



What is an appropriation?

The Constitution requires authority be provided by law before federal money can be spent. This authority is called an **appropriation**. Congress generally only provides this authority one year at a time through annual spending bills that are signed into law by the President. These spending bills are called *appropriation bills*. For example, a 2023 appropriation bill for the Indian Health Service (IHS) allows the agency to spend money in 2023. Passing appropriation bills is Congress' most important job because, without appropriation bills, the government shuts down.

What is an advance appropriation?

An advance appropriation is a commitment by Congress to provide money in a future year. For example, if the 2023 appropriation bill for the IHS includes an advance appropriation for 2024, then IHS can spend money in 2024 without the need for a 2024 appropriation bill.

The benefit of an advance appropriation is it enables programs to plan and continue to operate efficiently, regardless of federal politics that frequently cause delays, temporary funding, and government shutdowns. The federal government already protects healthcare programs for military veterans in this way.

Why are advance appropriations needed for the Indian Health Service?

Years ago, the federal government coerced Tribes into surrendering their lands in exchange for protections and services like healthcare in perpetuity. Today, it remains the policy of the United States to ensure the highest possible health status for American Indians and Alaska Natives, including all the resources necessary to affect that policy.

IHS is the primary agency responsible for meeting the government's healthcare responsibility to Tribes, yet the agency is funded at less than half of the need. Underfunded healthcare programs are particularly vulnerable during funding delays, temporary funding, and government shutdowns. One of the federal government's primary regulators, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), reported budgetary uncertainty hurts the ability to recruit and retain quality doctors and nurses and adds additional administrative costs that could otherwise be used for patient care.

The longest government shutdown in history occurred only four years ago. The IHS reported Tribal healthcare programs were forced to reduce their hours, days, or types of services, faced staff resignations, and had "other impacts on patient care."

In other words, patients suffered, leading to the current life expectancy for AI/AN to be roughly equal to that of the general United States population in 1944.