

PRESS RELEASE: Congressional Leaders Request Resources for Urban Indians in Budget Reconciliation

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Washington, D.C. (February 8, 2021) Today, 26 House Representatives called on Congressional leaders to prioritize expanding resources for urban American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) in the COVID-19 budget reconciliation. At a critical time when AI/ANs are dying at alarming rates from COVID-19, the federal government must do more to fulfill its trust and treaty obligations to serve this population. The [letter](#) specifically asks for Congress to include a fix that will provide parity for Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) and provide significant cost savings to cash-strapped states.

“Urban Indian Organizations are serving an at-risk population in some of the hardest-hit urban centers in 117 counties across 24 states and are doing so with limited supplies and resources. Now is the time to ensure these organizations have equal access to federal resources so they can continue to fulfill the federal government’s trust responsibility to Indian country. At a time when states are most strapped for resources, this fix would allow more resources to flow back into our states and provide parity to UIOs,” said Rep. Ruiz and the 26 Members of Congress in their letter.

According to a February 4, 2021, [article](#) by The Guardian, “Covid is killing Native Americans at a faster rate than any other community in the United States, shocking new figures reveal. American Indians and Alaskan (sic) Natives are dying at almost twice the rate of white Americans, according to an analysis by APM Research Lab shared exclusively with the Guardian.”

“One in 475 Native Americans has died from COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. As Congress works with the new Administration to ensure equity in the pandemic response, a good first step would be fixing this long-standing problem that is impeding critical access to health care for our relatives in urban areas. Additional resources for Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs), who have been on the frontlines since day one of this pandemic, also translates to major cost savings for state Medicaid funds that can be immediately redirected to patient care,” said National Council of Urban Indian Health CEO Francys Crevier (Algonquin).

There is a trust responsibility to provide healthcare to all AI/ANs that is a duty of the United States government. Section 3 of P.L. 94-437, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, declares that “it is the policy of the Nation, in fulfillment of its special responsibilities and legal obligations to the American Indian people, to ensure the highest possible health status for Indians and urban Indians.”

Next Steps

NCUIH will continue to work with Congressional leaders and the Biden Administration to build a better COVID-19 response for AI/ANs.