



July 2, 2024

Dear Tribal Leader:

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) will hold a Tribal consultation on August 5, 2024, to discuss the syphilis and congenital syphilis outbreak among Tribal citizens in your respective areas.

HHS recognizes the urgency of this issue and Tribal leaders' efforts to mobilize and raise awareness to address this important public health issue. HHS is committed to addressing the escalating cases of syphilis and congenital syphilis through the establishment of the National Syphilis and Congenital Syphilis Syndemic Federal Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force is a cross-agency collaborative effort, with participants from HHS agencies and offices, including the Indian Health Service (IHS), as well as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Justice, Department of Veterans Affairs, and the White House, including both the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Office of National AIDS Policy. The Task Force—and all of HHS—is diligently working to optimize syphilis screening, particularly during pregnancy, to prevent congenital syphilis, expand access to testing and treatment, heighten data and surveillance, increase awareness and education among provider groups, and engage communities and health departments.

The actions of the Task Force leverage federal resources to reduce rates, promote health equity, engage impacted communities, and direct resources to support those most impacted, including Tribes. The Task Force has identified 14 priority jurisdictions that account for nearly 75 percent of congenital syphilis cases and over 55 percent of primary and secondary syphilis cases nationwide to focus on targeted interventions. Additionally, these 14 priority jurisdictions represent over 65 percent of primary and secondary syphilis and over 70 percent of congenital syphilis cases among individuals that identify as American Indian and Alaska Native.

OASH seeks information from Indian country about possible HHS actions that may support Tribal efforts to reduce the number of syphilis and congenital syphilis cases among American Indian and Alaska Native populations. In addition, we hope to increase the reach of the Task Force and other HHS efforts to combat syphilis and congenital syphilis rates to Tribes and Tribal Organizations. OASH will use the information shared to inform the Task Force subcommittees and agency members.

OASH is hosting a virtual Tribal consultation to collect input and inform the National Syphilis and Congenital Syphilis Syndemic Federal Task Force. The logistical information for the consultation follows:

Title: OASH Tribal Consultation for Syphilis and Congenital Syphilis

When: Monday, August 5, 2024

Time: 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM Eastern Time (U.S. and Canada)

You must register in advance for this meeting. Register at:

<https://hhs.gov.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJItfuisrDwtE0C3p15RxjM8-thBB4vvaUA>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Objectives of the Tribal consultation are to:

1. Discuss the National Syphilis and Congenital Syphilis Syndemic Federal Task Force.
2. Solicit feedback and input from Tribal leaders to inform the Task Force's initiatives.

We invite Tribal comment broadly and, to facilitate discussion, also present the following questions for specific feedback:

1. What are your top three priorities for addressing the syphilis and congenital syphilis epidemic in Indian country?
2. What are the top three changes that HHS could implement that you feel are needed to reduce the cases of syphilis and congenital syphilis in your communities?
3. What successful models or innovations have you implemented that have contributed to reducing syphilis and congenital syphilis cases that could be adapted and scaled by other communities?

OASH is committed to assisting Tribes in addressing the syphilis and congenital syphilis epidemic in Indian country. We look forward to your input.

OASH is accepting written comments, as well, and appreciates your consideration. Please submit written comments to STI@hhs.gov, using the following subject line: "Tribal Consultation." The deadline to provide written comments is **September 5, 2024**. If you have questions or concerns, please contact the OASH Sexually Transmitted Infections team at STI@hhs.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Q22 MP'.

Rachel L. Levine, M.D.
ADM, USPHS