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Tribal Summit Addresses Opioid and Fentanyl Impact Across Tribes in Washington State

Third Annual Washington State Tribal Opioid Fentanyl Taskforce Summit held at the Cowlitz Indian Tribe during the week of May 19, 2025.

Ridgefield, Washington, May 28, 2025 – Last week Tribal leaders, Tribal health organizations and community members, WA state lawmakers, and representative from state health agencies met to address the opioid and fentanyl crisis in Washington State and the impact to Tribes. This was the third annual convening of these groups to define priorities for the upcoming year for the taskforce and workgroups.

The three-day Summit included a review of completed priorities from last year and a Living Experience panel featuring community members in recovery from Opioid Use Disorder, followed by a cleansing and healing ceremony hosted by the Cowlitz

Indian Tribe on the first day. Breakout sessions organized by the five focus area task force subcommittees were held during the second day. Day 3 focused on summarizing new priorities and a roundtable with Tribal and state leaders.

Representative Debra Lekanoff, 40th District, one of the state legislators appointed to this taskforce, joined the roundtable.

“The epidemic of opioids and fentanyl has been tightening its grip on Washington communities, and tribes have been at the forefront of our efforts to heal and offer hope,” said Lekanoff. “No one can heal alone, and it’s critical we continue to hold events like this Summit to allow Tribal, state, and local governments to work together to forge a path towards recovery. Only by standing and addressing this issue together can we instill hope, raise awareness, and foster community as we continue our journey to Heal One Washington.”

While the general trend of opioid and fentanyl related deaths across the country is downward, according to the CDC American Indian/Alaska Native deaths due to opioid and fentanyl overdose have been increasing sharply since the COVID-19 pandemic. Washington State AI/AN overdose deaths are 3.8 times the national average; Whatcom County AI/AN overdose deaths are 9.2 times the national average. This disparity drives home the need to focus our attention on this crisis. Proposed legislative priorities and actions will be summarized by the American Indian Health Commission, in partnership with the Washington State Health Care Authority, over the next few weeks based on presentations and discussions during this summit.

For more details on the summit, please see this webpage.

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