NIHB hosts Inter-Tribal World Café on Health Equity

Last week on May 13, 2022, the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) hosted the Inter-Tribal World Café on Health Equity to provide a forum for Tribal leaders and members to come together and discuss what health equity means from a Tribal perspective. As a national leader in advancing health equity for American Indians and Alaska Natives, NIHB held this event to ensure Tribal voices are heard in critical current national conversations on equity. The event was in conjunction with the 2022 National Tribal Public Health Summit.

NIHB CEO Stacy A. Bohlen opened the event with a story of two houses, built at the same time by the same builders with the same design. For the past hundred years, she explained, the first house received optimal annual maintenance, a new roof every 15 years, and modernization as the world has changed. The second house was ignored. "What we're asking is, bring this house that has been neglected for the past hundred years into parity with what exists in the mainstream. Make the kind of investment it will require to bring the Indian house up to the regularly maintained house. Then we can start talking about equality," Ms. Bohlen reflected.

Dr. Alicia Mousseau, Vice-President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe provided opening remarks on the importance of Indigenous knowledge in achieving health equity. Dr. Mousseau discussed her work culturally adapting, implementing, and evaluating prevention and intervention programs with American Indian youth and families. “Indigenous knowledge is what has made us still be here today and still in existence. If we lose that, we are losing key pieces of who we are and our health and our futures,” she observed.

Jim Roberts, Senior Executive Liaison at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, discussed the relevance of health equity as an issue currently in the national spotlight. President Biden has made advancing racial equity a priority of his administration, requiring agencies to develop equity action plans. “It’s important to come together and have a process by which we can inform the work that’s going on right now. We need to ensure that our story is not left out of the national conversation -- how historical and multigenerational trauma affect our people and communities and shape the issues that we face in our communities,” said Mr. Roberts in his opening speech.

The World Café included a series of small and large group discussions with robust engagement from approximately 70 participants from Tribes and state and federal government agencies. These facilitated discussions focused on factors that contribute to the health inequities experienced in Indian Country and how to move this work forward. Participants remarked that pursuing health equity for American Indians and Alaska Natives requires shifting away from a focus on disparities...
and deficits, and grounding efforts instead in the strengths and resilience of Indigenous identity, knowledge, and culture.

To further advance this conversation, NIHB will host a virtual Tribal Health Equity Summit on August 16, 2022. The summit will include sessions on data priorities for pursuing health equity, recommendations for federal agencies, and other hot topics around Tribal health equity.

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