



American  
Indian Policy  
Institute

Arizona State  
University

# POLICY ARTICLE

## Policy Article:

### How the American Rescue Plan Impacts Indian Country

Indian Country has been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, largely due to existing inequities exacerbated by the pandemic. Inadequate healthcare, a lack of housing, and underdeveloped infrastructure increased the severity of COVID-19 in Tribal communities. This resulted in an infection rate four times higher, and tragically, mortality rates twice that of other populations. The pandemic's disproportionate impact emphasizes the importance of addressing underlying systemic inequality as the threat of COVID-19 slowly dissipates and we attempt a return to a 'new normal'.

#### Funding for Indian Country

Despite the pandemic's severity, Indian Country has risen to meet every challenge head-on. Over the past year, Tribal Nations worked tirelessly to efficiently utilize available resources and find innovative ways to keep their communities safe. [The American Rescue Plan](#) recognizes that Indian Country is in the best position to address individual community needs by investing a historic \$31.2 billion into Tribal communities to directly combat the effects of COVID-19. The American Rescue Plan would deliver immediate assistance to address critical areas, including:

- \$20 billion for Tribal governments to combat COVID-19, with funding to assist Tribal community safety-net programs;
- \$6 billion for the Indian Health Service (IHS) for vaccinations, mental and behavioral health, urban health centers, third-party medical billing reimbursements, and other needs;
- \$900 million for Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) programs such as Tribal government services and potable water delivery;
- Over \$1.1 billion for Native education programs, including Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools, Tribal education agencies, and Tribal Colleges and Universities;
- \$1.2 billion for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Tribal housing programs;
- \$20 million to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on Native languages through language preservation and maintenance grants;
- \$19 million for Tribal community efforts to combat domestic violence.

#### Broadband Development

Tribes have until the end of calendar year 2024 to use the funds. One crucial tool that most Tribes did not have sufficient access to throughout the pandemic is broadband internet. According to an [FCC Report](#) from last June, about 28 percent of people on Tribal lands do not have broadband access. Where internet access is available, it can still be extremely expensive. The \$31.2 billion allocated to Indian Country in the American Rescue Plan provides funding to Tribal governments that can be used to invest in internet infrastructure or subsidize homeowner's internet access:

- The aforementioned \$20 billion allocated to Tribal governments will allow leaders to make important investments in broadband infrastructure;
- The \$100 million Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund provides Tribal governments and the state of Hawaii with the resources to invest in capital projects that directly support work, education, and health monitoring in response to COVID-19. This includes projects related to remote options for work, education, and health monitoring;
- The Homeowner Assistance Fund has some funding allocated specifically for Tribal governments to assist homeowners. This funding, which can be used to help with bills, including broadband, will allow people to stay in their homes;
- \$140 million is allocated for IHS to improve information technology telehealth infrastructure. Additionally, there is funding to improve rural telehealth through the Emergency Rural Development Grants for Rural Health Care.

### **Next Steps**

The Treasury Department is in the process of finalizing the distribution system of the \$31.2 billion to Tribal Nations, and will soon hold [consultations](#) to gather Tribal input. While there are not yet any scheduled consultations for the American Rescue Plan, the Department will host [meetings next month](#) to discuss Tribal consultation policies. AIPI applauds the incredible work of lawmakers, Tribal leaders, community advocates, and all who were involved with this effort. This investment from the Federal government makes great strides towards affirming Tribal sovereignty and better ensures the safety of America's Indigenous communities.

For more information contact:



Arizona State University  
American Indian Policy Institute  
Watts College of Public Service and  
Community Solutions  
Chase Building  
201 N. Central Ave.  
Phoenix, AZ 85005-2420  
<https://aipi.asu.edu/>  
Phone: 480-965-1055 / Fax: 480-965-6404