

## AI/AN Health Partners

September 3, 2020

Dear Senator:

The AI/AN Health Partners is a coalition of health organizations dedicated to improving health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). Our organizations are writing to strongly urge you to provide emergency funding in the Senate's next coronavirus legislation package so that the Indian Health Service (IHS) and tribal health programs can adequately address the COVID-19 pandemic ravishing Native Americans.

We were dismayed to see that the recently circulated "skinny bill", titled "Delivering Immediate Relief to America's Families, Schools and Small Businesses Act", included no direct emergency appropriation for the IHS and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). This is a step backwards from the Senate HEALS bill that had included \$1.6 billion specifically for the IHS.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the already existing health disparities, and high mortality and morbidity rates that AI/ANs face every day. As of September 2nd, the IHS reported that over 42,000 Native Americans tested positive for COVID-19. However, the total number of COVID-19 cases could be much higher because reporting by tribal and urban Indian health programs is voluntary.

Additional data highlights the impact the pandemic has on Indian country. A CDC Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity reported on August 14 that AI/ANs had the highest hospitalization rate, 311.2 per 100,000, of any ethnic group in the country.

Furthermore, a CDC Morbidity and Mortality [study](#) released August 18 found that in 23 selected states, the cumulative incidence of COVID-19 cases among AI/AN was 3.5 times that of non-Hispanic whites. Furthermore, the data showed that AI/ANs who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 tended to be younger than white non-Hispanic individuals with COVID-19 infection. Compared to whites, a higher percentage of cases among AI/AN individuals were in people under 18 years of age.

The CDC study concluded that, "Adequate health care and public health infrastructure resources are needed to support a culturally responsive public health effort that sustains the strengths of AI/AN communities."

As you finalize the next coronavirus legislation, we urge you to at least match the funding provisions to address the needs of AI/ANs included in H.R. 6800, which are:

**Bureau of Indian Affairs** – \$900 million to meet Tribal government needs necessary to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus, which includes funding for:

- \$780 million to continue Tribal government operations and programs and to clean Tribal facilities.
- \$100 million to address overcrowded housing which is prohibiting social isolation.
- \$20 million for sanitation needs to provide for water hydration and hygiene issues to mitigate and respond to the coronavirus.

**Indian Health Service** – \$2.1 billion to address health care needs related to coronavirus for Native Americans, which includes funding for:

- \$1 billion to account for lost third party revenues as a result of reduced medical care.
- \$64 million to assist Urban Indian Organizations.
- \$10 million to assist with sanitation, hydration and hygiene needs in Indian Country necessary to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus.
- \$500 million to provide health care, including telehealth services to Native Americans, and to purchase medical supplies and personal protective equipment.
- \$140 million to expand broadband infrastructure and information technology for telehealth and electronic health records system purposes.
- \$20 million to provide health care, housing and isolation units for domestic violence victims and homeless Native Americans.
- No less than \$366 million to provide isolation or quarantine space.

It was reported by the media that the “Delivering Immediate Relief to America’s Families, Schools and Small Businesses Act” will focus on the “most urgent” needs related to the pandemic. We can think of nothing more urgent than sufficiently and adequately funding the BIA and IHS programs at their needed levels.

Thank you for considering our requests.

We look forward to working with you,

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Association of Colleges of Nursing

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Dental Association

American Physical Therapy Association

Association of American Indian Physicians (AAIP).

Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA)

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