

Oklahoma Tribal State Relations Workgroup

Mission: To create the infrastructure to support a mutually beneficial government to government relationship between the state and tribes that is based on sovereign equality and includes urban and rural Indian programs as partners to promote the wellness of all tribal people in a holistic and strength-based way. The subsequent outcome of this work is to develop and implement a unified and integrated behavioral health services system for all Oklahomans.

What is the Tribal-State Relations Workgroup and why is it important?

The Tribal-State Relations Workgroup serves as a platform to engage the tribal serving agencies/governments and state governments to effectively provide Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

States and Indian tribes have a range of common interests. Both states and tribes have a shared responsibility to use public resources effectively and efficiently; both seek to provide comprehensive services such as education, health care and law enforcement to their respective citizens; and both have interconnected interests in safeguarding the environment while maintaining healthy and diversified economies (NCAI, 2006).

The state of Oklahoma and more than 38 tribal governments are expected to protect the health, safety and welfare of their citizens. By keeping these objectives in mind, both entities may realize that they have more in common than in conflict and that coordination and cooperation between states and tribes can be beneficial to all.

If legislators are uninformed, or misinformed, about the unique status and concerns of Indian communities, those communities may not be adequately served. Correspondingly, state lawmakers will want to be aware of the effects legislation can have on American Indian constituents. Both states and tribes-and the citizens who inevitably travel between the jurisdictions of these governments benefit immensely from respectful and open government-to-government relationships between state and tribal governments (NCAI, 2006).

Although direct government-to-government relations with the federal government remain a fundamental principle of the trust relationship, it is important that tribes recognize the benefits of understanding state governmental processes and potential avenues for collaboration. In a climate of increased devolution of federal programs, the need for intergovernmental coordination is an inevitable reality (NCAI, 2006).

State legislatures are responsible for appropriating funds for state programs that may be of benefit to tribes or to tribal members who also are citizens of the state. By increasing knowledge of how a state budget is allocated and how state legislatures operate and by building an open, working relationship with legislators who represent a tribal community's district, tribes can maximize the positive effects of state programs and services (NCAI, 2006).

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NCAI - Tribal State Relations. (2006). Retrieved June 29, 2006, from the National Congress of American Indians website: <http://ncai.org/State-Tribal-Relations.92.0.html>

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