

Need for a Larger Denver, Colorado Indian Health Facility

Denver, Colorado is in need of a larger health facility. The nearest full-fledged Indian Health Service hospitals are in Rapid City, S.D. or Albuquerque, N.M. which are a six-seven hour drive.

Possible Facility

The Veterans Administration Medical Center in Denver, Colorado, is getting a new medical center which includes a thirty bed Nursing Home Care Unit and is scheduled for completion sometime in 2015. The current Veterans Administration VA Nursing Home would provide an excellent site for a larger medical facility for the regional Urban Indian Population. The existing Nursing Home Care Unit was an addition to the main hospital in 1984, and has approximately 23,000 square feet of space and appears to be in excellent condition.

Obtaining this property would save the Denver Indian Health and Family Services clinic approximately \$100,000 a year in rent payments and the savings could then be used for expanded health services for patients.

Title V of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act would allow for a transfer of the property if and when the VA determines the existing Nursing Home to be excess to their needs.

Denver Urban Indian Population

The 2000 Census Data reports that 44,241 American Indian and Alaskan natives live in the State of Colorado, comprising 1.0 percent of the total population. This represents a 62.78 increase since the 1990 census and this increasing trend is expected to continue. The cities with the largest populations are Denver and Colorado Springs.

During World War II and the years immediately after the war, American Indians from rural areas, particularly from reservations, moved to cities in search of better opportunities. Selected as one of the initial destination cities for the relocation and employment assistance programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Denver became a hub for American Indian migrants. Although the federal government hoped to assimilate Indian relocatees by distancing them from reservation communities, the Denver American Indians created an urban Indian community to support themselves and showed little interest in losing their tribal or Indian identities.

With Denver's central location between the desert tribes of the southwest and the plains tribes east of the Rocky Mountains, the metropolitan area has become home to more than 20,000 American Indians. These descendents of the Cheyenne, Lakota, Kiowa, Navajo, and at least a dozen tribal nations are an integral part of the city's social and economic life. Despite their diversity, they are a tight-knit group, sharing the same strong commitment to family and cultural survival.

Hub of Indian Country

In the far-flung expanse of Indian country, Denver emerged as the informal capital. Denver has the nation's largest concentration of national Indian groups, about 15 associations ranging from the leading Indian law firm to the leading scholarship fund. Propelling Denver to center stage have been the city's neutrality in tribal affairs and its centrality in transportation. Denver is a seven-hour drive from Colorado's only reservations, the two Ute homelands in the State's far southwest corner.

"In the urban Indian political world, Denver is the primary city," Kevin Gover, assistant secretary for Indian Affairs, said from Washington. Gover, an Oklahoma Pawnee who most recently lived in New Mexico, observed, "If we need a location where we are not favoring one group over another, Denver is neutral ground."