

Affordable Care Act highlighted at conference



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UNIT I**

I am extremely happy and proud to say that our National Indian Health Board (NIHB) annual Consumer Conference, recently held in Traverse City, Mich., was a tremendous success!

This is the first time this conference was in the Bemidji area in over 14 years! As chair of the NIHB, I was very pleased our board agreed to bring our annual conference to our woodland area.

Our Anishinabek people from Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin gave their best welcome and hospitality.

Our drums, singers and dancers came and helped celebrate our culture night. I was very proud our Bahweting Singers were there. Many tribes donated food for our feast of smoked fish, elk,

wild rice, corn soup, fruit and berries.

Water ceremony teachings were given and our veterans were honored.

The hospitality of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians' tribal council was so amazing and very much appreciated! The Grand Traverse Resort's staff were exceptional in service.

Many Native people from across the nation made it a point to go to the waters and just put their foot in and say some prayers. We have been blessed to live in an area where there is good clean water, clean air and our natural medicines that surround us. I believe that the gifts that we shared helped make this conference a tremendous success!

Our conference highlighted the Affordable Care Act, improving the services to our veterans and the renewal of the Special Diabetes Program for Indians. We had discussions on strategies and outreach and education, specific to tribal nations, leading up to the Oct. 1 enrollment of the Insurance Marketplace of the Affordable Care Act. These issues affect us all. I was very happy the following board members came AND asked a lot of questions: Chairperson Aaron Payment, Vice Chair Denise Chase, Darcy Morrow, Debra Pine, Dennis

McKelvie, D.J. Malloy and Catherine Hollowell. It is so important to be involved and informed on the policies that are improving health care services and accessibility to our tribal members.

I was pleased that Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, acting director of the Indian Health Service, came and presented. She held a listening session and answered many questions and listened to many concerns.

I was pleased to co-facilitate a tribal consultation session with Dr. Mary Wakefield, administrator for the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The goal of HHS Secretary Sebelius is to improve health equity with Indian tribes. To achieve this goal, they are working on strengthening the health workforce by expanding the supply of culturally competent primary health care providers in Indian Country and improving access to quality healthcare and service by increasing the number of health care access points.

"Meeting with tribes and tribal organizations, such as the NIHB, is a very important part of our agency consultation efforts and IHS's priority to renew and strengthen our partnership with tribes. We value our partnership with NIHB as we work together to change and improve the IHS

and to eliminate health disparities in Indian Country," Dr. Roubideaux said.

We also had the privilege of meeting and speaking with John Garcia, deputy assistant secretary in the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. One of their goals is to create culturally sensitive outreach materials, incorporating traditional practices and rituals into treatment and care for our Native American veterans. He agreed to come back to Michigan and work with us to help incorporate these efforts and to address the issues of our veterans.

I could go on and on about the conference, so I will stop here!

One thing I do want to emphasize to our membership/citizenship is that the federal agencies are listening to us at a national level! We, as tribal leaders, have been telling them that we need to incorporate our own culture and traditions into our programs. From this report and what our top federal administrators are saying, we are moving in that direction.

For instance, just recently, an announcement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) was received that there will be a workshop on tribal grants access in Washington, D.C., in October.

The reason is that tribal leadership have been telling HHS leadership about their difficulties in successfully obtaining HHS grant funding. HHS is making improving tribal access to HHS grants a priority. They have been working very hard to improve tribal access to grants and I am very happy to be a part of this charge for our people.

In our own tribal communities, we need to incorporate our culture and traditions into our healthcare delivery systems. As I report to you, it is in the planning stages. As your board member, I am going to be strongly supporting the efforts of incorporating these changes in our Special Diabetes Programs for Indians and our Behavioral Health and substance abuse programs. I truly believe our ways will help us to become healthy again.

Good luck to all of you who are beginning the school year! It's always an exciting time! Also, I hope your gardens are bountiful and you are able to preserve enough for our long winters. (Obviously, this is for those who live in the north country! For you southerners – enjoy that sunshine and all that it brings!)

As always, if you have any questions, please contact me at cabramson@saultribe.net or (906) 322-3823. I look forward to hearing from you all.