

ACTION NEEDED TO STOP PREDATORY RECRUITMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TO REHABILITATION CENTERS & SOBER LIVING HOMES

POSITION STATEMENT

The 21 Member Tribes of the Inter Tribal Association of Arizona (ITAA) support the creation of a task force made up of Tribal leaders, law enforcement, AHCCCS and community members to create a plan to address the issue and funding to create a campaign to inform the American Indian population about unscrupulous rehabilitation centers and sober living facilities.

KEY POINTS



Allocate resources to investigate rehabilitation centers and sober living homes that engage in predatory behaviors.



Pass legislation to increase penalties for the brokering of patients and establish rights for individuals residing in these facilities.



Strengthen procedures to ensure that those that have been previously found guilty of patient brokering or other fraud are unable to own or work in such facilities.

BACKGROUND

The Affordable Care Act, along with the federal Mental Health Parity Act, provided those suffering from addiction the care they needed. These Acts require insurers to cover the costs of substance abuse treatment that is so desperately needed especially in light of the opioid epidemic. However, many unscrupulous people looking to make fast cash are taking advantage of these well-intended Acts by accessing the huge amount of insurance dollars available including from Medicaid programs such as the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). There has been a history of unscrupulous rehabilitation centers in Arizona, luring individuals in need of support and taking advantage of insurance claims while providing little to no actual rehabilitation services.

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Position on Issue

The 21 Member Tribes of the Inter Tribal Association of Arizona (ITAA) support the creation of a task force made up of Tribal leaders, law enforcement, AHCCCS and community members to create a plan to address the issue and funding to create a campaign to inform the American Indian population about unscrupulous rehabilitation centers and sober living facilities.

Key Points

- Allocate resources specifically to investigate and punish rehabilitation centers and sober living homes that engage in predatory behaviors and pass legislation to increase penalties for the brokering of patients and establish rights for individuals residing in these facilities.
- Establish rigorous review or licensing program for treatment and sober living facilities and increase oversight and monitoring.
- Strengthen procedures to ensure that those that have been previously found guilty of patient brokering or other fraud are unable to own or work in such facilities in the future such as by transferring ownership to a relative or opening a new business under a relative's name.

Background

The Affordable Care Act, along with the federal Mental Health Parity Act, provided those suffering from addiction the care they needed. These Acts require insurers to cover the costs of substance abuse treatment that is so desperately needed especially in light of the opioid epidemic. However, many unscrupulous people looking to make fast cash are taking advantage of these well-intended Acts by accessing the huge amount of insurance dollars available including from Medicaid programs such as the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS).

There has been a history of unscrupulous rehabilitation centers in California, Arizona and Florida luring individuals in need of substance abuse rehabilitation from other states and taking advantage of insurance claims while providing little to no actual rehabilitation services. Once they have reeled patients in, these treatment centers bill their insurance tens of thousands of dollars for often questionable counseling, costly and potentially unnecessary drug screens, and exotic laboratory tests.

These centers are now targeting the vulnerable populations on Tribal lands that are suffering from homelessness, domestic violence, mental illness or substance abuse. Individuals are targeted walking along the road and in other areas where people congregate such as at grocery stores, flea markets and medical centers. Tribal members are promised help, removed from their Tribal lands and often relocated to Phoenix. Some individuals go to the homes willingly but others are forced or coerced. In some cases, they are coerced with alcohol or taken when they are not sober.

Once in the homes, individuals are often not provided with care, not allowed to contact loved ones and in some cases are allowed to use substances. The centers, often housed in rental homes, are set up to take advantage of reimbursement from the AHCCCS American Indian Health Program that provides medically necessary services for enrolled members, including coverage for preventive and behavioral health care services. The homes or centers may get \$7,000 to \$20,000 per month for each person in their care.

Once released from the homes, Tribal members are often left stranded in the large urban area of Phoenix with no housing, transportation or financial resources to return home. In some cases, individuals are held against their will and a few have tragically passed away with the family not being notified by the treatment center. There may be a connection between these homes and the growing number of missing indigenous people. The Federal Bureau of Investigation recently began looking for victims who have been recruited to live in these centers and is still investigating.