NCUIH Policy Updates

Category: Policy Blog
written by NCUIH | May 31, 2022

Welcome to our new Policy Updates! We're still figuring it out so please bear with us!

Let's dive in.

1 Big Thing: 10 Senators Request $950 Million for Urban Indian Health



Senator Tina Smith led a letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee asking for bold and robust funding for urban Indian health.

The big picture: NCUIH worked with Senator Smith to secure the support of 10 Senators for increased resources for UIOs.

What they asked for:

- $949.9 million for urban Indian health,
- mandatory funding for the Indian Health Service (IHS),
- securing advance appropriations for IHS

What they're saying: "This funding request is essential to providing quality, culturally-competent health care to AI/AN people living in urban areas."

Why it matters: Funding for urban Indian health increased by 17% last year and the traction we're gaining among Senators will be instrumental as budget negotiations happen in the coming months.

What's next: Funding runs out on September 30 and it's unclear if Congress will pass a budget or do a continuing resolution instead.

2. On our radar: Senator Cantwell asks for permanent FMAP for UIOs at Hearing with Roselyn Tso



Nomination Hearing to consider Roselyn Tso to be Director of the Indian Health Service, Department of Health and Human Services (May 25, 2022)

What they're saying: "I wanted to ask you about 100 percent FMAP funding for our urban Indian health…So the issue is that the impacted urban Indian health care organizations are not treated the same, so they don't get the whole 100 percent of funding. We were able to fix this I think for one or two years, but to me, *it's a big inequity in the delivery of care*. So can you commit to securing 100 percent FMAP funding on a permanent basis for Indian health clinics in urban areas?" said Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA).

Ms. Tso's response: "I agree that we need to have equity in terms of funding for all the programs that serve American Indians and Alaska Natives. We also know, I also know that there are some limitations. Indian Health Service nor the department makes a determination on 100 percent FMAP payments. However, we can work with states. We can work with our partners to make sure that there's education and information flowing of how important this need is. So I will work with you on this if I am confirmed."

Why it matters: Ms. Tso has been nominated to run the Indian Health Service and President Biden has supported 100% FMAP for services provided at Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs).

The bottom line: If Ms. Tso is confirmed, NCUIH can work with her on long-term solutions for UIOs including collaborating with states.

3. Washington Post Op-ed: The injustices endured by Native American youths continue to this day

What they're saying: "In short: The legacy of denying Native young people basic — let alone quality — education, health care and opportunities continues to this day. To end this injustice, our country has an obligation to support Native American youths even more fervently now after oppressing them for centuries," said Katrina vanden Heuvel.

By the numbers: The column explains that IHS provides health care to 2.2 million Native Americans, but IHS would need to double its funding to provide even the base level of care that federal prisoners receive.

Our thought bubble: This article in the Washington Post is an example of connecting the dots on issues that matter in Indian Country. More awareness about the injustices faced by Native American youth is critical to increased funding for Indian health. It cites NCUIH's legislative priorities!

Go deeper: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/05/31/injustices-native-american-youth/

4. NCUIH Recognized Political Allies at the 2022 Conference: No More Broken Promises



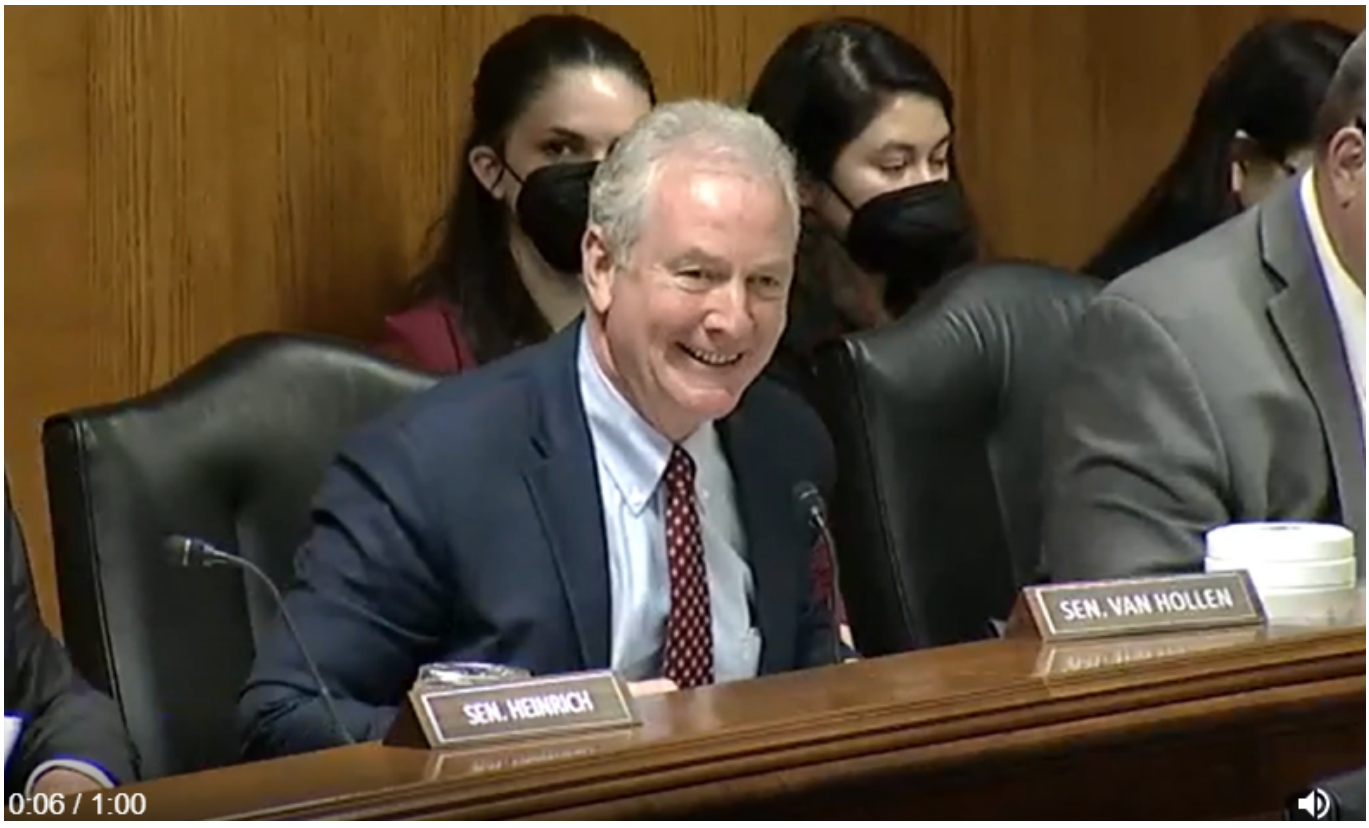
The Congressional Urban Indian Health Champion Awards were given to four members of Congress for their outstanding advocacy on behalf of urban Indian health: Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA),

Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS), Representative Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM-03), and Representative David Joyce (R-OH-14). Libby Washburn (Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma), the former Special Assistant to the President for Native Affairs, was awarded the Advocacy and Leadership in Urban Indian Health award.

What they're saying: "We know that there are more Native Americans living off our Tribal lands than on, and we know that the United States' trust duty to provide quality healthcare does not stop when you move into a city or town. We also know that too often the urban Indian health centers are overlooked and underfunded," said Representative Leger Fernandez in her remarks.

PRESS RELEASE: NCUIH Honors 2022 Urban Indian Health Champions

5. Catch up quick: Senators Highlight the Needs of Urban Indians in IHS FY 2023 Appropriations Hearing



Senator Chris Van Hollen's state of Maryland is served by Native American LifeLines of Baltimore and he noted, "In the state of Maryland, we have 40,000 individuals who identify themselves as American Indian or part American Indian, and nearly half of that population resides in Baltimore."

On May 11, 2022, the Senate held a hearing to review the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 President's Budget for the Indian Health Service (IHS) with Acting Director, Elizabeth Fowler.

What they discussed: The President's mandatory funding request, as well as addressing the needs of urban Indian communities and UIOs.

What they're saying: Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) followed up with Ms. Fowler, on the establishment of an Urban Indian Interagency Workgroup and highlighted the many underserved American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) residing in urban areas: "In my view, this is a population that has not received the attention or services that are deserved."

Go deeper: In February, 14 Senators sent a letter to the Biden Administration requesting the establishment of an Urban Indian Interagency Work Group.

The big picture: Ms. Fowler stated that "the Indian Health Service considers urban Indian organizations to be a vital component of the Indian health system" and expressed support for the creation of any urban interagency efforts.

Also: Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) emphasized the importance of UIOs and asked Ms. Fowler if more grants went out to UIOs as a result of the 17% increase in funding.

- Ms. Fowler informed that while IHS did not fund any additional UIOs with that funding, the funding will allow some referral-only programs to initiate clinical services to provide their patients.
- Senator Merkley noted that the committee will submit questions for the record to "better understand how we are spending the additional money in that account and understanding how urban Indian population is being better served, what specific changes have occurred."

Learn more: Senators Highlight the Needs of Urban Indians in IHS FY 2023 Appropriations Hearing

Next week, on June 10 at 1:00 pm ET, IHS is hosting a Virtual Urban Confer on Urban Indian Organizations All-Inclusive Rate.

- Register