

**December 6, 2021**

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

The We Can Do This COVID-19 Public Education Campaign recently released a [new toolkit on COVID-19 boosters](#). All adults 18+ should get their COVID booster shot. The toolkit includes helpful posters and flyers, social media templates, and shareable videos to help explain why all vaccinated adults ages 18+ should get a COVID vaccine booster to strengthen protection against COVID and its variants like Delta. Learn more about booster eligibility at the [CDC website](#).

### **HHS Tribal Consultation Updates**

**New American Rescue Plan Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and Build Back Better Act funding:** The Indian Health Service is [initiating Tribal consultation](#) to seek input regarding the allocation of \$210 million in additional funding to the IHS from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), Pub. L. No. 117-2, 135 Stat. 4 (March 11, 2021), \$3.5 billion appropriated to the IHS in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Pub. L. No. 117-58 (November 15, 2021), and \$2.35 billion currently under consideration by Congress in the Build Back Better Act (BBBA), H.R. 5376, 117th Cong.

- Virtual Consultation on December 14 at 1:00 – 3:00 PM EST, <https://ihs.gov.zoomgov.com/j/1608027268>

### **Departmental Updates**

**New HHS Study Shows 63-Fold Increase in Medicare Telehealth Utilization During the Pandemic:** A new report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) found that massive increases in the use of telehealth helped maintain some health care access during the COVID-19 pandemic, with specialists like behavioral health providers seeing the highest telehealth utilization relative to other providers. [Read full news release](#).

**Indian Health Service (IHS) Update:** The IHS remains vigilant and committed to protecting our employees and American Indian and Alaska Native communities from COVID-19 with safe, effective vaccines. Before gathering with friends and family this holiday season, you can keep up your protection against COVID-19 by getting a booster shot. Everyone 18+ can get a booster 6 months after your 2nd dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or 2 months after your single dose of J&J's Janssen vaccine. Contact your local IHS, tribal, or urban Indian organization facility to ask about getting your booster today: <https://www.ihs.gov/findhealthcare/>. You can also visit <https://www.vaccines.gov/> to find free vaccines near you.

The IHS invites you to the following events:

- [Virtual Career Fair](#) – December 7, 4:00 PM – 7:00 PM EST. Join the IHS for a nationwide virtual career fair to learn more about available positions and opportunities across the agency. Register at: <https://pmcareerfairs.eventmatch.com/nationwide>
- [Tribal Consultation Session - Designating the State of Arizona as a Purchased/Referred Care Delivery Area](#) – December 8, 4:00 PM – 5:30 PM EST. The IHS seeks Tribal leader recommendations and guidance on the implications of establishing a Purchased/Referred Care Delivery Area for the entire State of Arizona.
- [IHS Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee](#) – December 8, 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM EST. The Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee (TLDC) is a Tribal leader advisory group to the IHS Director on chronic disease issues and the Special Diabetes Program for Indians grant program.
- [December All Tribal and Urban Indian Organization Leaders Call & Informational Session: Additional Funding Sources: American Rescue Plan Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and Build Back Better Act](#) – December 9, 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM EST. The IHS invites you to join us on Thursday, December 9, for our monthly call for Tribal leaders and Urban Indian Organization leaders to provide important IHS updates and to extend an opportunity for leaders to share input with IHS officials. IHS will host an informational session on IHS Allocation of Additional Funding Sources: American Rescue Plan Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and Build Back Better Act. This call extends an opportunity for leaders to share input with IHS officials.
- [URBAN CONFER: IHS Allocation of Additional Funding Sources: American Rescue Plan Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and Build Back Better Act](#) – December 15, 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM EST.

**National Institutes of Health (NIH):** Please join NIH on December 7 from 3:00-4:30 PM EST to share your insight about the full range of issues and challenges in advancing racial and ethnic equity in biomedical research. UNITE was established to identify and address structural racism within the NIH-supported biomedical research community. Register here: <https://www.nih.gov/ending-structural-racism/unite-events>

Some issues include:

- Changing culture to promote equity, inclusivity, and justice
- Improving policies, transparency, and oversight
- Strengthening career pathways, training, mentoring, and the professoriate
- Ensuring fairness in review and funding deliberations
- Enhancing funding and research support for diverse institutions and historically under-resourced research areas
- Structural racism in the biomedical research enterprise

Information shared during this listening session will help identify priorities for UNITE and inform the development of an NIH action plan. We recognize that we share common interest in these areas and hope you will join us in these discussions. We look forward to working with you to learn more about efforts at your organization and your unique perspectives as we seek to advance these goals across the biomedical research enterprise. [Please register!](#)

**Office of Minority Health (OMH) Update:** OMH is recruiting primary and alternate delegates for the Center for Indigenous Innovation and Health Equity Tribal Advisory Committee (CIIHE TAC), in alignment with the 12 geographic areas served by the Indian Health Service. Information about CIIHE TAC membership can be found here: [American Indian/Alaska Native - The Office of Minority Health \(hhs.gov\)](#), including eligibility requirements, selection criteria, and nomination procedures. OMH has extended the deadline date for submission for nominations published in the [Federal Register \(86 FR 64951\)](#) from October 29 to January 7, 2022 at 11:59 PM EST.

We strongly encourage interested tribal leaders or designated tribal representatives to submit their nomination letter before the extended deadline. Information about CIIHE TAC membership can be found here: [American Indian/Alaska Native - The Office of Minority Health \(hhs.gov\)](#), including eligibility requirements, selection criteria, and nomination procedures and template letters. *We request you reach out to your respective tribes and tribal organizations. We also strongly encourage you to submit your nomination letter before this extended deadline.*

If you have questions about the nomination process for delegates, please contact Violet Woo, Designated Federal Official, at [Violet.Woo@hhs.gov](mailto:Violet.Woo@hhs.gov). For all other questions related to Tribal Affairs, please contact CAPT Damion Killsback, OMH Senior Advisor for Tribal Affairs, at [Damion.Killsback@hhs.gov](mailto:Damion.Killsback@hhs.gov).

**Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Update:** CMS [updated the FAQ page for the CMS Omnibus COVID-19 Health Care Staff Vaccination Interim Final Rule](#). On November 29, 2021, the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri issued a preliminary injunction against the implementation and enforcement in ten states of Medicare and Medicaid Programs; Omnibus COVID-19 Health Care Staff Vaccination, 86 Fed. Reg. 61,555, 61,556 (Nov. 5, 2021). On November 30, 2021, the United States District Court for the Western District of Louisiana issued a nationwide preliminary injunction against the implementation and enforcement of the same rule, with the exception of the ten states covered under the first preliminary injunction. CMS has appealed both of these decisions, and has filed motions for stays of these order. While CMS remains confident in its authority to protect the health and safety of patients in facilities funded by the Medicare and Medicaid programs, it has suspended activities related to the implementation and enforcement of this rule pending future developments in the litigation. Please note that the comment period is separate from the litigation.

### **CMS Health Insurance Marketplace for American Indians/Alaska Natives and Tribal**

**Sponsorship:** In partnership with the Center for Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight (CCIIO), On December 16 at 1:00 – 2:00 PM EST, the CMS Division of Tribal Affairs is co-hosting a webinar on the Health Insurance Marketplace, which provides affordable health care for individuals and families. Open Enrollment runs through January 15, 2022. Although American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) can enroll in the Marketplace at any time, now is the time for families that include Tribal and non-Tribal members to sign up for a plan. [Register here.](#)

**The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Update:** CDC and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) announced the [23<sup>rd</sup> Biannual CDC/ATSDR Tribal Advisory Committee \(TAC\) Meeting](#) will be held virtually on February 2, 2022, from 1:00PM to 6:00PM EST and February 3, 2022, from 1:00PM to 4:00 PM EST. This TAC meeting will focus on tribal public health infrastructure and programmatic issues affecting the health of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities, as well as tribal priorities for CDC and ATSDR. To register for the Biannual TAC Meeting, click [here](#). Registration is required to receive a personalized link to access the Zoom meeting. The meeting agenda will be posted to the [Tribal Health website](#) in early January 2022.

**Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Update:** Please join ACF for a webinar on December 13 at 2:30 – 4:00 PM EST to learn about approaches to building and improving facilities for early care and education in tribal communities. This webinar is part of a series of webinars on topics related to implementation and coordination of early childhood programs in American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities. Safe, well-designed, well-constructed facilities are critical components of high-quality early childhood programs. During this webinar, participants will hear an overview of issues related to building and improving facilities for early care and education, followed by a panel highlighting innovations and promising practices being implemented in tribal communities. Participants will then be able to learn more about and discuss highlighted strategies with peers and hear about resources they can use in their own communities and programs. Click [here](#) to register.

### **Vaccines**

#### **COVID-19 Vaccines for School-Aged Children, What Parents and Families Should Know**

**Webinar:** Please join the U.S. Department of Education and National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement for an informational webinar following the approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech age 5-11 vaccine. During the webinar, esteemed panelists including United States Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten along with representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics will address common concerns and worries among parents and families about the COVID-19 vaccine for their children ages 5-11. [Click here to register.](#)

### **Testing, Tracing, and Treatment**

**President Biden Announces New Actions to Protect Americans Against the Delta and Omicron Variants as We Battle COVID- 19 this Winter:** President Biden [announced new actions to combat COVID-19](#) as the United States heads into the winter months and with the emergence of a new variant, Omicron. The new actions aim to get Americans boosted for even greater protection against the Delta and Omicron variants, keep schools and businesses open, and help quickly respond to surges if needed during the colder months. Read the [full background press call](#) by senior administration officials on these new actions here.

**CDC Statement on B.1.1.529 (Omicron Variant):** The CDC [released the following statement on the Omicron variant](#): "On November 26, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified a new variant, B.1.1.529, as a Variant of Concern and has named it Omicron. No cases of this variant have been identified in the U.S. to date. CDC is following the details of this new variant, first reported to the WHO by South Africa. We are grateful to the South African government and its scientists who have openly communicated with the global scientific community and continue to share information about this variant with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and CDC. We are working with other U.S. and global public health and industry partners to learn more about this variant, as we continue to monitor its path. CDC is continuously monitoring variants and the U.S. variant surveillance system has reliably detected new variants in this country..."

**FDA Statement on the Omicron Variant:** The FDA [issued a statement](#) that it is actively working with our federal partners, international regulators and medical product companies to quickly address any potential impacts of the new omicron variant on the tools to fight the pandemic. The agency is working as quickly as possible to evaluate the potential impact of this variant on the currently available diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. The FDA is closely monitoring the situation and is committed to communicating with the public as it learns more.

**Permissible Flexibilities Related to Oral Antiviral Drugs for Treatment of COVID-19:** The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) [is issuing this guidance to inform Part D sponsors of permissible flexibilities](#) during the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) related to oral antiviral drug(s) for COVID-19 if such drug(s) become available under a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) (referred to in this memorandum as EUA oral antiviral drugs) and are procured by the U.S. Government (USG). If the FDA authorizes oral antiviral drug(s) for emergency use for COVID-19, we anticipate those EUA oral antiviral drug(s) will initially be made available for dispensing at sites that will include pharmacies that have provider agreements with the USG to dispense the drug in compliance with the terms and conditions of the authorization. CMS will provide a list of these pharmacies, including National Provider Identifier (NPI), on the Health Plan Management System as soon as it is available. CMS does not expect that all pharmacies participating in Part D networks will be included in these contractual arrangements to dispense the USG-procured EUA oral antiviral drugs.

**Research**

**Risk for Stillbirth Among Women With and Without COVID-19 at Delivery Hospitalization:** The CDC released an *MMWR* on the [risk for stillbirth among women with and without COVID-19 at delivery hospitalization](#) in the United States between March 2020 – September 2021. This report was released as an *MMWR* Early Release on November 19. Pregnant women are at increased risk for severe disease from COVID-19, and COVID-19 is associated with an increased risk for adverse perinatal outcomes. Among 1,249,634 delivery hospitalizations during March 2020–September 2021, U.S. women with COVID-19 were at increased risk for stillbirth compared with women without COVID-19 (adjusted relative risk [aRR] = 1.90; 95% CI = 1.69–2.15). The magnitude of association was higher during the period of SARS-CoV-2 B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant predominance than during the pre-Delta period. Implementing evidence-based COVID-19 prevention strategies, including vaccination before or during pregnancy, is critical to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on stillbirths

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

[TribalAffairs@hhs.gov](mailto:TribalAffairs@hhs.gov)