

# UIO Call to Action Toolkit: Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act

Category: Policy Blog

written by Meredith Raimondi | August 5, 2019

## **Call to Action: Ask Congress to Authorize the VA to Reimburse UIOs for Health Care**

Representative Ro Khanna and Senator Tom Udall, vice chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, introduced the *Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act*, a bill to improve health care access for Native American Veterans by providing Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) coverage for care that Native American Veterans receive at urban Indian health centers. This legislation would include “urban Indian organizations” in the statute requiring the VA to reimburse Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal health facilities for services they provide to native veterans. To ensure that the Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act receives as much support as possible, we encourage you to contact your Member of Congress and request that they sign on as a cosponsor of this bill (if they have not already).

- View NCUIH one-pager on [VA-IHS Memorandum of Understanding](#).
- [NCUIH Press Release](#)
- [Udall, Khanna Press Release](#)
- [AP Story: Bill would expand health care options for Native veterans](#)
- [House bill](#) (H.R. 4153)
- [Senate bill](#) (S. 2365)

### **Write to Your House Member**

Please use the following text below as a template to call or email to your Representatives. You should call and email your representative; you can find your representative [here](#).

Dear Representative [ ],

On behalf of [program] and the communities we serve, we respectfully request you sign on as a cosponsor to the Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act recently introduced by Representative Ro Khanna and Senator Udall. This bill is a critical language fix that would include “urban Indian organizations” in the statute requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to reimburse Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal health facilities for services they provide to native veterans.

Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) are an integral part of the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) health care delivery system. However, due to an oversight in legislation UIOs are the only part of the IHS Indian/Tribal/Urban (I/T/U) system that do not receive reimbursement under the VA-IHS MOU reimbursement agreement. However, UIOs were created by Congress as a response to Tribes that wanted to ensure their members would receive quality health care off of reservations as part of the trust obligation.

The Department of Veterans Administration has stated that it cannot address the issue on its own, and that only Congress has the authority to correct this oversight. The Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act of 2019 would ensure that all three branches of the I/T/U system receive

reimbursement for health care services delivered to AI/AN veterans. At [Your Program] we offer [services you provide]. With reimbursement under the VA-IHS MOU reimbursement agreement we could [expand services/hire additional staff/etc]. We hope you will become a cosponsor of the Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act and show your support for the health of urban AI/AN Veterans.

For the sake of the health of American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans and the fulfillment of the U.S. trust obligation, we request your support of this simple language fix. To sign on, please contact Mr. Will McKelvey ([Will.Mckelvey@mail.house.gov](mailto:Will.Mckelvey@mail.house.gov)) 202-225-2631 from Congressman Ro Khanna's office.

Sincerely, [Executive Director/CEO]

### **Write to Your Senator**

Please use the following text below as a template to call or email to your Senators. You can find your Senators [here](#).

Dear Senator [ ],

On behalf of [program] and the communities we serve, we respectfully request you sign on as a cosponsor to the Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act (S.2365) recently introduced by Senator Udall and Representative Ro Khanna. This bill is a critical language fix that would include "urban Indian organizations" in the statute requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to reimburse Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal health facilities for services they provide to native veterans.

Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) are an integral part of the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) health care delivery system. However, due to an oversight in legislation UIOs are the only part of the IHS Indian/Tribal/Urban (I/T/U) system that do not receive reimbursement under the VA-IHS MOU reimbursement agreement. However, UIOs were created by Congress as a response to Tribes that wanted to ensure their members would receive quality health care off of reservations as part of the trust obligation.

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At [Your Program] we offer [services you provide]. With reimbursement under the VA-IHS MOU reimbursement agreement we could [expand services/hire additional staff/etc]. We hope you will become a cosponsor of the Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act and show your support for the health of urban AI/AN Veterans.

For the sake of the health of American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans and the fulfillment of the U.S. trust obligation, we request your support of this simple language fix. To sign on, please contact Ms. Kim Moxley ([Kim\\_Moxley@indian.senate.gov](mailto:Kim_Moxley@indian.senate.gov)) 202-224-2251 from Senator Udall's office.

Sincerely, [Executive Director/CEO]

### **Press Release: Bipartisan, Bicameral Legislation Introduced to Improve**

## Health Care Access for American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans in Urban Areas

**Washington, DC (August 2, 2019)** — Today, **Senator Tom Udall (D-NM)** and **Representative Ro Khanna (D-Calif.)** introduced the *Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act* (S. 2365) which would improve health care access for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) veterans by providing Department of Veterans Affairs coverage for care that AI/AN vets receive from Title V Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs). The legislation allows AI/AN veterans better access to culturally-competent care and alleviates burdens on the VA system. In addition to Udall and Khanna, the bill is co-sponsored by **U.S. Senators Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Jon Tester (D-Mont.), ranking member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), and Tina Smith (D-Minn.)** and **U.S. Representatives Paul Gosar (R-Ariz.), Ben Ray Lujan (D-N.M.), Don Young (R-Alaska), Gwen Moore (D-Wis.), Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.), Greg Gianforte (R-Mont.), Don Bacon (R-Neb.), and Deb Haaland (D-N.M.)**.

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) [passed a resolution in July](#) supporting this legislative fix to help UIOs have the resources to better serve AI/AN veterans. The bill is also supported by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and VoteVets.

*"The Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act* is important legislation to ensuring that our veterans in urban areas are no longer left behind. Now, the Department of Veterans Affairs will have the explicit authority to reimburse the 41 Title V Urban Indian Organizations who are already providing critical resources for American Indian and Alaska Native veterans who have served the United States," said NCUIH Executive Director Francys Crevier.

"The National Council of Urban Indian Health has made it a priority to ensure that Urban Indian Organizations are included in the IHS-VA MOU to help provide health care to American Indian and Alaska Native veterans. As a Native veteran myself, I understand the importance of coming home and knowing I have a safe space to receive care. Thank you to my own Representative Ro Khanna, and we are grateful for the leadership of the 116th Congress in introducing this landmark legislation," said NCUIH Vice President Sonya Tetnowski.

"At First Nations Community HealthSource, we never turn anyone - veteran or not - away. Native veterans in Albuquerque consider our facility a safe, accessible space to receive health care. With critical underfunding, this legislation would allow all Urban Indian Organizations to finally be reimbursed for the necessary care we already provide to our Native veterans," said Linda Son-Stone, NCUIH Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of First Nations Community HealthSource, an Urban Indian Organization and member of NCUIH.

The NCAI resolution states: "The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) urges Congress to pass legislation that amends the Indian Health Care Improvement Act at 25 U.S.C. §1645(c) to insert UIOs after IHS and Tribal Organizations and require VA to reimburse for services provided to AI/AN veterans at all of the IHS, Tribal, and urban (I/T/U) system, in order to protect the health and welfare of AI/AN veterans living in urban centers, thereby honoring their sacrifices."