

MARCH 14, 2018

Udall, Heinrich Push for Additional Funding to Combat Opioid Crisis, Support Treatment Efforts in Indian Country

In 2015, American Indians had the highest overdose death rate of any group

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Senators Tom Udall, vice chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, and Martin Heinrich urged Senate leaders to prioritize robust, direct funding to Tribal communities to address the ongoing opioid epidemic in Native American communities.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), American Indians and Alaska Natives had the highest overdose death rates of any group in 2015 and the largest percentage change in the number of opioid-related deaths over time.

In a letter sent to the leadership of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, Udall, Heinrich, and a group of Senate Democrats pointed to the steep increase in opioid overdoses on reservations and the pressing need for strengthened federal support to address long-term recovery efforts and

prevent further deaths. The senators also addressed the opioid epidemic's strain on Tribal resources and its negative effects on entire communities.

“The impact of the opioid crisis extends beyond the addicted individual. Many Tribes have dedicated their own resources to improve access to treatment and recovery services for their members, but they continue to struggle to find further resources to address the secondary impacts of addiction in their communities—especially, the impacts on children and families of individuals fighting addiction,” the senators wrote. “As more children are removed from their homes due to their parents’ addiction issues, foster care systems and kinship care networks are strained. Mental and behavioral health services for these children are critical to help them process the trauma and related challenges. Funding to address the crisis must take a holistic approach and support these families and communities to put them on a path to healing and improve outcomes.”

In addition to Udall and Heinrich, the letter was signed by U.S. Senators Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.), Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Kamala Harris (D-Calif.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Tina Smith (D-Minn.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.).

Also today, Udall led an [Indian Affairs oversight hearing](#) on combating the opioid addiction epidemic in Indian Country. Udall also joined five other senators in introducing the Native Behavioral Health Access Improvement Act. The bill would create a Special Behavioral Health Program for Indians in order to help Tribes access the resources they need to address the mental health needs and substance use disorders in their communities. Modeled after the Special Diabetes Program for Indians, the program would allow Tribes to

develop solutions that incorporate local, traditional and cultural practices into evidence-based prevention, treatment, and recovery programs.

Click [here](#) to read the letter.