

NCUIH-Endorsed Bipartisan Bill to Elevate Native Health Care Within the Federal Government Re-introduced by Representative Stanton and Representative Joyce

Category: Policy Blog

written by Jeremy Grabiner | April 10, 2023

On April 6, 2023, Representative Greg Stanton (D-AZ) and Representative David Joyce (R-OH) re-introduced the *Stronger Engagement for Indian Health Needs Act* ([H.R.2535](#)). This bill would elevate the Indian Health Service (IHS) Director to Assistant Secretary for Indian health within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), increasing their authority within the federal government on the health care needs of the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population.

The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) worked closely with Representatives Stanton and Joyce on this legislation, which was originally [introduced](#) in January 2022 and is supportive of their efforts to improve representation for the health needs of AI/ANs.

“It is time for the government to recognize the importance of Indian health and uphold the federal trust responsibility to provide healthcare to all Native people. The elevation of the IHS Director to Assistant Secretary will uplift our voices in the Administration and is a critical step in reaching health equity in Indian country,” **said Walter Murillo (Choctaw), President-elect of NCUIH and Chief Executive Officer of Native Health, based in Phoenix, Arizona.** “We thank Representatives Greg Stanton and David Joyce for their commitment to improving health outcomes for Native people, and we urge Congressional leaders to support this vital legislation.”

Representative Stanton said, “The federal government has a trust obligation to provide quality health care to Tribal members, care that best fits their cultural and health needs.... Our bill does what should’ve been done years ago—elevates and centers native voices when it comes to making federal policy that affects American Indians and Alaska Natives.”

Representative Joyce added, “We know that federal American Indian and Alaska Native health programs continue to be plagued by challenges, and that many who rely on these services continue to experience health disparities and face barriers accessing care. By elevating the Indian Health Service Director position to Assistant Secretary for Indian Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this bipartisan bill represents an important step as we seek to fulfill the federal government’s sacred trust and treaty obligations to American Indians and Alaska Natives.”

This bill has been endorsed by lead advocacy groups—including the National Health Board.

Next Steps

The bill was referred to the House Energy and Commerce and Natural Resources Committees. It currently awaits consideration.

Resources

- Full Bill Text ([117th](#) Congress)