

National Indian Health Board

October 13, 2020

RADM Michael Weahkee
IHS Headquarters
Indian Health Service
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

RE: Funding for National Indian Health Board's Support for Tribal Budget Formulation Working Group (TBFWG)

Dear RADM Weahkee:

On behalf of the National Indian Health Board (NIHB), our member Tribal organizations, and the 574 sovereign Tribal Nations we serve, I write to express our deep concerns with loss of funding to support the National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup (TBFWG). For more than two decades, NIHB has served as a technical advisor and facilitator for the TBFWG, assisting Tribal leaders, Tribal officials, and Tribal health technical experts in carrying forth our shared, vital work of putting forth recommendations and strategies that reflect the collective national voice and recommendations of Indian Country to establish a fully funded Indian Health Service (IHS) budget.

The work of the TBFWG is essential to the mission of IHS, as it lay the foundation from which to achieve a fully funded and fully functional Indian health system in furtherance of federal Treaty obligations to Tribal Nations and American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people. In past years, as part of NIHB's cooperative agreement with IHS, our role was to partner with the agency on pre-planning and creation of an agenda for the annual convening of the TBFWG; facilitate Tribal Caucus meetings prior to sessions with IHS officials; assist in facilitation of the annual convening itself; and provide policy analysis to the group and legislative updates relative to the budget for Tribal officials.

NIHB would then facilitate the process through which Tribes across the nation synthesize their message into a cohesive national document. Moreover, NIHB is the lead organization tasked with facilitating the drafting, editing, proofreading, publishing, and dissemination of an annual report outlining the full national recommendations of the TBFWG. NIHB also provides technical support to the Tribal Chairs of the Committee by helping them prepare to present testimony annually to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services during its annual budget consultation. Over the past two years, NIHB has also taken the lead on facilitating a sub-workgroup of technical budget and economics experts to better assess and analyze funding shortfalls across all IHS line items to inform more accurate and comprehensive recommendations for a fully funded IHS budget.

NIHB has been entrusted by the Tribes with carrying out this essential work for two decades. No other organization is positioned to carry out this work effectively at the national level. This is

because, in addition to its policy and budget knowledge, NIHB maintains the necessary relationships with Tribal officials and technical advisors who work every day to advance Indian health, and NIHB has the demonstrated expertise and organizational focus on advancing quality and comprehensive healthcare policy and delivery of health information to Indian Country.

We are deeply concerned by the prospect of Indian Country losing the opportunity to put forth national recommendations next year for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 budget, and by the fact that IHS has failed to announce if this mission-critical work will be funded in the future at all. The IHS has a solemn responsibility to fulfill federal Treaty obligations for healthcare, which exist in perpetuity. The sacred work of the TBFWG is indispensable to IHS's completion of that obligation, and NIHB is indispensable to that work. It is vital that IHS take swift action to preserve and expand the essential work of the TBFWG by funding the NIHB to continue its role in the IHS TBFWG process and not disrupt and potentially harm the future of this body of work by neglecting to fund it.

We respectfully request that IHS continue its partnership with NIHB in this space by providing NIHB with funding adequate to serve the Tribes through support for the TBFWG. NIHB needs these funds in order to resume our mission critical activities. We appreciate the long partnership with IHS, and we look forward to continuing this work towards our common objective of improving the health and wellness of American Indian and Alaska Native people across Indian Country.

Respectfully,

National Indian Health Board
Alaska Native Health Board
Albuquerque Area Indian Health Board
Association of American Indian Physicians
California Rural Indian Health Board
Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board
Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council
Southern Plains Tribal Health Board
United South & Eastern Tribes, Inc.