



NOV 16 2016

Indian Health Service  
Rockville MD 20857

Dear Tribal Leader and Urban Indian Organization Leader:

Since I assumed the position of Principal Deputy Director earlier this year, one of my highest priorities has been to strengthen the quality of care that the Indian Health Service (IHS) delivers to the patients we serve. I also have been working to instill a culture of quality care, leadership, and accountability across the agency.

To that end, I am pleased to provide you with the final 2016-2017 Quality Framework and Implementation Plan. The Quality Framework is a product of input from quality experts from within IHS, our Tribal and Urban partners, and resources from the Department of Health and Human Services, particularly the Executive Council on Quality Care, all singularly focused on ways we need to focus our efforts on improving quality health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The final Quality Framework supports high quality patient-centered, timely, effective, safe, and reliable health care. The Quality Framework describes the vision, goals, and priorities to 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 for IHS Direct Service facilities.

The Quality Framework was developed by assessing current IHS quality policies, practices, and programs, incorporating standards from national experts, and including best practices from across the IHS system of care. The Quality Framework is a living document with an initial focus on strengthening the underlying quality foundation of the federally-operated facilities within the IHS system of care that builds upon existing initiatives and programs.

The five priorities of the Framework are:

1. Strengthen Organizational Capacity to Improve Quality of Care and Systems
2. Meet and Maintain Accreditation for IHS Direct Service Facilities
3. Align Service Delivery Processes to Improve Patient Experience
4. Ensure Patient Safety
5. Improve Processes and Strengthen Communications for Early Identification of Risks

We have already begun working on many items in the Implementation Plan including a mock survey initiative and a national credentialing system.

The staff at IHS is also committed to sharing best practices, models, and policies with Tribes and Urban Indian programs and strengthening partnerships with Tribes, local communities, and regional health care systems. Tribal Consultation/Urban Confer on the Framework was designed to ensure transparency and open communications with Tribal and Urban partners. The Quality Framework will be reviewed and updated annually.

On July 20, 2016, IHS initiated a Tribal Consultation/Urban Confer on the draft IHS Quality Framework for 2016-2017. The original 60-day comment period was extended until October 3, 2016, to allow time for consideration following the final in-person consultation that occurred on September 19, 2016.

We received many thoughtful and considerate comments and questions about the draft IHS Quality Framework. These responses were reviewed and carefully considered by the Quality Framework Steering Committee for potential incorporation into the final Quality Framework.

The enclosed Quality Framework Tribal Consultation Responses Matrix presents all of the comments received and questions from each consultation event accompanied by the responses from the Quality Framework Steering Committee. As a result of your responses, the Quality Framework was slightly reorganized to align related concepts. The vast majority of the comments received have resulted in additions or modifications to the implementation strategy for objectives described in the Quality Framework. A summary of the Tribal Consultation/Urban Confer process for the Quality Framework is also provided, as well as, the final 2016-2017 IHS Quality Framework and Implementation Plan.

I want to thank everyone who participated in this Tribal Consultation/Urban Confer process for the 2016-2017 IHS Quality Framework. Your partnership with IHS to improve the quality of health care services contributes to the IHS mission of raising the physical, mental, social and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level.

Sincerely,

/Mary Smith/

Mary Smith  
Principal Deputy Director

Enclosures