



Affordable Care Act: Indian Health Service

Improving access to care for vulnerable populations

The Indian Health Service (IHS) provides an array of medical services, including inpatient, ambulatory, emergency, dental, public health nursing, and preventive health care services. However, these medical services are historically underfunded to adequately accommodate American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Fast Facts:

- Cancer diagnoses among American Indian and Alaska Natives increased by 11 percent between 1990 and 2004.
- Alaska Natives have the highest mortality rates of all ethnic/racial groups for all cancers combined.
- There are fewer than 90 doctors for every 100,000 American Indians, compared to 229 doctors per 100,000 people nationally

The Affordable Care Act reauthorizes the Indian Health Care Improvement Act and creates new IHS programs to increase access to preventive services.

Highlights of the Indian Health Service Reauthorization in the Affordable Care Act

- Increases access to preventive cancer screenings, such as mammography, through culturally sensitive community education about the importance of early detection
- Covers payment for certain patient travel costs that are required due to a lack of local health providers in American Indian communities. For example, patients can use qualified private vehicle transportation (when no other transportation is available), specially equipped vehicles, or ambulance when air or motor vehicle transport is not available
- Increases the number of venues where individuals can apply for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Implications for the American Cancer Society and American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN)

- ACS CAN will continue to push for the elimination of disparities in access to care for American Indians and Alaska Natives. The American Indians and Alaska Natives have long experienced worse health outcomes than other Americans, often because of barriers to care.
- ACS CAN will advocate for adequacy of funding for the Indian health care delivery system to promote prevention and improve health outcomes.