

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Simpson and Merkley and Ranking Members Pingree and Murkowski,

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, write in support of the inclusion of **\$30 million** in new funding for the Indian Health Service overall budget in the FY2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill to address chronic clinical staff shortages by: (1) establishing Graduate Medical Education (GME) coordinators across IHS; (2) funding physician residency programs; and (3) funding clinical fellowship programs. These proven interventions to recruit, train, and retain health care workers would help reduce chronic provider shortages across Indian Country. We view these targeted interventions as part of a broader response to workforce shortages across health professions.

A new IHS clinical services funding line to establish a GME coordinating office and support four new residency programs was included in the FY2024 President's Budget Request, at \$4 million, as described on page 57 of the [IHS FY2024 Congressional Budget Justification](#). We support the inclusion of an amount greater than \$4 million, given the large demand for GME programming in Indian Country, and the benefits that additional fellowship programs outside of GME, across cadres of health workers, would provide.

Background:

Regional physician vacancy rates were as high as 46% in 2018 (see: "[The Indian Health Service and the Need for Resources to Implement Graduate Medical Education Programs](#)" in *JAMA*, 2022). The physician shortages across Indian Country have been attributed to limited recruitment incentives, lower salaries, lengthy hiring processes, and geographic isolation.

IHS is the only large federal health system to lack formalized partnerships with academic medical centers. This gap hinders the agency's ability to recruit and retain physicians. The Veterans Health Administration, in comparison, has had 75 years of active partnership with teaching hospitals through its Office of Academic Affiliations. The VHA annual [budget](#) of \$873.5 million for GME in 2023 will support 75,000 individual trainees and nearly 12,000 GME [positions](#). Academic partnerships provide many benefits, including stability, shared faculty, clinical, and research staff, and a wealth of experience. Virtually all of VA GME programming is sponsored by an academic affiliate and 99% of medical schools are affiliated with VA. This model should be replicated with IHS. This new requested line of funding is needed for the IHS to coordinate existing and burgeoning programs locally, and liaise with partners such as academic medical centers and agencies like VHA, HRSA, and CMS. Given the longstanding precedent across

Indian Country of regional coordination and local self-governance, funding should be made available for GME coordination at multiple levels of governance.

Residency programs are important for recruiting and retaining physicians to underserved areas. Physicians who train in rural environments are much more likely to stay and work there over the long-term. There are only a handful of residency programs at tribal facilities, and there is only one federally supported physician residency program across 24 IHS hospitals (Northern Navajo Family Medicine Residency). Programs with annual discretionary funding under HRSA, including Rural Residency Planning and Development (RRPD) and Teaching Health Center GME (THCGME), are productive initiatives with already notable impacts on tribal health workforce development. However, this funding does not meet the volume of need, and it does not provide the additional costs required for tribal and IHS GME, such as a longer path to sustainable funding, housing, and travel. As an example of costs to start up residency programs, RRPD awards \$750,000 over a three-year implementation period for recruitment, faculty development, and accreditation. Residency programs vary in per-resident annual payment rates due to distinct and complex financing systems; as a parallel example to IHS GME, the HRSA THCGME program caps funding at \$160,000 per resident.

Clinical fellowship programs are another way to recruit and retain physicians (and other cadres of health professionals) across Indian Country. Fellowships provide training, community, and additional support that aides in the retention of staff. A survey of four current fellowship programs working with tribal and IHS sites revealed significant cost variability depending on location and types of integrated professional development programs. Fellowship costs included faculty time, fellow salary and benefits, housing, travel, professional development costs, licensing, malpractice insurance, recruiting efforts, and program administration. Physician fellowships cost up to \$220,000 per year, but range dramatically based on specialty and depth of professional development training. Scaling up fellows within a program significantly reduces per-fellow costs. The HEAL fellowship—a recent partnership between an academic medical center, University of California San Francisco, and Navajo Nation clinical sites—has recruited and retained two dozen primary care physicians in Navajo Nation. This case and related successes demonstrate the promise of funding fellowships at a larger scale.

Sincerely,

Organizations

- Association of American Indian Physicians (AAIP)
- Association of American Medical Colleges
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- Association of Clinicians for the Underserved
- Mass General Brigham
- Washington State University
- Mount Sinai Health System
- University of California San Francisco School of Medicine HEAL Initiative
- University of California Davis Tribal Health PRIME
- University of California Davis Community Health Scholars
- Partners In Health

Individual Signatories

Sorted by primary IHS Area

Key: **LR** Local Residency Program, **RR** Residency Rotations, **F** Fellowship Program

Mr. Tom Anderson, MPH, *Cherokee*, Executive Director, Association of American Indian Physicians

Navajo Area

Dr. Adriann Begay, MD, *Tábaahi*, Navajo Nation Senior Advisor, University of California San Francisco HEAL Initiative, *AAIP* President 2013-2014 **F**

Dr. Nizhoni Denipah, MD, *Navajo*, Community physician in New Mexico, *AAIP* At Large Director

Dr. Kathryn Morse, MD, *Navajo*, Physician at Navajo Nation IHS

Dr. Dan Waldman, MD, Vice Chair of Education, Department of Family Medicine, University of New Mexico; Shiprock-UNM Family Medicine Residency Program **LR**

Dr. Arthur Kaufman, MD, VP for Community Health, University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center; Shiprock-UNM Family Medicine Residency Program **LR**

Dr. Sriram Shamasunder, MD, DTM&H, Professor of Medicine, Director of HEAL Fellowship, University of California at San Francisco **F**

Dr. Phuoc Le, MD, Co-founder of HEAL Fellowship, University of California at San Francisco **F**

Dr. David Sandeweiss, MD, Director, Rural and American Indian Outreach, Pediatrics; Director, Rural and Underserved Medicine Pathway, University of Utah School of Medicine **RR** **F**

Dr. Jeff Robison, MD, Associate Professor, University of Utah School of Medicine, Associate Chair for Community and Global Engagement, Department of Pediatrics, Robert Bolte Endowed Chair in Pediatric Emergency Medicine **RR** **F**

Dr. Joseph J. Rhatigan Jr, MD, Director, Hiatt Residency in Global Health Equity and Internal Medicine, Brigham and Women's Hospital with Residency Rotations in Navajo Nation and Immokalee, Florida **RR**

Great Plains Area

Dr. Matthew Tobey, MD, MPH, Director, Rural Medicine Program, Massachusetts General Hospital; MGH-Rosebud partnership **LR** **F** **RR**

Dr. Jennifer Hasvold, MD, University of South Dakota; Medical student rotations across SD IHS facilities

Dr. Julia Rubin-Smith, MD, MSPH, Director, Indigenous Health Program, Global Health Faculty, Boston Children's Hospital **RR**

Dr. M. James Eliades, MD, MPH, Co-Director, Global Health Division, Emergency Medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai; clinical faculty in Eagle Butte, SD **F**

Dr. Erik J. Blutinger, MD, MSc, FACEP, Assistant Professor, Emergency Medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai; clinical faculty in Eagle Butte, SD **F**

Dr. Ben McVane, MD, Assistant Professor, Emergency Medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai; clinical faculty in Eagle Butte, SD **F**

Dr. Trevor Pour, MD, Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine and Medical Education, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital; clinical faculty in Eagle Butte, SD **F**

Dr. Alice Lehman, MD, University of Minnesota; provider at Rosebud Service Unit

Dr. Mounika Muttineni, MD, University of Minnesota; pediatrician at Rosebud Service Unit and Cheyenne River Health Center
Dr. Stephen Selinsky, MD, Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota; provider at Rosebud Service Unit
Dr. Max Fraden, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Hennepin County Medical Center and University of Minnesota Medical School; provider at Rosebud Service Unit
Dr. Paul Johnson, MD, provider at Rosebud Service Unit

Bemidji Area

Dr. Mary J. Owen, MD, *Tlingit*, Associate Dean of Native American Health; Director, Center of American Indian and Minority Health, University of Minnesota Medical School; Alaska Native physician providing clinical care for the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians; AAIP President 2020-2022 **RR**
Dr. Michael A. Sundberg, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor in the Department of Medicine and Associate Program Director, Global Medicine Program, University of Minnesota Medical School **RR**
Dr. Janis P. Tupesis, MD, FACEP, FAAEM, FIFEM, Associate Director, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, Residency Rotations in Navajo Nation **RR**
Dr. Annie T. Sadosty, MD, Dean, Mayo Clinic School of Graduate Medical Education
Dr. Cynthia Ruth Howard, MD, Pediatrician at White Earth Reservation; Professor of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota **RR**
Dr. Adriana Dhawan, MD, Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota
Dr. Katlin VanDerhoef, MD, Provider at White Earth Reservation; University of Minnesota
Dr. Joseph de Jonge, MD, University of Minnesota
Dr. Hannah Lee, MD, MPH, University of Minnesota
Dr. Svatava Merkle, MD, University of Minnesota
Dr. Megan Lucas, MD, University of Minnesota
Dr. Sarah Soderberg, MD, MPH, University of Wisconsin

Billings Area

Mr. Drew Babcock, *Amskapi Pikuni (Blackfeet)*, American Indian Outreach & Project Coordinator, Family Medicine Residency of Western Montana **RR**

Portland Area

Dr. Terry Maresca, MD, *Mohawk*, Seattle Indian Health Board Family Medicine Residency, AAIP President 1994-1995 **LR**
Dr. Mary Platt, DO, Puyallup Tribal Health Authority Family Medicine Residency Program Director **LR**
Dr. James M. Galloway, MD, CMO, Arc Health; RADM U.S. Public Health Service (ret.)


Alaska Area

Dr. Allison Kelliher, MD, *Koyukon Athabaskan*, Research Associate, School of Nursing and Center for Indigenous Health at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, AAIP Secretary
Dr. Jason Deen, MD, FAAP, FACC, *Blackfeet*, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Medicine, University of Washington School of Medicine **RR**
Dr. Laura Romceovich, MD, Director, University of Washington Global and Rural Health Fellowship Internal Medicine; IM-Peds hospitalist, Pine Ridge Service Unit **F**

Oklahoma City Area

Dr. Jeffery M. Pinnow, MD, FACEP, FAAEM, Director, TTUHSC Permian Basin FP/EM Fellowship, Associate Professor TTUHSC Permian Basin, *AAIP*

Nashville Area

Dr. William Hathaway, MD, CEO, Mountain Area Health Education Center, North Carolina 

California Area

Dr. Nicole Stern, MD, MPH, FACP, *Mescalero Apache*, Assistant Professor, California University of Science and Medicine; *AAIP* President 2012-2013

Dr. Antoinette Martinez, *Chumash*, MD, UC Davis Tribal Health PRIME Co-Director, *AAIP* At Large Director

Dr. Eric J. Crossen, MD, UC Davis Tribal Health PRIME Co-Director

Dr. Melody Tran-Reina, MD, UC Davis Community Health Scholars Executive Director

Dr. Micaela Godzich, MD, Associate Professor, Family and Community Medicine, UC Davis; Director, Family Medicine Residency Program, UC Davis

[Add your organization or individual endorsement here](#)