

2024 Public Policy Priorities

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN INDIAN DENTISTS



The Society of American Indian Dentists (SAID) is dedicated to promoting and improving the oral health of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities and engaging in advocacy to support AI/AN dental professionals across the U.S. SAID's primary goals are to:

- Promote dental health in AI/AN communities
- Encourage AI/AN youth to pursue a career in dentistry
- Promote AI/AN heritage and traditional values
- Promote and support the unique concerns of AI/AN dentists

To support the advancement of the above goals and mission, SAID advocates for and supports tribal, federal, state, and local policy changes to improve dental health and oral health workforce pipelines in AI/AN communities.

Policy Agenda

The below chart outlines key priority areas, associated initiatives, and relevant advocacy activities that SAID will participate in and support via individual and coalition efforts in 2024. As SAID grows its policy portfolio and advocacy capacity, the organization aims to begin playing a lead role in some of the below (and/or additional) priority areas over the next 2-3 years. Additional information about each priority area is included in the sections that follow.

POLICY PRIORITY	INITIATIVE(S)
<p style="text-align: center;">EXPAND PUBLIC DENTAL COVERAGE</p>	<p>Make adult dental benefits a mandatory Medicaid coverage category</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate AI/AN dental providers and other stakeholders about federal efforts to add adult dental benefits as a comprehensive, mandatory coverage category in all state Medicaid programs • Support recruitment and retention efforts for AI/AN dental providers to ensure a sufficient workforce to administer services to people with Medicaid
	<p>Support comprehensive adult dental benefits in state Medicaid programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate AI/AN dental providers and other stakeholders about state efforts to increase covered dental services for adults with Medicaid • Encourage state policymakers and public officials to engage in regular, meaningful tribal consultation in crafting policies that affect Medicaid dental benefits
	<p>Add comprehensive dental benefits to Medicare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate AI/AN dental providers and other stakeholders about the importance of comprehensive Medicare dental benefits • Advocate to CMS to use their regulatory authority to further expand coverage for medically necessary dental care • Encourage policymakers and public officials to engage in regular, meaningful tribal consultation in crafting policies that affect Medicare dental benefits

POLICY PRIORITY	INITIATIVE(S)
<p style="text-align: center;">INCREASE LICENSE PORTABILITY</p>	<p>Expand dental licensure compacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate AI/AN dental providers about the Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact developed by the Council of State Governments that creates standardized credentialing for dentists and dental hygienists
	<p>Support universal licensure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate AI/AN dental providers about universal licensure and the unique benefits it holds for AI/AN providers and communities
	<p>Support tribal sovereignty regarding self-regulation of health care services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate AI/AN dental providers about the importance of mandatory funding of all Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) provisions
<p style="text-align: center;">IMPROVE THE INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE (IHS) SYSTEM</p>	<p>Support full funding for IHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate AI/AN dental providers about the importance of full funding for IHS • Support the National Indian Health Board’s (NIHB) efforts to ensure a tribally-driven process for securing full IHS funding
	<p>Support improved IHS staffing and infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate AI/AN dental providers about the importance of elevating the IHS Director’s position to Assistant Secretary for Indian Health

Priorities

PRIORITY: EXPAND DENTAL COVERAGE

Currently, adult dental benefits are optional for state Medicaid programs to cover and Medicare does not include a comprehensive dental benefit, outside of limited coverage for medically-necessary services. AI/AN adults have the highest uninsurance rates of any racial or ethnic group; among those who do have insurance, AI/AN people have the highest rates of public insurance coverage. AI/AN people covered by Medicaid are not required to pay premiums or enrollment fees, but the lack of standardization across states can interrupt access to care. Expanding Medicaid dental services for adults, through federal legislation to require state Medicaid programs to cover comprehensive dental care or via state policies to expand covered services, would expand access to dental care for millions of low-income AI/AN people. ***SAID will educate the field about the importance of mandatory Medicaid adult dental benefits and a full Medicare dental benefit and will support efforts to ensure a sufficient AI/AN dental workforce to meet the need for services.***

Additionally, Indian Health Service (IHS) and other tribal clinics can bill Medicaid and Medicare, so insuring comprehensive dental services are paid for by these programs can bolster revenue and improve the ability of tribal health systems to meet the dental care needs of their patients. See below for SAID's priorities related to IHS funding.

PRIORITY: INCREASE LICENSE PORTABILITY

58 million people live in areas without enough dental providers and AI/AN communities face steeper barriers to accessing dental providers. Additionally, only 0.2% of dentists are AI/AN. Restrictive state licensing laws can make it more difficult for AI/AN dental providers to practice across states and for AI/AN communities to find a dental provider who represents their language and culture. In particular, because several tribal nations span multiple states, policies that facilitate interstate practice can support AI/AN dentists and promote dental health in AI/AN communities. ***SAID will educate the field about the importance of dental providers, and AI/AN providers in particular, to be able to practice across state lines.***

Many medical fields already support interstate compacts allowing physicians and nurses, for example, to practice across state lines without applying for additional licensure. SAID supports interstate compacts allowing dental providers to practice in multiple participating states, rather than requiring individual licensure in each state, and universal licensure.

United States law has long reflected that Tribes are sovereign entities and that relationships between Tribes and the US are intergovernmental ones. As a result, the federal government has treaty obligations to provide health care to tribal communities. Many tribes have moved toward self-regulation of health care for AI/AN communities and on tribal lands. **SAID supports tribal efforts to take advantage of existing federal law allowing for self-regulation of dental and other health care**, including relying on tribal licensing authority rather than state licensing laws. **SAID also supports policy improvements to reduce state interference in the licensing and regulation of dental and other health care providers**, facilities, and services on tribal land.

PRIORITY: IMPROVE THE INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE (IHS) SYSTEM

IHS provides critical dental services to AI/AN communities. Despite its important role in supporting tribal dental and other health care, IHS is chronically underfunded in part because of year-by-year funding allocations that have historically been used to fund IHS. In 2023, for the first time, Congress authorized advanced appropriations for IHS, creating stability and infrastructure investments for critical health care services. **SAID will educate the field about efforts to extend advanced appropriations in the short term, including yearly funding increases.** In the long-term, **SAID supports full and mandatory appropriations for IHS.**

ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES

In addition to the priorities listed above that SAID will actively participate in and support in 2024, the below priorities are those that SAID will monitor. They are not main priority areas for SAID in 2024, but remain relevant to the above priority areas and may move into the participation or support categories if relevant advocacy opportunities arise.

- **Teledentistry:** Teledentistry can expand the reach of the workforce into community settings, which is especially important given access barriers AI/AN people face. SAID supports efforts to expand access to dental care via teledentistry.

- **Community water fluoridation:** AI/AN communities are less likely than the general population to have access to a safe water supply. Clean, safe, fluoridated water is important for good oral health and SAID supports expanding access to community water fluoridation.
- **Cultural humility of non-Native dental providers:** The currently small proportion of AI/AN dentists means that many AI/AN people receive dental care from non-AI/AN providers. In addition to supporting the current AI/AN dental workforce and encouraging AI/AN youth to pursue careers in dentistry, SAID supports efforts to increase the cultural awareness and humility of non-AI/AN providers.
- **Minimally invasive care:** Minimally-invasive dental care (MIC) includes non-surgical dental procedures that can often be provided in non-dental settings and improve patient choice. SAID supports expanding public coverage of MIC services and increasing access to a full range of dental services for AI/AN communities.