



OCT 5 2020

Dear Tribal Leader:

I am writing to inform you that the Indian Health Service (IHS) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) recently amended our national IHS-VA VHA Reimbursement Agreement, which effects direct health care services to eligible American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans at 74 IHS facilities. A copy of the signed agreement has been enclosed for your reference.

The amended IHS-VA VHA Reimbursement Agreement: 1) clarifies the definition of the term “direct care services” to include services provided through telehealth; 2) clarifies language in the quality section of the agreement relating to certification and accreditation requirements; 3) extends the terms of agreement an additional 2 years beyond the existing term until June 30, 2024; and, 4) adds a new section for reimbursement for care or services provided by the IHS through a contract established by the IHS (i.e., the IHS Purchased/Referred Care program) for health care provided outside of the facility during the coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency period that meet certain conditions.

Our agencies are authorized to enter into reimbursement agreements to financially compensate the IHS and Tribal Health Programs<sup>1</sup> for direct health care services provided to AI/AN Veterans who are eligible for and enrolled in the VHA health care system through the Indian Health Care Improvement Act at 25 U.S.C. § 1645 and the VA Sharing of Health-Care Resources at 38 U.S.C. § 8153.

In conjunction with our updates to the IHS-VA VHA Reimbursement Agreement, the VA is also in the process of updating and executing agreements with individual Tribal Health Programs to reflect these changes. To date, the VA reports that 116 Tribal Health Programs have executed individual reimbursement agreements with the VA-VHA. For Alaska Tribal Health Programs<sup>2</sup> only, the updated agreements include the pharmacy reimbursement rate, adopting Wholesale Acquisition Cost + dispensing fee telehealth.

Tribal Health Programs seeking additional information may contact the VA Office of Community Care by e-mail at [Tribal.Agreements@va.gov](mailto:Tribal.Agreements@va.gov), or visit the VA Office of Community Care’s Web site at [https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/providers/info\\_IHS-THP.asp](https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/providers/info_IHS-THP.asp), or the VA Office of Tribal Government Relations Web site at <http://www.va.gov/tribalgovernment>.

---

<sup>1</sup> 25 U.S.C. 1603(25). The term “tribal health program” means an Indian tribe or tribal organization that operates any health program, service, function, activity, or facility funded, in whole or part, by the IHS through, or provided for in, a contract or compact with the IHS under the ISDEAA.

<sup>2</sup> Alaska Tribal Health Program-VA VHA reimbursement agreements already include telehealth.

In the 8 years since signing our first reimbursement agreements with the VA in 2012, health care programs operated by the IHS and Tribes have received over \$121 million from the VA for care to more than 11,000 VHA-enrolled AI/AN Veterans, across 74 participating IHS sites and 116 Tribal Health Program sites. This marks a notable partnering achievement for Tribal Governments, the VA, and the IHS. Our ongoing partnerships are key to promoting quality health care, increasing access to services, and coordinating resource-sharing that benefits eligible AI/AN Veterans.

Thank you for your continued support of these important collaborations. I look forward to providing additional updates of our progress.

Sincerely,

/RADM Michael D. Weahkee, MBA, MHSA/  
Assistant Surgeon General, U.S. Public Health Service  
Director

Enclosure: Amended IHS-VA VHA Reimbursement Agreement