

SAMPLE OPINION EDITORIAL

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[DATE]

DIRECTIONS: Use this template op-ed to let your local community know about healthcare reform and why it is important to American Indians and Alaska Natives. Include local information to demonstrate the importance of this issue to your local community.

Preserve and Strengthen Indian Country's Healthcare of Choice

In Washington, the Congress has been debating an issue that affects the health and well-being of every single American and our economy. Congress is acting to fix America's health care system. The American people and the American economy need reform that improves care, lowers costs, strengthens businesses, and gives families the choices and security they deserve. As American Indian and Alaska Native people, we know, more than most, that this is long overdue. Our people face enormous health disparities and our health care is chronically underfunded. As Indian people, we must support this national health care reform. But we must also make our voices heard. We must loudly insist that our system of care – the Indian Health System – **BE PRESERVED AND STRENGTHENED.**

It's time for Congress to fix America's health care system. Under the proposals currently being considered in Congress, Americans can keep what they have if they like it, including their doctors and their health plan. For others without insurance, health reform will give them affordable options. However, the delivery of health care in Indian Country is complex and unique. We have health programs being operated directly through the Indian Health service, through tribes and tribal organizations, and through urban Indian organizations. Each of these are needed and work together to provide a culturally appropriate system of care to our people living both on and off our home lands.

We understand that members of Congress are working hard to ensure that health care reform improves our current health care system and reflects the need of the American people. But they must not forget the federal trust responsibility to Indian people. The Indian health system requires that Congress specifically include language to prevent unintended adverse consequences to our health care delivery system.

1. Any health care reform legislation must respect the fact that Indian people have already paid for their health care by ceding millions of acres of land. We should

not be held to any individual financial penalty for failing to acquire or purchase health insurance.

2. Health reform legislation will include significant subsidies to help Americans purchase health coverage. Indian people must also be eligible for insurance subsidies so that we can participate in whatever national health care plan is provided. And our tribes must be allowed to pay for insurance premiums and any cost-sharing or co-pay requirements on their citizen's behalf.
3. Our Indian health care providers, who form a crucial system of care in some of the most remote communities in the country, must be provided protection and the right to participate in health care reform legislation to assure that Indian health care providers receive payment when they provide services to patients enrolled in an Exchange plan.
4. In this era of reform, Indian Country needs assurance from Congress that the Indian Health Care Improvement Act will continue to direct how health care will be delivered to Indian people. By making this law permanent in the health care reform bill, Congress would demonstrate that it is honoring its trust responsibility to tribes regarding health care.

The Indian health care delivery system must be strengthened and improved so that Indian people and Indian health programs benefit from the reformed health care systems. But we must also make sure that Indian Country has protections in place so that our Indian Health System will not be severely damaged and the rights of Indian people and our sovereign governments will not be trampled.

The health insurance reform legislation that the President and Congress are working to pass will provide American families with the health care stability and security they are slowly losing. By reducing the soaring cost of health care, reining in the worst insurance industry practices, expanding health care choices, and assuring that every American can get affordable health insurance coverage, health reform will let families get the health care they need.

Indian Country should be excited about the President's assurances of "Preserving Health Care Choice" by protecting what works and fixing what's broken. The Indian Health Service is Indian Country's provider of choice and our system is not broken, rather it is starved. With adequate funding, and the protections that we need in place, the health delivery system promised to Indian people through the cessation of millions of acres of lands, will thrive.