



June 16, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair
The Honorable Roy Blunt, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor/HHS/Education
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair
The Honorable Tom Cole, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor/HHS/Education
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As your Subcommittees consider the FY 2023 Labor/HHS/Education appropriations in the coming months, the National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA), which advocates for improved comprehensive health, social services and economic well-being for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) elders, and USAging (formerly the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging), which advocates for the more than 270 Title VI Native American aging programs serving those elders, urges you to prioritize Older Americans Act (OAA) Title VI Grants for Native Americans for significantly increased funding this year.

OAA Title VI Grants to Indians (Native American Aging Programs), Parts A (nutrition services) and C (caregivers) are a primary authority for funding aging services in Indian Country, where elders are the most economically disadvantaged in the nation. We encourage lawmakers to build on the COVID-era relief funding for tribal aging programs and increase Title VI appropriations levels to alleviate the burgeoning current and future needs of American Indian elders and to begin to correct the decades-long insufficient growth in funding. We continue to urge the funding of OAA Title VII B, a provision that provides funding for tribal elder protection programs. Although in the law, it has never been funded.

Title VI programs and other vital Aging Network partners have been selflessly serving on the front lines of the public health emergency and responding to the needs of older adults who face significantly increased risks. In a recent [USAging survey](#), 85 percent of Title VI Native American aging programs reported they were serving more people as a result of COVID-19, and nearly as many report that the needs of their existing clients have increased, as well. At the same time that client demand is growing, direct care workforce challenges are exploding across the country. Specifically, tribal programs have been impacted by reduced staff levels due to illness or caregiving; decreased staff morale due to intensity of workload; diminished volunteer capacity; and reduced overall capacity of the direct care workforce. Tribal aging programs also face technological barriers in the delivery of services, especially those aimed at reducing elders' social isolation, given the fact that only 40 percent of elders have any internet access, according to estimates by Title VI directors.

Despite these challenges, Title VI programs have, with the support of Congress through COVID-relief emergency funding, risen to the occasion. Nearly all added or expanded home-delivered meals, 76 percent added/expanded delivery of groceries or supplies, 75 percent conducted telephone reassurance or wellness check-ins and more than half are providing elders with activities to engage them at home, in order to support increased health and wellness by reducing social isolation. It's also worth noting that more than three-quarters of directors wanted more training and technical assistance on the topic of reducing social isolation of elders—it's a major issue and one the tribes could better tackle with increased funding and support.

It's also important to note that these levels of service delivery will not abate to pre-pandemic levels. The added clients the Title VI programs served for the past two years are unlikely to stop needing these services. Advocates report that the repercussions of social isolation among elders—attributed to the pandemic—will, without appropriate interventions and support, continue to impact their well-being, cognition and overall health. Moreover, just as the entire country is aging, with more than 1 in 5 people in the U.S. to be age 65 and older by 2030, so, too, is the population of American Indians, Native Alaskans and Hawaiians. It is projected by the Administration on Aging that this population will increase from 259,000 to over 443,000, an increase of almost 50 percent.

Based on the ongoing and widespread needs of tribal elders, we urge Congress to double funding for Title VI in FY 2023 to reach \$72.5 million for Part A (nutrition and supportive services) and \$22.6 million for Part C (family caregiver support). To adequately protect tribal elders, we urge the first time funding of Title VII B in the amount of \$20 million.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting the most vulnerable older adults in their efforts to remain as healthy and independent as possible at home and in their communities.

Sincerely,



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cc:

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Ranking Member Richard Shelby, Senate Appropriations Committee
Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro, House Appropriations Committee
Ranking Member Kay Granger, House Appropriations Committee
Members of the House and Senate Labor/HHS/Education Subcommittee