

Background Information for the Tribal Consultation and Urban Confer on the NIH IMPROVE Initiative Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence

Thursday, June 30, 2022 | 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. ET, Virtual

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

NIH's mission is to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability.

- NIH invests nearly \$50.54 billion¹ annually in medical research for the American people.
- NIH invested more than \$406 million in maternal health research in 2020, including \$223.5 million specifically for maternal morbidity and mortality research. This included research on diagnosing, treating, and preventing pregnancy complications as well as epidemiological studies of pregnancy-associated mortality.
- More than 80% of NIH's funding is awarded through almost 50,000 competitive grants to more than 300,000 researchers at more than 2,500 universities, medical schools, and research institutions in every state.
- About 10% of the NIH's budget supports projects conducted by nearly 6,000 scientists in its own laboratories, most of which are on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland.
- Located in Bethesda, Maryland, NIH is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is composed of the Office of the Director and 27 Institutes and Centers, many of which have an organ- or disease-specific focus.

Purpose of Consultation

NIH is focused on supporting research and projects that can increase our overall understanding of maternal morbidity and mortality and its effects on American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN). As NIH plans to expand the IMPROVE (Implementing a Maternal health and Pregnancy Outcomes Vision for Everyone) Initiative and establish Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence, it is critical that the agency receive Tribal input on how best to address the needs of AI/AN peoples. For instance, NIH wants to hear from Tribal leaders on how to encourage applications from AI/AN researchers interested in proposing a Native-focused center, including input on responsible data management and sharing practices and strategies. Such information will inform the development of the Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence funding opportunities, enabling NIH to support research that may save lives and improve well-being.

¹ This amount includes discretionary budget authority of \$50.54 billion, Program Evaluation financing totaling \$1.27 billion, and slightly over \$140 million for mandatory special type 1 Diabetes research. The total request also includes \$6.50 billion for an Administration initiative to create a new Advanced Research Project Agency for Health (ARPA-H). Visit the links on the Budget Request for more information on the NIH request.

IMPROVE Initiative Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence

Causes of maternal morbidity and mortality are multifaceted and vary widely by state and across populations, including among American Indians and Alaska Natives. NIH launched the IMPROVE Initiative in 2020 to help address this public health crisis. To date, it has supported research through supplements to existing awards on how to mitigate preventable maternal mortality, decrease severe maternal morbidity (SMM), and promote health equity. With this opportunity to expand the initiative, NIH seeks to build on and bolster community strengths to address maternal health.

NIH is working to establish Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence in geographically diverse regions and in partnership with communities that could benefit the most. These centers will investigate biological, behavioral, sociocultural, and structural risk factors and mechanisms of the leading causes of severe maternal morbidity and maternal mortality. Components of the Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence may include:

- Maternal Health Research Centers
- Data hub that would provide technical assistance around data collection and analysis and provide data sharing and coordination across centers and hubs to the extent possible
- Implementation science hub that could serve as an expert resource for the centers and other researchers and provide implementation science research training opportunities for a diverse cadre of researchers

Community partnerships are central to the development and success of the centers. NIH recognizes that there may be unique concerns for AI/AN communities regarding broad data sharing, including circumstances in which broad data sharing may not be appropriate.

Discussion

Some discussion questions to consider:

- How can the goals and objectives of the Centers of Excellence be inclusive of the needs of tribal communities?
- Are there research priorities or types/areas of research, e.g., culturally-based practices, that should be included to specifically address the needs of expectant mothers and their families in tribal communities?
- How can we better encourage and facilitate research partnerships with tribal communities on maternal health topics?
- What special considerations for tribes should be in place as we develop funding opportunities?
- How should the data hub for the Centers of Excellence be established to incorporate and sustain tribal sovereignty for data collected and stored?