



**NICWA**

National Indian Child Welfare Association

## **NICWA 2023 Policy Priorities**

Each year the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) identifies policy priorities that will guide our efforts and focus our resources during the calendar year. These annual priorities are developed through input from our board, staff, and tribal constituents. They reflect our mission, ongoing commitments, and our assessment of opportunities to improve services and resources for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children and families. NICWA's 2023 policy priorities include the following:

**1) Expand and support the network of tribal leaders who advocate on behalf of AI/AN children and families.**

- a) Provide tribal leadership with information on effective child welfare governance, including working in partnership with youth, to support change in tribal communities that improves the well-being of AI/AN children, youth, and families.
- b) Expand tribal leader engagement and advocacy on NICWA priority policy issues at the federal and state levels.

**2) Protect the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and advocate for proper and consistent implementation.**

- a) Provide leadership in coordinating a comprehensive communications plan and policy-level support to protect ICWA and develop policy and communication strategies and resources to respond to the United States Supreme Court decision in the *Haaland v. Brackeen* case.
- b) Restore the 2016 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) data elements for Native children and families that tracked ICWA implementation with states that were removed in a 2020 AFCARS Final Rule.

- c) Educate federal policymakers, federal and state administrative officials, and state courts on the benefits of ICWA, its relationship to good child welfare practice, and opportunities to strengthen ICWA implementation and protect the law at federal, state, and local levels.
- d) Educate core mainstream partners about the steps they can take to participate in efforts to protect ICWA and support effective state implementation.
- e) Advocate for the Department of the Interior to continue to conduct a full investigation into the operation of Indian boarding/residential schools in the United States and collect all relevant documentation, including both federal and privately run boarding/residential schools.
- f) Advocate for passage of the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy Act to examine the Indian boarding school legacy and provide recommendations on how to help address the trauma and negative effects of the boarding school era in Indian Country and facilitate healing.

**3) Ensure federal and state child welfare policy supports culturally appropriate services for AI/AN children and families and provides tribal nations equitable access to federal resources.**

- a) Advocate for child welfare redesign and appropriate responses to racial inequities in child welfare that impact AI/AN children, families, and tribes that are rooted in the unique political status of AI/AN people and tribes and the trust relationship of the federal government to tribal nations. Legislative and administrative responses must not address AI/AN child welfare inequities primarily through the lens of racial status or equity but rather promote tribal sovereignty.
- b) Advocate for legislative and administrative policy that allows tribal nations and states to develop and utilize culturally based and culturally adapted prevention and kinship navigator services for AI/AN children and families as provided for under the Family First Prevention Services Act (Division E of Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018—H.R. 1892). This includes extending current guidance for tribes operating the Title IV-E program directly through the federal government to tribes operating the Title IV-E program through agreements with states.

- c) Advocate for increased funding for tribal nations and a study on promising child abuse prevention practices in Indian Country within the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act reauthorization.
  - d) Advocate for reauthorization of the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act that reauthorizes existing grant programs and increases authorizations to needed levels.
- 4) Advocate for federal funding levels that provide parity with other governments to address the needs of AI/AN children and families in child welfare, children's mental health, and juvenile justice systems as well as poverty reduction and family support programs.**
- a) Advocate for a tribal set-aside to the Social Services Block Grant to provide tribal nations with the opportunity to receive funding and administer the program directly through the federal government for social service-related purposes.
  - b) Educate federal policymakers and administration officials on the barriers to tribal and urban Indian program access to child welfare and related services.
  - c) Advocate for sufficient federal funding levels so that every tribal nation and urban Indian program can offer the child welfare and related services that are needed within their communities.
  - d) Advocate for appropriate matching fund policies that promote tribal nation participation in federal child and family programs and are aligned with tribal economic realities.