

February 26, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

The American Dental Association (ADA), the nation's oldest and largest dental association, representing 157,000 dentist members, recognizes the importance of funding the Indian Health Service's Division of Oral Health. Although the President's budget proposal would fund the Indian Health Service's (IHS) Division of Oral Health for fiscal year 2016 at approximately \$181,459,000, that amount is not even adequate to maintain current programs, considering population growth and cost-of-living increases for current staff. It will not support additional staff or new facilities, and it will not address the increasing rates of oral disease in tribal areas.

The proposed fiscal year 2016 budget for the IHS oral health division allows only \$82 in dental care for each of the 2.2 million people it serves. That amount doesn't even cover one dental visit for the year, considering that dental care expenditures in the United States as a whole amount to approximately \$353 per capita.

Tooth decay in Indian Country has reached epidemic proportions. According to data from the Navajo nation, tooth decay is present in 48 percent of 1-year-olds and up to 94 percent of four year olds. By comparison, the decay rate in 4-year-olds nationally is approximately 35 percent.

While the ADA accepts that, given extremely tight budget constraints, you will not likely be able to fund IHS's oral health division to the level the agency truly needs to fulfill its mission, our members urge you to appropriate an additional \$4 million for projects that can have real and immediate impact, like improving dental record keeping and implementing preventive measures. The ADA is aware that the Division of Oral Health is increasing and improving the portable equipment it uses to provide care to Bureau of Indian Education-operated schools. Additional resources to expand these services would be a good investment in the treatment and prevention of oral disease for Tribal children.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We appreciate the many competing demands for resources in your bill and how difficult a task you have in writing the fiscal year 2016 funding bill for your subcommittee.

Sincerely,

/s/

Maxine Feinberg, D.D.S.
President

/s/

Kathleen T. O'Loughlin, D.M.D., M.P.H.
Executive Director