



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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Vice President Lizer advocates for Special Diabetes Program and CHR's at the National Indian Health Board meeting

WASHINGTON – Navajo Nation Vice President attended the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) Board of Director's first quarter and annual meeting this week in Washington, D.C., to advocate for budget and policies related to the Indian Health Service. President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Lizer represent the Navajo region on the NIHB, serving with 12 other tribal members.

The NIHB represents tribal governments that operate their health care delivery systems through contracting and compacting, and those receiving health care directly from the Indian Health Service. NIHB's mission is to advocate for tribal sovereignty, strengthen tribal health systems, secure resources, and build capacity to achieve the highest level of health and well-being for tribal people.

"There are many health care issues on Indian Country, and with the collaboration with other tribal nations, we have a stronger voice to make sure our tribal citizens have access to adequate health care and services," said Vice President Lizer.



PHOTO: Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer during the National Indian Health Board meeting on February 26, 2020, in Washington, D.C.

During the meeting, the board approved a resolution to support permanent reauthorization of the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI). The resolution states that the program is crucial for tribal nations to fight against a disease that threatens tribal families, children, and communities. Since 2011, there has been a 54 percent decrease in diabetes-related and end-stage renal disease among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

"The Navajo Nation has declared 'War on Diabetes' to help improve and save the health and lives of our Navajo people. As leaders, we need to be proactive in claiming victory over diabetes by raising awareness and changing our lifestyles to become healthier and stronger," said Vice President Lizer.

During the report from the Indian Health Service Principal Deputy Director RADM Michael D. Weahkee, Vice President noted the need to avoid the budget combination of the Community Health Representatives (CHR) program, and Health Education Program, and the nationalization of the Community Health Aide Program. The program combination would reduce funds in all three applications.

"We continue to support and value our Community Health Representatives and health educators because they are in the field daily to provide health services to elders and high-risk patients in remote locations. The CHR's are connected to the community and health care delivery system. We need more CHR's and combining the budgets with the Community Health Aide Program would hinder vital preventative health efforts," said Vice President Lizer.

He also discussed the importance of the construction of four health care facilities on the Nation, including the Dilkon Health Center, Pueblo Pintado Health Center, Bodaway-Gap Health Center, and the Gallup Indian Medical Center. Funding shortfalls for the facilities jeopardizes efforts to update and modernize IHS hospitals and health centers.



PHOTO: Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer meets Asst. Speaker of the House Rep. Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.) to advocate for tribal health care on February 27, 2020, in Washington, D.C.

On the third day of the meeting, Vice President Lizer and NIHB members met federal officials, including the Asst. Speaker of the House Rep. Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.) and Sen. Martha McSally (R-AZ), to advocate for advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service. Advance appropriations would allow IHS and tribal health representatives to continue treating patients without threats caused by the federal government shutdowns, and it would increase the ability to plan programmatically over several years to improve long-standing quality health care.

"On behalf of the Office of the President and Vice President, we commend the NIHB members and federal officials for working collaboratively to help improve the well-being and health of our tribal communities, children, and families," said Vice President Lizer.

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