July 7, 2021

House Proposed Appropriations for Health IT Modernization for Indian Country

The House Appropriations Committee proposed language for Health Information Technology (health IT or HIT) modernization in the Department of The Interior, Environment, And Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2022. The Bill proposes $284.5 million. While these funds are not yet approved as of this writing, this is an important first step towards ensuring that the Indian health care system has the funding it needs to modernize its IT infrastructure. NIHB will be tracking this issue and advocating for language to ensure Tribes have direct, full and fair access to any funds allocated, as the appropriations bill works its way through the full House. Items to note in the draft language include:

- o Deployment of an **EHR that is interoperable with VA**, so that complete records exist for Tribal Veterans and other patients who utilize care at VA and IHS facilities
- o Deployment of an EHR **interoperable with Tribes** that have purchased their own modern EHR solutions
- o Consideration for **deploying a population health data platform as part of EHR modernization** that shares capabilities and resources already available at other departments (i.e., at VA)
- o **Enhancement of IHS abilities through this modernization to understand chronic conditions affecting IHS patient populations, research social determinants of health**, and assist Tribal governments in building their public health infrastructure
- o Requirement to provide an initial notification and quarterly reports to the Committee on the status of implementation and of an RFP to select core components and activities for modernization
- o Requirement to report back to the Appropriations Committee on whether additional appropriations are necessary for specifically funding the substantial infrastructure costs associated with EHR modernization
- o **Requirement for consultation with Tribes regarding the costs** they have already incurred by individually modernizing their own EHRs

Health IT (HIT) modernization has long been a pressing issue in Indian Country. With many Indian health facilities using outdated and difficult to use software, it is critically important that HIT modernization proceed in a quick and equitable manner and include **both** Tribes and the Indian Health Service. NIHB notified Congressional leadership of our concerns in a letter dated June 17, 2021.

We appreciate the progress that is being made on this very important issue and look forward to focusing advocacy efforts where they are needed most, including work with the Senate.

Please find the link to the draft Bill here:
https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP00/20210701/112878/HMKP-117-AP00-20210701-SD002.pdf