NCUIH Endorses Coronavirus Mental Health and Addiction Assistance Act

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On January 28, 2021, Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Todd Young (R-IN), and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) reintroduced the NCUIH endorsed *Coronavirus Mental Health and Addiction Assistance Act*. The bill intends to address the growing mental health and addiction crisis in the U.S. exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic by expanding mental health and substance use disorder services. If passed, the bill would require:

- The Secretary of Health and Human Services to award grants to establish a Coronavirus Mental Health and Addiction Assistance Network. These grants would go to eligible entities offering appropriate mental health and addiction services, **including Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs)**.
- Emergency authorization of $100 million to initiate or expand programs offering mental health and substance use disorder services in response to the pandemic, including support groups, telephone helplines and websites, training programs, telehealth services, and outreach services.
- The Department of Health and Human Services to gather data to better understand the effects of the pandemic on mental health and addiction and make recommendations on how to improve future mental health and addiction response efforts

Even before the pandemic, American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) residing in urban areas faced significant behavioral health disparities – for instance, 15.1% of urban AI/ANs report frequent mental distress as compared to 9.9% of the general public and the AI/AN youth suicide rate is 2.5 times that of the overall national average. The COVID-19 pandemic has inflamed the need for funding for UIOs to address the behavioral health and substance abuse crisis among urban Indians.

NCUIH welcomes Sen. Klobuchar, Sen. Young, and Sen. Van Hollen's legislation to support mental health and addiction services during coronavirus pandemic.

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