

**American Indian Disparities Initiative  
Advisory Committee Meeting  
Summary of Recommendation, September 3, 2003**

The Advisory Committee for the American Indian Disparities Initiative previously identified recommendations related to the following 7 areas of practice in child welfare: prevention, intake/screening, assessment, emergency placement, extended voluntary/court ordered placements, case management services and systemic changes.

During the September 3rd, meeting, the committee expanded/clarified these recommendations, and include the following language for purposes of implementation.

**1. Prevention:**

The Committee recommends that Department of Human Services (DHS) emphasize the federal Indian Child Welfare Act and state Indian Family Preservation Act's requirement to use Active Efforts in case planning with American Indian children. To implement this recommendation DHS should:

- Collaborate with tribal and urban Indian social services agencies to define the parameters of active efforts.
- Develop a practice guide to address compliance with active efforts and to ensure that county agencies are taking the right steps to comply.
- Review its current Social Services Manual and include the expanded definitions in the manual.
- Develop and disseminate an informational bulletin to inform counties and tribes regarding the practice guide.
- Consult with county social services agencies and assess their ability/capacity to comply.
- Collaborate with county and tribal agencies to create the infrastructure, and build the county agencies' capacity to comply.

**2. Intake:**

The committee recommends that DHS develop a practical and rigorous method for counties to identify Indian children at the earliest point possible. To implement this recommendation DHS should:

- Ensure that methods for screening child protection reports should include categories that allow workers to collect the information necessary to comply. Revision of the SSIS system to enable documentation of such identification would be necessary. Tribes and urban social services agencies and rural and metro counties should be involved to ensure that revision of the electronic system is effective and can be managed by the county agencies.

- Appoint a statewide committee with county and tribal representation to ensure the development of culturally appropriate child protection screening criteria that is effectively, appropriately and consistently used by all county social service agencies system.

### **3. Assessment:**

Social workers need access to efficient systems that allow them to conduct effective screenings and assessments.

- Training should be provided to workers and supervisors to ensure effective use of screening criteria and SSIS systems.

### **4. Outcome measures:**

Title IV-B of the Social Security Act was amended in 1994 to require that states describe in their IV-B plan, after consultation with tribal organizations, specific measures taken to comply with ICWA and MIFPA. To implement this requirement, DHS should:

- Develop outcome and performance measures to evaluate county compliance with ICWA and MIFPA.
- Secure funding resources to convene regional forums to inform county social services agencies about compliance with ICWA. An advisory group should be formed to work on the logistics of this effort.
- County and tribal social services agencies should be invited to provide input into both of the efforts described above.

### **5. Alternative Response and ICWA:**

DHS, should clarify for county social services that compliance with the notice and other requirements of federal and state Indian child welfare laws applies to all child protection assessments involving Indian children regardless of whether they are alternative response or traditional. This information should be incorporated into DHS's informational bulletin on compliance with ICWA and MIFPA.

### **6. Emergency Placements**

DHS should establish clear guidelines and effective training for implementation of kinship care policy in both emergency and other placements of Indian children. DHS's practice guidelines and training should include steps for compliance with ICWA and techniques to assist the authority in identifying alternatives to institutional placements. DHS should work with the Supreme Court's Children's Justice Initiative to develop a practice protocol and training for county social workers and law enforcement regarding tribal social service resources and compliance with ICWA. The Supreme Court and DHS should work together to develop and promote alternative placement options for Indian children. County social workers and law enforcement officers need to receive training about a

greater range of alternatives for Indian children in lieu of placing children in shelters on emergency holds. Law enforcement should be encouraged to work with families, tribes and the Indian community to meet the best interest of Indian children.

## **7. Case Management/Services:**

DHS's practice guidelines and training should include steps for compliance with ICWA and techniques to assist the authority in identifying alternatives to institutional placements. In collaboration with tribal social services, DHS needs to identify successful programs, tools and models to implement effective cultural practices, recruitment of foster families and compliance with ICWA/MIFPA.

## **8. Systemic:**

To reduce the disparities in the rate of placement of Indian children in foster care, DHS needs to involve tribal organizations in all aspects of case planning. DHS should:

- Develop clear outcome measures related to ICWA compliance and adherence to service outcomes described in the state's Title IVB plan.
- Revise the SSIS system to include better procedures to document the identification of Indian children. Procedures for ICWA/MIFPA compliance should be clearly documented on SSIS throughout all county processes when they involve an Indian child.
- Work with tribal organizations to develop infrastructures that enhance their capacity to meet the best interest of Indian children and to provide a continuum of services that ensure safety, permanency and wellbeing for Indian children.