

# [NCUIH Submits Comments to DOI on Boarding School Initiative and the Lasting Impact on Urban Indian Health](#)

Category: Policy Blog

written by NCUIH | December 23, 2021

On December 23, 2021, the National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) [submitted comments](#) to the Department of the Interior (DOI) regarding the agency's Federal Boarding School Initiative (Initiative). NCUIH reiterated its ongoing support for the Administration's efforts to address the legacy of boarding school programs, while urging the Administration to use the Initiative to address the public health impact of boarding schools on urban American Indian and Alaskan Natives (AI/ANs). NCUIH emphasized the importance of studying not only the impact of boarding school programs for survivors, but also the lasting impact of the intergenerational trauma caused by boarding schools within urban AI/AN communities.

## **Background**

On June 22, 2021, DOI Secretary Haaland issued a [memorandum](#) directing DOI to prepare a report addressing the "intergenerational trauma, cycles of violence and abuse, disappearance, premature deaths, and other undocumented bodily and mental impacts." This Initiative came weeks after the [discovery of 215 Indigenous children's remains](#) were found at a boarding school site in Canada. Secretary Haaland noted that to "promote spiritual and emotional healing in [AI/AN] communities, we [DOI] must shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past...no matter how hard it will be."

Boarding schools and residential schools are a tragic thread in history that the United States and Canada share: The United States Government Indian Boarding School Policy authorized the forced removal of hundreds of thousands of Native children, as young as 5 years old, relocating them from their homes in Tribal communities to one of the 367 Indian Boarding Schools across 30 States. Between 1869 and the 1960s, the United States federal government stole Native children from their families to destroy their indigenous identities, beliefs, and traditional languages to assimilate them into white American culture through federally funded Christian-run schools.

## **NCUIH's Role**

Following Secretary Haaland's memorandum, NCUIH issued [a statement](#) commending Secretary Haaland for beginning the process of holding the United States to account for the effects of its boarding school policy. NCUIH also reiterated its support of the Initiative's ability to address Indian Country's historical trauma. NCUIH recognizes the deeply sensitive and emotional impact that federal boarding schools have on the AI/AN community at large, including the continued impact on the many UIOs we serve and their constituents. NCUIH exists, in part, because of the historic oppression of the AI/AN population including federal boarding schools that resulted in the growing AI/AN populations in cities.

Additionally, [NCUIH endorsed the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States Act](#). This bill would create a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States. The Commission will provide a space for AI/AN people to speak about their personal experiences in government-run boarding schools and allow them to

provide recommendations to the government. NCUIH is in full support of this Commission and hopes to see DOI establish a similar commission in the Initiative that includes a UIO representative to represent AI/ANs who reside in urban settings.

## **Importance of Including Urban Indians in the Initiative**

In its comments, NCUIH urged DOI and the Administration to address the ongoing effects of Indian boarding schools on AI/AN health. Specifically, NCUIH requested that DOI incorporate the following items into the Initiative:

- Partner with AI/AN organizations, including UIOs, to fully study and understand the impact of boarding school trauma and assist survivors in healing from this trauma.
- Study the lasting impact of boarding school policies, including intergenerational trauma, on the social determinants of health of contemporary AI/AN communities, including those in urban areas
- Include the UIOs representing the seventy percent (70%) of AI/ANs living in urban areas in DOI's process through urban confer
  - NCUIH's comments recognized the importance of Tribal sovereignty and the government-to-government relationship as vital to the Initiative, but noted failure to include UIOs in consultation will leave a significant portion of the AI/AN population without a voice
- Ensure a comprehensive assimilation of data by making all AI/AN communities true partners in the Initiative.

The DOI report on the investigation is scheduled to be finished in April 2022. NCUIH will remain close to the investigation and monitor for updates. NUCIH will also continue to advocate for the inclusion of UIOs in the process and encourage DOI to incorporate a study of the impact of the boarding schools on urban AI/AN health into the Initiative.