



August 17, 2020

Dear Tribal and Urban Indian Organization Leaders:

Last week, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar visited the [Alaska Native Medical Center](#) to observe their COVID-19 testing capacity and learn how they have adapted to challenges in delivering services during the pandemic. He met with the [Cook Inlet Tribal Council](#), the [Anchorage Native Primary Care Center](#), the [Southcentral Foundation](#), and the [Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium](#). He acknowledged the Alaska Native organizations for making progress using new technology to deliver healthcare and human services in some of the most remote places in America. This stop was part of a nationwide tour by Secretary Azar to hear from healthcare workers on the frontlines responding to the pandemic. I appreciate the significant support provided by Secretary Azar and Deputy Secretary Eric Hargan for prioritizing health programs and services for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Under the leadership of President Trump, HHS and the Department of Defense earlier this month [announced an agreement with Moderna, Inc.](#) to manufacture and deliver 100 million doses of the company's COVID-19 vaccine candidate. Moderna will manufacture the vaccine doses while clinical trials are underway. Manufacturing in parallel with clinical trials expedites the traditional vaccine development timeline and builds toward the U.S. government's [Operation Warp Speed](#) goal to begin delivering safe and effective vaccines to the American people by the end of the year. At IHS, we continue to engage with the leadership of [Operation Warp Speed](#) as it moves towards this goal.

The HHS, through the [Provider Relief Fund](#), is now [accepting applications from eligible providers](#) to receive funding equal to two percent of total patient care revenue. This funding opportunity applies to many Medicare/Medicaid/CHIP and dental providers, as well as providers who had a change of ownership in 2020 and may not have previously received any funding or did not receive the full amount of funding. For more information, a [Provider Relief Fund tribal stakeholder call](#) was held last week answering specific questions from our tribal partners. The HHS has streamlined the application process and the deadline to [apply for funding](#) is **August 28, 2020**.

The HHS is also seeking recommendations for nominations to fill vacancies on the [Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee](#). The STAC was established in 2010 by the Department in an effort to create a coordinated, Department-wide strategy to incorporate tribal guidance on Departmental priorities, policies, and budget. I am requesting your support in nominating a primary and alternate candidate to serve two-year terms from each of the IHS Areas: Albuquerque, Bemidji, California, Nashville, Navajo, Oklahoma, Portland, and Tucson. These representatives should be an elected official or designated representative that is qualified to represent the views of the Tribes in their respective Area for which they are being nominated. The STAC is also seeking nominations for two national at-large members. All nominations should be submitted to STAC@hhs.gov by **September 11, 2020**.

The IHS continues participating with HHS leadership in virtual HHS Regional Tribal Consultation sessions. Thank you for the feedback you have provided on ways we can work to improve tribal outreach and coordination activities. I encourage you to [register](#) to participate in the upcoming sessions that focus on regional specific issues and also discuss programmatic and policy issues and concerns with HHS leadership on a national level. The IHS remains committed to engaging in meaningful tribal consultation with tribal leaders, and conferring with urban Indian organization.

I also want to inform you about some upcoming tribal consultations with the [Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives](#). These virtual consultation sessions will discuss the scope and nature of issues regarding missing or murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives. The Task Force has established a series of tribal consultations to be held virtually. The sessions are in each of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' regions. The [12 regional consultations begin today](#) and continue through September. Written comments can also be submitted by e-mail to OperationLadyJustice@usdoj.gov by **September 30, 2020**.

In closing, I want to acknowledge that August is National Immunization Awareness Month. Immunizations play an important role in keeping you, your family and your community healthy. [Vaccinations](#) help prevent the spread of disease, especially those who are most vulnerable to illness, such as infants and young children, elders, and those with chronic conditions or weakened immune systems. This month, the Department of Health and Human Services is urging healthcare providers and parents to "catch-up to get ahead" on childhood immunizations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Surgeon General, the Indian Health Service, and many others are working together to get children caught up on vaccines that have been delayed due to the COVID-19

pandemic, especially those living in medically underserved areas. Visit [Vaccines.gov/catch-up](https://www.vaccines.gov/catch-up) to learn more about which vaccines might be important for you and your family.

And lastly, our colleagues at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a new easy-to-understand graphic to accompany data on COVID-19 hospitalization and death by [age](#), [race](#), and underlying [medical conditions](#). As we continue to fight this pandemic, please continue to stay safe and take responsible actions to stop the spread of COVID-19. I encourage you to visit our [IHS Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up to date information on our COVID-19 response activities.

Respectfully,

Michael

RADM Michael D. Weahkee, MBA, MHSA
Assistant Surgeon General, U.S. Public Health Service
Director, Indian Health Service

Below is general information on various topics that could be of interest to you and your community. Web links are included where you can find more information on each topic.

Testing/Supplies/Contact Tracing Resources:

- [CDC Updated information on risk factors for severe COVID-19 illness](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance for enhancing front line Public health Capacity](#)
- [CDC Resources for Contact Tracing Training](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance for Employee and Workplace Safety](#)
- [CDC Information on Pregnancy and COVID-19](#)
- [CDC Updated Information on in-home social services providers and clients](#)
- [CDC information on COVID-19 and Seasonal Allergies](#)
- [CDC information on ending home isolation after exposure to COVID-19](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance on criteria for returning to work](#)
- [CDC Updated Strategies for K-12 school administrators](#)