

# Indian Youth Suicide Prevention

Scurr, Sheri

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**From:** Stockwell, Hope  
**Sent:** Monday, April 18, 2016 11:10 AM  
**To:** Scurr, Sheri  
**Subject:** Indian youth suicide prevention funding

Hi, Sheri,

Attached is the letter that STRC wrote to DPHHS Director Opper regarding the agency's plan for using the \$250,000 appropriated by the 2015 legislature for Indian youth suicide prevention. Also attached is Dir. Opper's response.



STRC-Suicide-Pr... 4.8.16 letter to  
Chairman Wind...

The STRC has followed this funding closely, receiving updates at each of its meetings. On March 23 in Box Elder, Lesa Evers, tribal relations manager at DPHHS, said that after completing its tribal consultations the department intended to use the funding as follows:

- \$100,000 to hire a contractor to form a coalition of tribal and urban Indian stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for suicide prevention;
- Approximately \$130,000 would remain and its use would be directed by the coalition, potentially for direct grants to prevention programs;
- I believe the remainder will go to agency overhead costs.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Hope

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**State-Tribal Relations Committee**  
**64th Montana Legislature**

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Helena, MT 59620-1706  
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LAURA SANKEY, Staff Attorney  
LAURA SHERLEY, Secretary

March 24, 2016

Richard Opper, Director  
Department of Public Health and Human Services  
PO Box 4210  
Helena, MT 59604-4210

Dear Director Opper:

I write on behalf of the State-Tribal Relations Committee to strongly encourage you to reconsider the department's plan to hire a contractor with \$100,000 of the \$250,000 appropriated by the 2015 Legislature for Indian youth suicide prevention grants. We understand the contractor would be directed to form a coalition to develop a strategic plan. However, the STRC believes this money is better spent providing direct grants to tribes and other entities to support suicide prevention programs at the local level.

The STRC respects and appreciates the extensive effort that DPHHS made to consult with and get input from tribes and urban Indian stakeholders on how the funding should be used. While consensus was not found, the STRC heard loudly and repeatedly that direct grants are the preferred choice.

We recognize the monumental challenge of suicide prevention. There is no key. It will take a multi-faceted approach like the grassroots programs designed by tribes and other entities to respond to the specific needs of their Indian communities. Therefore, the STRC believes this funding is best spent in support of those programs, especially those with a holistic, culturally- and/or spiritually-based approach.

With the decline in oil and gas revenues, the state budget is expected to be tight in the 2017 Legislature. It is easy to imagine additional funding will not be available.

Director, please don't lose this opportunity to most effectively and efficiently use the 2015 funding. We urge you to reconsider the department's proposed direction and focus on direct grants. We ask the department to collect data on and measure the success of programs that receive grants in order to report their progress to the 2017 Legislature.

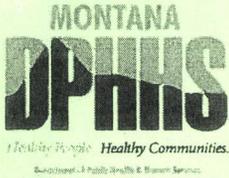
Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Windy Boy".

Senator Jonathan Windy Boy, Chairman

cc: Governor Bullock  
Lesa Evers

CI0106 6085hsxa.



# Department of Public Health and Human Services

Director's Office ♦ PO Box 4210 ♦ Helena, MT 59620 ♦ (406) 444-5622 ♦ Fax: (406) 444-1970 ♦ www.dphhs.mt.gov

Steve Bullock, Governor

Richard H. Opper,  
Director

April 8, 2016

Senator Jonathan Windy Boy  
Chairman  
State Tribal Relations Committee  
PO Box 201706  
Helena MT 59620-1706

**Re: American Indian Youth Suicide Prevention Appropriation**

Dear Chairman Windy Boy:

Thank you for your letter of March 24, 2016 on behalf of the State Tribal Relations Interim Legislative Committee in which you requested that the Department reconsider our approach on how the American Indian Youth Suicide Prevention funds are invested.

For far too long Montana has held a top five spot nationally in regards to suicide rates. Governor Bullock recognized that when he requested funds in his budget to begin focusing on reducing suicides among American Indian youth. Once the appropriation was made by the 2015 Legislature, the Department of Public Health and Human Services began to work methodically towards its implementation. I agree with you that it will take a multifaceted approach to address the high rates of suicide across the State of Montana, including Indian Country.

As shared with you during the Department's update to the State Tribal Relations Committee on March 23, 2016 in Box Elder, the Department made a significant effort to seek guidance through feedback, ideas and comments in several different arenas over the past several months. That effort has included visits by me and several of my staff to all eight tribal governing bodies at their tribal headquarters, many one-on-one conversations with key tribal government and health department representatives, a formal tribal consultation, and additional opportunities for our partners to provide comments verbally and in writing. This extensive consultation was very valuable to us and we are grateful for the many tribal and urban representatives who engaged with the Department to assist our efforts in getting to this point.

Although comments varied widely and there was not a unanimous decision, what did emerge was a desire to not only involve and engage youth but to use this unique opportunity to work toward a foundational change utilizing a strategic approach. We believe our approach to investing the funding honors the extensive feedback we received from our partners and will

complement the work that is already being done in tribal communities. We have confidence that the local level will be included with the involvement of tribal and urban representatives who will be a part of the coalition. We have also built in some flexibility in that once the strategic plan is developed, implementation could include direct grants to tribes and urban organizations.

Although it is our intention to implement as originally planned, I appreciate the committee's strong interest in this very important issue and am encouraged by your support for addressing our American Indian youth suicide reduction efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard H. Opper", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard H. Opper, Director  
Montana DPHHS