

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PURPOSE

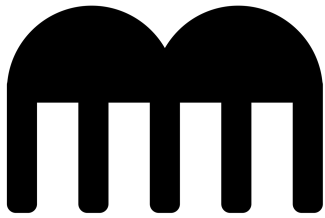
The National Indian Health Board developed the Tribal Prenatal-to-Three Policy Agenda to raise awareness regarding the most impactful and culturally appropriate policy levers and strategies to support American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) health and wellbeing in the earliest years of life, from the prenatal period through age 3. These recommendations chart a path forward to health equity and improved outcomes for AI/AN families, infants, and toddlers.

## CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

Several core principles and values guided the development of this policy agenda, including ensuring that the resulting resources and recommendations:

- Honor Tribal sovereignty
- Build on a variety of knowledge sources, including lived experience, Indigenous knowledges, academic literature, and others
- Take a holistic, intergenerational, and strengths-based approach
- Reflect Indigenous perspectives and uses the Indigenous Determinants of Health as a guiding framework

Taking a collaborative approach to policy, NIHB conducted a series of interviews, roundtables, document reviews, and Tribal listening sessions to gather input, recommendations, wisdom, and expertise from Tribes across the country and Tribal subject matter experts in a wide range of critical disciplines. We have made every effort to ensure the following recommendations are truly Tribally led and authentically reflect the priorities, perspectives, and needs of Indian Country. At the same time, we acknowledge that AI/AN communities across the country are diverse and face wide-ranging circumstances, in addition to a continually evolving policy landscape. Therefore, this policy agenda is not the final word on any of these topics, but instead represents a robust starting point for equitable and effective policymaking.



### FIVE POLICY GOALS

#### 1. Protect Tribal Sovereignty and Self-Determination

Tribal sovereignty – the inherent right of Tribal nations to self-govern – is the foundation of advancing health equity for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Many of the current issues Tribal communities and families face are rooted in colonization and a history of paternalistic federal policy. Emphasizing Tribal sovereignty and self-determination are essential for healing from this harmful legacy and setting a more equitable, effective path forward.

#### 2. Invest Equitable Resources and Funding.

Tribes have been starved for funding and resources for centuries as federal policy created conditions of scarcity in Tribal communities. For any chance of widespread improvement in outcomes for children prenatal to three, large-scale investment into Tribes must be a top priority.

#### 3. Address Trauma and Strengthen Connection to Culture

Trauma is a root cause of many issues facing Tribal families, communities, parents, and children. At the same time, connection to culture has been found to be a powerful component in building resilience and healing from trauma. To move forward in protecting Native kids in infancy and early childhood, we will need to prevent trauma currently caused or worsened by many systems, support healing from previous trauma (including historical, intergenerational, and individual), and build resilience through the strength of culture.

#### 4. Support Family-Centered Systems

Services and systems Native families must navigate can be complex, stressful, and even traumatic. These barriers can prevent accessing essential care and services young families need. More Tribal control over programs and more flexibility given to Tribes in administering these programs can make these systems easier and more family-friendly to navigate. We can improve health and wellness outcomes for families and young children by designing services, programs, and systems to intentionally prioritize meeting the needs of families, rather than the convenience of funders.

#### 5. Empower Tribal Voice in State and Federal Governance

Federal and state agencies administer programs and make policy choices that have immense impact on Tribes. Tribes must have a voice in these decisions. Improved state-Tribe and federal-Tribe relations can go a long way to supporting the policies and infrastructure needed to support Native families and improve health and wellbeing in early childhood.