

## **Indigenous Health, Education and Resource Task Force**

American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) language and cultural traditions are rebounding across the United States. That we are seeing a resurgence despite centuries of attacks on Indigenous communities, including the systematic destruction of traditional educational and healthcare practices, is remarkable. Still, AIAN wellbeing overall, as measured by poverty, health, and education indices continues to be poor. AIAN health and education disparities persistently rank among the worst in the United States. Many reasons for AIAN health disparities exist but high among them is a significant shortage of healthcare professionals serving at Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal health facilities. Additionally, there is little representation by AIAN people in healthcare which exacerbates long-standing mistrust of these institutions by Indigenous patients and communities. Increasing the number of AIAN health professionals requires addressing AIAN educational disparities.

Educational Pathways programs exist throughout the United States, supporting AIAN students at every level of their education. Importantly, the distribution of Pathways programs is uneven, with some regions having fewer programs than others. Further, within the same regions and area, programs occasionally compete against one another for grant funding to serve the same students. Finally, to serve as many students as possible, undergraduate programs attract AIAN students from across the United States to their Pathways programs because they often do not have a large enough pool of academically strong students locally and regionally.

While it is important to provide students with many varied educational opportunities, without better communication and collaborations between Pathways programs, these programs risk continued duplication of services, competition against one another for funding, and failing to serve large numbers of AIAN students where programs do not exist. As importantly, without a significant increase in the pool of AIAN students succeeding academically at all grade levels, there will be no marked change in the numbers of AIAN applicants to health professions programs and schools. AIAN students want to serve AIAN communities. (JP's paper)  
Graduating more AIAN health professionals can help alleviate the long-standing and great health disparities faced by AIAN communities.

IHEART proposes to address AIAN health and education outcomes by encouraging  
**Goal: Improve AIAN education and health outcomes.**

### **Objectives:**

- 1. Increase the numbers of and effectiveness of existing AIAN pathways programs**
- 2. Increase the numbers of AIAN graduating health professionals**
- 3. Increase the numbers of AIAN health professionals returning to work in AIAN communities**

**To meet these objectives, we are collaboratively:**

- A. Developing regional infrastructure to identify educational pathways programs to support and encourage American Indian/Alaska Native students to enter the health professions workforce**
- B. Establishing connections within each region to build a network of pathways programs for students and practitioners ranging from kindergarten through employment**
- C. *Promoting and developing educational pathways programming grounded in Indigenous values***
- D. *Highlighting models and programming that promote success for Indigenous health students and professionals***
- E. *Developing and advocating for local, state, regional, and national policies that support the academic enrichment and advancement of AIAN students***
- F. Establishing a sustained series of national meetings to support existing pathways efforts, the development of new programs, *and to share successful efforts nationally***
- G. Developing and maintaining AIAN health education resource banks:**
  - maps of regional AIAN educational pathways programs
  - database demonstrating outcomes from participants in pathways programs