

# Bipartisan Group of Thirty-Eight Congressional Leaders Request Increased Resources for Urban Indian Health and Support Mandatory Funding for Indian Health in FY24

Category: Policy Blog

written by Jeremy Grabiner | April 10, 2023

On March 24, 2023, 38 Congressional leaders requested up to \$973.59 million for urban Indian health in FY24 and maintaining advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service (IHS) until mandatory funding is achieved.

Representatives Gallego and Grijalva [again](#) led a [letter](#) to Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree of the House Interior Appropriations Committee requesting up to \$973.59 million for urban Indian health in FY24 and maintaining advance appropriations for IHS until authorizers move IHS to mandatory funding. The letter includes the Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup (TBFWG)'s findings stating the need for full funding for the urban Indian line item, "Due to historically low funding levels for urban Indian health, UIOs are chronically underfunded. Full funding of UIOs will directly benefit urban Indians that rely on UIOs to access culturally-competent care."

The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) has made continuous efforts to address the health disparities for Natives living in urban areas. Following the pandemic, [Native life expectancy has decreased by almost 7 years, coupled with the highest rates of diabetes, infant mortality, and suicide](#). Despite these staggering statistics, Congress funds the IHS at around 10% of need.

The 38 Congressional leaders stated their support for the Appropriations Committee's work on the historic inclusion of advance appropriations in the FY23 omnibus. Previously, IHS was the only federal health care provider funded through annual appropriations. Without advance appropriations, IHS is subject to the negative impacts of government shutdowns and continuing resolutions that can lead to serious disruptions in UIO's ability to provide critical patient services. The inclusion of advance appropriations is a crucial step toward ensuring long-term stable funding for IHS. The letter also emphasizes that the urban Indian line item must be protected from sequestration and any budget-cutting measures being considered in Congress.

This letter sends a powerful and straightforward message to Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree, and members of Congress that in order to fulfill the federal government's trust responsibility to all Natives to provide safe and quality healthcare, funding for urban Indian health must be significantly increased and protected.

NCUIH is grateful for the support of the following Representatives:

1. Don Bacon
2. Nanette Barragán
3. Earl Blumenauer
4. Shontel Brown
5. Salud Carabjal

6. Greg Casar
7. Sharice Davids
8. Diana DeGette
9. Ruben Gallego
10. Steven Horsford
11. Jared Huffman
12. Pramila Jayapal
13. Dusty Johnson
14. William Keating
15. Ro Khanna
16. Teresa Leger Fernandez
17. Mike Levin
18. Zoe Lofgren
19. Doris Matsui
20. Gwen Moore
21. Eleanor Holmes Norton
22. Ilhan Omar
23. Mary Peltola
24. Brittany Pettersen
25. Deborah Ross
26. Adam Schiff
27. Kim Schrier
28. Terri Sewell
29. Adam Smith
30. Melanie Stansbury
31. Greg Stanton
32. Jill Tokuda
33. Gabe Vasquez
34. Jasmine Crockett
35. Chris Pappas
36. Raul Ruiz
37. Jesus “Chuy” Garcia
38. Raul Grijalva

## Full Letter Text

Dear Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree,

We write to thank you for your proven commitment to urban Indian health and Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) and to request you continue your support by funding urban Indian health at the highest level possible, up to \$973.59 million, and retaining advance appropriations for IHS in the FY 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

UIOs provide health care for the over 70% of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) living off-reservation and are an important part of the Indian health system, which oversees a three-prong system for the provision of health care: the Indian Health Service, Tribal Programs, and UIOs (I/T/U). UIOs receive direct funding only from the Urban Health line item and do not receive direct funds from other distinct IHS line items, including the Hospital and Health Clinics, Indian Health Care Improvement Fund, Health Education, Indian Health Professions, or any of the line items under the IHS Facilities account.

Our FY24 request for \$973.59 million for urban Indian health reflects the recommendation made by the Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup (TBFWG), which is comprised of sovereign Tribal leaders representing all twelve IHS service areas. For FY23, the House passed \$200 million for urban Indian health, reflecting the minimum investment we must make in urban Indian health. The marked increase between the FY23 and FY24 request is a result of Tribal leaders' decision, over several decades, to provide budget recommendations based on a plan to phase in full funding for IHS and UIOs over 10-12 years to address growing health disparities that have largely been ignored. In FY24, Tribal leaders are unified in their request to fully fund UIO need at \$973.59 million.

In its report, the TBFWG states that, "Due to historically low funding levels for urban Indian health, UIOs are chronically underfunded. Full funding of UIOs will directly benefit urban Indians that rely on UIOs to access culturally-competent care." If urban Indian health funding continues to be funded at its current pace, it will continue to contribute to the severe health disparities. Due to this fact, we respectfully request the highest possible funding for Urban Indian Health up to TBFWG's recommendation of \$973.59 million, and no less than the FY23 House passed level of \$200 million.

Underfunding not only impacts day-to-day operations of the 41 UIOs, it has resulted in entire sections of the United States lacking in culturally focused healthcare for AI/ANs living in urban areas. Currently, the entire Eastern seaboard, with an estimated urban Indian population of over 2 million, lacks full-ambulatory UIOs due to insufficient funding. The IHS has deemed the two remaining UIOs on the East Coast to be outreach and referral providers only. Two outreach and referral UIOs to serve all urban Indian patients on the entire East Coast of the country is undeniably inadequate to uphold the federal trust obligation to provide healthcare to AI/ANs. Without a significant increase to the urban Indian line item, UIOs will continue to be forced to operate on limited budgets that offer almost no flexibility to expand services or address facilities-related costs.

We applaud this Committee for your work on the historic inclusion of advance appropriations in the FY23 Omnibus. This is a crucial step towards ensuring long-term, stable funding for IHS. Previously, the I/T/U system was the only major federal health care provider funded through annual appropriations. It is imperative that this Committee retain advance appropriations and ensure that IHS is protected from sequestration.

Cuts from sequestration force I/T/U providers to make difficult decisions about the scope of healthcare services they can offer to Native patients. For example, the \$220 million reduction in IHS' budget authority for FY 2013 resulted in an estimated reduction of 3,000 inpatient admissions and 804,000 outpatient visits for AI/ANs. At a minimum, funding must be maintained and protected as budget-cutting measures are being considered.

We thank you for your consideration of our request to provide as high a funding level as possible for urban Indian health and the 41 Title V UIOs up to \$973.59 million, and to retain advance appropriations for IHS in the FY 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.