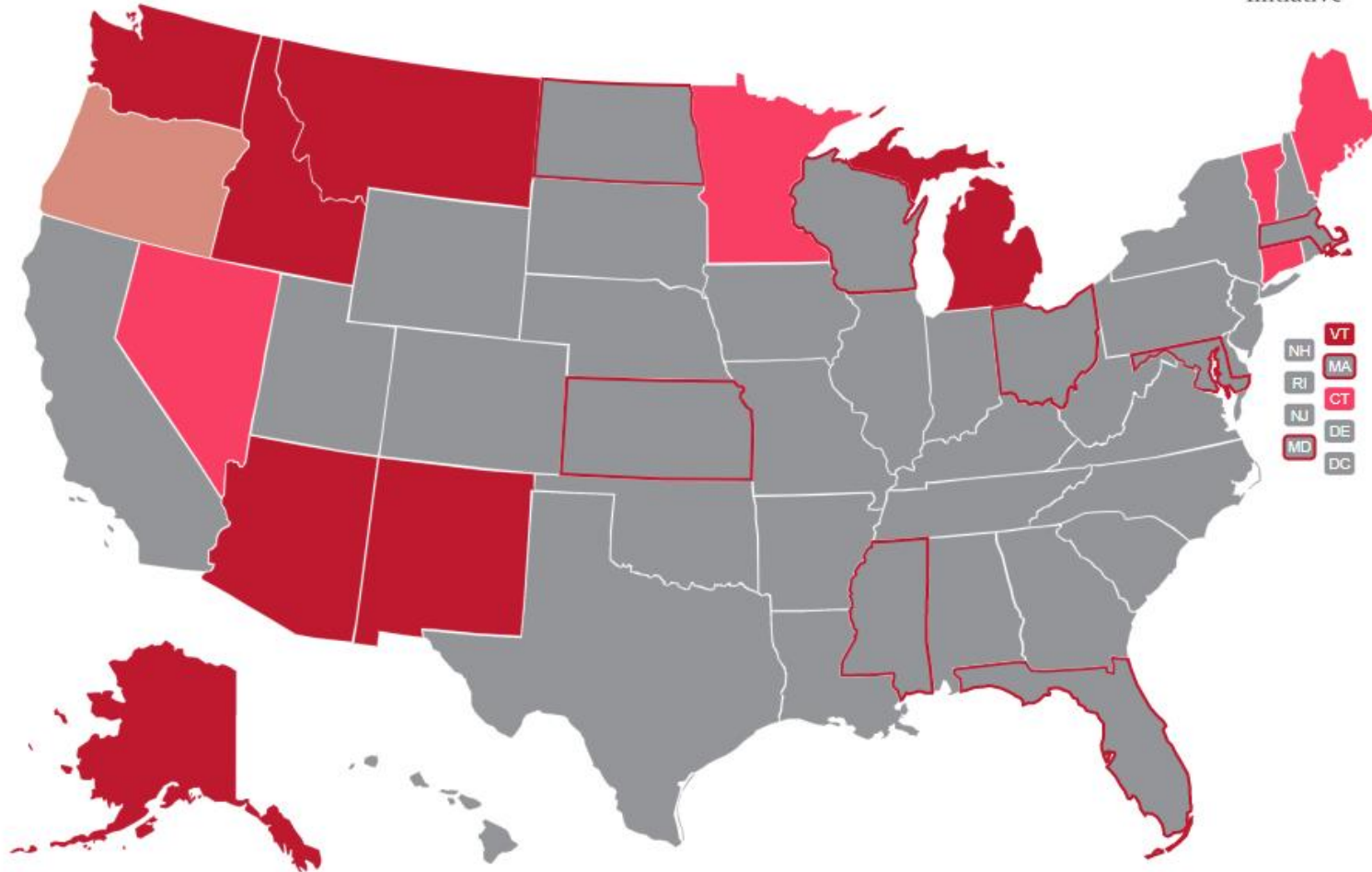
- Many Tribes advocate to their state legislatures to license DTs
- Washington State, Arizona, Maine, Minnesota, Idaho, New Mexico, Montana, Nevada, Connecticut, and Michigan allow DTs on Tribal land
  - Oregon has Tribal pilot projects
  - Active Tribal campaign in Wisconsin
- NIHB helps coordinate Tribal advocacy campaigns with States



Native Dental Therapy Initiative



# Tribal Dental Therapy Legislation in the States



State Authorizes Tribal Dental Therapy with CODA Standards

State Authorizes Dental Therapy with a Hygienist License

State is Considering Authorizing Dental Therapy

State Authorized Tribal Dental Therapy Pilot Projects

State Does Not Authorize Dental Therapy

# New State Dental Therapy Laws:

Currently in Rules Making Phase

## Arizona

- DTs can practice in certain settings
  - Tribal and Urban Indian programs, federal programs, FQHCs and Look-Alikes, nonprofits serving underserved populations
- Requires DTs to have a hygiene license
  - Tribal exemption
- Preceptorship is 1000 hours
- State Medicaid agency reimbursement issue

## Michigan

- DTs can practice in certain settings
  - Tribal and Urban Indian programs, FQHCs, schools, clinics and mobile programs serving underserved populations, and any setting in a dental shortage area
- CODA-based, no hygiene requirement
- Preceptorship is 500 hours

# New State Dental Therapy Laws:

Passed in 2019

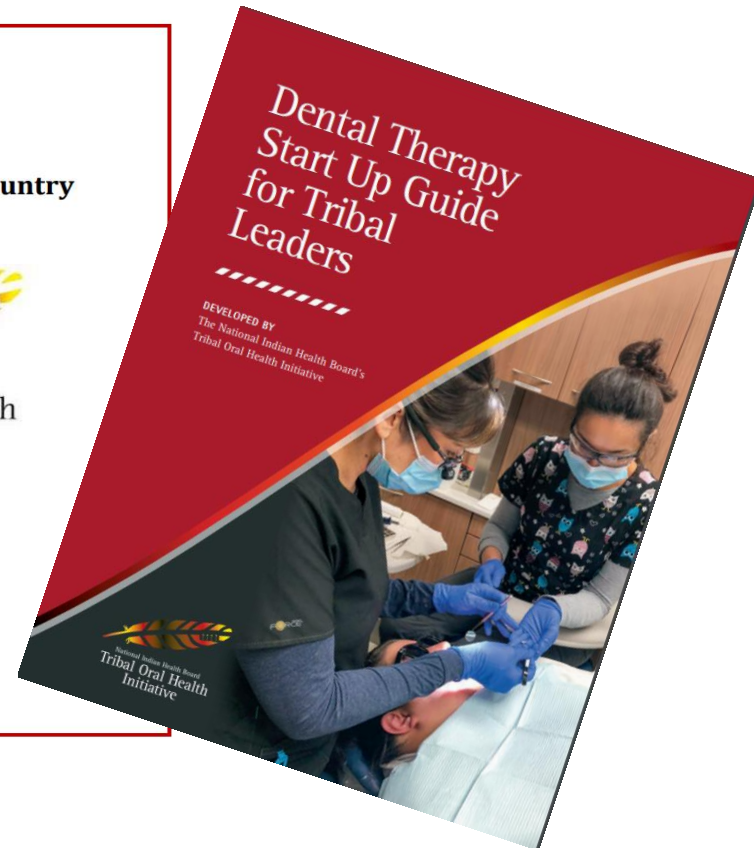
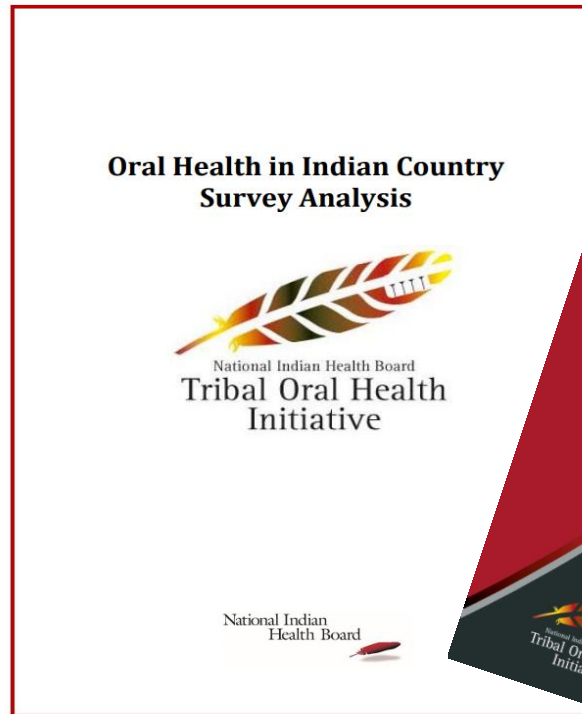
## Idaho

- DTs can practice in federal or Tribal health programs
  - Settings include schools and long term care facilities
- CODA-based
- No Hygiene license requirement
- DTs work for 500 hours under direct supervision

## New Mexico

- DTs can practice in certain settings statewide
  - FQHCs, Tribal and IHS facilities
- Hygiene Requirement
  - But Tribes can follow CODA standards

# Resources for Getting Started at the Tribal Level



[www.nihb.org/oralhealthinitiative](http://www.nihb.org/oralhealthinitiative)



# Changing the Narrative of Indian Health

## *Shutdown Leaves Food, Medicine and Pay in Doubt in Indian Country*



### Congress Is Starving the Indian Health Service and South Dakota Tribes Are Paying With Their Lives



Nick Martin  
12/05/18 2:01pm • Filed to: NATIVE AMERICANS

11.3K 26 3



Dr. Lowell Styler treated Services in Sault Ste. Marie back. Brittany Greeson for



## Federal report reveals patient died needlessly in South Dakota IHS hospital

Dana Ferguson, Sioux Falls Argus Leader Published 5:13 p.m. CT Aug. 17, 2018 | Updated 1:30 p.m. CT Aug. 18, 2018

## The Never-Ending Crisis at the Indian Health Service

As the chronically under-funded agency struggles, American Indians are getting sicker and dying sooner



# Thank You!

**Brett Weber**

*Congressional Relations Manager*  
National Indian Health Board

[bweber@nihb.org](mailto:bweber@nihb.org)



National Indian Health Board  
**Tribal Oral Health  
Initiative**

