

Recommendations

The Commission will focus its recommendations on solutions to issues that would improve the health, safety, and well-being of Native children, including: child welfare; physical, mental, and behavioral health; 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; and models of successful federal, state, and tribal programs. Recommendations will recognize the diversity in cultural values and integrate the cultural strengths of the diverse communities of Native children.

The Commission on Native Children presents a vital opportunity to identify new strategies for lasting solutions, and will provide the much needed expertise, guidance, and cultural wisdom on how best to address the needs of Native children.

Photo of Commissioners

The Commissioners are accompanied by the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, Tara Sweeney; U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska; and former U.S. Senator Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota.

Commissioners

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

The Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children



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Native Children

Tribal communities face numerous obstacles in responding to the needs of Native children. While the federal government has a trust responsibility to provide for the education, health, and safety of Native children, complex program requirements and limited resources stymie efforts to reduce the disparities among Native children. To exacerbate issues, federal agencies too often lack clear guidance and operate in an uncoordinated way, inhibiting the ability to effectively address the needs of Native children.

The Commission

The Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children (Commission), established by Congress in 2016, is charged with conducting a comprehensive study of the programs, grants, and supports available for Native children (including American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children), both at government agencies and on the ground in Native communities. The Commission will examine the unique challenges Native children face and 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 effective, culturally appropriate, meaningful wrap-around services to Native children.

The 11-member Commission includes experts in areas of juvenile justice, social work, education, and mental and physical health. The Commission will be advised by a Native Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from diverse tribal communities, and a Native Children Subcommittee.

Comprehensive Study

As part of its comprehensive study, the Commission will hold public hearings throughout the U.S. to hear directly from Native children and communities. After three years, the Commission will issue a report with its recommendations on how to achieve better outcomes for Native children, including but not limited to:

• Better Use of Existing Resources

The Commission will identify ways to streamline current federal, state, and local programs to be more effective. It will provide ideas to give tribes greater flexibility to devise programs for the communities in the spirit of self-determination and suggest best practices for assisting government agencies in redirecting resources to the areas of most need.

• Increased Coordination

The Commission will seek to improve coordination of existing programs and resources currently addressing Native children's needs. The federal government houses programs across numerous different agencies, yet these programs often work independently and inefficiently.

• Measurable Outcomes

The Commission will recommend measures to determine the wellbeing of Native children and use such measurements to propose short-term, mid-term, and long-term national policy goals.

• Stronger Data

The Commission will seek to develop better data collection methods. Too often Native children are left out of the conversation because existing data collection, reporting, and analysis practices exclude them.

• Stronger Private Sector Partnerships

The Commission will seek to identify obstacles inhibiting public-private partnerships in Native Communities.

• Implementation of Best Practices

The Commission will identify and highlight successful models that can be adopted in Native communities.