



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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May 31, 2023

RE: Washington State Department of Health Launching *New**** Office of Tribal Public Health & Relations (OTPHR)***

Greetings Honorable Tribal Leaders and Tribal Partners,

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to serving the needs of Tribal people and the communities in which they live across Washington and beyond. In accordance with chapter [43.376 RCW](#), the [Washington State Centennial Accord of 1989](#), and Washington State Department of Health (DOH) [Consultation and Collaboration Procedure](#), we invite collaboration with sovereign tribal nations and tribal organizations in the development of policies, agreements, and program implementation that directly affects Indian tribes and tribal people.

Almost a year into the launch of the [DOH Transformational Plan: A Vision for Health in Washington State](#) (Dear Tribal Leader Letter – August 3, 2022), we have continued to listen, have learned a tremendous amount, and continue to recognize of the work that remains. Our agency’s cornerstone values of **Equity, Innovation, and Engagement (EIE)** are the foundation of the plan and help to focus our work on five key priorities that reenergize our commitment to *Transformational Health*:

1. [Health and Wellness](#);
2. [Health Systems and Workforce Transformation](#);
3. [Environmental Health](#);
4. [Emergency Response and Resilience](#); and,
5. [Global and One Health](#).

With these key priorities in mind, we know there is much to learn, share, and grow and to do this work together with you. Consider us a genuine partner on the importance of working, collaborating, and engaging with sovereign tribal nations and tribal organizations, which is critical to improving optimal health for all.

To realize this vision of *Transformational Health*, DOH is pleased to announce the creation of a new office and focus area at our agency to accentuate our tribal public health efforts: ***Office of Tribal Public Health & Relations (OTPHR)***. To help provide context, we are providing additional information about this newly created office.

The DOH Office of Tribal Public Health & Relations (OTPHR)

Our Commitment

The Office of Tribal Public Health & Relations (OTPHR) reflects our commitment to tribal public health and well-being while simultaneously honoring the sovereignty of tribal nations in all the work we do. This office will be supported by the investment of new resources that will intensify our focus on our agency's mission to work with others to protect and improve the health of all people across Washington.

We value the importance of taking a human-centered and equity-based approach, in recognizing the importance of inter-generational relationships, while striving for healthy people living in healthy communities.

Purpose and Structure

This new office will recommit our steadfast promise to honoring our government-to-government relationship with federally recognized tribes (sovereign tribal nations) in our practices, initiatives, and decisions.

We are committed to ensuring collaboration with sovereign tribal nations and tribal organizations in the development of policies, agreements, and program implementation that directly affects sovereign tribal nations, tribal people, and tribal organizations.

The new office will lead our government-to-government relations with tribal partners and serve as the primary point of contact for the 29 sovereign tribal nations in Washington State, as well as tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers.

We will soon be recruiting for the leader of this new office who will oversee a team of direct reports as well as ensure coordination and direction of tribal focused positions across the agency. This will ensure our work and efforts are aligned optimally to serve sovereign tribal nations, tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers for the health of American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) and all Washingtonians.

Values and Goals

Pursuant to [DOH Value of Seven Generations](#), inspired by Native American cultures, through the creation of this new office we seek wisdom from those who came before us to ensure our current work protects those who will come after us.

The *Office of Tribal Public Health & Relations (OTPHR)* will:

- Offer information to sovereign tribal nations, tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers regarding public health policy, innovation, prevention, partnerships, public affairs and equity, science, Global and One Health, and resilience.

- Develop policies and programs in partnership with sovereign tribal nations, tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers.
- Provide technical assistance, support, and training to DOH staff on government-to-government relations with cultural humility and sensitivity.
- Meet and communicate regularly with sovereign tribal nations, tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers.
- Facilitate meetings between DOH and sovereign tribal nations, tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers, including Tribal Consultation.
- Provide timely response to tribal-related questions, concerns, comments, matters, or issues.

Guiding Principles

The **Office of Tribal Public Health & Relations (OTPHR)** will also adopt the following guidance issued by the [United States Department of Interior Indian Affairs](#) and commit to the following principles:

- *Respect tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance, which includes the right of sovereign tribal nations to make important decisions about their own best interests.*
- *Be responsive and informative in all communications and interactions with sovereign tribal nations, tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers.*
- *Work in partnership with sovereign tribal nations, tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers, on mutually beneficial projects.*
- *Work with sovereign tribal nations, tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers, in matters, issues, concerns, in a manner that accommodates and respects government-to-government relations.*
- *Work collaboratively and in a timely fashion with sovereign tribal nations, tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers, when evaluating requests to accommodate and respect government-to-government relations.*


We look forward to embarking on this new journey for health and well-being along with you as we refocus and realign our steadfast commitment to our government-to-government relationship with sovereign tribal nations, as well as tribal organizations, and tribal health care providers.

We know we have provided a lot of information here and while this is exciting news, undoubtedly you may have questions about what has been shared. Anticipating this, we are planning on hosting a virtual conversation in July to discuss this new office and the work that we envision for this area of the **Office of Tribal Public Health & Relations (OTPHR)**.

In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact Candice Wilson – Quatz'tenaut (Lummi) – DOH Tribal Policy Director, should you have any questions or comments at candice.wilson@doh.wa.gov or 360-819-7626.

Thank you again for your leadership, your support, and most importantly your work on behalf of tribal peoples and communities across our great State. We look forward to working with you on the road ahead - a big thank you to all of you!

Respectfully,



Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH
Secretary of Health
Washington

cc: Candice Wilson – Quatz'tenaut (Lummi), Tribal Policy Director, Department of Health
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