

## 2022 NC Indian Unity Conference

- Greetings, and thank you all the opportunity to speak at this year's NC Indian Unity conference.
- Our American Indian population and their cultural contributions have had an important impact on the vibrancy, health, and history of our State.
- The theme of this year's conference, healing through unity, is especially relevant as we continue to respond and recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The pandemic has taught us that in order to make long-standing and meaningful change, we have to do so together.
- I'm committed to learning about, engaging with, and supporting the inclusion of North Carolina American Indians in all aspects of life in our state.
- Through our pandemic response, we have prioritized earning trust, and I am focused on sustaining that trust going forward.
- Placing equity at the center of our work requires that our data efforts be centered around equity as well so that each decision we make, program we develop, or policy we establish is beneficial for the communities they serve.
- As we look to the future, our work will continue to further advance our data capabilities, so they are accessible and representative of all populations.
- We are continuing our efforts to ensure American Indian communities are actively present and involved in the health equity and racial equity conversations not just regarding the pandemic response, but as we move forward.
- Unfortunately, the omicron surge had a disproportionate impact on our historically marginalized populations.
- We have worked tirelessly to shift our strategies to ensure more individuals get boosted and vaccinated, as well as have access to other services, but we know that the disproportionate balance of cases in historically marginalized communities is related to the chronic health debt that impacts various groups across our state.
- In general, our key trends and indicators continue to improve in North Carolina. Our daily number of cases continues to decrease, as does our percent positive, hospitalizations, and surveillance data.
- These improvements are a result of incredible collaboration and tremendous work by the entire state and American Indians have had a key role in supporting their communities.
- I am incredibly grateful for our partnership with The Commission of Indian Affairs who collaborated with us and local health departments to get COVID-19 testing sites and vaccination sites in American Indian communities.
- Additionally, our leadership met with vendors and tribal leaders across the state to create partnerships and expand access to testing and vaccination.

- Collaboration with our vendors led to ongoing community testing sites in Robeson County to support the local health directors and partnerships with the Lumbee Housing Authority to increase vaccination efforts.
- Our family vaccination site hosted at the Lumbee Tribe Boys and Girls Club, had great success encouraging families to get vaccinated together, while also providing accurate and up to date information.
- Our Healthier Together partnership worked to build and earn trust in our historically marginalized communities and successfully distributed over 10,000 food boxes, vaccinated over 14,000 individuals at healthier together events, and connected community health workers who served 1.7 million individuals, many of which were our American Indian communities.
- We have been able to provide the Easter Band of Cherokee Indians with over 1000 at-home tests and counting, and as a reminder any of our tribal partners can request at-home tests on our website.
- To date we have distributed over 12.5 million high quality masks across North Carolina, many of which went directly to our American Indian communities.
- These partnership opportunities open doors to communicate and explore ways to implement lessons learned for future planning for American Indian Communities and our state vendors.
- In our efforts to improve the health and wellness of everyone in our state, we can't just treat the symptoms in the moment but treat the issues at the root.
- This involves going after the historic inequities at play in our communities by listening to community leaders such as you and making sure our actions are reflective of the change we need to see to improve our overall health outcomes.
- I look to the future and scope the priorities of our Department, I think the best way we can fulfill the Department's mission of promoting the health and wellbeing of all North Carolinians is by equitably investing in behavioral health and resilience, focusing on child and family wellbeing, and reinforcing a strong and inclusive workforce.
- I believe that people are policy and we bring our whole experiences to this work to help the people of this great state.
- As the department continues to drive change, we want and need your voices to help inform our policies and approach
- It is very important to me that we have a diverse group of stakeholders at the table both internally and externally to help drive policy and shift programs in a way that is built on true equity.
- I am committed to reaching and serving the American Indian Community. I'm listening to you, and I want us to build on this partnership, of which the foundations have been laid throughout our collaborative work over the past year.