



Indian Health Service Press Release

October 16, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: (301) 443-3593, newsroom@ihs.gov

IHS Division of Environmental Health Services recognized for outstanding service during COVID-19 pandemic

The Indian Health Service [Division of Environmental Health Services](#) has received the National Indian Health Board's 2020 Outstanding Service Award in recognition of its service and dedication in improving American Indian and Alaska Native Health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are proud to receive this award in recognition of our team's COVID-19 response efforts in Indian Country," said James Ludington, director, Office of Environmental Health and Engineering. "The IHS remains committed to continuing this important work alongside our tribal and urban partners to protect the health and wellness of tribal communities throughout the United States."

The DEHS was recognized for collaborating with tribal environmental health officers to assist tribal health organizations and communities with the development of local response plans, education materials and reopening guidance. In addition, staff have performed essential direct services and consultation throughout Indian Country to ensure the environmental health and safety of child care programs, correctional facilities, casinos, restaurants, healthcare facilities, and drive-through testing sites. Members of DEHS staff serve as [Emergency Management Points of Contact](#) for many IHS Area Offices while concurrently assisting with the reopening of tribal and federal buildings and institutions.

The NIHB hosted a virtual [Heroes in Health Awards Gala](#) on October 14 to honor all award recipients. Rear Adm. Kelly Taylor, director, Division of Environmental Health Services, [accepted the award](#) on behalf of all DEHS staff.

"It truly is an honor for our division to be recognized for its work," said Taylor. "I would like to thank the NIHB for recognizing and acknowledging the DEHS staff for their dedication, professionalism, leadership, and service to American Indians and Alaska Natives during the COVID-19 pandemic."

In all, the [NIHB presented 36 awards](#) in the categories of Local Impact, Area/Regional Impact, National Impact, Youth Leadership and the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Jake Whitecrow Award at this year's gala. The DEHS received the award for National Impact.

Individual award recipients included Lt. Cmdr. Amanda Wyatt, a nurse practitioner at the [IHS Richmond Service Unit](#) who was presented an Outstanding Service Award for her leadership and contributions to the COVID-19 emergency response with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in Oklahoma. Wyatt initially served as the sole COVID-19 hotline point of contact for one of the largest tribal nations. She provided real-time instruction and guidance on evidence-based practices,

recommendations, triage, consults, coordination of care, and community services directly related to the effects of COVID-19. The 2020 Lifetime Achievement Jake Whitecrow Award was given posthumously to the late Michael D. Mahsetky of the Comanche Nation and the former director of IHS Congressional and Legislative Affairs office.

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](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

###