

Topic 8 – Federal and State Policy

Key federal and state policies that affect early childhood development in Indian country

- The large gap in federal funding, and figuring out what the tribal need is.
- There is a lack of data to get more specific about the need.
- Making sure that federal and state policies are transparent. Tribes need to know how much flexibility they have with various policies.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education recently released [guidance and tools](#) on the value of teaching in more than one language.
- The Native Language Immersion Act facilitates creating Native language immersion programs in Bureau of Indian Education schools.
- There was a cap on payment to tribes for Head Start and child care, but that is now removed. Home visiting has a similar issue. Tribes have an opportunity to demonstrate the need for home visiting to make the case for more funding. Generally speaking, instead of a cap on grants and other funds set aside for tribes, make it a floor/minimum.
- Sen. Tester Bill: Implementing a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (taking the Tribal Early Learning Model into legislation). Tribal communities need to know their needs, such as those in workforce development.

Changes in federal and state policies that would positively impact early childhood development in Indian country

- Conduct a survey of what data currently exists to learn about what data are available and what datasets are shared. Also develop a template for tribal-level data gathering. Tribes could use help with data collection.
- Promote policy of state gaming revenues going to tribes instead of the state general fund.
- Tribal Grant Reviewers – in the process have a balance of reviewers.
- Need to make sure policymakers understand the value of rooting education in Native culture. Much of the current system is designed to make Native students like the majority culture.
- Federal government can provide clarification on how language immersion can operate in Head Start centers. For example, it is possible to renegotiate Head Start grants to include costs for additional expenses related to language immersion. Head Start provides assistance to centers on management issues.
- Develop effective communication channels for programs to engage federal and state government agencies. One program director noted that she was encouraged to go around the local manager to voice her concern at a higher level which helped address the issue, but it can alienate the local manager and create strain in the relationship. Clear communication channels, particularly to voice concerns, can help everyone in the process.
- Provide more clarity on how policies are tied to funding streams; sorting out how much flexibility is allowed. Policies can potentially be interpreted more broadly. If there is not a program regulation that limits an action, the default position is that you can do it. Need outreach to make sure tribes understand this.
- Many children are not in licensed child care. It is important there are initiatives to reach family, friend, and neighbor care providers to encourage quality.

- Develop an economic development strategy to support facilities.
- Need to build a pathway for Infant Mental Health/Early Intervention.
- Provide assistance with budgeting and develop pathways for start-up programs.
- As more requirements are placed on child care programs to boost quality, also provide funding to cover the cost of the quality enhancements.

How communities can impact changes in these policies

- Engage universities and other stakeholders. Work with them to develop models and templates.
- Use technical assistance in Tribal Early Learning Communities.
- Tribes can advocate for changes in points and preferences for tribal communities.
- Bring federal and state leaders to tribal communities so they can see programs in action firsthand and the need for more funding.
- Advocate for policy change to give preference to tribes, as tribes have greater need. Tribes need to make the case. Data can show both challenges and successes.
- Identify the data sets tribes need to make the case for early childhood development funding and other support in Indian country.
- Develop a collective strategy to Congress on how tribes can ask for more funding.
- Use the Tribal Consultation process to provide feedback on policies and funding.
- Find ways to address health and social costs through culturally sensitive programs. For example, to address diabetes, which has specific explicit costs, work with communities on producing and preparing traditional foods, which also supports tribal food sovereignty.