

Zika Summit in Louisiana Brings Together Tribes and their State and Local Partners



Communicating, coordinating, and collaborating with adjacent or overlapping governments can be daunting in the best of situations. Collaboration becomes especially complex when those partnerships get tested in public health emergency situations. Many Tribal governments face additional challenges, including the need to educate state and local partners on Tribal sovereignty, jurisdiction, and the status Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs) hold as public health authorities. Nevertheless, Tribal-State-Local partnerships are valuable and important - especially for emerging issues like Zika which can require emergency response as well as interdepartmental and cross-jurisdictional cooperation.

Keeping in mind that disease knows no boundaries and much public health work is local, the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) and United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. (USET) hosted a Zika Summit, focused on collaboration with a theme of "Ensuring Healthy Tribes through State and Local Partnership" February 27-28 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Nearly 40 state, local, and Tribal representatives came together during this day-and-a-half event to learn about and discuss collaborative efforts to address Zika and other vector-borne diseases and ways to increase collaboration between Tribal, state, and local partners. Attendees stressed the potential benefits of partnership including the increased ability to share information and resources, to avoid duplication and waste, and to allow all stakeholders to contribute to program design.

NIHB led interactive activities designed to clarify values, discuss barriers to collaboration and possible solutions, and workshop through potential Zika scenarios that might affect Tribal communities in Louisiana. USET described Tribal health systems and the role of TECs to help non-Tribal staff better understand the Tribal health/public health framework. The Louisiana Department of Health staff discussed non-Tribal public health systems for Tribal attendees and

also provided information about Zika and other vector-borne diseases. The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) presented about partnerships and collaboration.

Participants shared best practices and identified opportunities for improvement that could lead to more successful communication, coordination, and collaboration including:

- Ensure contact lists are up-to-date
- Be consistent, transparent, and fair
- Learn about each other - ask about needs and priorities, look at the data that does exist
- Build relationships and consider phone or in-person meetings
- Spend time in partnership before urgent needs arise; for example, work together during "friendly events"
- Pair staff or liaisons at both Tribal and state/local level
- Attempt formal and informal contact in different ways when reaching out
- Use long term cross-jurisdictional sharing agreements
- Solidify shared goals and objectives
- Keep lines of communication open and ensure ongoing opportunities for discussion such as forums, summits, or partnership events

Over the next few months, working with our Area Indian Health Board partners, NIHB aims to host similar meetings in New Mexico and California. If you live or work in one of these states, please look out for additional information about these upcoming events.

To learn more about NIHB's Zika project, or to request technical assistance, please contact Angelica Colagreco, NIHB Public Health Project Coordinator at acolagreco@nihb.org or 202-507-4074 or visit the NIHB website [HERE](#)