



April 6, 2020

Dear Tribal and Urban Indian Organization Leaders:

It's my pleasure to continue to send you these updates every week. As we continue to work together during this unprecedented time, I am encouraged by the dedication and partnership across the Indian health system. The White House Task Force continues to stress the importance of social distancing as the one proven method to slow the spread of the virus. The [timeline](#) on slowing the spread has been extended, and now is a critical time that we all do our part to social distance and stay home as much as possible.

Normally, this time of year, Tribal leaders are getting ready to provide in-person recommendations on the HHS Budget during the Annual Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tribal Budget Consultation. While we may not be able to gather in-person this year, I am grateful that COVID-19 has not stopped the budget process. The [annual HHS Tribal Budget Consultation](#) is in writing this year. Tribes have until Friday, May 1, to submit their written recommendations. We invite you to join us on Wednesday, April 8, for a virtual discussion with HHS operational divisions. Tribal leaders will have an opportunity to hear updates and instructions for providing written recommendations for the FY 2022 budget.

Please be advised that we have postponed HHS Region 10 consultation due to COVID-19. Please continue to check the HHS Regional consultation [website](#) for the status of Regional consultations. In addition, the HHS Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee (STAC) has extended the deadline to nominate new STAC members memberships. We will identify a new deadline once we resume normal operations. Tribes can continue to submit nominations to STAC@hhs.gov. We greatly appreciate the STAC's leadership during this unprecedented time.

We have updated our [guidance](#) for Tribes to access the Strategic National Stockpile. While there continues to be great demand and access across the country is strained, we continue to work to 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. When possible, please continue to make requests through your normal supply channels.

Today, [HHS announced](#) that it is purchasing the ID NOW COVID-19 rapid point-of-care test for state, territorial public health labs and to IHS. This test allows for medical diagnostic testing at the time and place of patient care, provides COVID-19 results in under 13 minutes and expands the capacity for coronavirus testing for individuals exhibiting symptoms as well as for

healthcare professionals and the first responder community. To ensure that remote and rural populations are also being reached, the Indian Health Service will receive tests and devices to distribute to selected IHS and tribal locations. We will share more information on these tests and where the devices will be distributed later this week.

On Friday, we [announced](#) the availability of, and distribution decisions for, \$600 million in new resources appropriated in the recently enacted Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), to address coronavirus (COVID-19) prevention, preparedness, and response in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. I greatly appreciate the rapid and robust input we received last week and value your support as we work together on a significantly accelerated timeline. We will continue to work in partnership with you to distribute these critical resources for immediate support of COVID-19 response.

Last week our partners at the CDC published a new notice of funding opportunity, [Supporting Tribal Public Health Capacity in Coronavirus Preparedness and Response](#), on [Grants.gov](#). **The application period is open, and responses are due by 11:59 pm eastern time on May 31, 2020.**

Our sister agency, the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#), also released a grant funding opportunity announcement, [Emergency Grants to Address Mental and Substance Use Disorders During COVID-19](#) with **applications are due no later than Friday, April 10, 2020.**

Other updates from the HHS family, include some recent announcements from the [Administration for Children and Family](#). ACF recently published [new guidance](#) announcing flexibilities in conducting human service activities related to or affected by COVID-19. Additional announcements from ACF are below.

- **[Office of Head Start \(OHS\)](#)**: Communications regarding OHS coronavirus prevention and response are available [here](#).
- **[Office of Family Assistance \(OFA\)](#)**: OFA released a Program Instruction (PI) to State and territorial Agencies and Tribal Agencies administering the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program on March 24, 2020. The PI addresses TANF's administrative flexibilities for states and tribes and includes questions and answers about how state and tribal grantees might use TANF to address COVID-19. The OFA PI is available [here](#).
- **[Children's Bureau](#)**: The Children's Bureau issued a letter to Child Welfare Leaders on March 18, 2020 that addresses: (1) requirements for case worker visits to children in foster care; (2) Program Improvement Plans developed to address the results of a Child and Family Services Review; (3) the onsite Title IV-E Eligibility Review; (4) child abuse and neglect investigations; and (5) other legislative and regulatory flexibility requirements. The letter to Child Welfare Leaders is available [here](#). Additional

information and resources for state and tribal child welfare professionals relating to COVID-19 are available [here](#).

- [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program \(LIHEAP\)](#): The LIHEAP Initial COVID-19 Program Guidance can be found [here](#).

Other news from last week include:

CDC Issues [Guidance on Cloth Face Masks](#): On Friday, CDC recommended “wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) **especially** in areas of significant community-based transmission.” Note: medical grade masks should be preserved for healthcare workers and other first responders. This recommendation complements and does not replace the [President’s Coronavirus Guidelines for America, 30 Days to Slow the Spread](#).

Bringing Blood Related Therapies to Market: FDA is leading a national effort to [facilitate the development of, and access to, two investigational therapies derived from human blood](#). These are called convalescent plasma and hyperimmune globulin and are antibody-rich blood products made from blood donated by people who have recovered from the virus. The products can be administered to individuals diagnosed with COVID-19. There are some limited data to suggest that convalescent plasma and hyperimmune globulin may have benefit in the COVID-19 illness. This is why evaluation of these therapies in the context of a clinical trial and expanded access program is so important.

Continued Partnerships with Health Insurers: The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) announced that independent and locally-operated BCBS companies across the country and the BCBS Federal Employee Program® (FEP®) have decided to [waive cost-sharing for treatment of COVID-19](#) through May 31. This includes coverage for testing and treatment administered, including for inpatient hospital stays. Participating BCBS companies will reimburse health care providers at in-network or Medicare rates as applicable and consistent with relevant state regulations. They join Cigna, Humana, and Anthem in taking this step to help their customers get treatment, regardless of economic circumstances.

Defense Production Act Invoked to Manufacture More Ventilators: President Trump [issued an order](#) to HHS Secretary and DHS Secretary to work with domestic companies to produce additional ventilators. The manufacturers mentioned include General Electric, Hill-Rom, Medtronic, ResMed, Royal Phillips, and Vyair Medical who will now be able to secure the supplies they need to build more ventilators.

New Guidance for Nursing Homes to Continue to Mitigate the Spread: CMS released [updated recommendations to state and local governments, as well as nursing homes](#), to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in nursing homes. The recommendations build on and strengthen recent guidance from CMS and CDC related to effective implementation of longstanding

infection control procedures. The recommendations includes urging State and local leaders to consider the needs of long term care facilities with respect to supplies of PPE and COVID-19 tests; immediately implementing symptom screening for all staff, residents, and visitors – including temperature checks at nursing homes; ensuring all staff are using appropriate PPE when they are interacting with patients and residents, to the extent PPE is available and per CDC guidance on conservation of PPE in nursing homes; using separate staffing teams for residents to the best of their ability in nursing homes; and urging nursing homes to work with State and local leaders to designate separate facilities or units within a facility to separate COVID-19 negative residents from COVID-19 positive residents and individuals with unknown COVID-19 status.

Continued Actions Against Bad Actors: The FDA and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued warning letters to three companies for selling fraudulent COVID-19 products, as part of the agency's effort to protect consumers. With these warning letters, the FDA is exercising its authority to protect consumers from companies selling unapproved products and making false or misleading claims during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the companies [warned](#), Gaia's Whole Healing Essentials LLC., sells unapproved and misbranded colloidal silver products with misleading claims the products can build immunity for the treatment or prevention of COVID-19. Another company [warned](#), Homeomart Indibuy, offers homeopathic drug products for sale in the U.S. that are unapproved and misbranded with misleading claims the products are safe and/or effective for the treatment or prevention of COVID-19. The third company [warned](#), Health Mastery Systems DBA Pure Plant Essentials, sells essential oils with misleading claims that the products are safe and/or effective for the treatment or prevention of COVID-19.

New Medicaid FAQs: CMS posted additional [FAQs to the Medicaid.gov](#) website to aid state Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) agencies in their response to COVID-19. The recently added FAQs cover topics including emergency preparedness and response and flexibilities around eligibility, enrollment, benefits, cost-sharing, financing and managed care.

Food and Water Supply Remains Safe: the FDA released a [public service announcement on food safety and the food supply](#). Consumers should rest assured that the FDA is on the job and working tirelessly to keep the American food supply among the safest in the world. The agency still reports no widespread food shortages or food safety issues. CDC released an [FAQ on Water and COVID-19](#) which adds information on boil advisories and information on the spread of COVID-19 in spas and water playgrounds.

Extra Precautions for Older Adults: CDC updated their webpage with guidance and [recommendations for older adults](#). The page includes information on what you can do, how to cope with stress, and resources for what to do if you display symptoms.

Optimizing the Supply of PPE: CDC updated their [guidance on strategies to optimize the supply of PPE](#). This document contains information for each different type of PPE and specific ways to

extend the capacity and supply of PPE. Relatedly, CDC has updated their guidance and graphics on the [Use of Personal Protective Equipment when Caring for Individuals with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#). The updated information shows how to appropriately don and doff PPE with graphics showing both how to wear an N-95 respirator as well as a facemask as an acceptable alternative.

Increased Flexibility Around HIPAA: The Office of Civil Rights announced that it will exercise its enforcement discretion and will [not impose penalties for violations of certain provisions of the HIPAA Privacy Rule](#) against health care providers or their business associates for the good faith uses and disclosures of protected health information (PHI) by business associates for public health and health oversight activities during the COVID-19 nationwide public health emergency. This rule will allow for more freedom to cooperate and exchange information with public health and oversight agencies to better assist patients.

Helpful Resources: This is a time of great uncertainty. For mental health concerns, we want to remind everyone of the SAMHSA disaster distress line, which can be accessed via 800-985-5990; by texting “talkwithus” to 66746 or visiting disasterdistress.samhsa.gov. ASPR also developed a [COVID-19 resource page](#) that provides easy access to the plans, tools and practices that have been developed. Lastly, a new website was also established that outlines the paycheck protection program and other programs and resources available from the Small Business Administration at coronavirus.gov/smallbusiness.

Thank you for continuing to join our weekly Thursday calls. Please check the [IHS calendar](#) for updates on this call including call in information, which we will update soon. These calls continue to be a great opportunity to hear the latest information and updates across the federal government, and they are an opportunity for Tribal leaders to ask questions and make recommendations on how we can serve Indian Country. Starting this week, we will hold [weekly calls on Tuesday for Urban Indian Organization](#) leaders.

And as always, please continue to check cdc.gov/covid19 for the latest information.

Respectfully,

Michael

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