



Indian Health Service Press Release

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Indian Health Service awards \$6.8 million telemedicine services contract to Avera Health

*Services will provide quality health care to American Indian and
Alaska Native patients in the IHS Great Plains Area*

The Indian Health Service today announced a new contract for \$6.8 million awarded to Avera Health to provide telemedicine services in all 19 [Great Plains Area](#) service units, which serve approximately 130,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives. Telemedicine services use electronic communications to connect health care providers and patients for remote clinical appointments, as well as some nonclinical services. In some cases, specialty care furnished through telemedicine is supplemented by a nurse or assistant who is physically in the room with the patient. IHS has found that telemedicine can be one of the best ways to get health care services where they are needed most, and this contract expands telemedicine services as a means of strengthening access to care at IHS health facilities in Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota.

The contract will strengthen existing IHS services for patients by enabling IHS facilities to offer additional specialty services and appointments to ensure patients have the fastest possible access to the health care they need. Under the contract, Avera Health will be providing additional emergency medical services at hospitals in the Great Plains Area as well as providing additional access for American Indian and Alaska Native patients to see specialists in: behavioral health; cardiology; maternal and child health; nephrology; pain management; pediatric behavioral health; rheumatology; wound care; ear, nose and throat care; and dermatology.

“It is challenging to provide specialty health care in rural areas, and this is especially true in Indian Country. IHS has long been a leader in information technology and electronic health records, and IHS experience shows that telemedicine is an effective way to increase access to quality health care services in remote, hard to reach areas,” said Mary L. Smith, IHS principal deputy director. “This contract is beneficial to IHS patients because it connects Avera Health’s medical experts to American Indian communities as part of a major IHS initiative to improve access to quality care at hospitals, health centers and other facilities in the Great Plains.”

Some IHS facilities in the Great Plains Area already have the infrastructure in place to provide telemedicine services for behavioral health and diabetic retinopathy screening for patients right now. This new contract to Avera Health builds on that expertise and will provide additional telemedicine services to

serve more patients. IHS works collaboratively with tribal leaders to deploy telemedicine services that respond to the needs of patients and communities.

The funding announced today covers one year of services. IHS has the option to add funding to the contract to expand services this year as well as to extend the services up to five years in total, subject to the availability of resources.

IHS issued the [Request for Proposal seeking these telemedicine services](#) earlier this year. The contract has a maximum value of \$100 million in total over five years, should additional resources become available.

IHS has a long history of using telemedicine to meet the needs of patients:

- The [IHS TeleBehavioral Health Center of Excellence](#) was established in 2009 to provide behavioral health services for patients across the Indian health system. The Center works to provide, promote and support the delivery of high quality, culturally competent telebehavioral health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- The [IHS Teleophthalmology Program](#) was established in 2001 to screen IHS patients across the country for diabetic retinopathy, the leading cause of blindness in patients with diabetes.

The IHS, an agency in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides a comprehensive health service delivery system for approximately 2.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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