

FOREWORD

We are delighted to showcase a unique process for reaching out to, engaging, and disseminating research conducted among Alaska Native people. The Southcentral Foundation, notably its Research Department, led by Dr. Denise Dillard and her colleagues – the authors of this special issue – is widely respected for its deep commitment to pursuing research relevant to its customer/owners. Indeed, simply referring to their patient population in this fashion underscores the alignment of their mission, values, and actions. Frankly, I know of no other entity, tribal or otherwise, so fully dedicated in principal as well as practice to ensuring that its research is driven by stakeholders, that the results are translated into terms meaningful to them, that the findings reflect their perspectives, that the attendant insights are applied with local benefit, and that this work is undertaken in a scientifically rigorous manner that contributes to our understanding of the health and well-being of this special population. The articles herein testify to the effort required of such work and the potential return on investment for all participants.

Unfortunately, much of today's conversation about outreach to, engagement of, and dissemination among Native communities proceeds at a level of abstraction that offers little guidance about actual process. Not so here. The authors describe in detail the nature of their research, steps taken to communicate findings to key stakeholders, the latter's reactions, and implications for this process. Their candid discussion of the challenges that arose during this endeavor represents a refreshingly authentic analysis of a difficult subject, the mechanics of which are often glossed over in the rush to exhort others to engage tribal communities. Of particular value is the authors' reflection on how the communication strategies available to them through the Southcentral Foundation can be mobilized to maintain the momentum of their initial efforts and to reinforce the reciprocity as well as transparency that characterized this undertaking. The lessons learned, and shared in the pages to follow, are important ones. Thank you for stretching yourselves beyond the typical role of researcher-as-scientist to illustrate these lessons and the wisdom contained therein.

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