



Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You

Osiyo -

Cherokee Nation Health Services, through the tribe's Behavioral Health Program, is dedicated to reducing suicide attempts and deaths through research projects, educational programs, intervention services and bereavement services. Oklahoma ranks eighth nationally in suicides, with 20 being the average age of those committing suicide. And Native American youth ages 10-24 have a suicide rate three times higher than the rate of their non-Native peers in Oklahoma.

Cherokee Nation is working diligently to address the needs of our people and discuss this current epidemic impacting our country. We have taken a stand against suicide and the lasting impact it has on our people. As tribal people we are resilient; it is our responsibility to help one another and reach out for help when help is needed.

We believe you cannot change the fruit until you address the root. Although our tribal roots are filled with historical and intergenerational trauma, we remain unwavering in our ability to rise above our past. Sometimes we need to give each other a helping hand getting there, though.

Our Behavioral Health Program has multiple grants and initiatives to increase prevention and intervention efforts in our communities. Behavioral Health staff has trained over 515 community members in Adult and Youth Mental Health First courses across the 14 counties of the Cherokee Nation. These trainings are for professionals and community members who interact with youth or adults who may experience a mental health crisis and provide them the skills to intervene and connect them to appropriate care.

Additionally, Cherokee Nation's Children's Behavioral Health program, the HERO Project, is specifically designed to educate youth. It has trained more than 400 students in suicide prevention. We are also working closely with Sequoyah Schools in suicide prevention activities.

Our people are Cherokee Nation's most precious resource. When we come together as a community to support families and invest in mental health, both our tribe and our people thrive. This is why we are pledging to stop the stigma against mental illness. We pledge to start talking about the importance of mental health, and to stop using phrases that create stigma. We pledge to keep an open mind and treat those around us with dignity and respect. We pledge to offer support when support is needed. We pledge to care for mental health just as we care for physical health, because there should be no difference in seeking help.

People all over the Cherokee Nation have pledged to stop the stigma and start caring about their mental health. We are doing a better job of talking about mental health, and we have highlighted the importance of children's mental health, to get a head start on this critical aspect of wellness. The more we bring these issues to the forefront, it benefits our tribe and communities.

Our work in behavioral health is some of the most important work that we do as a tribe. The dedication that we continue to see from this team is making a difference in the lives of so many Cherokee children and families, and we are very proud of that.

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Bill John Baker



17675 S. Huskogeas Ave.
Tahlequah, OK 74465
918-453-5000

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Cherokee Nation P.O. Box 948 Tahlequah, OK 74465