

Native American Suicide Prevention Act

Senator Elizabeth Warren and Senator Lisa Murkowski

Original cosponsors: Senators Udall, Sullivan, Sanders, Blumenthal, Duckworth, Smith, King, Tester, Klobuchar, Hirono, Schatz, Heinrich, Merkley, Cortez Masto, Rosen

Suicide has reached crisis levels in Native communities. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Native people ages 10–34. For AI/AN people ages 15–34, the suicide rate is 1.5 times higher than the national average. In some tribal communities, the youth suicide rate is 10 times greater than the national average. Despite the devastating scope of this crisis and the clear need for Native communities’ involvement in the development of suicide prevention strategies, tribes and tribal organizations are too often left out of planning and execution of statewide suicide prevention programs.

The Native American Suicide Prevention Act addresses this crisis by giving tribes a seat at the table in the design and implementation of statewide suicide prevention programs. This bipartisan bill amends the Public Health Service Act to require states or state-designated entities to collaborate with tribes in an effort to curtail the alarming suicide rate in Native communities. Specifically, the bill would mandate that each federally recognized Indian tribe, tribal organization, urban Indian organization, and Native Hawaiian health care system in the state be given the opportunity to collaborate with state governments in developing and implementing statewide suicide early intervention and prevention strategies.

Ensuring that states collaborate with tribes and Native organizations is key to ensuring that statewide suicide prevention programs are culturally sensitive and as effective as possible – and that the federal government upholds its trust responsibilities to Native communities.

The Native American Suicide Prevention Act is supported by the National Indian Health Board, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health, the Association on American Indian Affairs, the National Council of Urban Indian Health, the Alaska Native Health Board, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Papa Ola Lōkahi, and the Association For Behavioral Healthcare.

The Native American Suicide Prevention Act was first introduced in the Senate in September 2018 by Senator Warren and Senator Murkowski. This bill is the Senate companion to legislation introduced in the House by Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva (D–Ariz.) and Congressman Tom Cole (R–Okla.).