



## **National Institutes of Health (NIH) Tribal Consultation on the Helping to End Addiction Long-term® (HEAL) Initiative**

**March 31, 2022 | 2:00 – 4:00 p.m., ET**

This document provides an overview for Tribal leaders and community members to participate in the upcoming NIH Tribal Consultation and Urban Confer on the [Helping to End Addiction Long-term® \(HEAL\) Initiative](#), a trans-agency effort to speed scientific solutions to stem the national opioid public health crisis. The initiative aims to reduce suffering due to opioids and chronic pain; curb the rates of opioid misuse, addiction and overdose; and achieve long-term recovery from opioid addiction. The consultation will be held on **Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup> from 2:00-4:00p.m., ET**. This Tribal Consultation session will be held as a web-based meeting.

### **National Institutes of Health (NIH)**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) 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. In FY2021, NIH invested nearly \$42 billion annually in biomedical research for the American people.

### **The Helping to End Addiction Long-term® Initiative**

The Helping to End Addiction Long-term® Initiative, or **NIH HEAL Initiative®**, is a bold and

innovative, trans-agency effort to speed scientific solutions to stem the national opioid public health crisis. Almost every NIH Institute and Center is accelerating research to address this public health emergency, supporting a variety of approaches to tackle the opioid epidemic including:

- Understanding, managing, and treating acute and chronic pain
- Improving prevention and treatment for opioid misuse and addiction

### **Purpose of Consultation**

NIH is focused on supporting research and the development of research infrastructure to aid American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) and their communities by identifying community relevant solutions to the opioid crisis, including reducing suffering due to chronic pain, opioid addiction, and by preventing overdose deaths. The purpose of this Consultation is to request input from Tribal Nations about their priority areas of research interest and research-related needs to address the opioid crisis and support new strategies to improve chronic pain management and opioid misuse, addiction, and overdose in AI/AN communities.

### **Background Information**

The opioid crisis is impacting all Americans, and tribal communities have previously indicated through Consultation (NIH, 2018) that discovering solutions to this crisis for their communities is a high priority. In continued follow-up to the actions initiated by that [Consultation](#), and acknowledging that the overdose crisis has continued to evolve, NIH is seeking further input on

this topic. The COVID-19 pandemic has stretched health care systems and created stress and uncertainty, including for AI/AN communities, with implications for the opioid crisis as well as for mental and physical health outcomes. We seek to understand emergent needs related to research to address the opioid crisis in this new context. In addition, approximately 50 million adults in the United States are affected by chronic pain. Previously identified strategies to address the crisis for all people include access to coordinated and appropriate chronic pain management; access to culturally appropriate addiction prevention and treatment; overdose prevention and reversal; and strategies to address accompanying mental and behavioral health issues that may increase risk for poor opioid outcomes. Through the Native American Research Centers for Health (NARCH) program, tribal led-research initiatives have explored plant-based therapeutics and pain outcomes. Culturally grounded strategies to address the opioid crisis are also ongoing through investigator initiated, community partnered research or are tribally led through the NARCH program. These studies integrate cultural knowledge to identify strengths and resiliencies that are essential to avoiding or recovering from addiction. They further consider the role of historical trauma and structural inequities in increasing risk and consider how these risk factors may be targeted through culturally grounded interventions to improve outcomes. While current research is making advances, AI/AN communities continue to work to develop novel solutions, informed by traditional knowledge, to further address this evolving crisis. Understanding how research can aid Tribes to further these solutions and how NIH can best partner to provide support for tribally led research to address this crisis is critical to ensure that the research, and programs such as HEAL, are relevant and benefit AI/AN communities.

**Some potential discussion items are identified below:**

1. What areas of research do you think are important to aid in addressing the opioid crisis? This may include research on chronic pain, opioid misuse, addiction, and overdose and other targets of research.
2. What research resources are needed to effectively and ethically conduct research with AI/AN communities responding to the opioid crisis?
3. Is there interest in including Traditional healing practices as part of new research approaches? How should it be approached (including studies investigating traditional healing practices for the prevention and treatment of chronic pain, opioid misuse, addiction, and overdose)?
4. If this is a research priority, what resources are needed to support research on Traditional healing practices and non-pharmacological therapies for chronic pain, opioid misuse, addiction, and overdose?
5. How could or should the impact of social, economic, and historical factors be included in research on chronic pain and accompanying conditions? For opioid misuse, addiction, and overdose?
6. Does the lack of availability of data hinder your ability to respond to the opioid crisis? What data would be most helpful?
7. What resources are needed to support research infrastructure for data collection and analysis, and research by Tribes to support programs to improve chronic pain management, reduce opioid misuse, addiction, or overdose?