

NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL CONCEPT CLEARANCE

Date of Council: May 2020

Title of Initiative: Resource Center for the Tribal Epidemiology Centers (RC-TEC)

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Objectives: This initiative will support a resource center to enhance the capacity of the Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs) to collect or compile data that can be used in health research and/or to directly engage in health research focused on American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations and to develop research capacity among early-stage investigators based in the TECs.

Background: There are approximately 5.6 million individuals who self-identify as AI/AN, and there are 574 federally recognized tribes and many state-recognized tribes. While characterized by many strengths and resiliencies, as a whole, AI/AN populations experience significant disparities compared with the general population across a range of health conditions and outcomes, including infant mortality, alcohol-related mortality, tobacco smoking, accidental overdose, unintentional injury, homicide, suicide, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, obesity, chronic kidney disease, asthma, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, selected cancers, and other chronic diseases. However, significant gaps in data and knowledge about the health of AI/AN populations remain.

TECs are ideally positioned to contribute significantly to the evidence base and scientific research literature on AI/AN health. Established in 1996 under the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) and funded by the Indian Health Service (IHS), TECs serve AI/AN communities and populations through the collection and analysis of health surveillance data, maintenance of patient registries, implementation and evaluation of public health interventions, development of health awareness campaigns, and mobilization of emergency response to public health crises. There are currently 12 TECs nationwide (see <https://tribalepicenters.org/12-tecs/>) that serve AI/AN populations within the 12 IHS administrative areas, as well as urban AI/ANs across the nation.

Each TEC serves multiple tribal communities or urban AI/AN populations within a geographic region. TECs generally fall under the umbrella of a state or regional AI/AN Indian health board or tribal health consortium that reflects partnerships with tribal leadership, health care organizations, and community-based organizations. Each TEC is specifically supported to collect data and implement public health programs responsive to the needs and priorities of AI/AN populations within its region.

TECs have much of the necessary infrastructure to conduct research, including community partnerships, avenues for gathering stakeholder perspectives, and access to local health data. However, research is not one of their primary functions. TECs vary in the availability and expertise of scientific staff to conduct research projects. Although some TEC directors have PhDs, many have an M.P.H. or other master's degree and may lack the methodological training to conduct and report research results. Some TECs have been collaborators on NIH-funded center or research grants, while others have been less involved in research activities. Nevertheless, all TECs have potential to further contribute to research efforts with AI/AN populations, either by directly conducting research or

collaborating on research projects with external researchers or by generating or compiling high-quality data that can be analyzed by researchers or used to inform research questions and research hypotheses.

NIMHD has historically provided support for the TEC program through the IHS in the form of administrative supplements to each TEC through an Intra-Departmental Delegation of Authority (IDDA). In order to better connect this support with NIMHD's mission and priorities, this initiative will support a resource center to enhance the capacity of the TECs to collect or compile data that can be used in health research and/or to directly engage in health research and to develop research capacity among early-stage investigators based in the TECs. This initiative is complementary to NIMHD's funding opportunity announcement [PAR-17-484](#): Collaborative Minority Health and Health Disparities Research with Tribal Epidemiology Centers (R01 Clinical Trial Not Allowed). It is expected that the resource center will contribute to an increased volume of applications submitted to this PAR (when it is reissued) and other relevant NIH funding opportunity announcements. This initiative has been discussed with the Director of the IHS and the Director of the NIH Tribal Health Research Office.

Description of Initiative: This initiative will support a single RC-TEC to provide data-related technical assistance, to develop research capacity among early-stage investigators based in the TECs, and to provide subawards to the 12 TECs.

Research Priorities: The RC-TEC is expected to engage in the following activities:

- Provide subawards directly to each TEC to enhance its capacity to engage in data collection, compilation, analysis, and reporting. These resources can be used to support personnel, training, and/or information technology infrastructure related to addressing the TEC's data needs.
- Provide technical assistance to the TECs regarding data collection, curation, and analysis through regularly scheduled and, as needed, consultation to individual TECs, as well as webinars or workshops available to all TECs.
- Offer a research skills development and sustained mentoring program for early-stage investigators based in or closely affiliated with a TEC through a competitive application process.
- Disseminate information about NIH and other federal research funding, training, and mentorship opportunities, and provide technical assistance to TECs on how to prepare applications for research grant funding.
- Maintain a list of shareable data resources generated by the TECs, as well as data sharing policies and requirements of the TECs, to foster collaboration across TECs and between TECs and external researchers. Because of issues related to tribal ownership of data and data privacy issues, TECs will not be responsible for maintaining data repositories.
- Maintain a compendium of publicly available resources generated by the TECs, including publications, reports, and public health campaign materials.
- Serve as a liaison between the TECs and external researchers interested in collaborative research.

Eligibility is open to all types of institutions. Applications are encouraged from institutions with current or past TEC awards or a history of collaboration with one or more TECs. Applicants are expected to document their experience working with tribal communities or organizations, including familiarity with tribal data policies, data use agreements, and institutional review boards (IRBs).

NIMHD

National Institute on Minority Health
and Health Disparities

Funding Mechanism: A cooperative agreement is proposed for this initiative. The cooperative agreement, rather than a grant, is the appropriate award instrument because of the anticipated involvement of NIMHD program staff with the RC-TEC.

