

Indian Health Service Division of Oral Health



Strategic Plan, 2018-2027

Strategic Plan Development

In 2014, the IHS DOH developed its first strategic plan in over a decade (Attachment 1). This plan was developed predominantly after consultation with internal stakeholders and in alignment with the first-ever Health and Human Services (HHS) Oral Health Strategic Framework. Strategic goals included monitoring oral health status, reducing the prevalence of early childhood caries, promoting the adoption of the IHS electronic dental record, strengthening dental infrastructure and workforce capacity, and promoting evidence-based prevention strategies.

In mid-2017, the IHS DOH began development of a new long-range oral health strategic plan, with an emphasis on receiving input from numerous internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include IHS Area Dental Officers, tribally- and IHS-operated clinical and preventive dental support centers, medical providers, and tribal leaders, while external stakeholders include multiple academic institutions with whom the IHS has established relationships, tribal advocacy organizations, philanthropic and public health organizations, and dental organizations.

The IHS Division of Oral Health convened the first-of-its-kind American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Oral Health Disparities Strategic Planning Meeting held August 15-16, 2017 at 5600 Fishers Lane in Rockville, Maryland. The goals of the meeting were to provide a forum to share results of recent IHS oral health initiatives, strengthen existing, and forging new, partnerships and collaborations, and developing a long-range strategic plan initially to address oral health disparities in 0-5, 6-9, and 13-15 year-old AI/AN children and youth. Based on survey data collected over the past 17 years, the oral health in the AI/AN population has improved significantly in the 6-9 year-old, 13-15 year-old, and 35+ year-old age groups. In the past 7 years, the oral health in the 0-5 year-old group improved slightly. However, oral health disparities still exist, with AI/AN children and youth having twice the caries experience and untreated decay rates as the next highest ethnic group, U.S. Hispanics, and four times that of U.S. white children, and AI/AN adults over 35 years having two to three times the untreated decay rate and almost double the severe periodontal disease prevalence as the general U.S. population.

Following this two-day meeting, IHS Area Dental Officers, Area Clinical and Preventive Support Centers, and IHS Division of Oral Health Headquarters staff met and drafted an initial plan. After the initial Plan was developed, participants of the August 15th-16th meeting were asked to provide initial comments specifically to address oral health strategies. This initial comment period is now being followed by a more prolonged comment period for Tribes and tribal leaders.

Plan

The mission of the Indian Health Service (IHS) is to raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) to the highest level. The 2018-2027 IHS Division of Oral Health (DOH) Strategic Plan (“the IHS Dental Strategic Plan”) serves as the framework from which the DOH will carry out its national program over the next decade. Through extensive feedback from internal and external stakeholders, the Plan describes three overarching goals, each with multiple objectives and strategies aimed at elevating the oral health of AI/AN to the highest level and reducing the significant oral health disparities evident at the onset of the Plan. The IHS maintains an effective government-to-government relationship with 567 tribes and nations. These partnerships will be key to the long-range success of this Plan. Strategic Goals and Objectives under this Plan include:

Strategic Goal 1: Reduce oral health disparities in the AI/AN population.

- Objective A: Maintain a continuous oral health surveillance program to periodically assess oral health status (caries experience, untreated decay rate) of the AI/AN population.
- Objective B: Promote evidence-based practices in the prevention and early intervention of dental disease.
- Objective C: Leverage existing partnerships and forge new ones to effectively reduce oral health disparities in the AI/AN population.

Strategic Goal 2: Strengthen the dental workforce to improve access to, and quality of, dental services in IHS, Tribal, and urban dental programs.

- Objective A: Embrace and promote different dental workforce models, including but not limited to the Dental Health Aide Program as authorized by the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (see 25 U.S.C. §1616l) to improve access to dental services in IHS and Tribal programs.
- Objective B: Invest in workforce innovations to improve oral health with a focus on core competency development, education, and training.
- Objective C: Promote an integrated model of care throughout IHS, Tribal, and Urban dental programs by leveraging relationships with medical and community partners.

Strategic Goal 3: Ensure transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of the IHS Dental Program and its component projects and initiatives.

- Objective A: Working with strategic partners, report outcomes of oral health initiatives and projects and changes in oral health status of the AI/AN population.
- Objective B: Identify, develop new, and revise existing oral health measures related to efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of oral health care in the system.
- Objective C: Report progress on implementation of the strategic plan annually to internal and external stakeholders.

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