

**House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 7516, “PRC Improvement Act of 2024”**

**Questions for the Record
Responses of the Honorable Janet Alkire, Chairwoman, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and
the Great Plains Representative, National Indian Health Board**

May 17, 2024

- 1. Please expand on your written statement about how IHS's inability to pay PRC claims can discourage tribal members from seeking health care.***
 - a. How does poor health care impact a tribal member's willingness to seek out health care?***

When Tribal citizens receive medical bills for claims which should have been paid by the PRC Program, it can create a lot of distress for Tribal citizens and their families. If that medical bill ends up in collections, it can exponentially increase the stress and distress that Tribal citizens feel. When they turn to the bureaucratic process created by IHS to administer the program, it can leave many Tribal citizens feeling hopeless for a solution to their specific concerns.

The distress and the lack of resolution in the bureaucratic process can be a deterrent to Tribal citizens re-using the PRC Program to access necessary care again. When Tribal citizens have chronic or acute diseases which require specialist care unavailable from the IHS, the PRC Program is a necessary lifeline to receiving the life saving and critical care they need to manage those conditions. If there is a strong disincentive to go receive that care, such as the real possibility of medical bills and debt collection, Tribal citizens will avoid seeking the care they need. What is worse, is this can have a deterrent effect even beyond the specific Tribal citizen. Because our communities are small and tight-knit, when this happens to one citizen, word can spread of the impacts creating a larger community-wide deterrent effect. This can contribute to lower community-wide health outcomes if the deterrence is felt broadly.

- 2. Your written statement mentioned the lack of education that PRC vendors have regarding the Indian Health Care system.***
 - a. What kind of education do you think IHS should be providing to vendors about the PRC program and the Indian Health System?***

PRC vendors need to have a better understanding of the Indian health system generally, but they must have an improved understanding of how the PRC process works. The IHS has spent a lot of administrative and regulatory effort on spelling out how beneficiaries interact with the PRC Program, including beneficiary training, but there is little public information for participating providers. The Indian Health Manual, Chapter 3 which addresses the PRC Program offers little to no information for participating PRC vendors.

Education to providers who choose to participate in the PRC Program should start at the enrollment and contracting process by providing some type of training and manual on how the PRC program operates and the rules and regulations governing the program. We also recommend that IHS work with Area Offices and Tribes to best determine what training should address to education PRC vendors since the program is largely operated at the Service Unit and Area Office level.

b. How often should this education be renewed?

The IHS should set a regular cadence, annually at a minimum, on updating the educational information for providers to keep pace with regular regulatory and policy changes to the PRC Program.

3. Are you aware of any PRC program carryover funds in your region, and if so, can you provide the committee with numbers and/or documentation showing this?

The IHS shared with Tribes in January 2024 that the Great Plains Area had a PRC prior year balance of \$27.7 million. Unfortunately, due to the nature of how PRC is operated for Direct Service Tribes, this information is not regularly available to the Tribes served. The IHS would be best placed to answer the Subcommittee's questions on current balances, rates of spend down, and documentation.

4. What other information and/or examples of how the PRC program has affected tribal members would you like to provide to the Committee?

I do not have any additional information to provide at this time.