Department of Veterans Affairs Seeks Nominations for Membership on the Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs

Category: Policy Blog
written by Alex Sampson | July 6, 2023

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Tribal Government Relations (OTGR), is seeking nominations of qualified candidates to be considered for appointment as a member of the Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs ("the Committee") to represent the following Indian Health Service (IHS) Areas: Bemidji; California; Great Plains; Nashville; Navajo; Tucson. Nominations for membership on the Committee must be received no later than 5 p.m. EST on August 21, 2023, and should be mailed to OTGR at 810 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 915H (075) or emailed to tribalgovernmentconsultation@va.gov. Individuals interested in participating in this Committee and who are located in the open IHS areas should work with local tribes and tribal organizations to be nominated.

Requirements for Nomination Submission:

Nominations should be typewritten (one nomination per nominator). The nomination package should include:

> (1) a letter of nomination that clearly states the name and affiliation of the nominee, the basis for the nomination (i.e., specific attributes which qualify the nominee for service in this capacity), and a statement from the nominee indicating a willingness to serve as a member of the Committee;
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> (2) the nominee's contact information, including name, mailing address, telephone number(s), and email address;
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> (3) the nominee's curriculum vitae or resume, not to exceed five pages; and
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> (4) a summary of the nominee's experience and qualification relative to the professional qualifications criteria outlined by the VA (diversity in professional and personal qualifications; experience in military service and military deployments; current work with Veterans; committee subject matter expertise; and experience working in large and complex organizations).

The nominee must also appear to have no conflict of interest that would preclude membership. An ethics review is conducted for each selected nominee.

The individual selected for appointment to the Committee shall be invited to **serve a two-year term**. All members will receive travel expenses and a per diem allowance in accordance with the Federal Travel Regulations for any travel made in connection with their duties as members of the Committee. For more information, contact Ms. Stephanie Birdwell and/or Mr. Peter Vicaire, Office of Tribal Government Relations, 810 Vermont Ave., NW, Ste 915H (075), Washington, DC 20420. A copy of the Committee charter can be obtained by contacting Peter.Vicaire@va.gov (612-558-7744) or by accessing the Web site managed by OTGR at: https://www.va.gov/TRIBALGOVERNMENT/index.asp.

Background

The Committee was established in accordance with section 7002 of Public Law 116- 315 (H.R.7105 – Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020). In accordance with Public Law 116-315, the Committee provides advice and guidance to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on all matters relating to Indian Tribes, tribal organizations, Native Hawaiian organizations, and Native American Veterans. The Committee serves in an advisory capacity and makes recommendations to the Secretary on ways the Department can improve the programs and services of the Department to better serve Native American Veterans.

In carrying out its duties, the Committee's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

> (1) Identifying for the Department's evolving issues of relevance to Indian Tribes, tribal organizations and Native American Veterans relating to programs and services of the Department;
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> (2) Proposing clarifications, recommendations and solutions to address issues raised at tribal, regional and national levels, especially regarding any tribal consultation reports;
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> (3) Providing a forum for Indian Tribes, tribal organizations, urban Indian organizations, Native Hawaiian organizations and the Department to discuss issues and proposals for changes to Department regulations, policies and procedures;
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> (4) Identifying priorities and provide advice on appropriate strategies for tribal consultation and urban Indian organizations conferring on issues at the tribal, regional, or national levels;
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> (5) Ensuring that pertinent issues are brought to the attention of Indian tribes, tribal organizations, urban Indian organizations and Native Hawaiian organizations in a timely manner, so that feedback can be obtained;
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> (6) Encouraging the Secretary to work with other Federal agencies and Congress so that Native American Veterans are not denied the full benefit of their status as both Native Americans and Veterans;
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> (7) Highlighting contributions of Native American Veterans in the Armed Forces;
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> (8) Making recommendations on the consultation policy of the Department on tribal matters;
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> (9) Supporting a process to develop an urban Indian organization confer policy to ensure the Secretary confers, to the maximum extent practicable, with urban Indian organizations; and
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> (10) With the Secretary's written approval, conducting other duties as recommended by the Committee.

AI/AN Veterans

There is an urgent need to ensure that all AI/AN Veterans have access to the benefits they earned through their service. According to a 2020 VA Report, AI/AN Veterans served in the Pre-9/11 period at a higher percentage than other Veteran populations. Despite a distinguished record of service, VA's statistics also show that AI/AN Veterans were more likely to be unemployed, were more likely to lack health insurance, and were more likely to have a service-connected disability when compared to Veterans of other races. In addition, in Fiscal Year 2017, AI/AN Veterans used Veterans Benefits

Administration benefits or services at a lower percentage than veterans of other races.

NCUIH and the VA

The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) has continued to advocate on behalf of AI/AN veterans living in urban areas and to strengthen its partnership with VA. In October 2021, Sonya Tetnowski (Makah), Army veteran, NCUIH President, and CEO of the Indian Health Center for Santa Clara Valley, was appointed to the VA's first-ever Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs to represent the voice of urban Indians. She currently serves as a member of the Committee and the Chair of the Veterans Health Administration Subcommittee and has highlighted the importance of looking at the whole person and making sure that their needs are being met. She has also brought forth potential subcommittees, including unhoused urban Veterans, Native Healer utilization, and Behavioral Health and Substance Use.

Thanks to NCUIH's work with VA, UIOs are now eligible to enter the VA Indian Health Service/Tribal Health Program (THP)/UIO Reimbursement Agreements Program, which provides VA reimbursement to IHS, THP, and UIO health facilities for services provided to eligible AI/AN Veterans. NCUIH is also working to address homelessness among urban Native veterans and works closely with the VA, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the White House Committee on Native American Affairs on the implementation of the interagency Native American Veteran Homelessness Initiative. These efforts have emphasized the critical importance of working with UIOs to reach and serve the significant portion of Native veterans living in urban areas.