



2026 Policy Priorities

Each year, the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) identifies policy priorities that guide our efforts and focus our resources during the calendar year. These annual priorities are developed with input from our board, staff, and Tribal constituents. They reflect our mission, ongoing commitments, and assessment of opportunities to improve services and resources for American Indian and Alaska Native children, families, and communities.

In 2024, NICWA and partners established a generational strategic plan, referred to as ICWA 2050, to protect the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) for future generations and improve Tribal Nation capacity in child welfare. NICWA's annual policy priorities reflect the goals and objectives of this plan. They also reflect our commitment to ensuring Native children are protected, their families are well supported, and they are connected to their Tribal communities and culture. These priorities position Tribal sovereignty as the centerpiece of all our policy solutions. NICWA's 2026 policy priorities are listed below with references to the ICWA 2050 goals and objectives.

Goal 1: Increase funding and support to Tribal Nations so that every Tribe can provide the full range of child welfare services needed by their children and families (ICWA 2050).

- a. Increase federal appropriations for Tribal human service programs to a level that is equitable to state funding and responsive to the needs of Tribal Nations. Advocate

for sufficient federal funding levels from Department of Health and Human Services and Department of the Interior programs so that every Tribal nation and urban Indian program can offer the child welfare and related services needed by their communities (Goal 1, Objective 1 and 7).

- b. Establish a 5% tribal set-aside in the Social Services Block Grant to provide flexible human services funding directly to Tribal nations (Goal 1, Objective 1 and Goal 3, Objective 3).
- c. Establish a 5% Tribal set-aside in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grant Program to allow more Tribal Nations to receive funding to support primary and secondary child abuse prevention programs (Goal 1, Objective 1 and Goal 3, Objective 3).
- d. Advocate for changes to Title IV-B of the Social Security Act to increase the Tribal set-asides in subpart 1 and subpart 2 to 5% and increase the Tribal Court Improvement Act funding to \$5 million annually.
- e. Provide Tribal leadership with information on effective child welfare governance, including working in partnership with youth, parents, and relative caregivers, maximizing funding, and supporting change in Tribal child welfare systems that improves child and family well-being (Goal 1, Objective 4).

Goal 2: Establish strong working relationships between Tribal Nations and states so that ICWA is rigorously implemented and all Native children and families in child welfare systems have the benefit of culturally based services and supports that improve outcomes (ICWA 2050).

- a. Examine ICWA accountability systems and measures to determine the strengths and challenges of different state and federal models as well as opportunities to establish stronger, complementary state and federal accountability systems (Goal 2, Objective 3 and Goal 3, Objective 1).
- b. Participate in the Uniform Law Commission process to develop a model state ICWA law for Tribal Nations who are interested in establishing a state ICWA law in their

state and identify support Tribal Nations may need to successfully lead efforts to pass a state ICWA law (Goal 2, Objective 1).

Goal 3: Establish a federal-Tribal relationship that rigorously monitors and supports ICWA compliance and establishes increased child welfare capacity for every Tribal Nation and urban Indian organization to provide the culturally based services their communities need and assist them in supporting state ICWA implementation (ICWA 2050).

- a. Advocate for changes to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act so Tribal Nations can have the option to directly operate the Title IV-E Prevention Services program and receive funding for prevention services without also having to operate the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance programs (Goal 1, Objectives 1 and 5).
- b. Expand Tribal Self Governance, P.L 102-477 program options, and other models of Tribal operation of federal programs that reduce Tribal administrative burden, support Tribal sovereignty, and afford Tribal Nations flexibility to provide effective and efficient services for their communities (Goal 3, Objective 3).
- c. Educate the Administration on Tribal Nation political status, consultation, Tribal program service delivery, and the role of Tribal sovereignty in supporting effective policy and program solutions by supporting Tribal leadership on the Administration for Children and Families Tribal Advisory Committee and Department of Health and Human Services Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee (Goal 3, Objective 3).
- d. Develop written materials and provide presentations on the impact of Executive Orders issued by the new Administration on Tribal human services and urban Indian organization programs (Goal 3, Objectives 3 and 5).
- e. Partner with Tribal leadership and the Administration for Children and Families under the Department of Health and Human Services to establish a plan for implementation of legal requirements contained within the Supporting America's Children and Families Act (P.L. 118-258), which include ICWA data collection by states, a funding increase to Tribal Title IV-B of the Social Security Act grants,

streamlining administration of Title IV-B programs, and improving Tribal engagement in state child welfare proceedings (Goal 3, Objectives 1 and 3).