

Acts look to improve health care services for tribes



**CATHY ABRAMSON, DIRECTOR,
UNIT I**

The Affordable Care Act and Indian Health Care Improvement Act represent new opportunities to improve health care service for our people. With this in mind, I attended the National

Tribal Health Reform Training, along with other tribal leaders and health directors from across the nation. This training was sponsored by the National Indian Health Outreach and Education.

The goal of the NIHOE is 1) to provide the basic education about the ACA and IHCA and 2) to provide outreach to each person in our tribal communities — our fellow tribal members, tribal health directors and tribal leaders.

Some of the benefits of the ACA that we heard about include:

1. For individual American Indians and Alaska Natives who sign up for insurance the Health Exchanges, they will have no cost-sharing requirements when they receive services provided by IHS, tribal or urban Indian

Programs, or through Contract Health Service referrals.

2. In 2014, ALL individuals up to 133 percent of federal poverty level will be eligible for Medicaid. This is very important because many American Indians and Alaska Natives will be eligible for Medicaid for the first time.

3. For tribal employers, the access to the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program provides a new option to provide insurance to tribal employees.

The Affordable Care Act (also referred to as “Obamacare”) is very complex, and many things have not been implemented yet. Some people say, “Why even bother when the Supreme Court is just going to strike it down?” Because there is so much work and education to be done, we

need to keep moving forward. We do not know what the next election will bring nor do we know the final Supreme Court decision.

Strategy sessions were held in each region. I recommended that our tribes’ health directors and tribal leaders meet by states. We have our United Tribes of Michigan meetings. Phyllis Davis, a tribal leader from Gun Lake, and I, will be requesting a United Tribes meeting that will focus strictly on the ACA and IHCA. At this time, we will be bringing in “the experts” to help educate those in attendance. After that we will focus on educating our tribal members.

Our discussions regarding ACA must begin. I brought back a lot of the material distributed and gave it to our

Communications Dept. There is also a website, www.tribalhealthcare.org. The materials developed in connection with this meeting will be posted there.

I am definitely not an expert on the ACA and after attending this training, I find that I am certainly not alone. I don’t expect anyone to grasp all of this, but I do believe that with the information available, we will be able to develop a good educational campaign to assist our tribal members when the changes occur. With the this implementation, our tribes will benefit greatly.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at cabramson@saulttribe.net or (906) 322-3823. I look forward to hearing from you!