

May 18, 2021

Dear Tribal Leaders, Public Health Officials, and Indian Country Professionals:

Last week, following a bipartisan confirmation by the U.S. Senate, HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra formally [swore in Andrea Palm as Deputy Secretary](#). Palm previously served as the Secretary-designee of Wisconsin's Department of Health Services and in several leadership roles at HHS during the Obama-Biden Administration. "I want to congratulate Andrea Palm, a lifelong public servant, for her bipartisan confirmation to serve as Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services," said HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra. "We are elated to have her join the HHS team. As a veteran of the Obama-Biden Administration and as the former top health official in Wisconsin, Ms. Palm brings valuable experience and deep knowledge to this role. I have no doubt she will hit the ground running and be a crucial partner as we work tirelessly to tackle this pandemic, expand affordable health care, and build a healthier country for all Americans."

HHS Tribal Consultation Updates

HHS Annual Regional Tribal Consultations: Next week, HHS will be holding three [HHS Regional Tribal Consultation Sessions](#). These sessions provide Tribes opportunities to focus on regional specific issues with their respective regional HHS counterparts, and also provides an opportunity for Tribal Leaders to consult with HHS headquarters leadership on issues at the national level. The schedule and registration links are below:

- May 25, 2021: **Regions 7 & 8**
<https://www.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJlSfu2ggDgpHA7ZYBtZwBYNuLtKURACtmE>
Contact: Kit Wagar; Kit.Wagar@hhs.gov (Region 7)
Contact: Dylan Kintish; Dylan.Kintish@hhs.gov (Region 8)
- May 26, 2021: **Tri-Regional Meeting for 6, 7, & 8**
<https://www.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJlSd-GqqzWjHazdKmUZVtFrj1Ut3wIAQso>
- May 27, 2021: **Region 6**
<https://www.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJlSdOctrTMuH2DXGZNV-Q-KMnkGZbLmcX8>
Contact: Julia Lothrop; Julia.Lothrop@hhs.gov

National Institutes of Health: Last week, the National Institutes of Health issued the attached Dear Tribal leader Letter, announcing Tribal Consultation on the forthcoming draft NIH Tribal Consultation Policy. This Policy will reflect NIH's commitment to consistent and meaningful engagement with Tribal Nations on NIH policies, programs, or activities that significantly affect Tribes. If you have questions, please contact Dr. Dave Wilson, Director of the NIH Tribal Health Research Office, at Dave.Wilson2@nih.gov.

Office of Minority Health: Today, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Minority Health (OMH) issued the attached Dear Tribal Leader Letter, announcing a series of sessions during the HHS Regional Tribal Consultation Meetings to obtain feedback on establishing a Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC) that will advise OMH on the structure and function of a new Center for Indigenous Innovation and Health Equity (CIIHE). Tribes also can submit written comments and suggestions to CAPT Damion Killsback, OMH Senior Advisor for Tribal Affairs, at Damion.Killsback@hhs.gov by **Friday, August 20, 2021**.

ACF Head Start: The Office of Head Start (OHS) has scheduled four Tribal Consultation sessions. These one-day sessions will be held between U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and OHS leadership and the leadership of tribal governments operating Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The purpose of these consultation sessions is to discuss ways to better meet the needs of American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) children and their families, taking into consideration funding allocations, distribution formulas, and other issues affecting the delivery of Head Start services in their geographic locations. The dates of the virtual sessions are included below;

- Geographic Regions 1–5: Wednesday, July 7, 2021, 1–4 p.m. ET
- Geographic Regions 6–8: Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021, 1–4 p.m. ET
- Geographic Regions 9–10: Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2021, 2–5 p.m. ET
- National: Monday, Nov. 15, 2021, 1–4 p.m. ET

Additional information can be found on the [ELCKC website](#).

Departmental Updates

IHS Update: Last week, IHS began vaccinating children ages 12 years and older with the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, consistent with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommendation and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [expanded the emergency use authorization](#) for the Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine for the prevention of COVID-19 to include adolescents 12 through 15 years of age. Vaccinating adolescents means their faster return to social activities and can provide parents and caregivers peace of mind knowing their family is protected. This is a significant step in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

This week, IHS sent a letter to [Tribal Leaders](#) and [Urban Indian Organization Leaders](#) to request information in response to language in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, *“to report back within 120 days of enactment of this Act with a list of Tribes that currently maintain their own non-RPMS EHR systems along with cost estimates required for those Tribes to implement, maintain, and make any necessary upgrades to these systems.”* To help the IHS respond to this Congressional mandate and improve their understanding of Tribal and Urban Indian Organization investment in HIT, please complete an [EHR Data Call Template](#) by June 4, 2021, and return it to ihsmodernization@mitre.org.

The [IHS Direct Service Tribes Advisory Committee](#) will hold a quarterly meeting on [May 20, 2021](#). Established in 2005, the DSTAC provides, leadership, advocacy and policy guidance to the IHS Director.

The IHS and [Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health](#) will host a Twitter chat on Wednesday, May 19, 2021 from 12:30-1:30pm ET. The chat will focus on lessons from rolling out COVID-19 vaccines in rural and urban Native communities, highlighting strengths and highlighting what's working across communities and regions.

CMS Update: On Wednesday, May 19, 2021, the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) in coordination with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), will be hosting a Tribal Managed-Care Virtual Round Table from 12:30pm to 5:00pm EST. This round table will feature best practices and strategies for implementing Medicaid managed care in Tribal communities. To register, please click here: <http://bit.ly/MCRoundtable>.

CDC Update: New [Information on CDC COVID-19 response staff](#) deployed across America. A total of 582 CDC staff are currently working in state, tribal, local, and territorial health agencies.

The CDC/ATSDR are currently accepting nominations for the Alaska area, Nashville area, Phoenix area, and Tucson area delegates. Nominations will be accepted until June 4, 2021. More information about vacant seats, eligibility, selection criteria, and nomination procedure can also be found at [CDC Tribal health](#). If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Tribal Affairs and Strategic Alliances at tribalsupport@cdc.gov.

SAMHSA Update: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [updated their guidance on training and technical assistance related to COVID-19](#). SAMHSA provides products and resources (e.g., webinars) that can be helpful when coping with the effects of widespread public health crises, such as psychosocial impacts of disasters and supportive practices for mental health professionals.

FDA Update: The FDA [updated its COVID-19 Response At-A-Glance Summary](#), which provides a quick look at facts, figures and highlights on the FDA's response efforts. The Summary now includes information regarding the FDA's decision to expand the EUA for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to include adolescents 12 through 15 years of age.

Vaccine Updates

Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People: CDC [updated their guidance for fully vaccinated people](#). CDC states that [fully vaccinated people](#) no longer need to wear a mask or physically distance in any setting, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance. CDC also states that fully vaccinated people can refrain from testing following a known exposure unless they are residents or employees of a correctional or detention facility or a homeless shelter. Fully vaccinated people can [resume activities](#) that you did before the pandemic.

COVID-19 Vaccines for Children and Teens: CDC [updated their information on COVID-19 vaccines for children and teens](#). CDC recommends everyone 12 years and older should get a COVID-19 vaccination to help protect against COVID-19. Widespread vaccination is a critical tool to help stop the pandemic. Getting your child or teen vaccinated can bring you one step closer to enjoying the activities you miss. Children 12 years and older are able to get the [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine](#).

COVID-19 Vaccine Social Media Toolkit: CDC [updated the COVID-19 vaccine social media messaging toolkit](#). The page includes sample Facebook messages, Facebook digital resources, sample Instagram messages, Instagram digital resources, sample Twitter messages, and Twitter digital resources for the following topics: about the COVID-19 vaccines, vaccine benefits, vaccine FAQs, vaccine safety, what to expect after vaccination, and vaccine effectiveness.

Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine: CDC [updated their information on the Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 vaccine](#). According to information from the [Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System \(VAERS\)](#), there have been 653 reports of fainting events (fainting and near-fainting) among nearly 8 million doses of J&J/Janssen vaccine administered in the United States in March and April 2021. This translates to a rate of about 8 fainting events for every 100,000 doses of the J&J/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine given. These events occurred during the recommended 15-minute wait after vaccination. It's not clear at this time whether these events were associated with the vaccine or with anxiety, possibly related to preexisting concerns some people who chose to get the one-dose J&J/Janssen vaccine may have about needles or shots. By comparison, the rate of fainting after flu vaccination in 2019-2020 was 0.05 per 100,000 doses.

SARS-CoV-2 Variant Classifications and Definitions: CDC [updated their information on SARS-CoV-2 variant classifications and definitions](#). A US government interagency group developed a Variant Classification scheme that defines three classes of SARS-CoV-2 variants: Variant of Interest, Variant of Concern, and Variant of High Consequence. The B.1.1.7, B.1.351, P.1, B.1.427, and B.1.429 variants circulating in the United States are classified as variants of concern. To date, no variants of high consequence have been identified in the United States.

Data

CMS Data Shows Vulnerable Americans Forgoing Mental Health Care During COVID-19 Pandemic: On Friday, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) [released data highlighting the continued impact the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency \(PHE\)](#) is having on Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) beneficiaries and utilization of health services. The data show that, from March through October 2020, beneficiaries have foregone millions of primary, preventive, and mental health care visits due to the COVID-19 PHE, compared to the same time period in 2019. Although utilization rates for some treatments have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, mental health services show the slowest rebound. This decline in utilization is occurring at a time when preliminary evidence shows mental health

conditions have worsened nationwide. The gap in service utilization due to the PHE, particularly for mental health services, may have a substantial impact on long-term health outcomes. Medicaid and CHIP-funded mental health services, in addition to primary and preventative services, cover the majority of children, people living in poverty, and those with special health care needs. Medicaid and CHIP also cover millions of racial and ethnic minorities.

Funding

HHS Announces \$3 Billion in ARP Funding for SAMHSA Block Grants to Address Addiction, Mental Health Crisis: Today, HHS [announced that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) is distributing \$3 billion in American Rescue Plan funding — the largest aggregate amount of funding to date [for its mental health and substance use block grant programs](#). The Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG) Program and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant Program (SABG) will disperse \$1.5 billion each to states and territories (with the latter also awarding money to a tribe). This follows the March announcement of supplemental funding of nearly \$2.5 billion for these programs.

Treasury Launches Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund to Deliver \$350 Billion: Last week, the U.S. Department of the Treasury [announced the launch of the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds](#), established by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, to provide \$350 billion in emergency funding for state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments. Treasury also released details on the ways funds can be used to respond to acute pandemic-response needs, fill revenue shortfalls among state and local governments, and support the communities and populations hardest-hit by the COVID-19 crisis. Eligible state, territorial, metropolitan city, county, and Tribal governments will be able to access funding directly from the Treasury Department in the coming days to assist communities as they recover from the pandemic.

Research

The ACIP's Interim Recommendation for Use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine in Adolescents Aged 12-15 Years: CDC released an *MMWR* on [the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' \(ACIP\) interim recommendation for use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in adolescents](#) aged 12-15 years in the United States. On May 10, 2021, the Food and Drug Administration expanded Emergency Use Authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to include adolescents aged 12–15 years. On May 12, 2021, after a systematic review of all available data, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices made an interim recommendation for use of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in adolescents aged 12–15 years for the prevention of COVID-19. The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is the first COVID-19 vaccine approved for use in adolescents and has high efficacy against symptomatic COVID-19. Vaccination will be important to protect adolescents against symptomatic COVID-19 disease and to reduce community transmission of SARS-CoV-2. CDC also released two documents with more information about ACIP's decision: [“ACIP Evidence to Recommendations for Use of Pfizer-](#)

[BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine Under an Emergency Use Authorization,” and “Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation \(GRADE\): Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for Persons Aged 12-15 Years.”](#)

Largest CDC COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness Study in Health Workers Shows mRNA Vaccines 94% Effective: On Friday, CDC [put out a press release on the largest CDC COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness study in health workers](#), which shows mRNA vaccines to be 94% effective. The study was released as an *MMWR*, that [examined the interim estimates of vaccine effectiveness of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines](#) among health care personnel at 33 U.S. sites from January – March 2021. The first U.S. multisite test-negative design vaccine effectiveness study among HCP found a single dose of Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines to be 82% effective against symptomatic COVID-19 and 2 doses to be 94% effective. The mRNA vaccines are highly effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 among U.S. HCP. High vaccination coverage among HCP and the general population is critical to prevent COVID-19 in the United States. This new CDC study adds to the growing body of real-world evidence (outside of a clinical trial setting) showing that COVID-19 mRNA vaccines authorized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) protect health care personnel (HCP) against COVID-19. This assessment, conducted in a different study network with a larger sample size from across a broader geographic area than in the clinical trials, independently confirms U.S. vaccine effectiveness findings among health care workers that [were first reported March 29](#). Data for this assessment come from a network covering 500,000 HCP across 33 sites in 25 U.S. states, providing additional robust evidence that mRNA vaccines are effective against symptomatic illness in real-world conditions.

Other Resources

- [CDC Updated Information for Healthcare Workers](#)
- [CDC & TSA Statement on Public Transportation](#)
- [CDC Pediatric Toolkit](#)
- [CDC Updated K-12 School Operational Strategy](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance for Group Homes for Individuals with Disabilities](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance on Vaccinating Older Adults and People with Disabilities](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance and Tools to Help People with Disabilities](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance for Caregivers of People Living with Dementia](#)
- [CDC Updated Information for Pregnant People](#)
- [CDC Updated Information for People Breastfeeding and Caring for Newborns](#)
- [CDC Updated Information and Guidance on Running Essential Errands](#)
- [CDC Updated Considerations for Owners and Operators of Multifamily Housing](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance for Residents of and Visitors to Retirement Communities](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance for Dental Healthcare Facilities](#)
- [HRSA Updated COVID-19 Information Resources](#)
- [FEMA Updated COVID-19 Food and Nutrition Resource Roadmap](#)

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions!

Tribal Affairs Team

Office of the Secretary | Intergovernmental and External Affairs
Department of Health and Human Services