

National Indian Health Board



REAUTHORIZATION OF THE INDIAN HEALTH CARE IMPROVEMENT ACT (IHCIA) BRINGING INDIAN HEALTH SERVICES INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

What is the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA)?

The IHCIA is the key legal authority for the provision of health care to American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). The IHCIA was originally enacted in 1976 to address the deplorable health conditions in Indian Country. As Congress states in the findings of IHCIA:

Federal health services to maintain and improve the health of the Indians are consonant with and required by the Federal government's historical and unique legal relationship with, and resulting responsibility to, the American Indian people.

Along with the Snyder Act of 1921, the IHCIA forms the statutory basis for the delivery of health care to AI/ANs, by the Indian Health Service (IHS), an agency with the Department of Health and Human Services.

Why Is It Necessary To Reauthorize The IHCIA?

Congress should act to officially extend the life of the IHCIA authorization and to update the bill to reflect both the current needs of Indian health care and the modern methods of health care delivery.

The IHCIA contains a number of provisions that authorize appropriation of funds to support health care programs set forth in the law; however, the life of these provisions ended in fiscal year 2001. Fortunately, the Snyder Act of 1921 provides permanent authority for the appropriation of funds for Indian health, so Congress can and does continue to appropriate funds for these programs. IHCIA needs to be reauthorized to supply the baseline authority for providing direct health care to AI/ANs.

Also, since Congress' last comprehensive review of IHCIA in 1992, the American health care delivery system has been revolutionized while the Indian health care system has not. For example, mainstream American health care has moved out of hospitals and into people's homes; focus on prevention has been recognized as both a priority and a treatment; and, coordinating mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse services into comprehensive behavioral health programs is now standard practice. Reflecting these improvements in the IHCIA is a critical aspect of reauthorization.



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What Are The Current Healthcare Needs of AI/ANs?

Statistics clearly reflect a critical need for health promotion and disease prevention activities in Indian country which provisions of the IHCIA reauthorization would address this need.

- 13% of Indian deaths occur in those younger than 25, a rate 3 times higher than the U.S. population.
- The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported in 2003 that “American Indian youths are twice as likely to commit suicide...” Also, suicide ranked as the second leading cause of death for AI/ANs aged 10 to 34 as reported by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.
- Indians are 550% more likely to die from alcoholism, 200% more likely to die from diabetes, and 150% more likely to suffer accidental death compared with other groups.

Highlights of what is included in the IHCIA Reauthorization

- Establishes objectives for addressing health disparities of Indians as compared with other Americans.
- Enhances the ability of Indian Health Services (IHS) and tribal health programs to attract and retain qualified Indian health care professionals.
- Updates and modernizes health delivery services, such as cancer screenings, home and community based services and long term care for the elderly and disabled.
- Provides innovative mechanisms for reducing the backlog in health facility needs.
- Establishes a continuum of care through integrated behavioral health programs both prevention and treatment –to address alcohol/substance abuse problems and the social service and mental health needs of Indian people.
- Facilitates greater decision-making regarding program operations and priorities at the local tribal level in order to improve services to tribal populations.

How can I help?

Please support the reauthorization of Indian Health Care Improvement Act by becoming an original co-sponsor and actively support the success of the bill in your Committee through final passage in 2009.

For more information, contact Jennifer Cooper, Legislative Director at (202) 507-4076 or jcooper@nihb.org.



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