



May 5, 2020

Mr. Kevin J. Allis  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Congress of American Indians  
1516 P Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Allis:

Thank you for your letters to Dr. Francis S. Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), regarding the importance of meaningfully engaging Tribal Nations and the NIH Tribal Consultation process. We apologize for the delayed response and want to assure you that NIH remains firmly committed to working with Tribal Nations. As the NIH Associate Deputy Director, the NIH Deputy Director for Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives, the NIH Acting Chief of Staff and Associate Director for Science Policy, and the Chief Executive Officer of the *All of Us* Research Program, we are pleased to respond to your letters on behalf of Dr. Collins.

NIH's commitment to working with Tribal Nations is more important than ever, as together we face the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Through additional funding from Congress, NIH has established a robust research response for developing diagnostics, vaccines, and treatments for COVID-19. Along with other HHS agencies, such as the Indian Health Service and the Centers for Disease Control, NIH is working to stay informed on the needs of Indian Country and bring together the best science, medicine, and public health measures possible to support Tribal Nations.

As the nation gets more accustomed to this new way of life, NIH continues to prioritize Tribal input in processes, programs, and policies with the goal of developing and supporting research activities that incorporate the needs and perspectives of Indian Tribes. Representation and participation of Tribal communities in biomedical research are critical for ensuring that scientific discoveries are translated into improved prevention strategies and culturally appropriate treatments for Tribal populations. Input from Tribal leaders is vital to NIH as we continue to learn and improve how best the agency can collaborate with Tribal Nations in biomedical research. We welcome comments from the National Congress of American Indians and will consider Tribal leader input as we move forward in developing programs and policies.

We would like to provide a status update on several of the Tribal Consultations initiated last year and keep you abreast of planned next steps for these efforts. As you may be aware, Consultation periods for both NIH's draft Policy for Data Management and Sharing and the *All of Us* Research Program have concluded. NIH currently is in the process of concluding the

Consultation on Intellectual Property Rights. Additionally, NIH intends to release summaries of the recommendations, comments, concerns, and agency actions for each of these Consultations on the THRO website and will send an official notification to Tribal leaders when these summaries are published. Tribal leaders can expect to see these summaries in early summer 2020, as it is our intent to provide materials at a time in which Indian Tribes have sufficient time to review the summaries. Given the impact of COVID-19, we understand that tribes need to prioritize the health of their communities, and NIH will work with Tribal leaders to allow time to respond. Please note that although the official Consultation periods have ended, NIH remains committed to continuing to engage Tribal Nations in each of these activities moving forward through a variety of mechanisms. We will continue to work with you to ensure your participation is included as we move forward.

NIH planned to initiate a formal Tribal Consultation in 2020 on a draft NIH Tribal Consultation Policy, but will need to adjust that timeline due to the ‘all hands on deck’ public health response to COVID-19 across the country. We appreciate that successful Consultation emphasizes trust, respect, and shared responsibility. It is our hope that through an open and free exchange of information and opinions, we will strengthen the government-to-government relationship that results in effective collaboration.

We would personally like to reiterate the importance NIH places on our collaborations with Tribal Nations, leaders, organizations, and communities. NIH looks forward to strengthening our outreach and engagement to work together to improve health outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

We hope that you and your community remain safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

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Deputy Director for Program Coordination,  
Planning, and Strategic Initiatives, NIH

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