



PRESS RELEASE

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## **New effort targets drug overdoses in Indian Country**

*Provision of life-saving medication will help reduce rate of opioid overdoses  
in American Indian and Alaska Native communities*

A partnership to equip Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) law enforcement officers with naloxone for responding to drug overdoses in tribal communities was today announced by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy; the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Indian Health Service (IHS); and the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs. Naloxone is a medication that can reverse the effects of a prescription opioid or heroin overdose and can save lives.

The new agreement formalizes the partnership between IHS and BIA to reduce opioid overdoses among American Indians and Alaska Natives. In 2016, the more than 90 IHS pharmacies will dispense naloxone to as many as 500 BIA Office of Justice Services officers and will train these first responders to administer emergency treatment to people experiencing opioid overdose. The partnership will be reviewed annually by IHS and BIA and will continue as long as the agencies agree it is delivering the desired results.

"IHS is working to ensure that tribal communities receive the fastest possible access to this life-saving medication in situations where every minute matters," said Robert G. McSwain, principal deputy director of the IHS. "Today's agreement underscores the IHS commitment to partnerships and innovative solutions that can prevent the tragedy of drug overdoses and can improve the health of American Indian and Alaska Native communities."

"I am deeply grateful to the IHS for working with us to create another level of safety throughout Indian Country for those trapped by the vicious cycle of drug addiction," said BIA Director Michael S. Black. "Law enforcement officers are usually the first responder to a drug overdose situation in a tribal community. This partnership greatly strengthens our public safety mission by enabling our BIA officers to take immediate action to save a life endangered by an overdose."

"The President has made it clear that addressing the opioid epidemic is a priority for this Administration," said Director of National Drug Control Policy Michael Botticelli. "In tackling this epidemic, we know that naloxone is one of those tools that can help save the lives of overdose victims so they can get the treatment they need for their opioid use disorder. Today's commitment by IHS and BIA is an important example of public health and public safety partnerships to address this epidemic."

IHS data indicate that the rate of drug-related deaths among American Indians and Alaska Natives increased from five per 100,000 population (adjusted) in 1989-1991 to 22.7 per 100,000 in 2007-2009. The rate among American Indian and Alaska Native people is almost twice that of the general population; drug-related deaths were 12.6 per 100,000 population for the U.S. all races population in 2007 to 2009. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the rates of [death from prescription opioid overdose](#) among American Indian or Alaska Natives increased almost four-fold from 1.3 per 100,000 in 1999 to 5.1 per 100,000 in 2013.

Today's announcement is part of a series of community forums across the country focused on best practices and evidence-based initiatives to prevent and treat prescription drug abuse and heroin use (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/10/white-house-announces-community-forums-opioids-epidemic>). These forums will continue the conversation that President Obama began in West Virginia in October, where he announced new public and private sector efforts to address the opioid overdose epidemic. These announcements build on efforts that began in 2010, when the President released his first National Drug Control Strategy, which emphasized the need for action to address opioid use disorders and overdose.

HHS Secretary Sylvia M. Burwell has made addressing opioid abuse, dependence and overdose a priority and through [an evidence-based initiative](#) focused on three promising areas: informing opioid prescribing practices, increasing the use of naloxone and using medication-assisted treatment to move people out of opioid addiction. The Obama administration is also committed to combatting the prescription drug and heroin epidemic, proposing [significant investments](#) to intensify efforts to reduce opioid use disorder.

For national trends in Indian health, see <https://www.ihs.gov/dps/index.cfm/publications/trends2014>.

For more information on prescription drug overdose, visit <http://www.hhs.gov/opioids>

For information on IHS, visit <http://www.ihs.gov/>

For information on BIA, visit <http://www.indianaffairs.gov/>

For information on ONDCP, visit <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp>.

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