

SOUTH  DAKOTA
STATE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
Values. Ethics. Advocacy.

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June 9, 2016

The Honorable Kristi Noem
United States Representative
1323 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Helping Ensure Accountability and Trust in Tribal Healthcare (HEALTTH) Act

Dear Representative Noem:

The South Dakota State Medical Association (SDSMA), is dedicated to protecting the health care interests of patients and enhancing the effectiveness of medical care throughout South Dakota. Therefore, on behalf of the SDSMA, and the physicians, residents and medical students that we represent, I am writing you to express our support of the proposed *Helping Ensure Accountability, Leadership, and Trust in Tribal Healthcare (HEALTTH) Act*.

Despite the funds appropriated by Congress to deliver health care services, Native Americans are dying of diabetes, alcoholism, tuberculosis, suicide, unintentional injuries, and other health conditions at shocking rates. Beyond the mortality rates, Native Americans also suffer significantly lower health status and disproportionate rates of diseases compared with all other Americans – both whites and other minority populations.

The examination of the structure and operation of the Native American health care delivery system (Indian Health Services or IHS) has revealed significant problems with the retention and recruiting of qualified health care providers, and the maintenance of aging facilities. Furthermore, severely inadequate funding of IHS creates additional access and quality of care issues. While some access and quality of care issues may be resolved with additional funding, raising IHS funding levels alone will not eliminate many of the problems.

IHS and Medicaid are undeniably integral parts of South Dakota's health care network, and we believe the changes proposed by you via the *Helping Ensure Accountability, Leadership, and Trust in Tribal Healthcare (HEALTTH) Act* will help address the funding and administrative/structural issues currently crippling Native American health care delivery system.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposed legislation. Please contact Mark East, SDSMA Vice President at meast@sdsma.org or 605.336.1965 with any questions you may have with respect to the position of the SDSMA.

Sincerely,



Tim M. Ridgway, MD
President