



JAN 19 2021

Dear Tribal and Urban Indian Organization Leaders:

It has been a tremendous honor to serve as the tenth Senate-confirmed Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS), and as the Acting Director, and Principal Deputy Director of the Agency prior to that. I would like to personally thank you for the opportunity to serve our American Indian and Alaska Native people, our Tribal Nations, and our Urban Indian Organizations over these past 4 years. My role has been extremely challenging at times, but throughout my time serving as the leader of the IHS, it has also been inspiring and rewarding.

The challenges for the IHS are great, and we speak often of the limited resources available to adequately and equitably care for and treat our patients. I appreciate the important role that you as leaders perform – advocating for increased funding for the Indian health system of care and focusing dialogue on the resources needed and not on topics that would not exist were there adequate funding appropriated to the system.

The function of the IHS is quickly evolving, from an Agency that just a few decades ago was providing all of the health care services directly through federally operated hospitals and health clinics, to one that now facilitates the delivery of funding to Tribes and Tribal Organizations that are exercising their right to self-determination to contract and/or compact their health care operations themselves. You are creating world class programs, and each year, as the expansion of Self-Determination and Self-Governance continues, we are witnessing more and more Tribes and Tribal Organizations exercising these authorities.

I am extremely proud of the hard working men and women who serve in the IHS. They are some of the most dedicated and mission-minded individuals that I have ever had the privilege to work with. From the senior leadership team at IHS Headquarters, to the health care professionals and support teams serving our patients on the front lines of this global pandemic, we truly do employ the very best around. Thank you for your support to protect the IHS brand. We want this Agency to be one that our employees are proud of, and that our patients, Tribes, Urban Indian Organizations, and stakeholders identify as providing high-quality health care. It is a vision that is possible, with your support.

Thank you to the National Indian Health Board, the National Council of Urban Indian Health, the National Congress of American Indians, the Association of American Indian Physicians, Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium, all of the IHS Tribal Advisory Committees, Area Indian Health Boards, and Inter-Tribal Councils, and to each and every one of you that I have had the pleasure to meet in person or converse with over the telephone these past 4 years. It has truly been an honor to serve you.

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