

Thanks for participating in access to health care survey



CATHERINE HOLLOWELL,
DIRECTOR, UNIT II

I want to thank the DeTour and Drummond Island communities for participating in the recent survey regarding access to health care. Your personal experiences provided valuable feedback for the Adhoc Access to Healthcare Committee and shined a spotlight on how difficult it is (and in some instances, how unacceptable it is) for tribal members to access the care they need. Thanks to our health ser-

vice staff for thinking outside the box and proposing both immediate short term solutions, as well as strategic long term solutions for our underserved rural tribal members.

Another community meeting will be held in DeTour in April. A letter will be sent announcing time and date. We continue to meet biweekly in order to restore services in all outlying areas (Escanaba, Marquette, Newberry, Kinross). It's important to remember that this is not an expansion of health services, but access to services we already provide.

Our various funding sources — IHS, BIA, BIE and other federal dollars, along with our own tribal revenue from casinos and enterprises — determine the budget we have to work with. It is within this financial framework that improvements — both in services to our citizens and workforce investment — have to be made. The truth is, we face a

lot of challenges and solutions will have to be found within the realities of the resources available to us. For the most part, federal dollars are restricted to specific program line items. The only real discretionary dollars we have is tribal support (around \$17 million) from our casinos and enterprises. This month, we will have the final report on 2012 expenditures and will be able to see exactly where every dollar of our discretionary tribal support was expended. It is imperative that every dollar of tribal support is prioritized and appropriated for maximum benefit. This is our opportunity to evaluate and make midcourse corrections to the 2013 budget to ensure fair, equitable and effective appropriations of tribal support dollars.

Sequestration: The federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reports that IHS services and facilities are subject to a 5 percent budget cut,

or \$195 million in services and \$22 million in facilities for 2013 (with only seven months remaining to absorb those cuts). How that will impact our funding dollars remains to be seen, but we will remain vigilant to ensure our underserved rural communities don't shoulder the brunt of the funding reduction. How sequestration will affect other programs such as Head Start and Housing remains to be seen but "doing more with less" has to be our operational goal.

Fiscal discipline and debt reduction must remain a priority.

When I came onboard in summer of 2010, we were presented with a seven-year debt reduction plan. Our external debt (casino and governmental side) at the beginning of 2012 was \$50,695,257. Payments made were \$8,763,590, leaving a balance of \$41,931,667, so we remain on target. I'm really looking forward to retiring this

debt and applying that \$8.7 million toward restoration of popular tribal programs.

I will have to report on internal loans next month as I am visiting my new grandbaby and don't have the figures in hand at press time.

With spring just around the corner (and bad weather behind us), Director Causley and I will resume unit office hours starting in April: Naubinway, snowmobile museum, last Wednesday of the month, 1-6 p.m.; Newberry, Tribal Community Center, third Thursday of the month, 1-6 p.m.; and Hessel, Tribal Community Center, third Monday of the month, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

As always, I look forward to hearing from you with your questions, comments and concerns.

And I do want to say miigwech for all the calls of support I've received in the last two weeks and your faith in me.