



California Interagency Council on Homelessness

To: Members of the California Interagency Council on Homelessness
From: Meghan Marshall, Executive Officer, Cal ICH
Subject: Summary of Tribal Input to Inform the New Cal ICH Action Plan
Date: June 12, 2024

Purpose

This memo provides a high-level summary of feedback gathered from Tribal communities about proposed changes to the [Action Plan for Preventing and Ending Homelessness in California](#) (Action Plan) as well as general feedback on the State's role in addressing homelessness in Tribal Communities. Input was received through formal and informal tribal consultation in California during Spring 2024. It also lists discussion questions planned to be asked of Council members during the Cal ICH meeting on June 12, 2024.

Background

California currently is home to 109 Federally Recognized Tribes as well as over 80 Tribes seeking recognition. The meaningful incorporation of Tribal feedback into programs and policies that impact Tribal communities is required per in Executive Order N-15-19 and reflected in Department and Agency Tribal Consultation Policies. The incorporation of the needs and voices of Tribal Communities further ensures that program and policy interventions designed to meet the needs of Tribal Communities are meaningful, culturally appropriate, and effective.

Tribal input about the Action Plan included inviting formal government-to-government Tribal consultations. Additionally, Cal ICH staff co-hosted three regional, hybrid listening sessions with Tribal communities, in partnership with Tribes and Tribally Designated Housing Entities. A survey was available for completion, if preferred.

Tribal leaders and members who attended listening sessions received a presentation on the Action Plan, an explanation of the Council's role in the coordination of the response to homelessness, and were also asked "How can Cal ICH uplift the needs, voices, and best practices of Tribal Communities?"

Input received is summarized here for Council members to understand the lessons learned from Tribal communities through this process.

Key Elements of Tribal Input

Cal ICH staff reviewed all the feedback and organized it into four categories: General Feedback, Streamlining & Coordination, Tribal Access to Funding, and Tribal Data. The below summaries are direct statements from Tribal communities and have not been distilled or censored by Cal ICH.

General Feedback

Tribal leaders and members expressed frustration regarding the lack of Native American representation on the Council. This lack of inclusion was viewed as further disenfranchisement and disregard for California's Tribes. Participants made it clear that California Tribes are not "BIPOC" as they are sovereign nations and should be considered as such. Addressing BIPOC needs does not equate with working with nor addressing the needs of California Tribes.

Tribal leaders and members requested the Council regularly discuss and address Tribal-specific issues. Both Federally Recognized Tribes and Tribes who have not yet received federal recognition should be included in the Action Plan and general homelessness efforts.

Tribal Communities are in crisis and the "status quo" only perpetuates this. Purposeful, and new bold action is imperative. California Tribes have the highest disparities of homelessness (with homelessness rates of up to 50%), are far less resourced, and have more barriers than local governments and Continuums of Care (CoC). However, they do not have a "seat at the table" to effectively participate in meaningful solutions that serve their communities, nor access to adequate and accessible funding.

State, local governments, and others lack an accurate understanding of the real circumstances of Tribal Communities. Decision makers, staff, and others involved in homelessness solutions require culturally responsive, Tribal-led education that includes critical history, facts about current needs and circumstances, what homelessness looks like in Tribal Communities, how to have respectful and effective government to government relationships with Tribes, tribal sovereignty, and the connection between Missing Murdered Indigenous Peoples, suicide, substance use disorders, poverty, intergenerational trauma, and homelessness. Further, improved engagement with Tribes is necessary to rebuild respectful relationships. Tribal engagement strategies and relationship building efforts require improvement. Cal ICH's strategies were elevated as best practices. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) meetings with tribal leaders were also highlighted.

Tribal Liaisons should be placed in the Executive Office of their department or agency, where they are best able to ensure strategies that meet the needs of Tribes are elevated and coordinated department wide. A request was made for the Cal ICH Tribal Liaison to work on the Executive Team, and to oversee a team of Tribal Liaisons to support Tribes regionally.

Tribal engagement strategies and relationship building efforts require improvement. Cal ICH's strategies were elevated as best practices. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) meetings with Tribal leaders were also highlighted.

In addition to racism, Tribal Communities experience businesses that will not work with them, or when they do work with Tribes, intentionally increase their prices. Tribal Leaders and their members face intimidation, threats of violence, and death threats when progressing homelessness solutions that place homeless Native Americans in general communities.

Finally, participants requested the identification and sharing of Tribally-identified best practices, requirements for Tribal inclusion in local efforts, and enforcement of these where possible. These are necessary to support local communities, state departments, and others to be more successful in their efforts.

Streamlining & Coordination

Tribal Representatives expressed a need and desire for a regular forum to engage Cal ICH and the state to inform solutions that meet the needs of their communities, regardless of whether Cal ICH has access to funding to compensate members for their time and travel.

State Tribal Liaisons, state departments, and others require better coordination within their departments, and amongst each other. State departments and agencies should ensure they are all applying the same culturally appropriate, government-to-government strategies in Tribal engagement and program and policy development and implementation. Communications must be culturally responsive, rather than use standard state language. Tribes have limited capacity to engage numerous state representatives and opportunities. This requires the state to avoid duplication of approaches and be better coordinated.

Tribal Access to Funding

Tribes are in need of increased capacity, infrastructure, and permanent housing. However, the majority of state funding options are not designed for Tribes, are not culturally responsive to Tribes, and do not take into account their unique

socioeconomic, legal, nor sovereign status. Tribal HHAP at Cal ICH was noted as the most accessible “best practice” program, however, Tribal Representatives expressed that it was far underfunded, with a 2% set aside of the total funding allocation. Unlike non-Tribal HHAP, Tribal HHAP required Tribes to compete against one another for this funding.

Tribal funding sources and state standard practices with Tribal programs and policies require decolonization. This includes a greater understanding of Tribal needs, a focus on relationship, a person-centered approach, and the elimination of practices that further disenfranchise Tribal Communities. Examples include:

- A funding source that competitively scored Tribes and other entities on their housing development experience. Tribes' lack of development experience originates from their disenfranchisement. Tribes have only recently received some state funding – most of which they report cannot be accessed. This results in their inability to compete for this funding opportunity. This is one example of many that demonstrates the need for tribal-specific opportunities designed for their unique circumstances.
- Funding often comes with a requirement to utilize “evidence-based practices.” These practices are typically not researched within nor in partnership with Tribal Communities, and therefore may not be applicable to them. Tribal expertise has been excluded from the development of these evidence-based practices. Tribes have had their own evidenced-based practices that have worked within their communities for thousands of years. Requirements such as these prohibit Tribal inclusion, and require culturally appropriate adaptations.

Tribal Data

The current racial equity frameworks, systems, and data collection methods used to collect and analyze homelessness data do not adequately include California's 109 Federally Recognized Tribes, nor the over 80 Tribes seeking recognition. California Tribes report homelessness rates of up to 50%.

Data solutions must begin with meaningful engagement of Tribes and be co-created. Tribes are rarely included in the Point in Time (PIT) count, nor are they accurately captured in HMIS for a variety of reasons. When they are included, there are consistent errors that require tribal inclusion and partnership to resolve. Data interpretation must be culturally appropriate, or it is meaningless and can be harmful.

Listening session participants requested improved data sharing between housing, social services, and others in the homelessness arena and a dropdown menu in HMIS for tribal affiliation.

California Tribes are often denied funding opportunities and a “seat at the table” due to their low numbers in these data systems, in comparison to other populations in the state. These low numbers are due to the ongoing impact of government actions such as genocide and policy decisions that have harmed the community for centuries. California Tribes and Tribal Communities desire equity and consideration of the government’s role in their current circumstances, rather than being an afterthought in homelessness policy and program solutions.

Council Meeting Discussion and Next Steps

Cal ICH staff will present this input to the Council at its meeting on June 12, 2024. During this discussion, Council members will be asked to reflect on the following questions:

- How does this feedback align with other feedback you have received about your department or agencies' work on homelessness and Tribal engagement?
- How can the Council, collectively and individually as departments and agencies, ensure that feedback is considered carefully in the shaping of activities for the new and bold Action Plan?

Additionally, Cal ICH staff will use Tribal Input to guide the development of Cal ICH's work to uplift the needs, voices, and best practices of Tribal Communities.

Tribal consultation has been solicited from all California Tribes to inform the development of convenings between Cal ICH and Tribal Representatives. Through partnership with Tribal Representatives and coordination across the Council, collaborative, culturally responsive solutions to the challenges and barriers identified will be pursued.

Cal ICH will outreach to all member agencies' Tribal Liaisons, share the full list of Tribal input, and seek deeper coordination with Tribal Liaisons at Cal ICH member departments and agencies. Cal ICH will further support its member in the implementation of solutions that meet the needs of Tribal communities.

Finally, Cal ICH will uplift the needs, voices, and best practices of Tribal Communities through presentations, articles, publications, projects, and further consultation. Cal ICH staff will plan to follow up with the Council at a future meeting to discuss progress made on addressing the feedback above.