



American Psychological Association Services, Inc.
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By Katherine B. McGuire
Chief Advocacy Officer
to the
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Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

The American Psychological Association (APA) is the nation's largest scientific and professional nonprofit organization representing the discipline and profession of psychology. APA has more than 146,000 members and affiliates who are clinicians, researchers, educators, consultants and students. Through the application of psychological science and practice, our association's mission is to make a positive impact on critical societal issues across the states. Many programs funded in the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill provide essential support for our nation's public health programs by helping to provide critical access to essential mental and behavioral health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

APA urges Congress to provide the following funding levels.

The Indian Health Service

APA Services urges Congress to provide at least \$9.7 billion for the Indian Health Service (IHS). The IHS is currently funded at \$7.1 billion. The IHS provides federal health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN). As the main federal health care provider for AI/AN people, its main goal is to improve their health care to the highest extent possible. The agency provides a health service delivery system for approximately 2.6 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who belong to the 574 federally recognized tribes.¹

Increased funding is essential for the IHS since this population has a lower life expectancy of approximately 5.5 years less than the U.S. all races population and often has a disproportionate disease burden when compared to other populations.² For example, American Indians and Alaska

¹ Indian Health Service, (October 2019). Indian Health Disparities. Retrieved from:
<https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/factsheets/disparities/>.

² Ibid.

Natives die at higher rates than other Americans as a result of intentional self-harm/suicide, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, diabetes, unintentional injuries and assault/homicide.³

COVID-19 also highlighted how AI/AN communities were especially vulnerable to COVID-19, partly due to the long-term inequalities, high rates of poverty and high rates of underlying medical conditions within these communities. Now more than ever, it is important that Congress continue to address the needs of the most vulnerable. If more resources are not provided, the substantial number of health needs for AI/AN that already exist will become even greater.

To be able to effectively provide essential health care services, the APA requests that Congress fund the IHS at \$9.7 billion for FY 2024.

Mental Health

Within the Indian Health Services, APA Services recommends \$164 million be allocated to mental health services. This program is currently funded at \$127.2 million. AI/AN communities often lack access to adequate health care, including behavioral health. Particularly striking are the suicide rates among adolescents and young adults in these communities. Suicide rates for AI/AN individuals between the age of 15 to 24 years old was 39.7 per 100,000, compared with the overall U.S. rate of 9.9 per 100,000. This rate is more than 3 and half times the suicide rates for males of all races in the age group. The suicide rate for AI/AN females in the same age group was lower than males at 20.2. per 100,000. However, this rate was still nearly six times the rate for females of all races.⁴ Furthermore, during 2015-2020, 3,397 suicides among AI/AN individuals and 179,850 suicides among non AI/AN were reported. About three quarters (74.6%) of AI/AN suicide decedents were under the age of 44, compared to less than half (46.5%) of non AI/AN decedents.⁵

Given the prevalent mental health concerns following COVID-19, mental health resources are even more critical now for all communities, especially those that have extensive histories of high rates of mental health concerns such as American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Therefore, APA requests that Congress provide \$164 million for mental health services for the IHS to adequately address the mental health needs of this community.

³ Ibid.

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (2017). Suicide Clusters within American Indian and Alaska Native Communities: A review of the literature and recommendations. HHS Publication No. SMA17-5050. Rockville, MD. Retrieved from: <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma17-5050.pdf>.

⁵ Stone, D., Trinh E., Zhou, H., Welder, L., End of Horn, P., Fowler, K., Ivey-Stephenson, A., (September 2022). Suicides Among American Indian or Alaska Native Persons- National Violent Death Reporting System, United States 2015-2020. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2022; 71:1161-1168. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7137a1.htm>.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Within the IHS, APA Services requests at least \$309 million be allocated to alcohol and substance abuse programs. This program is currently funded at \$266.4 million. High rates of alcohol and substance abuse in AI/AN communities are well documented.⁶ This serious behavioral health issue has a strong impact on the health of individuals and families. AI/AN communities are much more likely to report past-year alcohol and substance use disorders than any other race.⁷

This population is also more likely to require alcohol use treatment than persons of any other ethnic group, with 1 in 10 in need of such treatment.⁸ These programs can be extremely helpful for individuals struggling with alcohol addiction, however there is often a lack of availability of culturally sensitive treatment programs.⁹ The IHS is especially positioned to ensure such programs contain these culturally sensitive components in the treatment plans.

For these reasons, APA requests at least \$309 million for alcohol and substance abuse programs within the IHS.

Indian Health Professions

Within the IHS, APA Services requests \$94 million for the Indian Health Professions account. This program is currently funded at \$80.6 million. We emphasize the importance of having psychologists who are aware of the cultural sensitivities of this community and can best address this community's needs. The Indian Health Professions account includes the American Indians Into Psychology Program (INPSYC). The primary goals of the program are to increase the number of AI/AN with doctoral degrees in psychology and enhance the cross-cultural understanding and competence of non-AI/AN about AI/AN psychology. Together, these aims will help ensure the development and maintenance of AI/AN psychology career recruitment programs to encourage AI/AN to enter the field of psychology.

More specifically, the program recruits and trains individuals to be psychologists. It also provides scholarships to individuals enrolled in schools of clinical psychology to pay tuition, for books, fees and stipends for living expenses. Additionally, the program seeks to directly engage with tribal communities in order to provide greater exposure to the field of psychology. Finally, the program provides stipends to undergraduate and graduate students pursuing careers in psychology and training opportunities for psychology graduate students in tribal communities.¹⁰

⁶ Indian Health Service, (October 2016). Behavioral Health. Retrieved from: https://www.ihs.gov/sites/newsroom/themes/responsive2017/display_objects/documents/factsheets/BehavioralHealth.pdf.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ American Addiction Centers. (April, 2021). Risk of Alcoholism Among Native Americans. Retrieved from: <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/alcoholism-treatment/native-americans>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Indian Health Service. American Indians Into Psychology Program. Retrieved from: <https://www.ihs.gov/dhps/dhpsgrants/americanindianpsychologyprogram/>.

With the higher rates of suicide and other mental health concerns for this community, APA values the importance of increasing the number of AI/AN psychologists.

For these reasons, APA recommends \$94 million for the Indian Health Professions Account.