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### **Leaders Across Michigan Convene to Improve Native American Health**

*Traverse City, MI* – On January 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan (ITCM) held a meeting with leaders from six federally-recognized tribes and the American Indian Health and Family Services Agency in Detroit to discuss their plans to improve the health of Native Americans across Michigan. The meeting served as an initial kick-off for REACH-*Journey to Wellness*, an initiative to prevent long-term diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease by encouraging exercise and healthy eating, as well as lowering commercial tobacco use, among Native Americans in Michigan.

In October 2014, ITCM was awarded three years of funding for REACH- *Journey to Wellness* by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as part of their Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) initiative.

“Native Americans in Michigan suffer from some of the highest rates of obesity and chronic illnesses—like heart disease and diabetes—and also have disproportionately high rates of commercial tobacco use. By focusing on chronic disease prevention, REACH- *Journey to Wellness* has the power to positively change the health and quality of life of Native Americans in Michigan”, said Noel Pingatore, ITCM Principal Investigator.

The following tribes and one agency will be leading local REACH- *Journey to Wellness* initiatives: The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, The Nottawaseppi Band of Huron Potawatomi, The Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa and Chippewa Indians, The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, The Hannahville Indian Community, The Bay Mills Indian Community and The American Indian Health and Family Services Agency in Detroit. Over the next three years, they will work together with their local communities to affect change—from passing commercial tobacco-free policies to enhancing worksite wellness programs and establishing local farmer’s markets—that will have a long-lasting positive impact and drive down the chronic disease rates among Native Americans.

“With leaders and key tribal health staff from tribal communities traveling from all around the state in the middle of winter to attend, this meeting was a truly special occasion. We were thrilled to see so many valued tribal health staff come to the table to address the health needs of Native Americans in Michigan through their participation in REACH -*Journey to Wellness*”, said Cathy Edgerly, ITCM Project Manager.

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The Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan, Inc. (ITCM) is a 501©(3) non-profit corporation duly organized under a State Charter filed April 16, 1968. It represents eleven of the twelve federally recognized tribes in Michigan: Bay Mills Indian Community, Hannahville Indian Community, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish (Gun Lake Tribe), Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, and the Nottawaseppi Band of Huron Potawatomi.