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News Release

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Indian Health Service and Department of Veterans Affairs Sign Memorandum of Understanding

WASHINGTON – The Indian Health Service (IHS) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) which will help both agencies improve the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) veterans. The IHS-VA MOU outlines a plan for coordination, collaboration, and resource-sharing between the two agencies.

“This memorandum of understanding is a renewal of the important partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Indian Health Service. It represents VA’s commitment to American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans through associations with the Indian Health Service and tribal facilities throughout the nation,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “The partnership further expands VA’s capability to serve those Veterans within their communities and provides increased access for Veterans in extremely rural areas.”

"We at HHS care deeply that American Indian and Alaska Native veterans are receiving the VA health care they earned through their military service and are entitled to through the Indian Health Service," said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. "This new agreement will go a long way to ensure that both agencies work toward providing the best possible care for these veterans."

The MOU will facilitate innovation at the local level between IHS, tribal, urban, and VA programs. It also emphasizes the necessity and importance of tribal consultation. This will be accomplished by increasing the services available, improving the delivery of care by sharing programs, providing culturally competent care for beneficiaries, and increasing the quality of care through training and workforce development.

“This MOU between the IHS and VA provides a firm foundation for collaboration to meet the needs of the AI/AN veterans who have served our nation,” said Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, IHS director. “It is an important step forward in our work to better serve all American Indian and Alaska Native people.”

In addition, this agreement will improve quality through training and workforce development and address emergency, disaster, and pandemic preparedness and response planning. The MOU requires the establishment of an implementation task force, the engagement of IHS and VA leadership to set priorities for action, and an annual progress report.

The MOU expands the partnership established through a previous MOU in 2003 that improved communication between the agencies and tribal governments, and developed strategies for sharing information, services, and information technology.

The MOU can be viewed at: <http://www.ihs.gov/announcements/documents/3-OD-11-0006.pdf>

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