



OS



ACF



AOA

CDC

CMS

FDA



SAMHSA

Indian Health Service

February 1, 2003

National American Heart Month Preventive Health Statement "Removing the Risks for Heart Disease"

by

Charles W. Grim, D.D.S., M.H.S.A.

Assistant Surgeon General

Interim Director, Indian Health Service

February is National American Heart Month and the Indian Health Service is to be commended for working tirelessly to provide information, treatment, and encouragement to patients with heart disease and to remove heart disease as the leading cause of death among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Heart disease among Indian people occurs at rates almost double that of the general population; a health disparity rate that the President, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the IHS are committed to eliminating. The IHS is working with other HHS programs, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health's National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, to develop a Native American Cardiovascular Prevention Program. Also participating in this effort is the IHS Diabetes Program, the IHS Disease Prevention Task Force, and the American Heart Association. This program is working to develop even more effective prevention programs for our communities. The IHS has also begun several programs to encourage employees and our tribal and urban Indian health program partners to lose weight and exercise, such as "Walk the Talk" and "Take Charge Challenge" programs.

Generally, heart disease is a result of a number of cardiovascular risk factors, which if controlled or eliminated can reduce the incidence and impact of heart disease and stroke. These risk factors include diabetes, high blood pressure, abnormal cholesterol levels, tobacco abuse, physical inactivity, and being overweight. Together, the IHS and our partners are focusing on prevention and encouraging every adult to be assessed to identify if any of these risk factors are present, and if so, to treat or control them.

In addition, this month is an opportunity for individuals to focus on the important role of proper eating, weight control, and exercise. We know with these tools we can reduce or eliminate most heart disease events and many of the modifiable risk factors leading to the heart disease. Throughout the month there will be reminders from many segments of the health community, sending out messages of prevention. I encourage you to heed that message and begin making healthy choices – so you can live a long and healthy life.