

# Department of Veterans Affairs Seeking Nominations for IHS Billings Area Committee Member for the Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs

Category: Policy Blog

written by Alexandra Payan | September 21, 2022

On September 16, 2022, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issued a [notice](#) seeking nominations of qualified candidates to be considered for appointment as a member of the [Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs](#) (“the Committee”) to represent the Indian Health Service, Billings Area. The Committee is composed of 15 members with at least one member of the Committee representing urban Indian organizations (UIOs) nominated by a national urban Indian organization. Appointed members of the Committee are invited to serve a two-year term. Nominations for membership on the Committee must be received no later than **5:00 p.m. EST on October 7, 2022**, and should be mailed to the Office of Tribal Government Relations, 810 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 915H (075), Washington, DC 20420 or emailed to [tribalgovernmentconsultation@va.gov](mailto:tribalgovernmentconsultation@va.gov).

## **NCUIH and the VA**

The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) has continued to strengthen its partnership with the VA and has ensured UIO input is included in VA efforts. In October 2021, Sonya Tetnowski, President of NCUIH and CEO of the Indian Health Center of Satna Clara Valley, Army Veteran, and member of the Makah Tribe was [appointed](#) to the VA’s first-ever Advisory Committee on Indian Affairs. On January 25, 2022, during the first meeting of the Committee, Ms. Tetnowski [highlighted](#) that American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans face significant barriers in accessing health care and other benefits. In an effort to ensure the Committee can represent the needs of all AI/AN Veterans, NCUIH recommends that UIOs consider working with Tribes and Tribal Organizations to nominate a Committee member.

## **Committee Objectives and Scope**

In accordance with [Public Law 116-315](#), the Committee provides advice and guidance to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on all matters relating to Indian Tribes, tribal organizations, Native Hawaiian organizations and Native American Veterans. According to the Office of Tribal Government Relations Director, Stephanie Birdwell, [the Committee](#) “...gives tribal leaders as well as American Indian, Native Hawaiians and Alaska Native Veterans a place at the table with the highest levels of leadership within the VA...” and “[i]t offers an unprecedented voice in how programs, policies, and services may be delivered and provided.”

Committee responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Identifying evolving issues of relevance to Indian tribes, tribal organizations and Native American Veterans relating to programs and services of the Department;
- Proposing clarifications, recommendations and solutions to address issues raised at tribal, regional and national levels, especially regarding any tribal consultation reports;

- Providing a forum for Indian tribes, tribal organizations, UIOs, Native Hawaiian organizations and the Department to discuss issues and proposals for changes to Department regulations, policies and procedures;
- Identifying priorities and providing advice on appropriate strategies for tribal consultation and UIOs conferring on issues at the tribal, regional, or national levels;
- Ensuring that pertinent issues are brought to the attention of Indian tribes, tribal organizations, UIOs and Native Hawaiian organizations in a timely manner, so that feedback can be obtained;
- Encouraging the Secretary to work with other Federal agencies and Congress so that Native American Veterans are not denied the full benefit of their status as both Native Americans and Veterans;
- Highlighting contributions of Native American Veterans in the Armed Forces;
- Making recommendations on the consultation policy of the Department on tribal matters;
- Supporting a process to develop an UIO confer policy to ensure the Secretary confers, to the maximum extent practicable, with urban Indian organizations; and
- With the Secretary's written approval, conducting other duties as recommended by the Committee.