

INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE REALIGNMENT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strengthening the Indian Health Service Through Modernization and Shared Leadership

The Indian Health Service (IHS) is undertaking a strategic modernization appropriate for the 18th largest health system in the United States by aligning the Agency's structure with its statutory requirements and operational realities. The IHS has not undertaken a strategic review of its organizational structure in 20 years. In that time, the Indian health system changed dramatically, through the permanent reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, the expansion of Tribal self-determination, and landmark court rulings.

Today, the IHS carries out its mission in partnership with American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal communities through a network of over 600 Federal and Tribal health facilities and 41 Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) located across 37 states, providing health care services to approximately 2.8 million American Indians and Alaska Natives annually. Currently, Tribes directly operate 65 percent of the IHS budget under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA).

The ultimate goal of these recommended changes is to bring a renewed focus on direct patient care by streamlining business services and alleviating the current administrative burden on IHS-operated hospitals and health clinics staff.

The recommendations further promote Indian Self-Determination and Self-Governance by bolstering ISDEAA negotiation functions to ensure consistent Agency processes and Tribal experience. The recommendations prepare the Agency to support increasing ISDEAA contracting and compacting, and to enhance the Government-to-Government relationship.

Finally, the recommendations address the reality of increasing ISDEAA contracting and compacting and the difficulty of recruiting and retaining health care and business services staff nationwide. To that end, the recommendations modernize the Agency's organizational structure, creating a more nimble organization that can adapt easily to its dynamic future.

The IHS is proposing to realign its organization and functions to achieve the following goals:

- **Strengthen Patient-Centered Care**
Elevate the quality of patient and family care by streamlining health care operations and business services to reduce administrative burden and ensure that IHS-operated hospitals and clinics can focus on delivering the highest standard of health care.
- **Advance Tribal Self-Determination through ISDEAA**
Promote and strengthen Tribal self-determination and the Government-to-Government relationship by expanding and supporting ISDEAA Title I contracting and Title V compacting, ensuring responsive, collaborative, and accountable Federal-Tribal partnerships.

- **Modernize Enterprise Services and Functions**

Transform the Agency's organizational structure and core business functions to enhance efficiency, optimize resource use, and effectively support the growing complexity of IHS operations and service delivery.

Key Items

- The proposed realignment preserves Tribal Shares, does not result in staff reductions, and is budget neutral.
- Recommended changes only impact Headquarters and Area Office organizational structures to better serve our Service Units and Tribes. Functions and activities at IHS-operated hospitals, health clinics, and residential treatment centers remain the same.
- The Office of the Director becomes the Agency's management and oversight entity, elevating enterprise-wide accountability, performance improvement, and risk management functions to the highest level of the organization.
- Governance for IHS-operated hospitals, health clinics, and residential treatment centers, is coordinated at the national level within the Health Care Operations Division, with oversight functions in the Office of the Director.
- The Divisions of Health Care Operations, Enterprise Services, and Intergovernmental and External Affairs collaborate with each other and the Office of the Director to meet Agency, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and Administration goals.
- On-the-ground facilities support services are organized under Health Care Operations to be as close to IHS-operated health facilities as possible, while national facilities programs like Health Care Facilities Construction and Sanitation Facilities Construction are managed in Enterprise Services.
- Area Offices become Area Tribal Relations Offices to support strong, on-the-ground Government-to-Government relationships, and to connect Tribes, UIOs, patients, and relatives across the Agency to address their inquiries.
- The IHS will have a total of 11 Area Tribal Relations Offices with a specialized support staff. The Tucson Area Office will merge with the Phoenix Area Office.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

The Immediate Office of the Director provides executive leadership and strategic direction for the IHS, overseeing all Agency operations, policy initiatives, and performance management. It includes the IHS Director and key senior officials who guide internal operations and strategic initiatives to advance the Agency's mission. The office ensures effective coordination across the Divisions to align Agency priorities, manage resources, and promote accountability across all programs.

Deputy Director

The Deputy Director will supervise the Office of the National Chief Medical Officer, the Office of Oversight and Performance Improvement, and a cadre of support staff within the Office of the Director. Critical communications and coordination functions will allow the Office of the

Director to interact with HHS, Tribal and Urban leaders, patients, Federal Agencies, and the new IHS Operating Divisions.

*** NEW Office of Health Programs and Policy:** The Office of Health Programs and Policy spearheads Agency-wide and public-facing health initiatives and sets national policy. Serves as the highest medical and public health authority in the IHS, dedicated to improving health outcomes. Functions as the national thought leader shaping clinical excellence and innovation across IHS, Tribal, and Urban Indian health systems. Partners with the Deputy Director of Health Care Operations to use clinical performance and health economics data to improve the quality of health care services.

*** NEW Office of Oversight and Performance Improvement:** The Office of Oversight and Performance Improvement is responsible for aligning the Agency's strategy with its operations to improve overall performance and achieve goals. It leads the development of Agency-wide goals and initiatives, develops performance metrics, and creates systems to track and report performance. It analyzes performance data, identifies areas for improvement, and implements strategies to boost efficiency, efficacy, and innovation. The office also manages all internal oversight activities through effective enterprise-wide risk management, and facilitates the work of the Agency's oversight boards.

*** NEW Agency Communication Team:** The Agency Communication Team is responsible for ensuring clear, consistent, and culturally grounded messaging both within the organization and to external audiences. The communications team strengthens transparency, builds trust, and amplifies IHS's commitment to improving the health and well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

*** NEW DIVISION OF HEALTH CARE OPERATIONS**

The Division of Health Care Operations is responsible for overseeing the planning, implementation, and evaluation of clinical and operational programs to ensure the delivery of high-quality, culturally competent health care services. It manages system performance, resource utilization, and policy compliance across IHS-operated health facilities to promote patient safety, positive health outcomes, and efficiency. It creates a consistent patient experience at all IHS-operated hospitals and health clinics. The Division also leads multi-disciplinary teams, optimizes the care-delivery process, and aligns operations with public health goals.

Office of Region 1 Health Care Operations: The Office of Region 1 Health Care Operations leads the provision of direct health care services at IHS-operated hospitals and health clinics located in the Bemidji, Great Plains, and Nashville Areas.

Office of Region 2 Health Care Operations: The Office of Region 2 Health Care Operations leads the provision of direct health care services at IHS-operated hospitals and health clinics located in the Oklahoma City, Albuquerque, and Navajo Areas.

Office of Region 3 Health Care Operations: The Office of Region 3 Health Care Operations leads the provision of direct health care services at IHS-operated hospitals and health clinics located in the Alaska, Billings, California, Phoenix, and Portland Areas.

The Office of Residential Treatment Centers: The Office of Residential Treatment Centers oversees the management and operations of residential treatment programs, including Youth Regional Treatment Centers, that provide behavioral health and substance use services. It is responsible for ensuring culturally appropriate evidence-based care, maintaining program quality and compliance, and coordinating with Tribal and community partners to support recovery and wellness.

The Office of Health Care Operations Support: The Office of Health Care Operations Support leads strategic planning, coordination, and improvement of health care operations support functions across all IHS-operated hospitals and health clinics to ensure high-quality, efficient service delivery. It is responsible for policy implementation, resource management, and operational performance to support patient care and mission success.

DIVISION OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Division of Intergovernmental and External Affairs (IEA) provides Agency leadership, coordination, and support for Tribes, Tribal Organizations, Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs), and Federal and non-Federal partners. They implement and ensure compliance with the ISDEAA through negotiation activities. They lead the coordination of Tribal Consultation, Urban confer, and strategic external engagements. They support grant activities and provide guidance, training, and technical assistance to Tribes, Tribal Organizations, and UIOs. It also serves as key points of access across IHS Areas by fostering transparency, responsiveness, and effective communication to advance Agency priorities and support Tribal and Urban Indian health programs.

Office of Tribal and Urban Affairs: The Office of Tribal and Urban Affairs serves as the Agency's central office responsible for coordinating, advising, and providing Agency-wide guidance on all matters involving Tribes, Tribal Organizations, national and regional Tribal consortiums, and UIOs. The office oversees and supports the administration and coordination of all IHS grant activities and serves as the primary lead for Tribal Advisory Committees, Tribal Consultation and Urban confer activities, and Tribal Delegations. It provides leadership in strengthening and upholding the Government-to-Government relationship with Tribes, ensuring consistent Agency policy and practice across all programs. The office partners with local, Federal, and non-Federal agencies to coordinate training, technical assistance, and policy development, including on issues concerning newly federally recognized and restored Tribes.

Office of Indian Self-Determination: The Office of Indian Self-Determination leads the implementation and oversight of ISDEAA policy across the IHS, excluding construction authorities. The office ensures Agency-wide compliance with ISDEAA statutes, regulations, administrative policies, procedures, and guidelines. It oversees Tribal shares computations, Tribal payments, and the coordination of audit findings related to Tribal health programs. The

office advises the Director on ISDEAA-related issues, including Contract Support Costs and Section 105(l) Tribal leasing.

Office of External Affairs: The Office of External Affairs advances Agency priorities by strengthening relationships with American Indian and Alaska Native communities and external partners. The office leads strategic engagement with Congress; intergovernmental and non-governmental entities; philanthropic, community, and faith-based organizations; and other Federal partners. It also oversees intergovernmental collaborations, including those with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to support coordinated efforts that promote the health and well-being of the populations the Agency serves.

*** NEW** Office of Agency Negotiations: The Office of Agency Negotiations provides national leadership and coordination for all ISDEAA Title I and Title V negotiations, excluding construction project agreements. It ensures consistency across all IHS Areas in negotiating compacts, contracts, funding agreements, and related documents, and serves as the central point for developing and coordinating guidance with Agency-wide subject matter experts. The office oversees training, orientation, mentorship, and ongoing development for Agency negotiators, supports consistent application of policy, and elevates issues requiring clarification or revision. Through these functions, the office ensures all negotiations are conducted in accordance with applicable laws and promotes a uniform, well-supported negotiation process across the Agency.

*** NEW** Office of Area Tribal Relations: The Office of Area Tribal Relations serves as the primary, local-level point of access to the Agency for Tribes, Tribal Organizations, Urban Indian Organizations, and their community members. The office oversees Area Directors' activities responsible for building and maintaining relationships with Tribal and Urban Indian partners, and with state and local governments where appropriate. The office monitors and analyzes inquiries and ensures their resolution, promoting transparency, responsiveness, and effective communication across all Agency programs and policies.

DIVISION OF ENTERPRISE SERVICES

The Division of Enterprise Services oversees the strategic management and delivery of shared business, technology, and administrative services to ensure support of health care operations across the Agency. It measures operational efficiency by coordinating enterprise-wide operational systems, data management, and support functions that enable mission success. The Division also provides oversight and management of facilities programs, enhances data-driven decision-making, and promotes operational excellence through standardized processes and innovative solutions.

Office of Human Resources: The Office of Human Resources leads the Agency's human resources strategy, policies, and programs to attract, develop, and retain a skilled workforce. They oversee workforce planning, talent management, employee engagement, labor relations, and compliance with Federal human resources laws, regulations, and policies. Additionally, the office ensures human capital initiatives align with the IHS mission and support the delivery of high-quality health care services to Tribal communities.

Office of Information Technology: The Office of Information Technology is responsible for managing and advancing the Agency's digital infrastructure to support health care delivery and administrative operations. It oversees the development, maintenance, and modernization of IT systems, including electronic health records and data management platforms. The office ensures compliance with Federal privacy laws and IT standards, enhances data security and interoperability, and provides technology solutions.

Office of Finance and Accounting: The Office of Finance and Accounting oversees all financial management activities, including budgeting, accounting, financial reporting, resource allocation, and grants management across the Agency. It ensures fiscal accountability and compliance with Federal laws, regulations, and policies governing the use of public funds, and optimizes revenue generation and management Agency-wide. Additionally, the office provides leadership in financial planning and analysis to support the effective use of resources for direct health care services and efficient Agency operations.

*** NEW Office of Acquisitions:** The Office of Acquisitions is responsible for planning, managing, and overseeing all procurement and contracting activities across the Agency. It ensures that goods and services are acquired efficiently, effectively, and in compliance with Federal Acquisition Regulations, laws, and policies. The office provides guidance and oversight to support mission-critical programs, promote Buy Indian Act and small business participation, and achieve best value in the use of public funds.

*** NEW Office of Infrastructure and Environmental Health:** The Office of Infrastructure and Environmental Health is responsible for planning, designing, constructing, and maintaining health care facilities that serve American Indian and Alaska Native communities. It leads the Health Care and Sanitation Facilities Construction programs, the Joint Venture Construction Program, and the Small Ambulatory Program. The office provides technical expertise and guidance to support long-term capital investments that enhance the delivery of quality health care services across the IHS system.