A Tribute to Councilman Joe A. Garcia from the SAMHSA Office of Tribal Affairs

“I feel the sense of the spirit here in your homeland, and that is a good feeling.” – Councilman Joe Garcia

It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the passing of Councilman Joe A. Garcia, member of the Ohkay Owingeh Tribe and Co-Chair of the SAMHSA Tribal Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC).

“Councilman Garcia was a beacon of hope, establishing lifelong bonds with others, regardless of their occupation, cultural background, or gender,” said CAPT Karen Hearod, Director of the Office of Tribal Affairs and Policy (OTAP). “He was the embodiment of authenticity, serving as a leader in spaces dedicated to helping Tribal Nations and devoting his life to community service.”

Councilman Garcia greatly contributed to the efforts of SAMHSA by serving as co-chair of the TTAC Council and primary TTAC delegate within the Albuquerque Area, representing Tribes in New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas for over eight years. The TTAC helps build and maintain SAMHSA’s government-to-government relationship with American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Tribes.

SAMHSA is grateful to Councilman Garcia for initiating the TTAC discussion and fervidly speaking on the importance of Tribal leaders’ voices when creating a behavioral health agenda for Tribal nations. Additionally, he was significant in the development of the Tribal Behavioral Health Agenda (TBHA), a collaborative Tribal-Federal blueprint for improving the behavioral health of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Councilman Garcia was inspirational in this work, helping lead the charge surrounding the TBHA and providing a vitally important Tribal perspective.

Throughout his life, Garcia championed Tribal sovereignty and was instrumental in the critical infrastructure for Native Americans, including access to health care, broadband Internet, and more. He was an electrical engineer by trade, earning a degree in engineering from the University of New Mexico. Moreover, Garcia was employed for 25 years at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, retiring in 2003.

We would like to thank Councilman Garcia for all his contributions leading to improving American Indian and Alaska Native behavioral health and express our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues. His spirit lives in all he encountered. But as he would say “you’re on your own now.”