NCUIH Board President-Elect Robyn Sunday-Allen Testifies on Importance of Native Health Care

Category: Press Release
written by NCUIH | February 28, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON, D.C. (February 28, 2025)– On Thursday, National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) board president-elect and Oklahoma City Indian Clinic CEO Robyn Sunday-Allen (Cherokee) testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, urging full funding for urban Indian health and the Indian Health System.

What They're Saying: Congressional Support for Strengthening Indian Health Services

Chair Mike Simpson (ID-02-R) reaffirmed the committee's commitment to advancing progress in Indian health care, acknowledging the long-standing failures in meeting treaty obligations.

"You have this committee standing behind you, doing everything we can to ensure we move forward—not backward—on our treaty obligations. The progress we've made so far is inadequate, but we are working to change how things are done," Chair Simpson stated.

Representative Jake Ellzey (TX-06-R) raised concerns about the rising cancer rates in Native communities including in urban areas of Texas, asking Ms. Sunday Allen for insights into potential causes. Ms. Sunday Allen discussed the complex interplay of social determinants, environmental exposure, and structural barriers limiting access to quality health care.

Why It Matters: The Urgency of Action

Protecting the Entire Indian Health System

- **Chronic Underfunding**
  Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) are integral parts of the Indian Health System, which has been "chronically underfunded," according to Ms. Sunday-Allen. Any disruptions in federal funding—including cuts, sequestrations, or hiring freezes—jeopardize lives and can force UIOs to consider staff furloughs or even suspending services.
- **"Our Care Is Too Critical to Be Paused"**
  As Ms. Sunday-Allen testified: "Historically, disruptions in funding to the Indian health system have resulted in loss of life… Our care is too critical to be paused or reduced." Ensuring mandatory and full funding for the entire Indian Health System—tribal facilities, the Indian Health Service (IHS), and UIOs—is essential for saving lives.
- **Cancer: The "New Diabetes" in Indian Country**
  Ms. Sunday-Allen highlighted the alarming rise in cancer rates at the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic, noting that they now diagnose 15–20 new cancer cases each month. She emphasized that "cancer has become what I refer to as the new diabetes in Indian Country. It is ravaging our community like diabetes has done." Increased resources and support are imperative to address this growing public health crisis.

Next Steps

NCUIH will continue to advocate for **protecting and fully funding the Indian Health System-**including UIOs, Tribes, and IHS—so that no Native person goes without life-saving care. NCUIH stands ready to work with Congress and federal agencies to ensure that all Native

people have consistent, high-quality health care.

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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