PRESS RELEASE: National Council of Urban Indian Health Calls for Protection of Indian Health System Funding

Category: Policy Blog,Press Release
written by NCUIH | January 31, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON, D.C. (January 31, 2025) – The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) today urged Congress, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to exempt the Indian Health System from any future funding restrictions or pauses. This call to action comes in response to recent events that temporarily froze resources critical to the operation of Tribal health care and Urban Indian Organization (UIO) facilities. While the recent OMB memorandum (M-25-13) has been rescinded, NCUIH remains concerned about potential future impacts on the Indian health system. The organization emphasizes that any disruption to funding could have severe consequences for American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Key points from NCUIH's communications include:

1. Federal Trust Responsibility: NCUIH stresses the U.S. Government's legal obligation to provide health services to Native people, as established by the Indian Health Care Improvement Act.
2. Preventing Service Disruptions: Recent funding uncertainties forced UIOs to consider staffing cuts, service suspensions, and even facility closures.
3. Historical Context: Past experience shows any disruption in funding can have grave consequences on the Indian health system. During the 2019 government shutdown, funding disruptions led to reduced services and facility closures, resulting in tragic consequences including fatal opioid overdoses in some communities.
4. Specific Exemption Request: NCUIH is calling for a specific exemption for the entire Indian Health System, including the Tribal organizations, and UIOs, from any future funding restrictions.

Walter Murillo (Choctaw), Board President of NCUIH stated, "Even a temporary halt in funding could immediately deprive Native communities of necessary health services. As leaders of Urban Indian Organizations, we're on the front lines of providing essential healthcare to Tribal citizens. We're calling for a specific exemption for the entire Indian Health System from any future funding restrictions or pauses. This isn't just about honoring agreements; it's about fulfilling the federal government's trust responsibility to provide healthcare for Tribal citizens, regardless of where they live."

NCUIH is actively engaging with Congress, the OMB, and HHS to secure this specific exemption and prevent any future disruptions to critical health care services for Tribal citizens. The organization has sent letters to both Congress and HHS detailing the critical need for uninterrupted funding to the Indian Health System.

About NCUIH

The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) is a national representative for the 41 Urban Indian Organizations contracting with the Indian Health Service under the *Indian Health Care Improvement Act*. NCUIH is devoted to the support and development of high quality and accessible health and public health services for American Indian and Alaska Native people living in urban areas.

NCUIH respects and supports Tribal sovereignty and the unique government-to-government relationship between our Tribal Nations and the United States. NCUIH works to support those federal laws, policies, and procedures that respect and uplift Tribal sovereignty and the government-to-government relationship. NCUIH does not support any federal law, policy, or procedure that infringes upon or in any way diminishes Tribal sovereignty or the government-to-government relationship.

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NCUIH Contact: Meredith Raimondi, Vice President of Policy and Communications, mraimondi@ncuih.org