

National Indian Health Board



November 16, 2018

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support for the Native American Suicide Prevention Act

Dear Senator Warren,

I write today to express my support for S. 3460, the Native American Suicide Prevention Act. As you know, American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) suffer disproportionately from mental health illnesses and this legislation will make a positive step towards reducing the mental health disparities in Indian Country.

Suicide continues to plague American Indians and Alaska Natives throughout Indian Country. Suicidality is often in combination with other behavioral and mental health issues including depression, feelings of hopelessness, history of trauma, substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse and other negative social issues. According to the Office of Minority Health, suicide was the second leading cause of death for AI/ANs between the ages 10 and 34 in 2014. Suicide was the leading cause of death for AI/AN girls between ages of 10 and 14; in AI/AN females from ages 15 to 19, rates of completed suicides were almost 4 times higher than in white females. In 2014, approximately 9% of AI/ANs ages 18 and up had co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder in the past year—almost 3 times that of the general population.

By requiring states to collaborate with Tribes, Tribal Organizations, and Urban Indian Organizations, it ensures that these factors will be addressed in a comprehensive way. Too often, Tribes are left out of critical funding and programing decisions, which further exacerbate the health disparities experienced in my Tribal communities. While this bill will not solve endemic funding shortages experienced by the Indian health system, this legislation is an important first step to closing some of the service gaps experienced by Tribal communities when it comes to mental health treatment and prevention.

Thank you for taking on this important issue by introducing the Native American Suicide Prevention Act. This effort is an important first step in addressing the mental health disparities associated with Indian Country. Please know, that NIHB is here to offer any support or assistance you may need in moving this legislation through Congress.

Yours in Health,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Vinton Hawley".

Vinton Hawley, Chairperson

