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Contact: Communications Office

(202) 224-4515

## **BAUCUS WORKS TO IMPROVE INDIAN COUNTRY HEALTH CARE**

*Finance Chairman: American Indians Deserve Top-Notch Health Care*

**Crow Agency, Mont.** – At a Senate Finance Committee hearing held today at the Crow-Northern Cheyenne Hospital on the Crow Reservation in Montana, Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) examined obstacles to accessing quality, affordable health care in Indian Country and discussed ways to make improvements. Senator Baucus noted that health care services often lag in Indian country due to shortages of doctors and nurses, funding shortfalls and technical concerns with facilities and equipment.

**“The state of health care in Indian Country is unacceptable,”** Senator Baucus said. **“American Indians deserve top-notch health care that’s responsive to their needs. We must use all available resources to make sure we are doing the best we can to turn Indian country health care around.”**

At the hearing, Senator Baucus said the life expectancy for Native Americans is five years shorter than that of the general population. He also noted that while Native Americans and Alaska Natives are more likely to face serious mental health problems than any other group, there is a shortage of mental health caregivers at many facilities like the Crow-Northern Cheyenne Hospital. According to the Indian Health Service, vacancy rates in Indian Country are as high as 20 percent for doctors and 15 percent for nurses and dentists. In addition, funding shortfalls remain a problem. Lack of funding led to nearly 220,000 denials for contracted health services in 2010, meaning thousands of patients went without care.

Senator Baucus said the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, which became permanent in health reform, will help Indian Health Services (IHS) expand tribal mental and behavioral health services and provide financial incentives to help tribes recruit clinicians. It also made private insurance plans on insurance exchanges accessible to any American Indian. Senator Baucus added that additional funding appropriated for IHS would help close the funding gap and guarantee high-quality care is available when needed.

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