

## **Carmelita Wamego Skeeter, Chief Executive Officer**

Carmelita Skeeter began her career in health care more than 37 years ago, first as a volunteer at Neighbor for Neighbor and then at Project Get Together. Through her volunteer efforts, her involvement with what would become the Indian Health Care Resource Center of Tulsa (IHCRC) began in 1976 when she assisted in surveying residents in Tulsa and surrounding areas to assess for a need of healthcare services for our vast urban Indian population living in and around Tulsa. Survey results showed that the medical needs of Tulsa's Native Americans were not being met. Based on these findings, Carmelita joined forces with three other individuals to form the four pillars on which IHCRC was founded and built to address these needs. Initially the agency only provided referral services, but within a year, provisions for medical services began. During her tenure with IHCRC Carmelita has worn many hats including Clinic Administrator up until 1989 when she was promoted to Chief Executive Officer. Throughout her career, Carmelita has been recognized numerous times for her tireless efforts to ensure quality, accessible and comprehensive health care to Tulsa's Indian people.

Recognized as one of Oklahoma's most distinguished First Ladies of Health, Carmelita coordinates the activities and visions for IHCRC. As a proud member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation she speaks out strongly in support of minority and Indian health needs. Carmelita has distinguished herself both locally and nationally with her advocacy and dedication to a wide range of critical health care issues. She is an activist who is in strong support in aiding underserved populations. Her devotion to providing the Tulsa area Indian community with the best in health care is unparalleled. If Carmelita recognizes that someone's needs are not being met, she takes care of it herself. She is not a person that sits down in the time of need; she is the one that coordinates the troops.

Through her dedicated leadership, IHCRC's 135 employees provide comprehensive health care services including primary medical and dental care, preventive services, therapeutic measures, health education and community outreach. Supportive medical services include a diagnostic lab and x-ray, mammography, optometry and pharmacy. Behavioral health services include psychiatry, individual, family and group professional counseling and out-patient substance abuse treatment. This rich mix of services holistically addresses all areas of an individual's life. The strength of the Indian family provides the foundation to promote positive development and foster healthy living. As one of Tulsa's traditional providers of critical safety-net health care, we maintain close working relationships with other community agencies to assist clients with referrals of wraparound services. Carmelita has dedicated her life to IHCRC and the issues affecting all Native Americans. She never lacks the drive and determination to add to and enhance the many services already provided by our health center.

Although her involvement and accomplishments are too numerous to list in their entirety, she has made a major difference through her involvement including: her service on the Tribal Technical Advisory Group for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for the past three years; her service on the Oklahoma Primary Care Board and Committees for the past 20 years; her service on the Indian Health Service (IHS) Oklahoma Area User Population Team Workgroups; her membership with the Oklahoma Academy; her service on the Susan G. Komen Foundation's American Indian/Alaska Native national advisory council; her testimony before the National Association of OB/GYN Physicians; her testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior and Environment; her address at a Town Hall meeting on Health Diversity for the Tulsa City County Health Department; her panel membership for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC); her address in Atlanta concerning Health Diversity; her membership with the National Council of Urban Indian Health and; her membership with the Iron Gate Advisory Board for Tulsa's homeless population.

Her passion for assisting the nation's underserved populations has not gone unnoticed. She is without a doubt one of the hardest working individuals when it comes to improving the quality of health care for Native Americans. She has made it her life's work to understand the health needs of our community and to make sure that those needs are being met. Carmelita has recently worked with Oklahoma State Representative Seneca Scott to write a Bill for State Medicaid Expansion for Indians, House Bill #1518. She has worked with the Neighborhood Business Property Association on zoning issues and bus routing issues in Tulsa. Carmelita is most proud of her tireless efforts in Oklahoma and nationally for permanent approval of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act dedicating over a decade of her time from 1998 to 2010 to assist with the accomplishment of this goal which benefits Native Americans from all federally recognized tribes.

Carmelita Skeeter has dedicated her entire adult life to the betterment of lives for the Native American population. Her emphasis has primarily been focused on improved health care and subsequently the quality of life for one of the largest Native American populations in the United States, Tulsa County. Her legacy will always be remembered as one who always stood up for those that couldn't speak for themselves and one that worked tirelessly to leave circumstances better than she found them. Because of her political finesse, hard work and dedication, she has ensured that the health care needs for Native Americans in Tulsa and the surrounding areas is not only better but much better.