



JULY 20, 2016

Dear Urban Indian Organization Leader:

I am writing to confer with Urban Indian Organization Leaders on a draft policy statement that proposes an expansion in the use of community health aides at Indian Health Service (IHS) facilities across the country. Urban Indian organizations could see expanded opportunities under the new draft policy for these aides, which could also include dental health aide therapists.

Partnership and collaboration are part of our ongoing work to deliver quality health care to patients. Increased access to care is a top priority, which is why the Agency is initiating Conferring on this important proposed change. Community health aides are proven partners, and utilizing them to the fullest extent permissible within the Indian health system will increase the availability of health workers in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

The IHS is proposing to expand our existing community health aide program, including exploring administrative requirements for this expansion. This could include the creation of a national certification board for community health aides in the IHS system. The IHS already runs an evaluation system mandated by statute to monitor IHS community health aides to assure that quality health care is being provided to patients.

Community health aides include workers in health education, communicable disease control, maternal and child health, dental health, behavioral health, family planning, environmental health, and other areas. Examples of community health aides within the Indian health system and other Federal agencies include the following:

- The IHS Community Health Representative (CHR) program, which currently deploys more than 1,000 well-trained, medically guided health care workers who provide health education, case management, patient transport, patient advocacy, and other services in Tribal communities and urban centers: <http://www.ihs.gov/chr/>;
- The Dental Health Aide Therapist (DHAT) program, operated by the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), is a community-driven program providing culturally appropriate dental education and routine dental services in 81 Alaska Native communities serving over 40,000 Alaska Native people since 2004: <http://anthc.org/dental-health-aide/>;

- The principal provider of health services at the village level in Alaska is the Community Health Aide (CHA). Overseen by the village council, CHAs are responsible for giving emergency first aid, providing patient examinations and follow-up in conjunction with a treating physician, carrying out treatment recommendations, patient- and family-focused education and instruction, and conducting preventive health programs. Community health aides store and dispense prescription drugs with physician instructions. https://www.ihs.gov/alaska/includes/themes/newihstheme/display_objects/documents/hf/area.pdf; and
- Behavioral Health Aides (BHAs) are counselors, health educators, and advocates. These practitioners help address individual and community-based behavioral health needs, including those related to alcohol, drug and tobacco abuse, as well as mental health problems, such as grief, depression, suicide, and related issues. Behavioral Health Aides seek to achieve balance in the community by integrating their sensitivity to cultural needs with specialized behavioral health training and approaches to treatment. <http://anthc.org/behavioral-health-aide-program/>.

Thank you for your support and partnership. I look forward to your input on the draft policy statement to expand the Community Health Aide program. Please provide your comments and recommendations by E-MAIL at consultation@ihs.gov or by POSTAL MAIL to the address indicated below. **The comment deadline is Friday, July 29, 2016.**

Sincerely,

/Mary Smith/

Mary Smith
Principal Deputy Director

Enclosure

E-MAIL your comments to:	consultation@ihs.gov SUBJECT LINE: IHS Expansion of Community Health Aide Program Draft Policy Statement Consultation
MAIL your comments to:	Alec Thundercloud, M.D. Director, Office of Clinical and Preventive Services Indian Health Service 5600 Fishers Lane Mail Stop: 08N34-A Rockville, MD 20857
	ATTN: IHS Expansion of Community Health Aide Program Draft Policy Statement Consultation