

# **Health Equity in Indian Country:** Rethinking How CMS Approaches Health Equity for American Indians and Alaska Natives

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NATIONAL INDIAN HEALTH BOARD



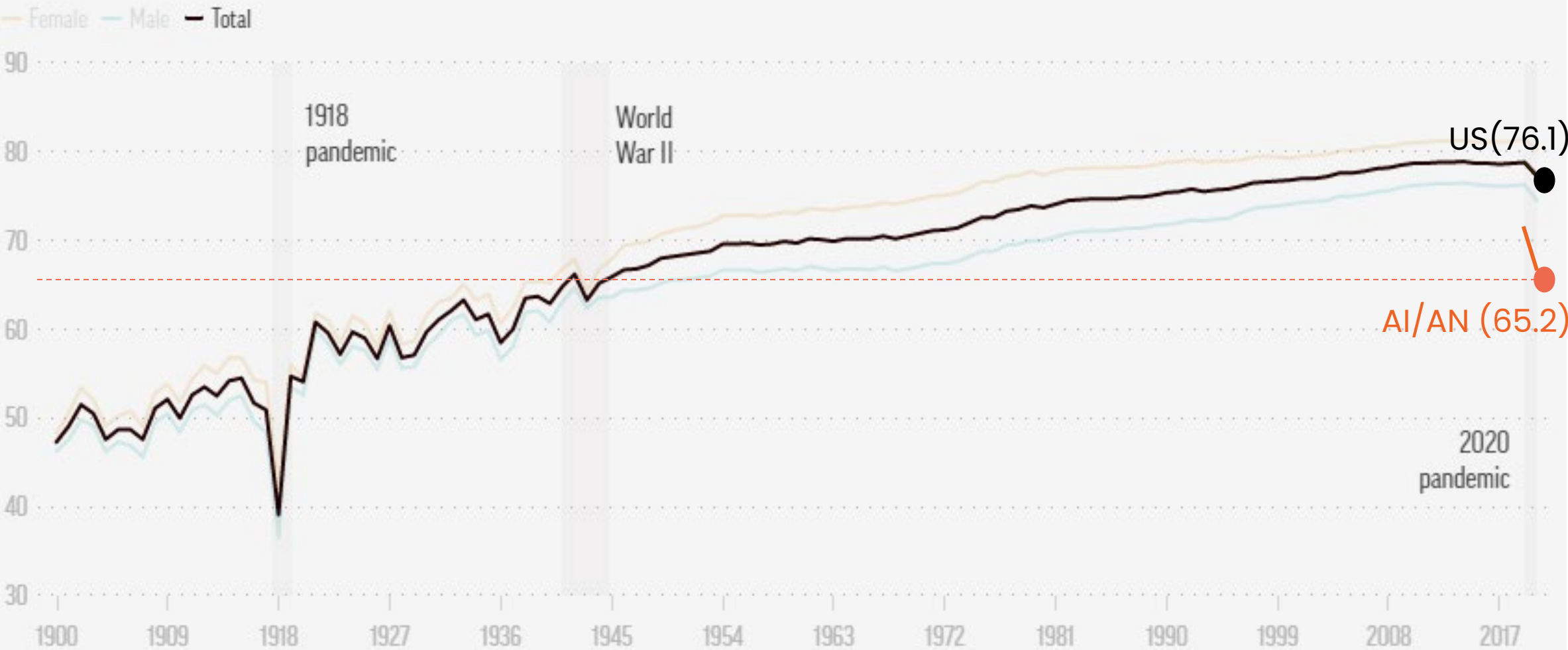
HEALTH

EQUITY

CONFERENCE

# U.S. life expectancy

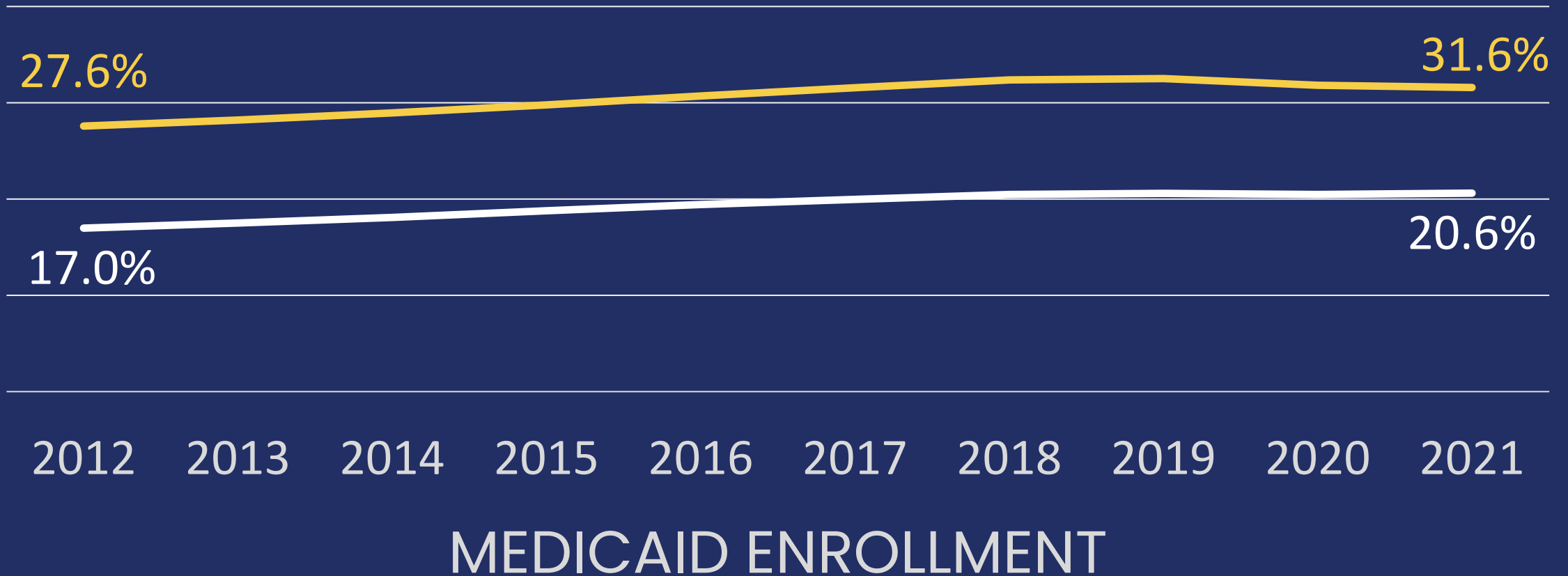
Life expectancy is a calculation of how long a baby born in a given year is expected to live on average.



Source: NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality



**American Indians/Alaska Natives** are more likely than the overall **US population** to be **enrolled in Medicaid**.



# Health equity is a priority at CMS...

“Health equity means the attainment of the highest level of health for all people, where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their optimal health regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, preferred language, or other factors that affect access to care and health outcomes.”

– CMS Definition of Health Equity

CMS Framework for Health Equity 2022–2032



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## ...but dominant perspectives of health equity don't tell the whole story.

## Priority 1:

Expand the Collection,  
Reporting, and Analysis  
of Standardized Data



## Priority 2:

Assess Causes of Disparities  
Within CMS Programs, and  
Address Inequities in Policies  
and Operations to Close Gaps



## Priority 3:

Build Capacity of Health  
Care Organizations  
and the Workforce to  
Reduce Health and  
Health Care Disparities



## Priority 4:

Advance Language Access,  
Health Literacy, and the Provision



## Priority 5:

Increase All Forms  
of Accessibility to  
Health Care Services  
and Coverage



**CMS Framework for  
Health Equity Priorities**



# Gaps in the Framework

CMS Framework for  
Health Equity Priorities

Accountability

## Priority 1:

Expand the Collection,  
Reporting, and Analysis  
of Standardized Data

Strengths,  
assets,  
and  
resilience

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Tribal  
visibility

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Justice

# Gaps in the Framework

CMS Framework for  
Health Equity Priorities

Accountability

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Strengths,  
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Priority 2:

Assess Causes of Disparities  
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Self-  
determination

Priority 3:

Build Capacity of Health  
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and the Workforce to  
Reduce Health and  
Health Care Disparities

Federal trust  
responsibility

Priority 4:

Advance Language Access,  
Health Literacy, and the Provision

Unique  
legal and  
political  
status

Tribal  
visibility

Priority 5:

Increase All Forms  
of Accessibility to  
Health Care Services  
and Coverage

Justice

Unique  
Indian  
health  
system





WHAT ABOUT TRIBAL PERSPECTIVES OF HEALTH EQUITY?

# NIHB & CMS HOSTED 3 TRIBAL HEALTH EQUITY EVENTS IN 2022

## May: Inter-Tribal World Café on Health Equity

- Foundations of health equity in Indian Country
- Key drivers of health inequities for AI/AN

## August: National Tribal Health Equity Summit

- What does health equity mean from a Tribal perspective?
- What is unique about working towards health equity in Indian Country?

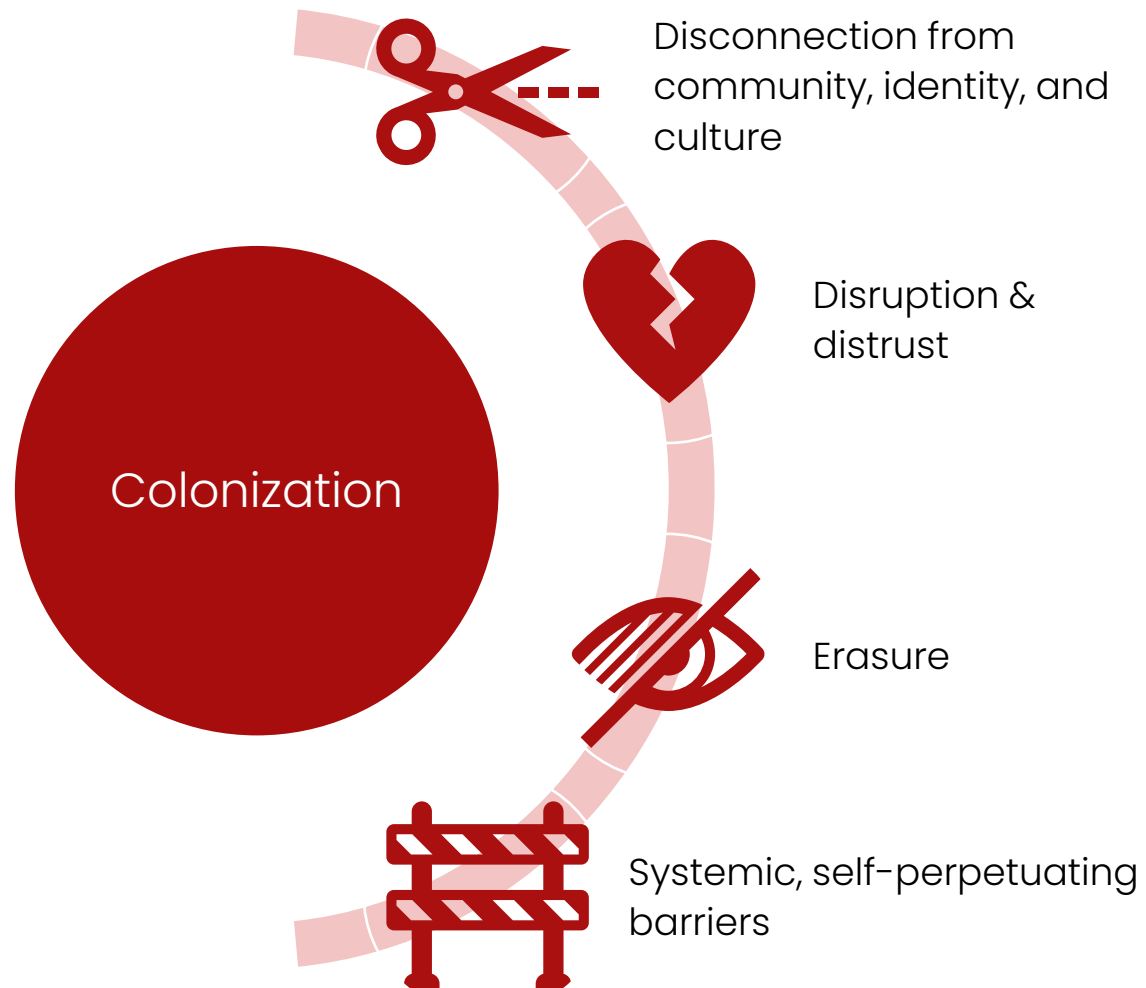
## September: CMS Listening Session

- Specific feedback on the CMS Framework for Health Equity
- Rethinking how CMS approaches health equity for AI/AN



FINDINGS

# KEY DRIVERS OF AI/AN HEALTH INEQUITIES



Inequities in health outcomes  
for American Indians and Alaska  
Natives:



**AI/AN life expectancy is  
now 11 years less than for  
the general American  
population**

# A PATH TO HEALTH EQUITY FOR AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES

## 9 ESSENTIAL PRIORITIES



# 1

## CENTER TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY AND THE NATION-TO-NATION RELATIONSHIP

- Respecting and upholding Tribal sovereignty must come first and foremost in any health equity work in Indian Country.
- Federal health equity initiatives must flow through the appropriate diplomatic channels that respect the authority of Tribal governments.
- “American Indian and Alaska Native” is a political status, not a racial group.



# 2

## PRIORITIZE FULFILLMENT OF THE FEDERAL TRUST RESPONSIBILITY

- Dedication to fulfilling the trust responsibility advances health equity.
- This obligation to ensure the health and wellbeing of AI/ANs extends across all federal agencies, including CMS.

# RECOGNIZE THAT TRIBES HOLD THE ANSWERS TO TRIBAL HEALTH EQUITY

3

- Connection to community and culture is among the most powerful drivers for good health and resilience for AI/AN people.
- Recognize that Tribes and Tribal programs have the knowledge, expertise, and authority to design and deliver services in ways best suited for their people, building on cultural strengths and traditions.
- Health equity requires a strengths-based approach.
- Framework priorities should include identifying, utilizing, and cultivating the health assets and strengths of communities and individuals.

# SUPPORT TRIBAL INSTITUTIONS

## 4

- A strong Indian healthcare system is necessary to achieve health equity for AI/ANs.
- Longstanding inequities in funding, resources, systems, and structures related to the Indian health system have contributed to the inequities in health outcomes.
- CMS policies that effectively support population health in most contexts may become detrimental within the special circumstances of the Indian health system.
- Listen to recommendations from the CMS Tribal Technical Advisory Group and Indian health care providers to understand how CMS policies and programs interact with the Indian health system, and how they can better serve AI/ANs.

# DISRUPT STRUCTURES OF INEQUITY AND SHIFT THE BALANCE OF POWER

5

- Colonization built structures of power that excluded and disadvantaged Tribes.
- Undoing centuries of harm to AI/ANs requires dedication to rebuilding relationships and trust among governments and purposeful inclusion of Tribes in decision-making.
- Prioritize timely, meaningful Tribal consultation & ensure states' Tribal consultations on CMS programs are timely & meaningful.
- Expand opportunities for Tribal self-governance in CMS programs.

# INCREASE VISIBILITY OF AMERICAN INDIANS & ALASKA NATIVES

6

- Colonization aimed to erase AI/AN peoples and cultures.
- As long as AI/ANs continue to be unseen, the inequities will continue.
- Federal agencies like CMS must take active measures to ensure AI/AN people and Tribes are visible in two critical arenas: policy creation and data.

# HEAL BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS

- Make an explicit effort to address systemic racism in CMS policies and operations – including in programs run through states.
- Address the ongoing harm of historical and intergenerational trauma in Tribal communities.
- Recognize the historical, political, legal, and cultural context of health inequities and the communities experiencing them.
- Focus on systemic changes that will improve health and well-being for the next seven generations.





# 8

## FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTEDNESS

- Health equity is complex and requires a broad vision and a holistic approach.
- Social Determinants of Health look different from a Tribal perspective.
- Strong relationships are key to advancing health equity.

# HONOR INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

9

- Indigenous knowledge holds tremendous value in insight, perspective, and understandings of health and healing.
- Indigenous knowledge represents a critical part of connection to culture and is essential for healing individuals and communities.
- Reimburse for traditional healing services.
- Set a standard for cultural humility across CMS programs and staff.



DECEMBER 01, 2022

## White House Releases First-of-a-Kind Indigenous Knowledge Guidance for Federal Agencies



CEQ

NEWS & UPDATES

PRESS RELEASES

"If you're going to address equity issues, **you're going to have to deal with Indian people differently than you've done in the past.** You're going to have to do something structurally different... You're going to have to treat Tribal governments, Tribal programs from a different standpoint."

# CONTACT

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National Indian  
Health Board



THANK YOU

The background is composed of several geometric shapes. On the left, there is a large orange rectangle. To its right is a vertical light blue bar. Further right is a large yellow shape with a curved edge. At the bottom, there are dark blue shapes, including a semi-circle on the left and a larger curved shape on the right. A white semi-circle is also visible in the upper right area.