

S.B. 181 NATIVE AMERICAN HEALTH AMENDMENTS

Sponsor: Senator Luz Escamilla

House Sponsor: Representative Christine Watkins,

Co-Chair of the Native American Legislative Liaison Committee

WHAT THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION WILL DO

This proposal will allow Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal facilities to receive reimbursement for qualified Traditional Medicine services provided for their Medicaid beneficiaries who reside in Utah. The Indian Healthcare Improvement Act (IHCA, PL 94-437) provides support for the practice and integration of Traditional Medicine/Healing services in the health and behavioral health sections for facilities and providers. This proposal received unanimous approval from the Native American Legislative Liaison Committee in November 2023.

WHY THE LEGISLATION IS NEEDED

The incorporation of Traditional Medicine/Healing services will improve how Utah's American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) receive health care. How AI/AN view their world and how health, wellness and illness are dealt with, centers from where they come from as a group and their ontological views about who they are (M. Zito, 1999). In 2021, one of Utah's tribal communities was surveyed about their health needs and safety. Forty-one percent (41 %) responded that more culturally appropriate and centered care was needed. When asked what types of worries had increased during the pandemic, 21% responded they worried more about their spiritual health needs. When asked what has made it difficult to receive culturally appropriate services, 25% stated a lack of financial resources and 20% stated availability (UNHS, 2022).

In addition, some Utah tribal health and behavioral health directors have reported the difficulty of being able to maintain Traditional medicine services due to a lack of financial resources necessary to maintain the position. This directly impacts accessibility for the communities and limits workforce development for facilities.

In 2022 the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) funded an assessment to address Victim of Crime Services on one of UT's reservations. One of the 4 significant findings from the report stated that traditional practices need to be integrated into a patients care (NCAI, NN Report, 2022).

HOW THE LEGISLATION WILL WORK

The Traditional Medicine services would be listed as an additional category of service that would be eligible for reimbursement for AI/AN Medicaid beneficiaries seen at an IHS/Tribal facility. Once included in Utah's Medicaid State Plan as a covered service, almost all reimbursement for Traditional Medicine services would be eligible for 100% Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP). Tribal Governments and Councils would approve traditional healers as providers qualifying for facility reimbursement under this waiver.

WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Utah's AI/AN communities and the Indian health facilities can both benefit from reimbursement. Wellness has been equated in some AI/AN communities in Utah with balance. Traditional medicine provides the path for maintaining balance and for restoring balance in a very culturally specific manner. Traditional and western medicine practices are currently integrated among some tribal health systems in Utah. The modalities in which they operate are very complementary.

- AI/AN communities benefit- improved health and well-being; improved perception of healthcare services; and enhanced community cohesiveness.
- Indian Health facilities benefit- opportunity to provide more comprehensive services to AI/AN patients; and sustainable financing for Traditional Medicine services.

STATUE IMPACT

- This would require an amendment to Utah Medicaid's State Plan.

FISCAL IMPACT

- This bill would require minimal ongoing general funds (\$41,330 ongoing) for a small number of services that do not qualify for 100% FMAP.

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