

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-790T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Indian Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

GAO's High-Risk Series identifies federal program areas needing attention from Congress and the executive branch. GAO added federal management of programs that serve Indian tribes and their members to its February 2017 biennial update of high-risk areas in response to serious problems with management and oversight by Interior and HHS.

This testimony identifies GAO's recommendations to Interior and HHS from prior GAO reports on the federal management and oversight of Indian education, energy resources, and health care that remain unimplemented. It also examines agencies' recent actions to address the recommendations and the extent to which these actions address GAO's recommendations. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed and analyzed agency documentation on actions taken to implement the recommendations and conducted interviews with agency officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO cited nearly 40 unimplemented recommendations in its February 2017 High Risk report on federal programs for Indian tribes in education, energy development, and health care, and added 12 recommendations in two new reports on BIE school safety and construction in late May of this year. Sustained focus by Interior and HHS in fully implementing these recommendations and continued oversight by Congress are essential to achieving progress in these areas.

View [GAO-17-790T](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or [emreyarrasm@gao.gov](mailto:emreyarrasm@gao.gov)

September 13, 2017

## HIGH RISK

### Status of Prior Recommendations on Federal Management of Programs Serving Indian Tribes

## What GAO Found

As discussed in the 2017 High Risk report, GAO has identified numerous weaknesses in how the Department of the Interior (Interior) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) manage programs serving Indian tribes. Specifically, these weaknesses were related to Interior's Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)—under the Office of the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs (Indian Affairs)—in overseeing education services and managing Indian energy resources, and HHS's Indian Health Service (IHS) in administering health care services. GAO cited nearly 40 recommendations in its 2017 High Risk report that were not implemented, and has since made an additional 12 recommendations in two new reports on BIE school safety and construction published in late May of this year. Interior and HHS have taken some steps to address these recommendations but only one has been fully implemented.

- **Education.** GAO has found serious weaknesses in Indian Affairs' oversight of Indian education. For example, in 2016, GAO found that the agency's lack of oversight of BIE school safety contributed to deteriorating facilities and equipment in school facilities. At one school, GAO found seven boilers that failed inspection because of safety hazards, such as elevated levels of carbon monoxide and a natural gas leak. In 2017, GAO found key weaknesses in the way Indian Affairs oversees personnel responsible for inspecting BIE school facilities for safety and manages BIE school construction projects. Of GAO's 23 recommendations on Indian education—including recommendations cited in GAO's 2017 High Risk report and in two late May reports—none have been fully implemented.
- **Energy resource management.** In three prior reports on Indian energy, GAO found that BIA inefficiently managed Indian energy resources and the development process, thereby limiting opportunities for tribes and their members to use those resources to create economic benefits and improve the well-being of their communities. GAO categorized concerns associated with BIA management of energy resources and the development process into four broad areas, including oversight of BIA activities, collaboration, and BIA workforce planning. GAO made 14 recommendations to BIA to address its management weaknesses, which were cited in the 2017 High Risk report. However, none have been fully implemented.
- **Health care.** GAO has found that IHS provides inadequate oversight of its federally operated health care facilities and of its Purchased/Referred Care program. For example, in 2016 and 2017, GAO found that IHS provided limited and inconsistent oversight of the timeliness and quality of care provided in its facilities and that inconsistencies in quality oversight were exacerbated by significant turnover in area leadership. GAO also found that IHS did not equitably allocate funds to meet the health care needs of Indians. Of GAO's 13 recommendations on Indian health care cited in GAO's 2017 High Risk report, one has been fully implemented.