



MAY 22 2023

Dear Urban Indian Organization Leader:

I am writing in follow-up to Urban Confer sessions convened by the Indian Health Service (IHS) on Urban Indian health priorities. These virtual Confer sessions were held on October 31, 2022, and December 15, 2022.

By letter dated October 27, 2022, Deputy Director P. Benjamin Smith requested your recommendations and guidance on how best to ensure Urban Indian health care needs were considered at the local, regional, and national level.

The IHS received (23) written and verbal comments from Urban Indian Organization Leaders.

In general, commenters recommended the following:

- Increase funding for the Urban Indian health budget line to improve the health of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people in urban areas and the IHS overall.
- Support mandatory appropriations to ensure stable funding for AI/AN health care that is exempt from the political process and exception apportionment for Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs).
- Continued advocacy by the IHS for permanent reauthorization of the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) at the current funding level of \$250 million. Urban Indian Organization commenters emphasize the ongoing need for this program to reduce diabetes and diabetes-related illnesses in Indian Country. There were also requests that UIO Leaders be included in all discussions related to SDPI structural changes to ensure urban health programs receive SDPI funding.
- Provide opportunities for UIO Leaders to participate in the IHS Budget Formulation process to ensure representation of urban AI/AN populations. Urban Indian Organization Leaders can share recommendations that address the unique health care needs of urban AI/AN patients.
- Support Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) at 100 percent for Medicaid-eligible AI/AN patients treated in UIO facilities. The lack of 100 percent FMAP creates a significant disparity that negatively impacts the ability of UIOs to expand health care services.
- Expand partnerships with other Federal agencies to support the provision of services addressing the social determinants of health through Urban Confer policies.
- Establish more consistency at the IHS Area Office level with regard to improving Agency funding processes, Health Information Technology (HIT) support, annual onsite reviews, etc.

- Improve the quality of data reported and collected by the IHS to ensure more accurate documentation of patient counts, patient visits, and patient identity verification. Urban Indian Organizations need accurate data to evaluate care delivery and organizational effectiveness.
- Select the best HIT solution for the Indian health care system that fully supports data exchange, interoperability, technical support, and training. Commenters request that the IHS reimburse all HIT support systems acquired by the UIOs to provide safe, effective, timely, patient-centered, and equitable health care to AI/AN patients.

The IHS is nearing the release of the *2023-2027 Strategic Plan of the Office of Urban Indian Health Program (OUIHP)*, which aims to improve Agency practices by engaging more effectively with UIO Leaders to promote meaningful discussion on your identified priorities. The IHS OUIHP Strategic Plan includes goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures that are based on input from UIO Leaders, Tribal Leaders, IHS staff, and external UIO stakeholders. The OUIHP Strategic Plan aligns with much of the input received in the Urban Indian health priorities Confer sessions. For input not included as part of the OUIHP Strategic Plan, the IHS will continue to work in partnership with you on those important matters.

The IHS is committed to improving the health of AI/AN people in urban areas. If you have any questions, please contact Rose Weahkee, Ph.D., Director, OUIHP, IHS, by telephone at (240) 994-9361, or by e-mail at rose.weahkee@ihs.gov.

Sincerely,

Roselyn Tso -S

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Roselyn Tso
Director