

[Senators Warren and Udall Unveil Bill to Guarantee Tribal Health Authorities Access to the Strategic National Stockpile](#)

Category: Policy Blog

written by Meredith Raimondi | March 17, 2020

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Indian Health Service and other tribal health organizations currently lack guaranteed, direct access to federal repository of drugs and medical supplies for emergencies; Legislation would allow the Indian Health Service, tribal health authorities, and urban Indian organizations to access the Strategic National Stockpile and help combat the coronavirus crisis

[Text of Bill \(PDF\)](#) | [One-Pager \(PDF\)](#)

Washington, D.C. — United States Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (SCIA) Vice Chairman Tom Udall (D-N.M.) today unveiled the Tribal Medical Supplies Stockpile Access Act, legislation that would guarantee that the Indian Health Service (IHS), tribal health authorities, and urban Indian organizations have access to the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), a federal repository of drugs and medical supplies that can be tapped if a public health emergency could exhaust local supplies.

Currently, IHS and tribal health authorities' access to the SNS is very limited and is not guaranteed in the SNS statute. In contrast, states' and large municipalities' public health authorities have ready access to the SNS. The lawmakers' bill comes as the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) indicated that IHS is likely to face shortages of necessary equipment as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) continues to spread.

"We must ensure that IHS, tribal nations, and Native communities are prepared to confront the coronavirus outbreak head-on, and that means ensuring that their health services have access to crucial medical supplies and equipment during public health emergencies," **Senator Warren said**. "It is as important as ever to empower Indian Country to tackle a public health crisis, and that is what our bill does."

"Tribal communities face unique challenges in responding to public health threats — that is why it is critical that we listen and respond to Tribal leaders and experts at IHS who say they are likely to face shortages of essential equipment and medical supplies that are needed to respond to this public health crisis," **said Senator Udall**. "We must do everything we can to make sure Tribes don't bear the worst costs of this public health crisis. This legislation will ensure that IHS facilities, Tribal health departments and urban Indian organizations have access to the emergency medical supplies they need. I will continue to push Congress and the Trump administration to make sure Indian Country has access to federal coronavirus resources and that there is meaningful engagement with Native communities and Tribal leaders in our response to COVID-19."

The Tribal Medical Supplies Stockpile Access Act is supported by the National Indian Health Board,

the National Congress of American Indians, the National Council of Urban Indian Health, United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund, Seattle Indian Health Board, and the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has placed immense pressures on the chronically underfunded and under-resourced Indian health system. Direct access to the Strategic National Stockpile will bring much-needed relief and critical medical and pharmaceutical supplies into IHS, Tribal and urban Indian health facilities to prepare and respond to the current COVID-19 pandemic, and future health emergencies.” — **National Indian Health Board**

“We are encouraged by the leadership of Senator Warren and Senator Udall to increase health care access for American Indians and Alaska Natives through the Strategic National Stockpile. As the coronavirus continues to have greater impacts, Congress must do everything possible to uphold its trust responsibility to Indian Country by providing appropriate resources including N95 respirators. The stockpile is designed for those who need it most in times of emergency and Indian Country should not be left behind.” — **Francys Crevier, Executive Director, National Council of Urban Indian Health**

“We are grateful for the leadership of Senator Warren and Senator Udall and recognizing the importance of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Seattle Indian Health Board is right in the epicenter of the outbreak in the United States, and we continue to do everything possible to limit the spread of the virus while taking every safety precaution for our patients, staff, and community. This has come at the cost of revenue, staff, and resources. But with access to the Strategic National Stockpile, we can mitigate future impacts and continue to be leaders in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.” — **Esther Lucero, Chief Executive Officer, Seattle Indian Health Board**

“As a Quaker organization who works to hold the United States to its trust and treaty obligations with Native nations, we thank Senators Warren and Udall for ensuring that American Indians and Alaska Natives are not forgotten during this global pandemic. The chronic underfunding of tribal and urban Indian health organizations has led Indian Country to be ill-prepared for a health crisis of this scale. Access to the Strategic National Stockpile will provide supplies and medicines critical to addressing the COVID-19 outbreak. Congress has a trust obligation to provide health facilities serving American Indians and Alaska Natives with the resources needed to protect the well-being of Native people and communities.” — **Kerri Colfer, Congressional Advocate on Native American Policy at the Friends Committee on National Legislation**

During her time in the Senate, Senator Warren has worked to protect and advance tribal sovereignty, to emphasize the federal government’s trust and treaty responsibilities to tribal nations, and to affirm Washington’s government-to-government relationship with tribal nations. She has introduced a number of bills to advance the health and welfare of Native peoples, including the [Native American Suicide Prevention Act](#), the [American Indian and Alaska Native Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act](#), and the [Comprehensive Addiction Resources Emergency \(CARE\) Act](#), and has cosponsored other legislation to achieve that goal. She has also unveiled with Congresswoman Deb Haaland (D-N.M.) a proposal for the [Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act](#), legislation that will address chronic underfunding and barriers to sovereignty in Indian Country.

In response to the coming economic downturn due to coronavirus, Senator Warren has [called for](#) a \$750 billion economic stimulus package that would focus on recovery from the grassroots up, not Wall Street down. Such a package would apply the lessons from the 2008 bailout and provide direct help to families harmed by the coronavirus outbreak, including universal paid leave, increasing Social Security benefits by \$200 a month, broad cancellation of student loan debt, and protecting

and expanding housing.

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