

Tribal Opioid Summit focuses on fentanyl crisis

The synthetic and deadly drug fentanyl has been a crisis and plague across Indian Country for some years now, emerging just before the covid pandemic, which only served to make the problem even worse.

In fact since 2019—the year when the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board first produced their Tribal Opioid Response: A National Strategic Agenda—across Indian Country by far more tribal members have died from fentanyl than from covid; and the deaths overwhelmingly have been among the younger generation.

Last month, the NW Portland Area Indian Health Board hosted the National Tribal Opioid Summit in Tulalip, Washington. More

than 1,400 people were on hand for the summit, including tribal representatives from across the nation, health workers, law enforcement, federal officials including the director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

From Warm Springs, a team of more than 20 people participated, from Health and Human Services, Tribal Council and Public Safety. The first day of the summit was devoted to more clearly defining the problem, with testimony from people whose lives have been effected by the drug.

"There were many stories of pain and trauma, and post-traumatic stress disorder," said Caroline Cruz, general manager of the Warm Springs tribes' Health and Human Services Branch. As

the summit continued over the next few days, the testimonials continued, demonstrating "the grieving and hurt, and the loss in Indian Country because of fentanyl," Ms. Cruz said.

The fentanyl crisis is somewhat different from past drug epidemics—methamphetamines, for instance—that have appeared in tribal communities. The reason for this is the deadly nature of fentanyl itself, Ms. Cruz said.

The street drug is a synthetic opioid, manufactured in illegal labs, that is 50 times stronger than heroin. Fentanyl made illegally may be cut with any number of unknown substances—horse tranquilizer, for instance—that are themselves deadly. And people selling other illegal drugs may cut the

other drug with fentanyl, rendering all illegal drug sales now potentially lethal transactions.

As an opioid like heroin, fentanyl is obviously addictive. However, unlike alcohol, methamphetamines or even less potent opioids, addiction to fentanyl is in many cases not even the problem, because the drug easily leads to overdose and death.

"It shuts down the body," Ms. Cruz explained. "The brain no longer tells the body to do its functions like breathing, and the person dies. That's what overdosing is."

The trauma caused by fentanyl to individuals and families across Indian Country was very evident at the National Tribal Opioid Summit. After the opening day of the gathering, when people were in-

vited to share their mostly harrowing and heart-breaking experiences, the summit agenda called for discussion of topics such as solution strategies and policy recommendations. Much of the discussion, though, continued to focus on personal past experiences, and the trauma that continues.

Jaycelene Brisbois is the Opioid Prevention Coordinator with the Warm Springs Prevention Team.

The team offices are located in the former elementary school building. Please reach out to Jaycelene for any specific or general questions, or concerns about this problem. Prevention also offers training in the administration of Norcan, the emergency overdose response treatment.



Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon

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Public Service Announcement

Urgent Message: Combatting the Fentanyl Epidemic in Warm Springs, August 2023

Dear Warm Springs Community,

The Fentanyl crisis is escalating, threatening us all. Fentanyl, a potent synthetic opioid, endangers lives. We must unite to save our loved ones. Fentanyl is 100x stronger than morphine, often mixed with other drugs. One pill can kill....

Local Statistical Information: Of the overdose calls made to the Warm Springs Police Department between 2019-2023: 92% of overdose calls are related to fentanyl use, with 14% of overdose calls are related to other prescription or non-prescription medication.

• ACT NOW:

Stay Informed: Educate yourself and family about Fentanyl's risks, overdose signs, and responses. The Warm Springs Prevention Team has educational information available, and can be contacted at [541-615-0116](tel:541-615-0116).

Speak Up: Report suspicions about dangerous drugs or activities. Save lives. Call the Warm Springs Police Department at [541-553-1171](tel:541-553-1171) or report anonymously to the Warm Springs Police tip line at [541-553-2202](tel:541-553-2202).

Stay Watchful: Pay attention to unusual behavior, report drug activity, aid law enforcement by sharing information.

Spread Awareness: Share with family, friends, neighbors for collective impact on the dangers of this drug.

Support Available: If you or a loved one want help reach out to addiction treatment centers, counseling, and community groups. Resources in Warm Springs is CTWS' Tribal Behavioral Health Center [541-553-3205](tel:541-553-3205), and Indian Health Services [541-553-1196](tel:541-553-1196).

Unity Empowers: Together, we can help safeguard our community from this drug, but it will take working together as a community. Open dialogue, education, report drug activity to police—keys to success.

If you suspect or know someone is experiencing an overdose **CALL 9-1-1** this is an EMERGENCY!

The Warm Springs Police Department, CTWS's Public Safety and Tribal Health & Human Services branches/departments look forward to working with our community to fight this epidemic.