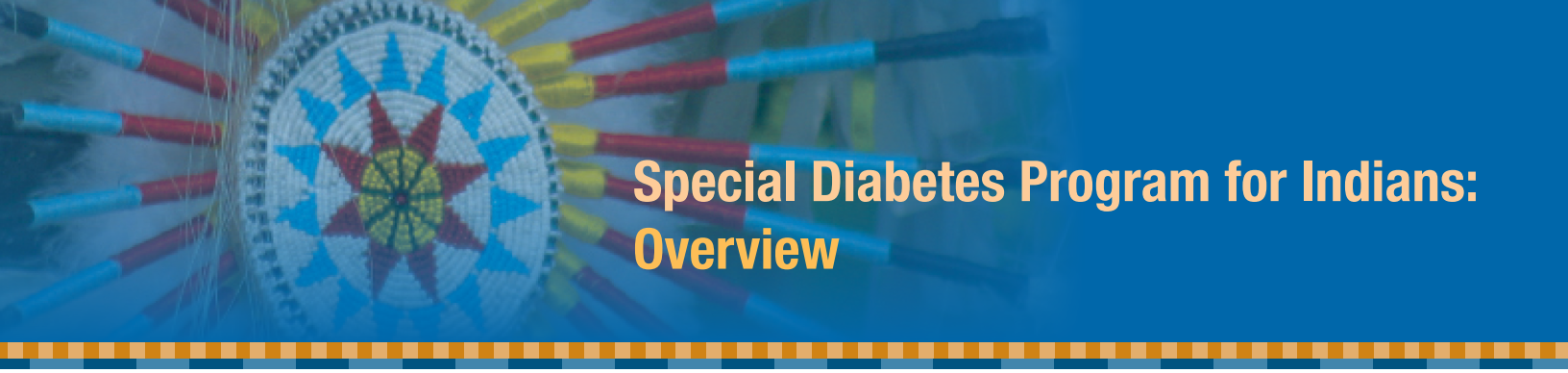

Special Diabetes Program for Indians: Overview

The *Special Diabetes Program for Indians* is a $150 million per year grant program that is funded through Congressional legislation and administered by the Indian Health Service (IHS) Division of Diabetes Treatment and Prevention.

Now in its tenth year, the *Special Diabetes Program for Indians* provides funding for diabetes treatment and prevention services at 399 IHS, Tribal, and urban Indian health programs, serving nearly all Federally-recognized tribes. The grant programs use proven diabetes treatment and prevention strategies, such as patient education, quality diabetes care, and culturally-appropriate physical activity, nutrition, and weight management activities, to help improve health outcomes among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Why the *Special Diabetes Program for Indians* is needed

Congress established the *Special Diabetes Program for Indians* in 1997 in the wake of increasing public concern about the human and economic costs of diabetes in the United States and its growing prevalence in vulnerable populations, particularly American Indians and Alaska Natives.

- American Indians and Alaska Natives carry the heaviest burden of diabetes in the United States, suffering from among the highest rates of diabetes in the world. In some American Indian and Alaska Native communities, diabetes prevalence among adults is as high as 60%.
- One out of six American Indian and Alaska Native adults (16.3%) has diagnosed diabetes—more than double the prevalence rate for the general United States population.
- Once exclusively a disease of adults, type 2 diabetes is increasingly common among American Indian and Alaska Native youth, threatening the health, well-being, and quality of life of future generations.
- The interaction among hereditary, behavioral, and environmental factors has left American Indians and Alaska Natives particularly vulnerable to diabetes. These factors include a hereditary predisposition to diabetes, increasingly sedentary lifestyles, exposure to diabetes while in the womb, and the effects of living in adverse social and physical environments.

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Key components of the *Special Diabetes Program for Indians*

As directed by Congress, the IHS established three major components of the *Special Diabetes Program for Indians*. Together, these components form the foundation of the Indian health system's response to the diabetes epidemic in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Community-Directed Diabetes Programs

- Established in 1998 to **begin or enhance diabetes treatment and prevention grant programs** at IHS, Tribal, and urban Indian health programs.
- Currently includes 333 grant programs in 35 states.
- Allows grant programs to design and implement diabetes interventions that address local community priorities.

Demonstration Projects

- Established in 2004 as a competitive grant program to **prevent diabetes in high-risk individuals** and to **prevent cardiovascular disease—the most compelling complication of diabetes—in people who already have diabetes.**
- Currently includes 66 grant programs in 19 states.
- Designed to translate the science of diabetes prevention and cardiovascular disease risk reduction in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Enhancing the IHS Diabetes Data Infrastructure

- Designs and implements systems to **improve American Indian and Alaska Native diabetes data collection and analysis.** These data help health care providers improve care to their patients.
- Supports the development and implementation of the IHS Electronic Health Record System, which is the electronic patient and data management system used in many Indian health facilities.

The *Special Diabetes Program for Indians* has successfully implemented innovative interventions in American Indian and Alaska Native communities across the nation to address the growing epidemic of diabetes. Guided by both the scientific literature and community-driven priorities, the *Special Diabetes Program for Indians* has helped the grant programs, Tribal leaders, and IHS collectively build one of the most strategic and comprehensive diabetes treatment and prevention programs in the United States.

Key clinical outcome measures—such as blood sugar control, cholesterol levels, and kidney function—have improved among American Indians and Alaska Natives with diabetes each year since the *Special Diabetes Program for Indians* was created.