

NCUIH Facilitates First Ever Listening Session Between UIOs and CDC on Response to COVID-19

Category: Policy Blog

written by NCUIH | June 29, 2020

On June 25, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) held the first virtual listening session for Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) to express their needs and identify gaps related to the COVID-19 response. The purpose of the session was for the CDC to hear about the needs of UIOs during this pandemic. This event was coordinated by CDC and the National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH).

The CDC officials that participated were Dr. José Montero, Director of the Center for State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Support, and Captain Carmen “Skip” Clelland, Director of the Office of Tribal Affairs and Strategic Alliances. The session was facilitated by NCUIH’s Sunny Stevenson, Senior Manager of Federal Relations, and Jamie Ishcomer-Aazami, Deputy Director.

UIOs expressed concern about distribution of and access to vaccines once they are developed; the need for flexible funding in order to make infrastructure improvements to accommodate social distancing requirements and coronavirus testing; and the need for Urban Indians to be included in data about the coronavirus. Often American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) are labeled as “others” and AI/AN data cannot be distinguished. UIOs requested that CDC and other agencies institute an urban confer policy with UIOs. They also requested recurring listening sessions with CDC. Captain Clelland confirmed that CDC will work with NCUIH to coordinate a second listening session.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provides that “not less than \$125,000,000 shall be allocated to tribes, tribal organizations, urban Indian health organizations, or health service providers to tribes” for “CDC-Wide Activities and Program Support”. The law states that the funding shall be for grants or cooperative agreements to carry out surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, infection control, mitigation, communications, and other preparedness and response activities.

CDC has yet to disseminate any CARES Act funds to UIOs, or announce an opportunity for UIOs to apply for them, even though the CARES Act was signed into law on March 27, 2020.