Washington State Tribes and Urban Indian Health Programs

COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution and Administration

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The American Indian Health Commission was created in 1994 by Washington’s federally recognized tribes and urban Indian health programs (UIHPs) to address tribal-state health issues. AIHC’s mission is to improve the health of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people through tribal-state collaboration on health policies and programs. The Commission’s work is directed by the 29 federally-recognized Tribes and 2 urban Indian health programs in the state. Delegates are officially appointed by Tribal Councils and urban Indian health organization boards to represent each individual Tribe and urban Indian health organization.
Each Tribe is Unique

- Culture
- Language
- Government
- Infrastructure
- Access to healthcare
- Laws
- Geography
- Economy
Shared Values

• Respect and value elders
• Taking care of one another
• Every person has a role
• Be generous
• Do not waste
COVID-19 Age Adjusted Mortality Rate for AI/AN

2.43 times the rate for non-Hispanic Whites

* American Indians and Alaska Natives are dying of COVID-19 at shocking rates (brookings.edu)
H1N1 (2009-2010)
Absence of Planning – MCM Distribution

• Medical Countermeasures = pharmaceuticals (medical treatments, prophylaxes), supplies, equipment, and other items needed to treat or protect against public health threats

• No planning or guidance at the state and federal levels regarding distribution of medical countermeasures (including vaccines) to tribal nations prior to 2009

• Washington State’s strategy was to distribute Tribes’ vaccine allocations to local health jurisdictions so they would transfer the vaccines to Tribes
H1N1 CDC Recommended Priority Groups

- Pregnant women
- Household contacts and caregivers of children less than 6 months
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- All people 6 months through 24 years of age
- Persons aged 25 through 64 years of age with health conditions associated with higher risk of complications from influenza
Tribal Sovereignty

- Tribes have the sovereign authority to provide for the health and welfare of their people
- Tribal leaders studied how H1N1 was affecting their communities
- Some Washington Tribes decided to vaccinate elders first
Catastrophic Failure

• Certain LHJs did not understand their lack of authority over Tribes and refused to hand over Tribes’ vaccine allocations if those Tribes’ priority populations to be differed from CDC recommendations

• Some Tribes never received their vaccine allocations

• Tribal members died
Washington Tribes committed to preventing this from happening again
Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboration

- Regional cross-jurisdictional planning meetings (Tribes, LHJs, DOH)
- Mutual Aid Agreement for Tribes and LHJs in Washington State
- Development of state policy – clearly outlines Tribes’ sovereign authority over medical countermeasures
- Advocacy for federal policy
- Tabletop exercises 2014, 2018
- Full-scale exercise 2019
COVID-19 Vaccine

- Tribes and UIHPs began meeting weekly in September 2020 to prepare to receive, store, manage and administer COVID-19 vaccine
- Meetings include Washington State Department of Health (DOH) COVID Vaccine Team members and the Indian Health Service’s Regional COVID-19 Vaccine Coordinator
Vaccination Achievements

- Tribes and UIHPs were prepared to receive vaccine supply from the 1st shipment

- 20 of the 29 Tribes and both UIHPs chose to order vaccine through Washington State

- Even the 4 Tribes that do not have a medical clinic are vaccinating their communities – leveraging tribal resources and partnerships

- 14 Tribes have now offered their vaccination capacity to support the state and neighboring counties
Broad Definition of Community

- Non-tribal school district staff and teachers
- County-wide home health workers
- County-wide elders and other high-risk individuals
Key Factors for Success

- Build relationships and partnerships across jurisdictions: federal, state, tribal, local
- Develop and implement policies at federal, state, tribal, local levels that clearly comply with applicable laws
- Provide training to agency staff at federal, state, tribal, local levels regarding applicable laws, policies and procedures
- Participate in exercises with partners