The Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children
The health and well-being of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children is fundamental to the future of Native people and communities.
Status of Native Children

- Native children experience severe health and socioeconomic disparities compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S.
  - American Indian and Alaska Native children are 1.9 times as likely to die before age 24 than Non-Hispanic Whites (National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 68, No. 9, 2019)
  - 30.7 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native children (under 18) live in poverty, compared to 18 percent in the U.S. (American Community Survey, 2018)
  - 22 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native children experience post-traumatic stress disorder, the same rate as veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and triple the rate of the general population (Department of Justice, 2014)
  - American Indian and Alaska Native youth ages 10 through 19 are twelve times as likely as Non-Hispanic Whites to be diagnosed with Type II diabetes (Diabetes in Youth Study, 2017)
  - American Indian and Alaska Native males age 15-24 are 2.4 times as likely as the U.S. male population 15-24 to commit suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019)
  - Native Hawaiian youth aged 10 to 14, while constituting only 27 percent of that demographic, are 50 percent of completed suicides (Hawai‘i Medical Journal 2011 Nov; 70(11 Suppl 2): 9-14))

- Historical trauma and intergenerational cycles of poverty contribute to the disproportionate health and well-being challenges faced by Native children and families today
The Historical Context

- Native people have experienced
  - The federal government’s inability to comply with its trust responsibility
  - Federal agencies failing to work together with Tribes and Tribal organizations
  - Tribes and Tribal organizations hindered by insufficient funding
  - Lack of sharing data collected by state, federal and tribal programs
  - Western beliefs that may not be appropriate for Native children
The Current Context

- The federal government has a trust responsibility to provide for the education, health, and safety of Native children wherever they live.
- Tribes are sovereign nations with an inherent authority for self-determination recognized by the U.S. Constitution.
- 5.2 million people in the U.S. identify as American Indian and Alaska Native alone or in combination with other races, 2.1 million under 24 (Census, 2010).
- 1.2 million people in the U.S. identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, either alone or in combination with one or more other races (Census, 2010).
- Native people are diverse and reside throughout the U.S. in rural, reservation, and urban environments.
- Native communities have many traditional and cultural strengths.
- Current programs and supports for Native children are challenging for Native communities to navigate.
- Limited data and research exists on the health and well-being of Native children.
The Commission

- Established by Congress with bipartisan support
  - Sponsored by Senator Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)
- Will examine the unique challenges faced by Native children (including American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians)
- Will make recommendations on improving the current system by building on the strengths and leadership of Native communities, with the goal of developing a sustainable system that delivers wrap-around services to Native children
Commission Structure

- The 11-member Commission includes experts in areas of juvenile justice, social work, education, and mental and physical health

- Commission is advised by:
  - Native Advisory Committee consisting of representatives of tribes in all 12 Bureau of Indian Affairs regions, as well as a Native Hawaiian
  - Native Children Subcommittee consisting of Native children and youth with experience serving on the council of a tribal, regional, or national youth organization

- Commission is supported by detailees from the U.S. Departments of the Interior, Health and Human Services, Education, and Justice
Commissioners

- Gloria O’Neill (Chair), President/CEO, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc., AK
- Tami DeCoteau, Ph.D. (Vice Chair), DeCoteau Trauma-Informed Care & Practice, PLLC, ND
- Carlyle Begay, Former State Senator, AZ
- Dolores Subia BigFoot, Ph.D., Director, Indian Country Child Trauma Center, OK
- Jesse Delmar, Director, Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety, AZ
- Anita Fineday, Managing Director of Indian Child Welfare Program, Casey Family Programs, MN
- Don Atqaqsaq Gray, Board Member, Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation, AK
- Leander R. McDonald, Ph. D., President, United Tribes Technical College, ND
- Elizabeth Morris, Administrator, Christian Alliance for Indian Child Welfare, ND
- Melody Staebner, Fargo/West Fargo Indian Education Coordinator, ND
Commission Activities

- Conduct a comprehensive study of the programs, grants, and supports available for Native children, both at government agencies and on the ground in Native communities.
- Hold public hearings throughout the U.S. to hear directly from Native children, community members, and other experts.
- Issue a report with its recommendations on how to achieve better outcomes for Native children.
  - The Commission will focus its recommendations on solutions to issues that would improve the health, safety, and well-being of Native children.
  - Recommendations will recognize the diversity in cultural values and integrate the cultural strengths of the diverse communities of Native children.
The report will look at a variety of issues, including:

- Child welfare
- Physical, mental, behavioral health, and nutrition
- Educational and vocational opportunities
- School district policies and practices
- Access to cultural and extracurricular activities
- Juvenile justice
- Early education and development
- Wraparound services for Native children through increased coordination
- Flexible use of existing federal programs
- Improved data collection methods
- Models of successful federal, state, and tribal programs
How to Support the Commission

- Help to spread the word about the Commission
- Identify experts the Commission should be talking to
- Identify best practices that the Commission should be aware of
- Share data or research for the Commission to review
- Testify at a public hearing
- Help us set up a visit to your community
Questions?
The Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children

Contact Information

asbwsnc@gmail.com
Thank you!