



March 30, 2020

Dear Tribal and Urban Indian Organization Leaders:

The Indian Health Service continues to coordinate with our partners across the federal government to take aggressive and proactive steps to address the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The health and safety of American Indians and Alaska Natives is our top priority.

I have some great news to share. As you may have heard, Congress has passed additional legislation, which includes over \$1 billion for the IHS to support a wide range of COVID-19 response activities. We will hold two national calls on Wednesday, April 1st to consult and confer on the new COVID-19 funding.

- 2-3 PM (Eastern): [Tribal Consultation](#)
- 4-5 PM (Eastern): [Urban Confer](#)

IHS was also pleased to [announce](#) late last week the distribution decisions for \$134 million in new resources to respond to coronavirus (COVID-19) in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. We sincerely appreciate the rapid and robust input from Tribal and Urban Indian Organization leaders. I value your support as we work together on a significantly accelerated timeline to ensure that critical resources can be distributed for immediate support of COVID-19 response.

We appreciate Congress' support of American Indian and Alaska Native communities during this national emergency.

Our weekly Thursday calls continue to grow and expand and we are grateful that you all continue to join us on these calls. Every week we have more federal partners available to answer questions and provide the latest updates on how the federal government is responding to the coronavirus pandemic. As our weekly Thursday calls continue to grow in interest, we are excited that the White House will begin hosting the call directly. HHS and IHS will continue to participate in the calls and answer your questions and provide the latest information along with the rest of our federal family of Agencies. Your comments and questions on these calls directly

inform how we communicate and allocate our resources to best support your communities during this difficult time.

With the President's Declaration of a National Emergency on March 13th, FEMA has taken the lead in the federal government's response to the coronavirus pandemic. In order to obtain needed supplies, especially personal protective equipment from local sources and through FEMA, IHS has issued [guidance](#) that will streamline the process across the Indian Health System. We are working closely with [Area Emergency Points of Contact \(EMPOCs\)](#) to continue to track and monitor needed supplies throughout the Indian Health System of care.

IHS continues to work closely with HHS and FEMA in coordinating our efforts, by having daily calls and ensuring that critical resources are reaching Indian country in a timely manner. We are also happy to share that on March 26th FEMA updated its COVID-19 [guidance for tribal governments](#).

We know that these are unprecedented times, but we are all in this together. I can assure you that the Indian Health Service and the entire federal government is working tirelessly to ensure that Tribes, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and all Americans are supported during this difficult time. We look forward to speaking to you again on Thursday's call. Lastly, I would like to leave you with a recap of some of the announcements from our federal partners that were provided last week (see below).

Respectfully,

Michael

RADM Michael D. Weahkee
Assistant Surgeon General, USPHS
Principal Deputy Director, IHS

How to Ensure Your Hospital is Prepared: CDC posted a comprehensive [hospital preparedness checklist](#) to help hospitals assess and improve their preparedness for responding to a community-wide outbreak of COVID-19.

Help for Facilities to Assess When to Discontinue Transmission-Based Precautions: To help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 in healthcare facilities, CDC released a

[reference](#) to guide healthcare regarding discontinuing transmission-based precautions and discharging hospitalized patients with COVID-19.

CMS Continues to Approve 1135 Waivers: CMS announced the approval of seven additional state Medicaid 1135 waivers bringing the total to 23 states with approved waivers. The list of states and waivers can be found [here](#).

Updates on How to Collect, Handle, and Test Clinical Specimens: CDC updated their [guidance for handling specimens](#) to allow for only nasal swabs if a nasopharyngeal is not available when collecting specimens to test for COVID-19. FDA also released new [FAQs on diagnostic testing](#) for labs, manufacturers and general questions.

New Grant funds for Meals for the Elderly: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has [awarded](#) \$250 million in grants from the Administration for Community Living for communities to provide meals for older adults. Also attached is a document with a state-by-state and U.S. Territories breakdown of the award amount.

TANF support communities affected by the Coronavirus: The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the Department of Health and Human Services released [program instruction \(PI\)](#) in reference to how the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program can support people affected by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Watch Public Health Leaders Answer Your Public Health Questions:

- How Can You Keep the Most Vulnerable Safe from Coronavirus? ([VIDEO](#))
- How Can You Engage in Social Distancing? ([VIDEO](#))
- Is It Still Safe to Donate Blood? ([VIDEO](#))
- Dr. Deborah Birx: If You Feel Sick, Stay Home ([VIDEO](#))

Please continue to check [cdc.gov/covid19](https://www.cdc.gov/covid19) for the latest information.