



# *American Indian Health Commission for Washington State*

## **Traditional Healing**

For American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs), wellness is achieved through a balance between mind, body, and spirit. Today, many AI/AN patients consult with traditional healers and practitioners as part of their treatment and wellness plans, a fact recognized by the Indian Health Service (IHS) in its policy on traditional healing, which emphasizes the alliance of traditional and western medical practices.

The IHS Traditional Medicine Initiative conducted a series of discussion circles between 1995 and 1996 to seek input and guidance from healers and tribal members. Several key principles emerged during these discussions.

- Traditional beliefs are a way of life, and spirituality and healing are closely linked.
- Each tribe and culture must be respected and acknowledged as unique when advocating for traditional medicine.
- Tribes and local tribal members must determine who is a healer, and how and what a healer is compensated is a local issue to be determined by a family or tribe.
- It is each tribe's choice whether to approach and orient local health care providers about tribal and/or community culture and traditions.
- Each tribe should determine if and how traditional healers should be incorporated into the broader medical system.

AIHC supports the concept of traditional healing within the framework of Indian health care delivery systems and the principles of the IHS Traditional Medicine Initiative. It is clear based on comments received during the 2004 Tribal Leader Health Summit held on November 4 and 5 at the Upper Skagit Casino Resort that traditional healing issues need further examination and clarification within and among Washington tribes, and AIHC will seek to promote continued discussion with tribal leaders, health care providers, traditional healers, and community members to identify and address the barriers that prevent the integration of traditional healing with the rest of the Indian health care system.

### **Resources**

Indian Health Service Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program  
<http://www.ihs.gov/NonMedicalPrograms/HPDP/index.cfm?module=focus&option=traditional&newquery=1>

Association of American Indian Physicians  
<http://www.aaip.com/tradmed/>