

Meet

Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium Vice Chair,
IHS DDTP Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee Member

Lincoln A. Bean, Sr.

(Tlingit)



I live in Kake, on an island in Southeast Alaska. It might be the only place in the world where you can stand in one spot and see bears grabbing for salmon in a river, with eagles flying overhead, then turn to the opposite direction, and see whales breaching in the sea. The skies are clear blue. The air is fresh. The sun looks like it is smiling down upon you.

This is my home, the place where I was born, the place where my sons Lincoln Junior and Austin were raised. They are my first loves, the first priorities of my life. My second priority is my people, to help Tlingit people and all Native people achieve better health.

Two years ago I found out I had diabetes. I was cutting wood and thought I had something in my eye. I went to the clinic, and they put me in intensive care.

Right after that, I was nominated to be on the IHS DDTP Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee. Because I have diabetes, I have a greater understanding of the epidemic of diabetes. It knows no boundaries. I thought I was healthy, but I realized I had not been eating right.





We live in a time when soda pop is cheaper than bottled water. In Alaska, milk can cost \$8 a gallon. It's cheaper to drink Tang or Kool-Aid. Poverty plays an integral part in the diabetes epidemic.

We must change the tide of diabetes. We cannot continue on this course, or we will be the only generation to be burying both our children and our grandchildren. The issue is huge. Poverty, toxic food, fast foods, school vending machines, youth obesity. The people controlling the funding for diabetes programs need to know that diabetes will not be resolved overnight. First and foremost, we need to continue funding diabetes prevention education. Then we

need to prevent diabetes complications.

When I am talking to Congress about diabetes funding, I think of Native people who have spoken to me about diabetes. I think of my uncle, one of the happiest, healthiest persons I have ever known. He got diabetes, became angry and frustrated, lost a leg, then died. Then, I think of my grandfather, wearing traditional regalia, 160 pounds of all lean. He ate no toxic food. He did not have diabetes.

When I go before Congress, I think of our healthy ancestors. I think of my uncle and myself. We thought we were healthy, but modern-day foods and lifestyle

took their toll. But most of all, I think of our children and grandchildren. I see too much inactivity, too much obesity. This is my biggest fear, and my biggest motivator. At the same time, I look around my community, and I see people walking "the loop." I see more traditional foods at gatherings. I see families walking on beaches, digging clams.

Alaska Natives and all Native people have a unified voice. We stand united, focused on diabetes prevention and wellness for our children and grandchildren. All of us have important roles to play to stop the diabetes epidemic. We can spread the message: Have a healthy lifestyle, and above all, have a love of life. ❖