

2023 Paddle to Muckleshoot, Nisqually canoe landing.  
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May 2026  
DOH 910-932

# Tribal School-Based Behavioral Health Services

## Project At-a-Glance

- The Adolescent & Young Adult Health (AYAH) Unit at the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is partnering with Seven Directions, an Indigenous public health institute at the University of Washington, to expand access to school-based behavioral health services.
- The partnership will fund 4 Tribal communities to implement culturally relevant, school-based behavioral health programs beginning in Spring 2026 through June 2027. The funding opportunity is called the **School-based Program for Indigenous Resilience, Integration, and Thriving (SPIRIT)**.
- In summer 2024, Seven Directions held community listening sessions with 4 school communities. To honor the relationships and commitments made during the listening sessions, funding was first offered to the participating Tribal communities. It was then extended to all Washington Tribes through a request for applications in April 2026.
- The funding will support 4 Tribal communities to plan for and begin delivering behavioral health programs for the current 2025–2027 biennium. It will also support Seven Directions to offer culturally tailored contract management, evaluation, and technical assistance.

## About the School-Based Health Center Program at DOH

School-based health centers (SBHCs) are student-focused health centers located in or next to a school. Students can receive integrated medical, mental health, and other health care services, such as dental care. Washington's first SBHC program began in Seattle in 1989. Today, there are over 70 SBHCs sponsored by more than 25 different health care organizations throughout the state. There is currently 1 Tribal SBHC, located at Lummi Nation School. SBHCs can help improve school attendance, reduce barriers to learning, and improve access to preventive health care. Learn more about SBHCs on the Washington School-Based Health Alliance website: [www.wasbha.org](http://www.wasbha.org).

The Washington State Legislature passed Substitute House Bill 1225 in 2021. The new law (RCW 43.70.825) established the SBHC grant program at DOH to expand and sustain SBHCs for students in public schools, with a focus on communities and populations who have been historically underserved. In 2021, DOH requested additional support for the new SBHC Program to respond to the growing mental and behavioral health needs of young people. This funding supports access to behavioral health care through community-based or innovative approaches, beyond only the SBHC model.

# Partnerships for American Indian Alaska Native Adolescent Health

## Identifying community priorities

Washington's Tribal communities have been leaders in community health since time immemorial. At the same time, historical trauma across both health care and education has led to widespread behavioral health concerns among American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth. Despite urgent need, accessible care remains out of reach for many. SBHCs are an effective strategy to provide essential care that improves both health and educational outcomes for youth.

To better understand Tribal needs and preferences related to school-based health services, the AYAH Unit partnered with Seven Directions to hold community listening sessions. The Department of Health announced this project in an [April 10, 2024 Dear Tribal Leader Letter](#). Seven Directions hosted 4 Town Hall conversations with Tribal communities in 4 regions of the state to learn about the needs and interests related to school-based health care.



*Scan to view the report*

Themes and findings from these conversations are described in detail in Seven Directions' report, accessible by scanning the QR code on this page. The recommendations describe a clear directive to: **build intentional partnerships with Tribal communities, prioritize continuous learning to understand Tribes' unique values, Treaty Rights, and implementation contexts; and establish a dedicated funding mechanism to support school-based health in Tribal communities while continuing to honor our government-to-government relationship.**

## Responding to serve Native youth

In response to Seven Directions' findings, the AYAH Unit set out to improve AI/AN youths' access to behavioral health services and programs by creating a school-based behavioral health services grant tailored to the unique priorities of Tribal communities. The AYAH Unit will continue its partnership with Seven Directions to provide culturally tailored support to Tribal communities with planning or start-up projects.

Funded projects may include staff time for behavioral health care providers, community or youth engagement activities, staff or student training, group counseling, or other culturally appropriate behavioral health projects. Seven Directions opened a request for applications during April 2026. Funding recipients will be notified by the end of May 2026.

## Next steps

Work with Seven Directions began in December 2025. Subcontracts with Tribal communities are expected to begin in spring 2026. AYAH staff will share updates with Tribal leaders and health officials during behavioral health-related Tribal workgroup meetings as the project progresses.



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