



Building health from the ground up

Carrie Irwin Brown leads Healthy Alaska Natives Foundation

Young views

Teen panel of advisers exercises its opinions about health care for state's benefit

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Stemming STDs

Increase in gonorrhea brings opportunities for statewide education effort

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System overhaul

Alaska Health Care Commission marks its first year with big plans for change

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MYTH

Alaska Native and American Indian people get free health care.

FACT

The Alaska Native Health System only receives half of the funds needed for a basic level of prepaid health care.

The Truth.

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ALASKA HEALTHY NATIVES FOUNDATION

Making communities better through philanthropy



Carrie Irwin Brown's moves more money to care needs

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A lifelong product of Interior Alaska, Carrie Irwin Brown traveled all the way to Japan before realizing how much she loved her home state. Born at Fort Wainwright and raised in Nenana, this 38-year-old professional of Koyukon Athabascan and Inupiaq Eskimo heritage did what many Alaskans do after high school: bolt for warmer, greener pastures.

Ironically, though, the farther she got, the more she craved it.

"Going abroad, it just gives you a much different and diverse perspective on your home and how you fit into that," Brown said. "It definitely made me realize how much I missed Alaska and how even though I loved traveling and seeing other places, Alaska is my home. I couldn't imagine living and working any where else."

After graduating from Alaska Pacific University, she was the executive director of the Alaska Native Arts Foundation and was responsible for marketing Alaska Native art work and artists from Anchorage to New York.

Then she became senior vice-president of First Alaskans Institute, where she was responsible for operating the initiatives in the areas of education, leadership development and policy analysis and expansion.

Last November she joined the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium as director of the Healthy Alaska Natives Foundation, a charitable arm of the ANTHC that raises money and spreads awareness while stressing a healthy lifestyle to Natives across the state.

"It's just kind of getting the word out about the different issues we're dealing with," she said.

Brown's background makes her a good fit for the position because not only does she have a passion for the Last Frontier, but more importantly, the indigenous people that call it home.

"I have a vested interest in seeing that we do get the best care that we can," she said.

The ANTHC operates the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage and other regional hospitals and clinics statewide, thanks in part to federal funding. But the other half,

Foundation in focus

While the Healthy Alaska Natives Foundation addresses a wide variety of health and wellness challenges, efforts and funding will focus on three key initiatives:

HEALTHCARE IMPROVEMENTS

Cancer, heart disease, unintentional injuries, suicide, and stroke are the leading causes of death for Alaska Natives. The foundation supports improved cancer care and survivorship along with health promotion and disease prevention programs throughout the Alaska Tribal Health System.

WELLNESS AND PREVENTION

To keep Alaska Natives healthy in body, mind and spirit, and to avert the high costs of hospital-based care, the foundation builds healthy communities through education, program development and promotion of health-conscious lifestyles.

HEALTHY VILLAGE ENVIRONMENTS

Diseases such as hepatitis A, bronchitis, impetigo and meningitis are widespread in rural Alaska, where many villages remain without clean water and sanitation services.

BROWN

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Brown said, comes from philanthropic donations, especially individuals, as well as corporate and other private foundations. It's her job to raise that money.

The Healthy Alaska Natives Foundation has been around for only two years, and Brown has been on the job for only six months. Most of the money raised in the past went into getting the program off the ground. Now her priority is funding the places that need it most.

"I'm not raising money to pay my salary or to buy me a computer. We're raising money to do things with it," Brown said. "At some point in the future, I would hope that we do have a million dollars coming in every year, but at this point we're still growing."

Three months ago, based on her recommendation, the ANTHC oversight committee approved \$100,000 allocation in what Brown said was the first big distribution made by the Healthy Alaska Natives Foundation. That money was spread out to eight different initiatives and grants ranging from \$2,700 to \$37,000 for various programs.

Then in April the foundation raised another \$36,000 through a fundraiser at the third annual Raven's Ball to pay for a new piece of ultrasound equipment.

So already, Brown's impact is being felt.

"We're really seeing some quick results," she said. "More



Carrie Irwin Brown, director of the Healthy Alaska Natives Foundation.

importantly, I've really made an effort to reach out to the providers and the doctors and the nurses over at the (Alaska Native Medical Center) because they really haven't been invited to things before.

"They maybe don't understand why we exist and how we

can help them. I think that was the first real concrete way how the doctors saw we could help them."

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