



NOV 12 2010



Dear Tribal Leader:

We are pleased to report that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Indian Health Service (IHS) have signed a comprehensive and far-reaching Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) aimed at improving the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans.

The VA-IHS MOU provides for coordination, collaboration, and resource-sharing between VA and IHS to benefit AI/AN Veterans, and enhancing the efficient operations of both health care organizations. It builds on the broad language and goals of the previous 2003 VA-IHS MOU, but is more specific in outlining mutual goals and areas for productive work. The MOU requires the establishment of an implementation task force, the engagement of VA and IHS leadership to set priorities for action among the topics identified, and an annual report of progress. It also makes clear the necessity and importance of Tribal consultation.

While it is intended to be clear and specific with regard to deliverables, the MOU also contains permissive language that will facilitate innovation at the local level between VA and IHS/Tribal/Urban programs.

The MOU outlines key strategies to:

- **Increase access** to services and benefits of IHS, VA, and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for AI/AN Veterans.
- **Improve coordination of care**, including co-management, for AI/AN Veterans served by both IHS, Tribal, or Urban Indian health programs and VA.
- **Improve care** through the development of health information technology.
- **Enhance access** through the development and implementation of new models of care using new technologies.
- **Improve efficiency and effectiveness** of both VA and IHS at a system level.
- **Increase availability of services** by the development of payment and reimbursement policies and mechanisms, in accordance with law, and the data sets to support these policies and mechanisms.

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- **Improve the delivery of care** through active sharing of care process, programs, and services with benefit to those served by both IHS and VA.
- **Increase cultural awareness and culturally competent care** for VA and IHS beneficiaries, recognizing that many cultures are represented in the populations served by IHS, Tribal and Urban Indian health programs and by VA.
- **Increase capability and improve quality** through training and workforce development.
- **Increase access to care** through sharing of staff and enhanced recruitment and retention of professional staff.
- **Address emergency, disaster, and pandemic preparedness and response.**
- **Accomplish the broad and ambitious goals of this agreement** through the development of a joint Implementation Task Force to identify the strategies and plans for accomplishing the tasks and aims of this agreement.

We are interested in hearing your priorities on implementation of the strategies in the VA-IHS MOU. Are there strategies that you would like us to implement sooner rather than later? Do you have suggestions for activities under any of the strategies in the MOU? Any comments are welcome as staff at IHS and VA begin the work of implementing the strategies in the new MOU.

Please send all comments to the email address consultation@ihs.gov or to the address listed below by December 31, 2010. If you have any questions, please contact Susan Karol, M.D., IHS Chief Medical Officer at susan.karol@ihs.gov.

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This MOU between VA and IHS provides a firm foundation for collaboration, coordination, and resource sharing to meet the needs of the AI/AN Veterans who have served our Nation so proudly. We have heard from Tribes that improving care for our Veterans is a top priority and we look forward to your input and suggestions.

Sincerely,

/Robert A. Petzel/

/Yvette Roubideaux/

Robert A. Petzel, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health
Department of Veterans Affairs

Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, Indian Health Service

Enclosure

Send written comments by December 31, 2010 to:

Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H.
Indian Health Service
801 Thompson Ave, Suite 440
Rockville, MD 20852

or by email to consultation@ihs.gov