

HEALTH SERVICES COMMITTEE

Senator Judy Lee, Chairperson

Wednesday, November 4, 2015

Roughrider Room, State Capitol

Bismarck, North Dakota

Submitted by: Brad Hawk, Indian Health Systems Administrator, ND Indian Affairs Commission

My name is Brad Hawk and I am the Indian Health Systems Administrator for the ND Indian Affairs Commission. I want to thank you for allowing me time today in providing a written and oral testimony regarding access to dental services for our ND Tribal Communities.

In 2011 there was a Dental Blitz on the Spirit Lake Nation. In 2013 there was another Dental Blitz that was coordinated at Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. These two efforts were great for these communities. The only issue is that this is only temporary.

I want to talk more about why there is so much tooth decay. I am going off my own experience and this maybe different in other Tribal communities. When I was growing up I do not remember one dentist that was a long time provider. There is a common fear among Tribal members that if they go to the dentist their teeth are going to be pulled. Add this fear to the fact that you are not comfortable with the dentist because he may not be the same dentists since your last visit, it makes it hard for our kids to be proactive and get the preventive care they need. Another aspect of this is the funding that the IHS facilities get for oral health services. Many times this funding is used to treat emergencies and not to provide preventive care.

There are on-going efforts to address barrier(s) for credentialing. For any dentist wanting to work on a reservation within the IHS systems, they need to have federal credentials to do so. Not only do the dentists have to be credentialed in the State of North Dakota, they also have to continually renew their credentials with IHS. This additional paperwork and process hinders dentist that may want to volunteer or provide services on a part time basis.

Another effort that is being looked at by Spirit Lake Nation and Standing Rock Sioux Tribes is to utilize the P.L. 638 process to allow the Tribe to have more control and management of the services. If they go through this process and take more control of the management of these services then they would have more freedom to set up rules for credentialing and contracts. The IHS services in Alaska have all been through the P.L. 638 process. What has been shown that if there is ownership of the funding and third party billing, the amount of effort to getting reimbursements is also increased. If these two Tribal Nations move forward to take more control of their dental services, we feel this will make it easier for them to offer a higher salary or other incentives to get and keep good dentist. If this is done correctly it can help with the credentialing issues and may increase the amount of funding for the oral health services.

We believe that one part of the solution is to get our local dentists (Bismarck, Devils Lake, Grand Forks, and Minot) that have long term residency here in ND to provide services on going to our Tribal communities.

This concludes my testimony, I'd be happy to answer any questions at this time.

Thank you.