

## History of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Caucus 2026

**Founding the Caucus:** In 1979 there was no formal group supporting public health among American Indians and Alaska Natives, as noted by Margo Kerrigan as she attended her first annual meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA). Margo was astounded by the overall size of the annual convention and found that there were no scientific sessions addressing the health of Indigenous people in the US. She noted that other ethnic minority groups such as Latinos, African Americans and Asian Americans had formed “caucuses” within APHA. Margo left the annual meeting determined to establish a similar forum for American Indians and Alaska Natives. At the 1980 annual APHA meeting, Margo established a new caucus, with the support of Dr. George Blue Spruce Phoenix Area of the Indian Health Service (IHS). She collected \$10 from 40 people who were health professionals (Native and non-Native) working for the health of American Indian and Alaska Native populations. On December 23, 1980, the American Indian and Alaska Native Caucus submitted a formal request for recognition to be in “official relations” with the American Public Health Association.

At the 1981 annual meeting of APHA, the American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) caucus hosted the first set of scientific and poster sessions on topics related to American Indian and Alaska Native health. The AIAN Caucus started out with 40 members, most of whom were American Indian or Alaska Native. Among the goals of the newly formed American Indian and Alaska Native Caucus were to expand the caucus membership, and to increase the quantity and quality of scientific presentations on the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Margo Kerrigan served as the chair of the AIAN Caucus for nine years, from 1980-1988.

**Forming our 501c3 non-profit status:** The AIAN caucus continued to grow and thrive under the leadership of Margo Kerrigan, Linda Burhansstipanov, Patricia Cochran, Michael Bird and others. In 1994 the AIAN Caucus registered as a non-profit in the state of Colorado, with Linda B and Patricia Cochran as officers. Patricia Cochran and Linda B developed the Articles of Incorporation and Operating Code in 1994 which were approved by the membership. The AIANNH Caucus submitted and received approval from the IRS as a 501c3 non-profit public organization in 2017.

**Formally adding Native Hawaiians to the Caucus:** Over the years, Native Hawaiians participated in the AIAN Caucus, presenting on topics related to the health of Native Hawaiians. In 1995, the American Indian and Alaska Native Caucus officially welcomed Native Hawaiians to the caucus, renaming it as the American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Caucus of APHA.

**Student Scholarships:** Over the years, our Caucus was able to invite Native students to attend the annual meeting with the help of the IHS and the Centers for Disease Control. In 2015 the Caucus formally established the Margo Kerrigan Scholarship for students to attend APHA. Each year our caucus has received generous donations from Papa Ola Lokahi, a Native Hawaiian non-profit that seeks to improve the health status and wellbeing of Native Hawaiians. AARP funds also support our Student Scholarships. The scholarships pay students' registration fees for attending APHA annual meeting, flight to and from the meeting, lodging and food expenses for each student awardee. There are generally 3-5 students chosen to receive the Margo Kerrigan Scholarship yearly.

**Wisdom of the Elders:** Each year at the annual APHA meeting, the caucus hosts a session known as the Wisdom of the Elders. This highly popular session has been generously supported by AARP since its inception in 2004.

**Caucus Social Event:** The Caucus also sponsors a Social Event annually, bringing together APHA members, sponsors, friends, supporters and guests to participate in an evening of celebration, cultural events, food and a silent auction. The silent auction, with items donated by Caucus members, raises funds to support the Caucus.

The American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian (AIANNH) Caucus promotes equal opportunity and access for indigenous peoples of North America and the Hawaiian Islands to health care, provides a supportive entry into APHA, and disseminates information about major native health issues and programs. The Caucus welcomes anyone who wants to join us in this effort.