



April 17, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

Secretary

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Ave SW

Washington, D.C., 20201

RE: Proposed Cuts to the Indian Health Service in the OMB Passback for HHS

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

On behalf of the National Indian Health Board and the 574+ federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Tribal Nations we represent, I write to express deep concern with the proposed budget cuts to the Indian Health Service (IHS) in the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) passback on Health and Human Services (HHS) agencies and programs. The cuts proposed represent a nearly 30% reduction to the IHS base allocation from FY 2025 estimates. This would devastate Indian health. We implore you to immediately appeal the proposed reductions to IHS and Tribal programs outlined in the OMB HHS passback, mirroring the swift and decisive action taken by the Secretary of the Interior to protect obligated resources for Tribal Nations.

Among the proposed edits included in the now public document, the Administration proposes to end IHS advance appropriations, stop funding to water and sanitation facilities and health care facilities construction, limit the ability of new Tribes to take on self-governance of IHS programs, and reduce the IHS services and facilities level by nearly \$900 million in FY 2026. The impact of such changes would be wholly devastating to our communities and our people, and would ensure hundreds to thousands of otherwise preventable deaths in Indian Country.

The funding to the IHS is not an arbitrary budget number; these figures represent funding to keep doctors and nurses in our facilities nationwide. The IHS already operates with a 30% vacancy rate and is woefully and chronically underfunded by tens of billions of dollars annually. Many IHS clinics already operate on significant understaffing; if each facility across the IHS lost just 1 physician-level provider, 43% of those facilities would have to close their doors entirely. This loss of funding will lead to deaths in our communities from preventable medical incidents, such as precipitous births, cardiac events, untreated diabetes complications, and preventable suicides. We know these impacts because we have lived these outcomes. Before IHS had advance appropriations, during previous government shutdowns, members of our families died from these exact types of preventable emergencies.

You have identified Indian health as a top priority for your tenure as the HHS Secretary. You have prioritized meeting with Tribal leaders and visiting Indian Country. Indian Country needs a strong ally now, and we request that you immediately appeal the proposed reductions to the IHS and Tribal programs to OMB. We stand ready to support you to stand up for Indian Country and Indian health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and a stylized "S".

William Smith, *Valdez Native Tribe*
Chairman
National Indian Health Board

CC: Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Senate Appropriations Committee
House Natural Resources Committee
House Appropriations Committee