



WASHINGTON STATE TRIBAL  
**OPIOID FENTANYL  
SUMMIT**  
STRENGTHENING PATHWAYS TO HEALING

# Washington State an honored partner in upcoming Tribal Opioid/Fentanyl Summit

Tribal and state leaders will create a plan together to combat the opioid crisis in Tribal communities

On May 22 and 23, Lummi Nation will host the first Washington State Tribal Opioid/Fentanyl Summit: *Strengthening Pathways to Healing*. As a true government-to-government health care summit, Tribal-elected officials will meet with Governor Jay Inslee and other state leaders to discuss the opioid crisis within our communities. During the summit, attendees will determine a plan of action to combat this crisis within Tribal communities, with special attention to the devastating impacts of fentanyl.

*“At one time, not too long ago, we lived in peace and harmony with all we knew,”* said Chair Carol Evans of the Spokane Tribe. *“Let us strive to find this peace and harmony once again. We cannot do this without providing ways for our people to heal within themselves, amongst one another; and with our environment. The opioid/fentanyl drug crisis continues to prevent us from healing. Let us come together to further discuss ways that we can provide healing from the impacts of the opioid/fentanyl crisis. Join us for the upcoming Tribal Opioid/Fentanyl Summit on May 22-23 at Lummi Nation. It is time for us to heal.”*

## Why hold a summit?

American Indian and Alaska Native people continue to experience negative impacts to their health and wellness, which began when the country was colonized. These impacts persist to this day and worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, Native people experienced significantly higher rates of suicide and overdose attempts than those non-Native people.

*“The COVID-19 pandemic should have been called a ‘Tri-demic’ due to the isolation, disruptions, and routines that were on the rise including partner violence, depression, overdose, and increase in fentanyl and substance abuse addiction,”* said Chair Teri Gobin of the Tulalip Tribe. *“Now that Covid has subsided, we can come together again with our communities and develop resources to have a ‘boots to the ground’ approach to combat the opioid crisis that continues to devastate tribal communities. As native people, coming together is a preventative and protective factor that provides healing for us. The more tribes and the state are able to partner and coordinate our efforts, the more resilient our people will be.”*

As a community, the life expectancy for Native populations dropped by 6.6 years. Of particular concern is the high rate of opioid and fentanyl-related overdose deaths.

*“Fentanyl is a deadly poison being pumped into our community,”* said Chairman Jarred-Michael Erickson of the Colville Tribes. *“The Colville Tribes will explore any approach to this problem that might bring real results. Our people deserve our best efforts to keep them safe.”*

During the 2022 Centennial Accord, Tribes called upon Governor Inslee to act to combat the opioid/fentanyl crisis that disproportionately affects the state’s Tribal communities. As a result, the state committed to holding a summit.

*“Bringing the tribes and the state together for these needed discussions will help shift the overall trajectory of how we effectively combat the fentanyl crisis that we all face,”* said Lummi Nation Councilman, Northwest Portland Indian Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB) Chair, and National Indian Health Board (NIHB) Vice-Chair Nickolaus Lewis. *“We’re in a time where we must acknowledge what isn’t working and improve what is. We can’t sit idle and accept excuses. Our people are dying and being impacted by this crisis regardless, and while this is the beginning of these efforts, it is not the end. These uncomfortable conversations will lead to solutions that we can all support.”*

Tribal- and state-elected officials will spend two days together during the summit and discuss topics like justice, housing, treatment, and family. The purpose of these discussion is for Tribes and the state to come together to create a plan and find the best path forward that addresses opioids and fentanyl in our communities.

*“We are self-determined people; we know how to care for ourselves,”* said Lummi Nation Chairman Anthony Hillaire. *“When provided adequate support and resources, we can address this drug epidemic in a way that promotes our culture, teachings, and way of life. Our vision is that one day we will heal ourselves from the atrocities that have happened to us. That one day, we will break the cycles of trauma, and our children and grandchildren will grow up unhindered by the negative aspects of the world. This summit is a step toward unity to address the drug epidemic on all levels of government and community. We are looking forward to collaborating with this state, Indian Country, and the United States of America to come up with effective solutions for the betterment of all people,”* Chairman Hillaire said.

#### Media contact

The summit is an invitation-only event. If you are a member of the press/media and are interested in attending, please [contact Rachelle Alongi](#).