



Indian Health Service Press Release

May 14, 2020
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: (301) 443-3593, newsroom@ihs.gov

Indian Health Service Announces Expansion of Specialty Care in Billings Area *Northern Cheyenne Service Unit will be first to provide services*

The [Billings Area Indian Health Service](#) is announcing the expansion of specialty care services, allowing local providers to refer patients to see a specialist via a virtual clinic appointment in areas such as behavioral health, heart care, kidney care, pain management, and more.

“Telehealth is a way to safely provide care for patients in appropriate situations,” said Bryce Redgrave, director, IHS Billings Area Office. “It offers our patients medical specialists close to home, reducing the need for travel. Telehealth also allows more American Indians and Alaska Natives to access healthcare they need from their home, without worrying about putting themselves or others at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Recently, the Trump Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services [announced unprecedented steps](#) to expand Americans' access to telehealth services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services expanded Medicare coverage for telehealth visits. The HHS Office for Civil Rights also announced it will exercise its enforcement discretion and will not impose penalties for noncompliance with the regulatory requirements under the HIPAA Rules against covered health care providers in connection with the good faith provision of telehealth during the emergency.

Beginning today, the [Northern Cheyenne Service Unit](#) in Lame Deer, Montana, will provide dermatology, endocrinology, wound management, and rheumatology telehealth specialty services. Behavioral health services will be available at a later date. The service unit will also have access to additional internal medicine providers. These services will be available through secure, interactive, high-definition video and audio equipment that is private, secure and confidential.

The Billings Area will implement the Avera eCARE® Specialty Clinic, a telehealth service which will complement the emergency care telehealth services that are already available in emergency departments throughout the Area.

Patients who are interested in a specialty appointment should talk with their primary health care provider and ask for a referral. During the COVID-19 pandemic, specialty services will also be available virtually, as IHS facilities continue to encourage telehealth appointments and try to minimize the number of patients in each building.

This is the first step in the Area-wide implementation of these specialty clinics, and all Area service units in Montana and Wyoming will begin offering services by August 2020. The contract will strengthen existing IHS services by enabling facilities to offer additional specialty services to ensure patients have the fastest possible access to the health care they need.

This follows the recent announcement of an [IHS-wide expansion of telehealth services during the COVID-19 response](#), which will further protect patients and employees by increasing access to care and doing our part to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. We must continue to be vigilant in our efforts to slow the spread of infections among our patients and within the communities we serve.

The IHS, an agency in the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), provides a comprehensive health service delivery system for approximately 2.6 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who belong to [574 federally recognized tribes](#) in 37 states. Follow the agency via social media on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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