



Indian Health Service Press Release

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Indian Health Service Highlights Agency's Quality Program during Health Care Quality Week

The Indian Health Service seeks to provide trusted, high quality health care to American Indians and Alaska Natives by promoting practices and policies that improve health outcomes. During National Health Care Quality Week, the Indian Health Service is recognizing the quality efforts that are improving the level of service it provides its patients.

“We are steadfastly committed to providing quality health care to American Indians and Alaska Natives, and our concerted efforts since the release of the Quality Framework last year is producing results,” said Rear Adm. Michael D. Weahkee, IHS acting director. The accomplishments we’re announcing today are just a small portion of the work being done across the Indian Health Service to improve the quality of care we provide every day.”

The [IHS Quality Framework](#) was released in November 2016, and outlines how the IHS will develop, implement, and sustain an effective quality program that improves patient experience and outcomes, strengthens organizational capacity, and ensures the delivery of reliable, high quality health care at IHS facilities. The Framework will be reviewed and updated annually. The IHS is now working with tribes to develop the IHS strategic plan that will guide the agency mission, vision and goals, including efforts to sustain quality health care delivery. The IHS will incorporate the Framework into the [IHS 2018-2022 Strategic Plan](#).

“Incorporating the Quality Framework into the IHS Strategic Plan ensures that our approach to high quality health care is consistent across all IHS facilities,” said Jonathan Merrell, acting IHS deputy director for quality health care. “We will continue our collaboration with our partners on actions to confront long-standing health care service challenges to improve quality of care at hospitals and facilities across IHS, as we have over the past year.”

In February 2017, the IHS was listed in the Government Accountability Office (GAO) High Risk Report. The GAO cited 14 recommendations that focus on IHS. Three months prior to the High Risk Report’s release, IHS had already released the Quality Framework. The Framework incorporates quality standards from national experts, including best practices and expertise from across the IHS system of care.

Since the framework was released, IHS quality improvement efforts include:

- **Awarding a master contract for accreditation of hospitals** – IHS is announcing for the first time a new contract awarded to The Joint Commission as the single accrediting organization for all IHS hospitals. This will result in a uniform set of health, quality and safety standards across the organization. On-site inspections at hospitals will verify compliance with recognized standards, including the Medicare conditions of participation established by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Additionally, IHS

awarded a contract for accreditation of IHS non-hospital-affiliated ambulatory health centers to the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC).

- **Acquiring a credentialing software system** – IHS is modernizing the way provider credentialing and privileging is carried out across the agency to facilitate the hiring of qualified providers and ensuring patient safety. IHS is now utilizing a centralized electronic credentialing database across all of its federally-operated facilities.
- **Developing a quality assurance accountability dashboard** – The [National Quality Accountability Dashboard](#) is a system to aid in evidence-based strategic decision making. The dashboard will allow the Indian Health Service to monitor data on key performance indicators in a succinct and easily viewed display. It will also allow oversight and management of compliance with policy and regulatory requirements that ensure quality and safety of care. The measures and data requirements are aligned with current IHS policy and quality improvement initiatives that directly relate to achieving high performance.
- **Establishing [patient wait time standards](#) for primary and urgent care settings** – Wait times are an important measure of the patient experience. IHS federally-operated service units are collecting and tracking this data to improve patient care and services. IHS will use the data collected to continually improve patient experience and access to care at direct service sites.
- **Developing a standard patient experience of care survey and an implementation strategy using electronic tablets** – A patient experience survey is an important tool for gathering information about experience and also for determining perceptions of the quality of care received. A well-designed survey can help identify gaps in the care experience that can be addressed to improve health care delivery and quality. IHS developed a standardized patient experience of care survey for uniform use and administration across all IHS ambulatory primary care sites, including hospital outpatient departments.
- **Implementing Emergency Department (ED) telehealth consultation in the IHS Great Plains and Billings Areas** – This service is available to providers handling complicated or unusual cases in the ED. At the push of a button, IHS emergency department staff have immediate tele-video access to a team of highly specialized, emergency medicine doctors and nurses. IHS has a long history of using telemedicine to meet the needs of patients.

Health Care Quality Week is a national observance that recognizes the healthcare quality profession and the contributions and impact these professionals make in their organization.

The IHS, an agency in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides a comprehensive health service delivery system for approximately 2.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. Follow the agency via social media on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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