



THE NAVAJO NATION

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PRESIDENT BEGAYE ADVOCATED FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

WASHINGTON—Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye called on support from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell to combat and address suicide in Indian Country through a summit to be hosted in the Navajo Nation. President Begaye and tribal leaders met over two-days during the Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee meeting.

"We are asking for a summit to be held to address suicide," the president said. In addition to a summit, the president called for a national anti-suicide campaign to reach Native youth through videos and social media. The videos could be designed and produced by Native youth.

President Begaye shared a recent executive order he signed with Vice President Nez that calls for Navajo Nation employees to be involved in preventing suicide in the Navajo Nation.

In the coming weeks, the president and his staff will begin a reservation wide tour that will include presentations on suicide prevention. "The vice president and I will visit Navajo communities and schools throughout the Navajo Nation to help build communities of hope," President Begaye said.

One of the challenges the president raised with Secretary Burwell was the lack of data on suicides in Indian Country and specifically the Navajo Nation. "We need data. No one is keeping adequate records, not only for those that do commit suicide, but also the attempted suicides. One suicide impacts a large community. How do we address and work with the communities impacted by this suicide? The data problems are compounded by the fact that we are situated within three states," the president said.

Secretary Burwell said the Indian Health Service is unable to provide complete data because they do not attend each suicide. She asked how local law enforcement collects data, and if there is regional consistency in reporting and if there are data sharing agreements between tribal and non-tribal public safety agencies.

Lastly, the president informed the secretary of a pilot project the U.S. Department of Justice is undertaking to knock down silos and concentrate funding to combat substance abuse. President Begaye advised the secretary to do something similar with regards to suicide.

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