

Health Care

A Crisis in Indian Country

By SAGE Council

It is vital that NAVA weigh in on the health care budget crisis issue. Our voice as a community is important for many reasons, not the least of which is to remind current elected officials that the federal government has a trust responsibility through treaty obligations and federal statutes dating back to the 1921 Snyder Act, to provide health care to Native Americans whether they are living on a reservation or elsewhere. Congress initiated the Urban Indian Health Program in 1976 to address the health needs of Native Americans who had been relocated from the reservations during the 1950s through the 1970s.

President Bush's 2007 federal budget proposal suggests the elimination \$33 million from the Urban Indian Health Program (UIHP) within the Indian Health Service (IHS) budget. This cutback would virtually eliminate UIHP services across the nation, requiring the absorption of those services by other, already over-burdened government programs and clinics.

Urban Indian health programs report that such a cut would result in:

- bankruptcies, lease defaults at UIHP clinics around the country;
- elimination of services to tens of thousands of Indians who may not seek care elsewhere;
- an increase in the health care disparity for American Indians and Alaska Natives; and
- The near annihilation of a body of medical and cultural knowledge addressing the unique cultural and medical needs of the urban Indian population held almost exclusively by these programs.
- Further eliminate trust responsibilities of the United States government.

According to the 2000 Census, nearly 70% of Americans identifying themselves as of American Indian or Alaska Native heritage live in urban areas. Notably, the Urban Indian Health Program receives only 1% of IHS funding, stretching health care dollars among an estimated 2.5 million urban Native Americans.

The Albuquerque Indian Hospital and the area nonprofit clinics remain in a constant state of Crisis and have had to routinely cut back on medical services to urban Natives as a result of continued cutbacks in federal support. These reductions in services are now reaching the breaking point will result in the loss of critical services altogether, if current budget proposals are approved.

Many in our community are advocating on our behalf to restore the funding and services to urban Natives health care. An alliance of Native voters has the potential to draw a lot of attention onto this issue, bringing the weight of an entire community on our elected leaders to demand accountability and solutions.



The future of Indian Healthcare requires our strong voice!