

Emerging Strategies to Ensure Access to Health Care Services

Indian Health Services Strategy



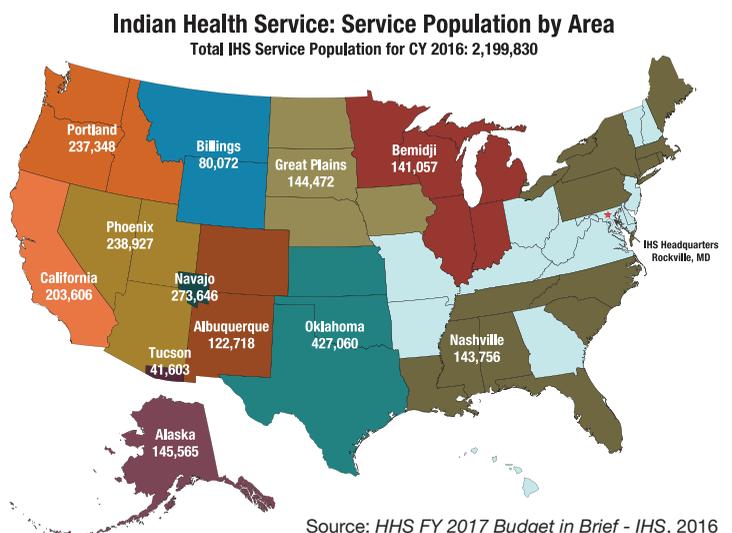
The AHA Task Force on Ensuring Access in Vulnerable Communities examined ways in which the access to and delivery of care could be improved. For American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes that receive health care services from the Indian Health Service (IHS), an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the AHA recommends a multi-step strategy to promote care coordination between IHS facilities and other health care providers. Doing so would increase access to, and the quality of, care provided for this population.

Improve care coordination between IHS facilities and non-IHS facilities

- 1 Assessment.** IHS facilities should conduct an assessment of the health care services they currently offer and those available in surrounding communities. This assessment should identify which health care providers the IHS system could partner with to most efficiently use its limited resources. In addition, the assessment should identify efficiencies that may come from sharing administrative and medical leadership, consolidating capacity and coordinating applications to increase financial support for personnel, equipment or facilities.
- 2 Establish new relationships.** IHS facilities and non-IHS providers should develop relationships to fill service gaps and expand access to needed services. This will include ensuring that financial resources are dedicated to the appropriate health care providers, and that systems are in place to exchange information among the participants responsible for different aspects of care.
- 3 Examine other strategies.** IHS should consider other strategies included in the task force report to improve care coordination. For example, IHS may expand use of virtual care at its facilities to increase access to health care services. IHS facilities could also partner with Federally Qualified Health Centers to eliminate duplication of services or more efficiently use limited IHS resources.

Federal solutions needed for successful implementation

- Increase IHS funding.** Congress should ensure IHS is adequately funded through the appropriations process. In addition, Congress should conduct a study to evaluate funding of IHS—so that limited funds may be used to improve care coordination, and incentivize those providing necessary services.
- Provide technical assistance.** IHS facilities often lack the technical expertise and assistance necessary to bill and collect additional reimbursement for services that may be covered by other federal programs. Congress and the Administration should provide additional technical assistance so that IHS may improve its operations.
- Reduce regulatory burden.** Congress should authorize a study to evaluate regulations that best match the needs of IHS facilities.



To learn more about the task force's report, including case examples, visit www.aha.org/EnsuringAccess.