



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases [Report](#):**  
***Broken Promises:***  
***Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans***

WASHINGTON – Today, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released its [report](#), *Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans*. The Commission majority found that the federal government is not meeting its trust responsibilities, and that budgets and spending of federal agencies sponsoring Native American and Native Hawaiian programs, including the Departments of Health and Human Services, Interior, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, and Education, are inadequate.

Prompted by concerns raised by Native American communities and Members of Congress, *Broken Promises* updates our 2003 [report](#), *A Quiet Crisis: Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country*, which similarly evaluated expenditures of federal agencies on Native American programs. *Broken Promises*, based on expert and public input, and extensive research and analysis, offers actionable recommendations to the President, Congress, and agencies to meet the federal government’s trust obligations.

Chair Catherine E. Lhamon said, “The harrowing inequities documented in this report, across every issue area the Commission examined, cry out for immediate federal action to ensure Native Americans live, work, and learn with the same expectations for opportunity and equality to which all other Americans have access.”

**Key findings** from the Commission majority include:

- Federal programs designed to support the social and economic wellbeing of Native Americans remain chronically underfunded and sometimes inefficiently structured, which leaves many basic needs in the Native American community unmet and contributes to the inequities observed in Native American communities.
- Unequal treatment of tribal governments and lack of full recognition of their sovereign status by state and federal governments, laws, and policies diminish tribal self-determination and negatively impact health, criminal justice, education, housing and economic outcomes.
- For example, Native Americans have 1.6 times the infant mortality rate of non-Hispanic whites and the life expectancy for Native peoples is 5.5 years less than the national average.

- In the areas of public safety and justice, also for example: in 2017, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) estimated it funded only 21 percent of law enforcement, 49 percent of detention center, and 3 percent of tribal court needs.
- During the last 15 years, most federal funding for Native American programs has remained stagnant; yet even when federal funding for Native American programs has increased, these levels have not kept pace with declines in real spending power.
- The federal government has failed to keep accurate, consistent, and comprehensive records of federal spending on Native American programs, making monitoring of federal spending to meet its trust responsibility difficult.

**Key recommendations** from the Commission majority include:

- The United States expects all nations to live up to their treaty obligations; it should live up to its own.
- Congress should honor the federal government's trust obligations and pass a spending package to fully address unmet needs, targeting the most critical needs for immediate investment. This spending package should also address the funding necessary for the buildout of unmet essential utilities and core infrastructure needs in Indian Country such as electricity, water, telecommunications, and roads.
- The federal government should provide steady, equitable, and non-discretionary funding directly to tribal nations to support the public safety, health care, education, housing, and economic development of Native tribes and people. It should also provide sufficient funding, training, tools, and resources to tribal nations to provide their citizens the opportunity to exercise self-government and self-determination.
- The Commission also reversed its previous opposition to federal recognition of Native Hawaiians. Congress should pass legislation facilitating the reorganization of a Native Hawaiian governing entity and to confirm the special political and legal relationship between the United States and such an entity.

In February 2016, the Commission held a public [briefing](#) on the subject, hearing from a broad range of panelists. Their testimony, along with that submitted by members of the public, played an integral part in informing this report. In addition, the Commission considered evidence from federal officials, tribal officials, community leaders and advocates, scholars and researchers, and legal experts; official visits to Standing Rock in North Dakota, Pine Ridge in South Dakota, and the Quinault Nation in Washington; and activities of our state Advisory Committees, among others.

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*The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 51 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: In our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For information about the Commission, please visit [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).*