

National Tribal Advisory Committee - Behavioral Health Workgroup

5 March 2026

1

Carol Larsen – CA National Tribal Committee Representative
Dominica Valencia – CA National Tribal Committee Representative
Karen Severns, Indian Health Services, Behavioral Health Consultant for IHS
California Area Office

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Today, we gather on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Pala Band of Mission Indians, who have stewarded this land for generations. We recognize their enduring connection ancestry and honor their ongoing presence and sovereignty.

We give them thanks and stand by those 400 plus Tribes who continue to fight for their sovereign lands here in California and across Turtle Island (North America).

Thank you!





4TH QUARTER MEETING

Announcements

- Dr. Loretta Christensen, CMO.
- Clayton Fulton – Chief of Staff (Acting Director Authority).
- Benjamin Smith returned to role as Deputy Director for Indian Health Services.
- OMB paid out EE salaries.
- 2026 monies good for Diabetes Facilities; retention concerns.
- Dec 5, 2025 submitted hiring plan for approval and posting of positions.



INDIAN HEALTH SERVICES BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

- Clinicians in billings, MT working on an initiative to get employee housing.
- Indian Health Behavioral Health scholarship opportunities are currently open.
- Realignment – tours, pick-up in January 2026; virtual consultation this month.
- New office Vets in HQ, 21 hospitals, CAO.
- Our relatives are dying; how will BHS be affected in the realignment? Stronger focus, not lost in med opt to share, can't do by ourselves (same goals, holistic & strongest).



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVES ACROSS THE U.S.

- Division of BHS 2I funding to integrate BH w/suicide.
- Crises Response Plan awardees-10.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

- **Questions were asked about the realignment process and Behavioral Health services.**
- **Lack of top leadership at the advisory meetings.**
- **Concerns regarding funding for Behavioral Health services.**
- **Concerns regarding crisis response teams related to suicide.**
- **Transportation remains a concern.**
- **Data sharing.**

CHAP SERVICES

- National IHS committee is working on policies for implementation at the National level in Indian Health Services.
- Technical Advisors include IHS BHS Consultants, University partners, Alaska and Portland Area staff who have implemented CHAP in their communities.
- The chapters and suggestions have been reviewed; review is half complete.

STAFFING CONCERNS

- Behavioral Health providers in IHS is at 43%.
- Cost of living is a concern.
- Lack of housing.
- Continual resolution for funding BHS services.
- Advanced appropriations for THS & BIA (6 accounts not covered).

SUICIDE PREVENTION & CARE

- CMS morbidity report.
- [CDC.gov/MMWR/volumes/741](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/741)
- Rates going down
- DBH released 4 actions
 1. Standard suicide screening (ASQ)
 2. 5-year strategic plan
 3. Crises response plans
 4. Mental health wellness to IHS staff.

1115 CA WAIVER PROGRAM

Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) 1115 Waiver Program.

Allows Tribal programs to bill the county at the IHS rate for Natural Helpers and Traditional Healers.

Problem: Not all counties are opting into the 1115 Waiver Program.

Call to Action: We are asking the State of California to honor their State to Tribal Government relationship.

THANK YOU

Carol Larsen – CA National Tribal Committee Representative

Dominica Valencia – CA National Tribal Committee Representative

Karen Severns, PsyD, MSW, LCSW, ACADC, LADAC, C.C.M.

Behavioral Health Consultant, California Area Office

Indian Health Services, Hemet, CA

karen.severns@ihs.gov

951-708-4054

ANY QUESTIONS??

