INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE
VOTER REGISTRATION

THE PROBLEM:
• Intentional suppression of the Native vote, the legacy of colonization, and present-day racism prevent many Native Americans from exercising their fundamental right to vote.
• When prevented from voting, Native people cannot elect leaders who represent Native communities and protect Native interests.
• Ongoing geographic, language, and resource barriers make it harder for Natives to complete even just the first step of voting – registration.
• As a result, over a third (34%) of voting age Native Americans are not registered to vote – this is approximately 1.2 million potential voters who aren’t being heard in our democracy.

A SOLUTION: Health programs that serve Native people can help patients who want to register to vote complete the process while they are waiting for their appointments.
• Under an order from President Biden, federal agencies – including facilities operated by the Indian Health Service (IHS) – are encouraged to seek and accept designation as voter registration sites under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA).
• Through NVRA designation, both IHS programs and health programs administered by Tribal governments under a 638-Compact could provide high quality voter registration services – similar to those provided for decades at DMVs, Medicaid offices, and other state agencies – to the Native people they serve.
• IHS and Tribally administered health programs serve approximately 2.6 million American Indians and Alaska Native people each year, many of whom are not registered to vote.
• Unregistered patrons would benefit from the convenience of voter registration alongside their routine visits to IHS and tribal health facilities.

THE IMPACT OF THIS SOLUTION:
• Agencies that have become designated voter registration sites under the NVRA, have added millions of people to the voter rolls.
• A robust body of research demonstrates the relationship between voting and improved individual and community health.
• NVRA designation is inexpensive and impactful. Data from one state’s Dept. of Health and Human Services show the average cost of offering voter registration at that agency is a mere $7,000 per site per year.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: NCAI passed a resolution urging IHS and tribal health facilities to seek NVRA designation.
• If you have an IHS program in your community, urge them to offer voter registration and accept NVRA designation.
• If you have a Tribal health program funded by IHS, reach out to NARF to get help seeking NVRA designation for the program and setting up voter registration services for your members.

TO DISCUSS THIS OPPORTUNITY FURTHER, REACH OUT TO THE NATIVE AMERICAN RIGHTS FUND AT VOTE@NARF.ORG.