



American Indian/Alaska Native Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) liaison annual report

State of Utah
Office of American Indian/Alaska Native Health and Family Services
11/1/23

To: Native American Legislative Liaison Committee
From: Jamie Harvey, DHHS ICWA administrator
Subject: Statutorily required report: UCA 26B-1a-107

Purpose

As required by 26B-1a-107, the ICWA liaison shall annually report the liaison's respective activities and accomplishments to the Native American Legislative Liaison Committee created in Section 36-22-1.

Executive summary

The Utah Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) created the Office of American Indian/Alaska Native Health and Family Service (IHFS). The goal of the Office of American Indian/Alaska Native Health and Family Service is to support Utah tribal governments and tribal communities, and to help children and families living on tribal reservations achieve and enjoy the highest level of health and wellness.

The Office of American Indian/Alaska Native Health and Family Service accomplishes this goal through respectful government-to-government collaboration, community leadership, and aligned systems of care. We continue to collaborate with all 8 federally recognized tribes and work with all stakeholders to serve the best interest of every child and family.

Potential legislative action/follow-up

None.

Activities and accomplishments

The Office of American Indian/Alaska Native Health and Family Services worked with the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) to accomplish the following activities during the reporting period:

- Planned, organized, coordinated and implemented in-person visits to all 8 federally recognized Utah tribes and provided updates on Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) administrator activities.
- Provided ongoing consultation and support to frontline DCFS case workers who have active ICWA cases.
- Actively participated in the 2023 Navajo Nation Tri State Intergovernmental Agreement meeting in Window Rock, AZ, to discuss ways to improve services and resources for all Navajo children and their families in New Mexico, Arizona and Utah.
- Provided recommendations on new data reports in the Utah DCFS SAFE software system. These reports will monitor American Indian/Alaska Native children within the child welfare system to ensure ICWA compliance.
- Encouraged best practices with ongoing ICWA cases. Best practices include locating family members, placing children with next of kin when possible, and working with local tribal communities.
- Collaborated with a variety of partners to plan, coordinate, and execute the annual ICWA conference at the University of Utah.
- Elevated and prioritized prevention, family support, and early intervention services within the tribal child welfare system. These priorities are intended to maintain the highest level of safety for all American Indian/Alaska Native children in the state of Utah. DCFS supports tribal child welfare programs by providing access and information about population-specific services such as early childhood home visiting, early childhood mental health care, support groups, cultural events, and services that build on natural support systems, like extended family members and traditional healing.

- Implemented, consulted on, and promoted compliance with ICWA Intergovernmental Agreements currently in place with Navajo Nation, Ute Indian Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation, Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, and Paiute Indian Tribe (PITU).
- Actively participated in the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR+) conducted by Office of Services Review for Salt Lake 1 with DCFS. The main objective of the reviews is to ensure conformity with federal and state child welfare requirements; to gauge the experiences of children and families receiving State child welfare services, and to assist the State of Utah as it enhances its capacity to help native families achieve positive outcomes.
- Discussed the potential incorporation of the Navajo Nation Peacemaking program with the DCFS Eastern Region. The goal of this incorporation is to utilize culturally relevant services for the DCFS Families First initiative that will do the following;
 1. Provide an option for native american parents, who are enrolled in the Navajo tribe, to access culturally appropriate family counseling which engages grandparents, extended relatives, and kin in revisiting historical family values, teachings and philosophy.
 2. Re-integrate traditional and historical parenting values to struggling native american parents who are working with DCFS and are living off the reservation, so they are able to reconnect with culturally appropriate services.
 3. Support native american parents in identifying important resources available within their tribal communities so they are able to maintain support when reaching the case closure milestone.

The Office of American Indian/Alaska Native Health and Family Services guiding principles

We strive to ensure our work adheres to the following guiding principles:

- **Respectful government-to-government collaboration and partnership.** We continue to build trust with all 8 federally recognized tribes by visiting with tribal councils in-person and by listening and receiving direct feedback from them to improve services and relationships.
- **Self governance.** We respect that Utah tribes utilize self-governance in their

children's welfare. We will continue to collaborate with them directly and find solutions about the Utah child welfare system.

- **Embrace and implement the spirit of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).** We continue to actively collaborate with all stakeholders to embrace the spirit and values of ICWA. We want to help American Indian/Alaska Native children remain with their families and their community.
- **State of Utah government alignment.** We continue to work with all Utah DCFS staff to ensure internal systems are aligned and appropriate services are provided based on the compliance and spirit of ICWA.
- **Community engagement.** We continue to support the Utah child welfare system as it operates in partnership with communities, tribes, and the federal government to keep American Indian/Alaska Native children within their families and connected to their cultures.
- **Culturally specific services and supports.** We continue to identify and provide a continuum of culturally specific supports that ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of American Indian/Alaska Native children.

Conclusion

DHHS is committed to preserving and strengthening all American Indian/Alaska Native children, families, and communities.

The Office of American Indian and Alaska Native Health and Family Services will continue collaborating with DCFS to improve services and resources in accordance with ICWA. Collaboration will include DCFS case workers, tribal communities, families, the Utah court system, social workers, and service providers at all levels.

Leadership and staff will continue establishing clear goals to reduce disparities in the child welfare system and improve outcomes for all Utah American Indian/Alaska Native children and their families.