



THE HENRY J.  
KAISER  
FAMILY  
FOUNDATION

NATIVE AMERICAN HEALTH  
POLICY FELLOWSHIP  
1999 -2003

*Five Years  
of Leadership  
Development  
in Health Policy*





*Roberta J. Kinzhuma*



JUNE 30, 1947–JULY 25, 2002

WE DEDICATE THIS PUBLICATION TO ROBERTA J. KINZHUMA  
2000 FELLOW.

A dear friend and colleague, whose tireless work to improve the health of American Indians will not be forgotten.

Photograph courtesy of Kinzhuma family. Roberta Kinzhuma at graduation holding her granddaughter.

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SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, HENRY J. KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION

<sup>1</sup>Served on the committee from 1999–2001

## INTRODUCTION

The health care needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) are poorly understood and often neglected in national policy discussions. Since 1995, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation has been engaged in a number of projects to broaden attention to these issues. The projects—including analytic efforts, policy forums, site visits, a fellowship program for mid-career AI/AN health professionals, and support for journalists who cover AI/AN health issues—have been a major part of the Foundation’s portfolio of work on racial/ethnic minority health issues.

This brochure profiles one of these projects, the *Native American Health Policy Fellowship Program*, and the accomplishments of the individuals who were awarded a fellowship. Established in 1999 and administered by First Nations Development Institute during its initial two years, the *Fellowship Program* has placed fourteen AI/ANs in Congressional or senior Executive Branch offices for a year-long work experience. Some of the fellows have returned to their communities to use their new knowledge and skills, while others have assumed new roles with national health organizations.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We appreciate the tireless efforts of the Selection Committee who, each year, chose outstanding candidates from an increasing pool of highly qualified applicants. Special thanks goes to Dr. Yvette Roubideaux for her guidance to program staff and fellows and for mentoring the fellows through the process of writing their policy papers. Thank you to Senators Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Pete V. Domenici, Daniel K. Inouye; Senator Thomas A. Daschle and the Senate Democratic Policy Committee; Congressmen Frank Pallone Jr., Nick J. Rahall, and Tom Udall; Secretary Tommy Thompson; and the 1999 White House for hosting Fellows. Special thanks to the legislative staff in each of the placement offices and staff of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee and the House Resources Committee for teaching, helping, and befriending the Fellows. From its inception, the office of the Director of the Indian Health Service through Leo J. Nolan, Senior Policy Analyst, has been a tremendous support. We would like to acknowledge all the individuals who helped the Fellows, taught them during orientation, welcomed them during seminars and site visits, and supported them as they wrote their policy papers.



2002 Fellows and Indian Health Service staff: Leo J. Nolan, Senior Policy Analyst; W. Craig Vanderwagen, Assistant Surgeon General; Michael D. Mahsetky, Director of Legislative and Congressional Affairs, respectively



2000 Fellows with Donna Shalala, Secretary of DHHS; Diane Rowland, Executive Vice President of the Kaiser Family Foundation; and Priya A. Helweg



2002 Fellows with Dr. David Satcher, Surgeon General of the United States



**MELISSA (McNIEL) GOWER**  
*Cherokee Nation*

Ms. Gower is the Executive Officer in the Office of the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. She directly oversees the Direction Team, which includes, strategy, solutions development, communications, and government relations. Her main focus is developing and enhancing the governmental relations and legislative activities at the local, state, and national level for the Cherokee Nation. Ms. Gower was offered this position immediately after the fellowship and credits the fellowship experience with giving her the skills to assume this responsibility. Ms. Gower came to the fellowship program from her position as the Health Planning Specialist for Pamela E. Iron & Associates—a major Native American health management consulting group. Previously, she worked as the Deputy Clinic Administrator of the Wilma P. Mankiller Health Center at Cherokee Nation for eight years. Ms. Gower has a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Care Administration from Northeastern State University.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Financing of American Indian health Care Facilities—Alternative Methods of Financing

**Fellowship Placement:** Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Majority Staff

**Supervisor:** Paul Moorehead, Majority Staff Director and Chief Counsel



**BEVERLY A. RUSSELL**  
*San Carlos Apache Tribe*

Ms. Russell is the Executive Director of the National Council of Urban Indian Health, an organization dedicated to advocating for and raising the health status and wellness of American Indian/Alaska Natives living in urban communities. She came to the fellowship from the American Indian Community House (AICH) in New York City where she was the Outreach Education Coordinator. After completing two years as a Kaiser fellow, she returned to the AICH as the Women's Wellness/Special Projects Coordinator to develop a network between AICH and health institutions, front line providers, key policy makers, and Native Americans in NYC. Her past experience includes working as the executive assistant to the San Carlos Apache Tribal Chairman and as a Campaign Committee Assistant for New Jersey Governor, Christine Todd Whitman. Ms. Russell has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology/Political Science from Seton Hall University.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Traditional Medicine

**Fellowship Placement:** Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Minority Staff

**Supervisor:** Patricia Zell, Minority Staff Director

<sup>2</sup>Titles and post fellowship activities are current to the best of our knowledge as of January 1, 2003.



**AUTUMN LEAF SPEARS**  
*Narragansett Indian Tribe*

Ms. Spears is the Director of Health and Human Services for the Narragansett Indian Health Center. Before accepting the Kaiser fellowship, she was both Acting Director of the Narragansett Indian Health Center and Director of the Tribe's Social Services Department in Charlestown, Rhode Island. She has also held the positions of Director of the Narragansett Indian Health Department, Contract Medical Care Coordinator, and Community Health Representative. Her devotion to the health care field is a result of her experiences with poor access and availability of quality health services within her community. This fact also prompted her to obtain an Emergency Medical Technician's license. She has completed the Indian Health Services Executive Leadership Development Program. She is a certified grant writer, grant reviewer, and grant consultant. Ms. Spears has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Health and Society/Bio-Community Health from Brown University. She is working on her Masters of Health Care Administration at Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Cancer and Native Americans: Race Effects and Research Needs

**Fellowship Placement:** White House Office on the President's Initiative for One America and Office of Policy Development; Office of the Director, Indian Health Service.

**Supervisors:** Ben Johnson, Assistant to the President and Director of the White House Office on the President's Initiative for One America; Lynne Cutler, Deputy Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs and Senior Advisor to the White House Chief of Staff on Indian Affairs; Leo Nolan, Senior Policy Analyst, External Affairs, respectively.



**DONAVAN S. BARKS**  
*Cherokee Nation*

After the fellowship, Mr. Barks became the Assistant to the Development Director at The Walden House Foundation. Here he continued his career objective to work in the Native American non-profit social services community. Mr. Barks came to the program from the Friendship House Association of Americans, Inc. in San Francisco, California where he was the Intake/Outreach Coordinator and Court Liaison. At the Friendship House he also held the positions of House Manger. He has served on the San Francisco's City-Wide Alcoholism Advisory Board, the Urban Indian Health Board, and the Native American Health Center Board in the Bay Area. Mr. Barks studied English, Spanish, and Pre-Law at San Francisco State University.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Health Services for Urban Indians: A Review of the Provisions of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act

**Fellowship Placement:** Senator Tom Daschle

**Supervisor:** Chuck Cooper, Staff Director





**ROBERTA KINZHUMA**  
*Oneida Nation of Wisconsin*

Ms. Kinzhuma served as the Program Director of Elderly Services of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin for over eight years. She was dedicated to the health and welfare issues affecting older Indian people. Ms. Kinzhuma served as Chairperson for the Wisconsin Indian Elders Association where she led the organization to double its membership and raised carry over funds where previously none existed. Her objective to be a reliable resource to “family, co-workers and community members in a manner that would enhance the educational goals and personal growth of others” demonstrates her selflessness and level of her commitment to her community. Ms. Kinzhuma was awarded a Bachelor of Arts in Urban and Regional Studies and Political Science, from the University of Wisconsin and an AA in Medical Office Assistant/Pre-Nursing from Rochester Community College.

At great loss to her community and all who knew her, Ms. Kinzhuma passed away on July 25, 2002.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Education of Indian Health Care Professionals

**Fellowship Placement:** Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Majority Staff

**Supervisor:** Paul Moorehead, Majority Staff Director and Chief Counsel



**JOSIE ATCITTY**  
*Navajo Nation*

Ms. Atcitty is the Management Analyst for the Northern Navajo Medical Center in Shiprock, New Mexico. Her mother inspired Ms. Atcitty to dedicate her life to impacting the health delivery system on the Navajo Reservation. Ms. Atcitty served as the Acting Supervisory Health Systems Specialist for the Contract Health Service and Acting Financial Manager for the Financial Management Branch of the Northern Navajo Medical Center. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from McMurry University. After completing the Fellowship program, Ms. Atcitty was asked to continue working for Senator Domenici. She spent a second year in the Senator's office as the Legislative Assistant for Indian Affairs and Housing and Urban Development before returning to New Mexico to her previous position. Ms. Atcitty is currently pursuing a Masters of Public Health degree.

**Policy Paper Topic:** National Diabetes Prevention Center for American Indians/Alaska Natives

**Fellowship Placement:** Senator Pete V. Domenici

**Supervisor:** Steve Bell, Chief of Staff

Policy papers for 2001 Fellows are featured in *The IHS Primary Care Provider* issues August 2002, Vol. 27, No. 8; September 2002, Vol. 27, No. 9; and October 2002, Vol. 27, No. 10.

## 2001 FELLOWS



**STACEY L. ECOFFEY, MSW**  
*Oglala Sioux Tribe*

Ms. Ecoffey is the Staff Specialist for Tribal Affairs, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Immediate Office of the Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services. After the fellowship she worked as the Project Coordinator for Strengthening Tribal Management Capabilities in Health & Human Service Delivery for the National Indian Health Board. Ms. Ecoffey came to the program from the Oglala Sioux Tribe in Pine Ridge, South Dakota where she was the Health and Human Services Committee Coordinator with oversight responsible for 37 Tribal programs. Her interests lay with the overall health of the community as it is impacted by socio-economics, the environment as well as physical health. She was the Administrative Coordinator for the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development at the John F. Kennedy School of Government; and a member of the Board of Directors for Cangleska, Inc, a non-profit dedicated to fighting domestic violence; and the Oglala Sioux Tribe's Environmental Health Technical Team. Ms. Ecoffey holds a Masters Degree in Social Work from Boston College and a Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Anthropology from Colorado State University.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Tribal Consultation: A Review of the Department of Health and Human Services Policy

**Fellowship Placement:** Intergovernmental Affairs, Office of the Secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services

**Supervisor:** Eugenia Tyner-Dawson, Senior Advisor for Tribal Affairs



**BARBARA FINKBONNER**  
*Lummi Tribe*

Ms. Finkbonner is the Director of the Lummi Tribal Health Center in Bellingham, Washington where she supervises 10 departments. A mother, first and foremost, she traveled with her three children to Washington, DC for the fellowship. Her commitment to the health of her community stems from her steadfast belief that prevention is the best medicine and that it is critical for competent Native American people to exercise influence over health care delivery to their people. Ms. Finkbonner has been the Program Coordinator for the Lummi Maternal Child Health Program at the Lummi Nation, Physician Assistant for the Indian Health Service, and Community Health Representative for the Lummi Nation. Ms. Finkbonner has a Bachelor of Arts in Health Services and a Certification in Medical Management from the University of Washington. She has also completed the University of Washington's MEDEX Northwest Physician Assistance Program.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Depression in American Indians and Alaska Natives: A Review of Indian Health Policy and Services

**Fellowship Placement:** House Energy and Commerce Committee

**Supervisor:** John Ford, Counsel



**HERMINIA FRIAS**  
*Pascua Yaqui Tribe of Arizona*

Ms. Frias returned from the fellowship to work for the Pascua Yaqui Tribe as the new Network Services Manager for the Tribe's Behavioral Health Program. She is responsible for the development and maintenance of a provider network that is capable of delivering medically necessary covered services. Before the Fellowship, she was a Social Worker/Case Manager for people diagnosed with a serious mental illness. Her goals include attaining a masters of public health and medical degree. She is passionate about creating a tribal health care system that reflects the communities needs and training physicians to practice medicine through an integrated medical and public health philosophy. Past experience includes biochemical and public health research and Medical Assistant for NorthStar Neurology. She received a full scholarship to attend the Johns Hopkins University 18th Annual Graduate Summer Institute of Epidemiology and Biostatistics in 2000. She is an active volunteer with the Yoeme Education Society, an alumni association established and composed of Yaqui graduates to promote higher education, student retention, and academic excellence. Ms. Frias holds a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry from the University of Arizona and is working towards a Masters in Public Health with a Health Administration and Policy concentration at the University of Arizona College of Public Health.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Analysis of the Proposal to Make Indian Health Care an Entitlement

**Fellowship Placement:** Congressman Tom Udall

**Supervisor:** Tom Nagle, Chief of Staff



**MARK LEBEAU**  
*Pit River Indian Tribe*

Mr. LeBeau is the American Indian Tobacco Education Program Manager for the California Rural Indian Health Board, Inc (CRIHB) where he directs and administers program activities, provides training, planning, and development. Mr. LeBeau is on a tireless quest to develop effective and relevant strategies to improve the health of American Indian people. He has worked as the Health Education Specialist for CRIHB, Teaching Assistant for University of California, Davis, and Director of the Pit River Research Project on cultural preservation. He is on the Board of Directors for DQ-University and ENACT. Mr. LeBeau holds a Bachelor of Arts from California State University, Humboldt in Native American Studies and is pursuing a Masters of Science in Community Development from the University of California, Davis.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Analysis of the Process for Determining the Distribution of the Special Diabetes Program for Indian Appropriation

**Fellowship Placement:** Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr.

**Supervisor:** Tim Yehl, Chief of Staff



**HELEN POOTOOGOOKLUK**  
*Native Village of Shishmaref in Alaska*

Ms. Pootoogooluk is the Planner/Analyst at the Norton Sound Health Corporation in Nome, Alaska. Since completing the fellowship, her responsibilities have expanded and she has been added to the Senior Leadership Team. Focused on the unique and specific health needs of Alaska Natives, Ms. Pootoogooluk has been instrumental in community infrastructure development as a way to improve the health of her village of Shishmaref. She has worked as the Community Health Survey Coordinator, Conference Coordinator for the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the Elders Conference. She is also a successful grants writer and political campaign Coordinator. She served as Legislative Aide to State Representative Eileen P. MacLean. As staff for Senator William L. Hensley, she coordinated his campaign activities and served as Legislative Aide. Ms. Pootoogooluk holds a Bachelor of Arts in Rural Development and a Bachelor of Arts in Alaska Native Studies from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

**Policy Paper Topic:** Analysis of the Proposed "Qualified Indian Health Program" Legislation

**Fellowship Placement:** House Committee on Resources, Minority Staff

**Supervisor:** Marie Howard, Democratic Legislative Staff



**MELISSA C. CANDELARIA**  
*Pueblo of San Felipe*

In 2000, Ms. Candelaria became the first woman Tribal Administrator for the San Felipe Pueblo. In this role, she directed the tribal health services and managed the federal P.L. 638 contracts totaling over three million dollars whereby the Pueblo assumes responsibility for its health delivery system. She supervised the education, elderly, health, and social services departments and program directors, initiated new programs, and acted as liaison between the Tribal Council, other tribal governments, federal, and state agencies. Before assuming these responsibilities, Ms. Candelaria was the Community Educator for Futures for Children where she worked with Hopi, Navajo, and Pueblo communities. She is a member of the Indian Health Service Santa Fe Service Unit Health Board and the Santa Fe Indian School Board. Consistent with her commitment to being a mentor and supporting the youth of her Tribe, she has taught for College Horizons, the TRIBES Program, and the Native American Preparatory School. Ms. Candelaria holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with a minor in Education from Dartmouth College.

**Fellowship Placement:** Senate Indian Affairs Committee, Majority Staff

**Supervisor:** Paul Moorehead, Majority Staff Director and Chief Counsel

<sup>4</sup> Paper topics for 2003 fellows were unavailable at time of printing.

## 2003 FELLOWS



**RITA LAFRANCE**  
*St. Regis Mohawk Tribe*

Ms. LaFrance is the Executive Director of Health and Human Services for her tribe. Along with directing and administering all programs within the Health and Human Services Divisions, she coordinates strategic planning, sets policy, and ensures the community needs are met. Ms. LaFrance has 20 years of experience in American Indian health. An impressive list of positions steadily brought her to this point. She was the Director of Human Services for the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, Director of Social Services for Kahnawaka Community Services, Acting/Assistant Director of Social Development and Health Division for the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Program Manager for the Akwesasne Child and Family Services, Program Policy Manager for the Department of Indian Affairs, and Program Officer for the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program for the Department of Health and Welfare. She has devoted her career to serving the health of her tribe and currently works to broaden the continuum of care by making it culturally appropriate.

**Fellowship Placement:** Intergovernmental Affairs, Office of the Secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services

**Supervisor:** Eugenia Tyner-Dawson, Senior Advisor for Tribal Affairs



**JORDAN P. LEWIS, MSW**  
*Aleut*

Mr. Lewis came to the fellowship from his position as a Policy Associate for the Forum of State Health Policy Leadership at the National Conference of State Legislatures. Jordan became interested in health policy after spending a summer in Senator Tom Daschle's office as a Morris K. Udall Foundation Congressional Intern. After graduate school, he worked as a Policy Officer for the First Nations Development Institute. He has grassroots experience as a Social Services Worker for the Missouri Division of Aging, and a Social Work/Research Intern for the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center at Washington University. He maintains his commitment to the elderly population by volunteering weekly at a local nursing home and acting as an Ombudsman in Fairfax County, VA. Mr. Lewis has a MSW from Washington University and a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work with Honors from the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

**Fellowship Placement:** Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr.

**Supervisor:** Jeff Carroll, Chief of Staff



1999 Fellows Melissa (McNiel) Gower and Beverly A. Russell with Cynthia Lindquist-Mala and Representative John Lewis



1999 Fellow, Beverly A. Russell, with Senator Inouye and Senate Indian Affairs Committee Staff



1999 Fellow, Beverly A. Russell, with President Clinton



2003 Fellows during orientation with Andy Schneider



2002 Fellows with Dr. Michael H. Trujillo, Assistant Surgeon General and Director of the Indian Health Service



2001 Fellows with Representative Brad Carson



2002 Fellows with Dr. Ruth L. Kirschstein, Acting Director of the National Institutes of Health



2001 Fellows; Kaiser Family Foundation President and CEO, Drew Altman; and Marsha Lillie-Blanton



2002 Fellows, Priya Helweg with Senator Pete V. Domenici



2003 Fellow Rita LaFrance and Michael Sinclair





Mark LeBeau presenting to participants of the Association of American Indian Physicians Youth Initiative



2002 Fellows with Yvette D. Roubideaux and Buford L. Rolin at Mid Year meeting

PETE V. DOMENICI  
New Mexico

United States Senate  
Domenici

COMMITTEES:  
BUDGET  
APPROPRIATIONS  
ENERGY AND NATURAL  
RESOURCES  
INDIAN AFFAIRS  
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

March 1, 2007

Ms. Sarah Hibel  
Crested Butte  
1000 E. 1st Street  
PO Box 1000  
Crested Butte, CO 81324

Dear Ms. Hibel:

I would like to thank you for the letter you  
sent me on 2/28/07 regarding the  
funding for the Crested Butte area.

I am pleased to hear that you are  
interested in the Crested Butte area and  
the 2007 appropriations. I will be sure to  
keep you informed of any developments  
in the future.

With best wishes,  
Sincerely,  
*Pete Domenici*  
Pete Domenici  
United States Senator



With best wishes from your friend and Senator,

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Native American Health Policy Fellowships were awarded to outstanding American Indian/Alaska Natives who made their career in health related fields and were interested in health policy. The purpose of the fellowship was to give American Indian/Alaska Native community leaders an opportunity to learn more about national health policy issues and the policymaking process.

Fellows were given the opportunity to work full-time for one year in a Congressional or Executive Branch office, develop their research and analytic skills by writing a policy paper as well as participate in seminars on health and welfare policy issues, and meet with top health administrators, elected representatives, Congressional staff, and experts from policy research groups.



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