

AI/AN Health Partners

December 2, 2025

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
522 Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
531 Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murkowski and Ranking Member Merkley:

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 thank you for the support the Committee provided to the Indian Health Service in its Fiscal Year 2026 Interior Appropriations bill. However, as you conference your bill we urge the Senate to recede to the House on three higher funded accounts:

- **\$95,252,000 for the Indian Health Professions.** The IHS currently has a 30 percent vacancy rate for health care providers. The Service has testified that providing loan repayment through this account is its best recruitment and retention program for attracting and keeping health care providers.
- **\$188,702,000 for Health Care Facilities.** A portion of the funding in this account is used for staff housing. Decent and adequate staff quarters, especially in remote areas, is necessary for attracting and keeping health care providers in Indian Country. Currently, 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.
- **\$41,874,00 for 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 However, many of these facilities use outdated equipment like analog mammography machines. The IHS has estimated that it needs \$100,000,000 every year to maintain and replace equipment.

Recruiting and keeping IHS health care providers is more important than ever. National Indian Health Board Chief Executive Officer AC Locklear testified before the Senate Indian Affairs

Committee on October 29, 2025, and highlighted how recent Administration decisions have impacted the Service:

“Since early 2025, workforce reductions and hiring freezes within HHS, particularly at the IHS, HRSA, SAMHSA, and CDC, have significantly reduced the personnel supporting Tribal programs. The uncertainty surrounding these actions has devastated morale, driving experienced staff and clinicians to leave the Indian health system altogether.”

The IHS was established in 1955, 70 years ago. During those years, Congress has provided much needed funding but has never been able to fully fund the program. With the Service experiencing additional program cuts this year, it is more important than ever that Congress allocate the highest funding levels possible for the IHS in the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations

Thank you for considering our requests. We look forward to working with you to improve health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Dental Association
Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists
Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium
National Kidney Foundation