

AI/AN Health Partners

April 29, 2025

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree:

The AI/AN Health Partners is a coalition of health organizations dedicated to improving health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). AI/ANs face substantially poorer health outcomes, and higher mortality and morbidity rates than the general population. The Indian Health Service (IHS) is critical to how they access health care. However, the IHS must have sufficient resources to meet its mission to raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level.

We appreciate the continued support the Committee has given to the Indian Health Service. We know that you have listened to testimony from tribes and tribal organizations stressing the importance of maintaining the best possible health care system for AI/ANs. We ask that you continue that support for the FY 2026 Indian Health Service appropriation.

Over the years, our mutual goals have not deviated. Instead, they have only become more urgent. To provide health care for AI/ANs at a level equivalent to the rest of the nation there must be strong support for increasing and maintaining a robust health care system. We believe that there are three initial steps to accomplish this:

- **Loan repayment and scholarships:** Increase funding for Health Professions Loan Repayment and Scholarships. For FY 2025, we requested an \$18,000,000 increase in this account. Recently, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr, cited the 30 percent health care provider vacancy rate for the Service. It has been estimated that it would take approximately \$18,000,000 to close this gap and allow the IHS to hire about 400 more providers.
- **Staff quarters:** Identify specific funding to address the need to provide decent staff quarters at existing healthcare facilities. Many of the 2,700 staff quarters in the IHS health delivery system are more than 40 years old and in need of major renovation or total replacement. Additionally, in several locations, the number of housing units is insufficient. Decent and adequate staff quarters, especially in remote areas, is necessary for attracting and keeping health care providers in Indian

Country. We endorsed the Administration's request for \$11 million for new and replacement staff quarters for FY 2025. We continue to support this request for FY 2026.

- **Medical and diagnostic equipment:** Health care professionals need modern equipment to make accurate clinical diagnoses and prescribe effective medical and dental treatments. The IHS/Tribal/Urban Indian (I/T/U) health programs manage approximately 90,000 devices consisting of laboratory, imaging, patient monitoring, pharmacy, and other biomedical, diagnostic, and patient equipment. However, many of these facilities use outdated equipment like analog mammography machines. In some cases, they are using equipment that is no longer manufactured. Today's medical devices/systems have an average life expectancy of approximately six to eight years. The IHS has calculated for several years that to replace the equipment at the end of its six to eight-year life would require approximately \$100 million per year. For three fiscal years, this account has been frozen at \$32,598,000. We urge the Committee for FY 2026 to fund the Indian Health Facilities equipment account at the House-approved FY 2024 amount of at least \$42,862,000.

In closing we are reminded of inspiring and guiding words from Native Americans:

"Let us put our minds together and see what kind of life we can make for our children." Sitting Bear

"Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people, and have always in view not only the present, but also coming generations – the unborn of the future nation." Constitution of the Iroquois Confederation

Thank you for considering our IHS funding requests for FY 2026. We look forward to working with you to ensure the best possible health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Sincerely,
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Dental Association
American Dental Education Association
American Medical Association
American Psychological Association Services
Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists
Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS
National Kidney Foundation