

National Indian Health Board



HONOR THE FEDERAL TRUST RESPONSIBILITY – EXEMPT INDIAN COUNTRY FROM SEQUESTRATION!

REQUEST: Co-sponsor H.R. 3063 / S. 1497 which, would exempt The Indian Health Service (IHS) from Federal Sequestration cuts.

BACKGROUND: The Budget Control Act of 2011, (P.L. 112-25) requires that federal spending remain under a certain cap. If that does not happen through the annual budget process, then automatic cuts, known as “sequestration” occur. But Congress designed the law so that the federal programs that serve the most vulnerable populations were exempt from the full sequester. When across-the-board sequestration occurred in 2013, all other federal programs that serve the health of our nation’s populations with the highest need, such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and the Veterans Administration, were exempt from full effect of the funding reductions. But, not the Indian Health Service (IHS) or other programs serving Indian Country. This loss of over \$219 million out of the IHS budget translated into a reduction of primary health care and disease prevention services for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs), which means loss of life in both short term and long term. The budget crisis in the United States is not due to the nation’s obligation to Indian Tribes.

Tribes have prepaid for their health care

- The federal promise to provide Indian health services was made long ago. Since the earliest days of the Republic, all branches of the federal government have acknowledged the nation’s obligations to the Tribes which were granted to AI/ANs through treaties as an exchange for Tribal land a peace.
- Sequestration cuts are a violation of the trust responsibility and represent another broken promise the federal government made to Indian Country.
- Even 2% is too much!

Better stability in funding = better care

- The Indian Health Service is funded far below actual need, so any disruption in funding greatly hampers the ability of IHS, Tribes and Urban health systems to deliver necessary services due to lack of funds.
- Lack of funding at IHS has resulted in AI/ANs suffering [disproportionally from a variety of health conditions](#) including alcoholism, cancer, maternal deaths, depression, and suicide.
- Exempting IHS from Sequestration would mean that AI/ANs are receiving better care with more access to critical services. Loss health care means surgeries are delayed, prevention not given, which results in increased sickness and even death

Parity between the Indian Health System and other Federal Health Providers

- During the 2013 Sequestration cuts, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) was practically exempt from sequestration. IHS, like the VHA, provides direct medical care to fulfill legal promises made by the federal government. Other federally-funded health programs such as Medicare and Medicaid were also exempt from the full sequester.
- As a direct health provider to some of the nation’s most in-need populations IHS should be exempt

Better recruitment and Retention of Medical Professionals

- According to the IHS, there are over 1,550 vacancies for health professionals across the system. As a rural health provider, recruitment and retention of medical staff is a chronic challenge.
- When sequestration occurred in 2013, many providers left IHS and Tribal providers, causing long-term vacancies across the IHS and Tribal health system.