

# National Indian Health Board



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## **Senator Begich Introduces Legislative Bill to Streamline the Definition of Indian in the Affordable Care Act**

On October 16, 2013, Senator Mark Begich (D-AK) with Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI), and Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) introduced a bill (S.1575) that would streamline the Definition of Indian in the Affordable Care Act. This is an important first step in ensuring that all American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) receive the benefits and protections intended for them in the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

The “Definitions of Indian” in the ACA are not consistent with the definitions already used by the Indian Health Service (IHS), Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) for services provided to American Indians and Alaska Natives. The ACA definitions, which currently require that a person is a member of a federally recognized Tribe or an Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) corporation, are narrower than those used by IHS, Medicaid and CHIP, thereby leaving out a sizeable population of AI/ANs that the ACA was intended to benefit and protect.

National Indian Health Board Chair Cathy Abramson said, “On behalf of the 566 Tribal nations we serve, the National Indian Health Board would like to express the deepest gratitude to Senators Begich and Baucus for introducing this important legislation. This bill will help to create parity in the American Indian and Alaska Native community with respect to provisions contained in the Affordable Care Act. If enacted, this measure will ensure that everyone is eligible to receive the protections and benefits that are designed to benefit all American Indians and Alaska Natives.”

Unless the definition of Indian in the ACA is changed, many AI/ANs will not be eligible for the special protections and benefits intended for them in the law. These benefits include cost-sharing and monthly enrollment benefits. This bill will also create statutory language to guarantee that AI/ANs are not subjected to tax penalties for not having insurance, even though they are eligible for Indian health care programs.

