



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

September 14, 2011

Dear Governor:

Over the last two years, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has taken a number of steps to strengthen our partnership with American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Nations. We take seriously the federal government's obligation to help improve the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives through the various health and human services programs administered by the Department.

However, improving the health and well-being of Tribal nations is contingent upon understanding the specific needs of Tribal communities. Tribal consultation is an essential tool in understanding these unique needs and ensuring government to government relations. I am writing to you today to encourage you to consult with Tribes as you administer health and human services programs that are supported with federal funding.

HHS has made significant progress in strengthening our partnership with Tribes, and Tribal consultation is one piece of our efforts to fulfill our responsibility to represent the best interests of Tribes. Since President Obama signed an Executive Order on Tribal Consultation in 2009, HHS has also updated its formal Tribal consultation policy. The updated policy includes the responsibility of states to consult with Tribes when HHS has transferred the authority and funding for programs to states that are intended to benefit Tribes. States must consult with Tribes to ensure the programs that they administer with federal funding meet the needs of the Tribes in that state. Tribes should be considered full partners by states during the design and implementation of programs that are administered by states with HHS funding. The requirement of states to consult with Tribes in the development of the Affordable Insurance Exchanges is an example of how states can proactively include and partner with Tribes during the planning stages of a program that has the potential to benefit Tribal members greatly. Consultations can identify strengths and barriers to Tribes accessing these services and ensure that Tribes have the opportunity for greater health care coverage for their members and employees.

I believe we share a vision of the future where our nation is strong and where every individual and every community has the opportunity to reach their full potential. We can continue to strengthen our partnership with Tribes and improve health and human service opportunities for all. Together, we have the opportunity to build something great.

Sincerely,

/Kathleen Sebelius/

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