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Vice President Ben Shelly Supports Tribal Leaders Health Group for Improved Health Care

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Participating in the Tribal Technical Advisory Group this week Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly represented the Navajo Nation’s health interest before the group of tribal leaders and advisors.

“We want to move to a paperless system,” said Vice President Shelly to officials for the Indian Health Services and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. “If there’s a model let’s use it—if we can get it done we can take care of a lot of problems,” said Vice President Shelly, who supports the cross-sharing of data of Native American healthcare recipients.

Discussion of health care data shared between two U.S. agencies is an ongoing dialogue at this week’s tribal advisory group meeting, held at the Smithsonian’s National Museum.

Patient information is kept on file mostly by the Indian Health Services, and data for Native American patients who receive Medicare and Medicaid is collected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Other patient information for Native American children is collected by states through the State Children’s Health Insurance Program, SCHIP.

The Tribal Technical Advisory Group is proposing a paperless system with the creation of a single health care card that gives Native American health care recipients access to any health care delivery system. “We want to do this while keeping the best health care for our people,” said Vice President Shelly.

Accompanying Vice President Shelly was Anslem Roanhorse, who heads the Navajo Nation’s Division of Health. Roanhorse, who was selected last year to head up the citizenship documentation, reported to the advisory group. In August, Roanhorse wrote



recommendations to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The federal agency replied this month.

Tribal leaders have repeatedly expressed concern over the federal government's requirement for citizenship documentation. An act passed by Congress, the Deficit Reduction Act, includes a section that requires Native American health care recipients prove national citizenship before being able to receive health care services.

The Washington University released findings in a survey known as the *second wave* that it's "costing more" to do verification of citizenship. "It's affecting health care delivery," said Roanhorse. "The study shows that these requirements are putting up more barriers for access to health care."

Roanhorse is seeking information and data from other groups and researchers to show that citizenship verification is costing the government money that can be spent in actual health care delivery. "We want to see what their data shows," he said.

The Tribal Technical Advisory Group meeting, held four times a year, is also discussing long term care. "When we think of long term care we normally think of the elderly," said Roanhorse. "There's a term we're using 'de-institutionalization' that moves health care out of the facility," said Roanhorse. "We want to provide quality health care for our recipients in the community through home base care."

Long term care would include individuals with disabilities and the developmentally disabled. "We want this to insure that our recipients are living as independently as much as possible," said Roanhorse, "while maintaining the best, quality health care. We all want to simply the process."

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has responded to Roanhorse's recommendations and working to take steps to implement the recommendations and findings of the subcommittee by this December.

The Tribal Technical Advisory Group, established by congressional law, is designed to acknowledge the role of tribal governments and their elected officials with regard to consultation on policy issues. Tribal membership is representative of the 12 Indian Health Service regions across the country.

Vice President Shelly returned to Navajo this afternoon, and will participate tomorrow Orme Dam celebration at Fort McDowell Indian Nation, near Phoenix. It is a celebration of Fort McDowell's victory that prevailed in the building a community dam.

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