NCUIH President-Elect Appointed To VA Advisory Committee

Category: Press Release
written by NCUIH | October 15, 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 10.15.2021

Media Contact:
National Council of Urban Indian Health
Meredith Raimondi, Director of Congressional Relations
MRaimondi@ncuih.org
651-470-1857

NCUIH nominated Ms. Tetnowski to represent urban Native Veterans.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 15, 2021) – National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) President Elect and CEO of Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley, Sonya Tetnowski, a member of the Makah Tribe, was appointed to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) first-ever Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs. The Committee will advise the Veterans Affairs Secretary based on personal experience on all matters relating to Indian Tribes, Tribal organizations, Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs), Native Hawaiian organizations, and Native American Veterans. NCUIH advocated for the bill that established the advisory committee and nominated Ms. Tetnowski for the role. In the past many advisory committees that relate to Indian health, including urban Indian health, have excluded urban Indian leaders from positions and conversations, which makes this appointment especially historic.

"NCUIH is proud of Sonya Tetnowski's representation of urban Indian organizations on the Department of Veterans Affairs new Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs. As a Veteran and urban Indian leader Sonya is uniquely qualified to serve on this committee. Sonya will be a strong voice for American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans who reside in urban areas," said NCUIH President Walter Murillo (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma).

Ms. Tetnowski was deployed multiple times during her service in the Army and has tirelessly advocated on behalf of health equity for American Indians, including Native Veterans, through Congressional testimony and leadership at NCUIH. In 2019, Ms. Tetnowski testified on bill H.R. 4153, the *Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act*, which allows Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) to be reimbursed for providing culturally competent care to American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans residing in urban areas. Most recently, Ms. Tetnowski appeared before the House Committee on Natural Resources in July 2021. She submitted testimony on Native Veterans Suicide Prevention on behalf of NCUIH in September. Also in October, the Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley was recognized with the National Indian Health Board's 2021 Outstanding Service Award.

"It is an honor to be a part of the first-ever VA Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs. With approximately 160,000 Native Veterans around the country, it is vital to have a representative on the

committee that can ensure that the healthcare needs for our Native Veterans is always a part of the broader discussion to ensure we are removing barriers to care while providing culturally competent care. I appreciate the VA's foresight and vision to address these challenges" said Sonya Tetnowski (Makah), NCUIH President Elect and CEO of the Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley.

"Native Americans serve in the military at a higher rate than any other population, and over 70 percent of Native Americans live in urban areas. Urban Indian organizations, like the Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley (IHC) fill a crucial gap in the health care system for Native Americans that do not have access to more remote facilities run by the Indian Health Service. I congratulate Sonya Tetnowski (Makah), CEO of the IHC on her appointment to the inaugural Tribal Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee to represent our Native Veterans," said Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA-15).

"A wide range of VA activities impact urban Indian organizations and the communities they serve. Sonya's appointment as the Committee representative for urban Indians provides an added layer of accountability for VA to uphold its trust responsibility to Native Veterans living outside of reservation boundaries," said Sunny Stevenson (Walker River Paiute Tribe), NCUIH Director of Federal Relations.

Resources

- (PRESS RELEASE) VA Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs appointees

Testimonies by Ms. Tetnowski

- Subcommittee on Health Oversight Hearing: Native Veterans' Access to Healthcare
- NCUIH President Elect and Chief Executive Officer of the Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley, in support of H.R. 3496, the Urban Indian Health Providers Facilities Improvement Act
- Veteran Suicide Prevention: Innovative Research and Expanded Public Health Efforts