



Indian Health Service Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Indian Health Service Announces New Chief Medical Officer

The Indian Health Service is announcing Dr. Loretta Christensen, MBA, MSJ, FACS, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, as the new chief medical officer. As chief medical officer, Dr. Christensen serves as IHS' lead expert on medical and public health topics, guiding the IHS Office of the Director and IHS staff throughout the country on American Indian and Alaska Native health care policies and issues.

Dr. Christensen began her career with the IHS as a general surgeon and served as the chief medical officer for the Navajo Area Indian Health Service from 2017-2021. She previously served as the chief medical officer at the Gallup Service Unit from 2014-2017, and also as acting IHS chief medical officer from May to June of this year.

"Dr. Loretta Christensen has been a consistent voice and leader in the Navajo Area IHS for years, most recently serving as a leader in the area's COVID-19 response by ensuring that patients received quality care, communicating safety measures to the public and staff, and establishing safety standards for the area," said IHS Acting Director Elizabeth Fowler. "Dr. Christensen is deserving of this important role as the IHS CMO, and we look forward to having her experience and expertise as she leads our IHS health care professionals towards further advancing the IHS mission."

The IHS chief medical officer is responsible for overall patient care policy and program development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the IHS health care delivery system. The chief medical officer also coordinates with staff regarding health services, clinical guidelines, and planning activities, and serves as the primary liaison and advocate for IHS health professionals.

Dr. Christensen received her undergraduate degree in biological anthropology from Harvard University and her medical degree from Hahnemann University Medical School, now the Drexel University College of Medicine. She completed her general surgery residency at Monmouth Medical Center in New Jersey and a fellowship in trauma and critical care at Cooper University Hospital. Dr. Christensen also holds a master of business administration from Georgian Court University and a master of jurisprudence with a specialty in healthcare law from Seton Hall Law School.

Before joining the Navajo Area IHS, Dr. Christensen served for 17 years as the clinical trauma director and associate director of the surgical intensive care unit at Jersey Shore University Hospital. She was also the director of integrative medicine and non-invasive pain management services, as well as an assistant professor of surgery at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. She has specialty training in medical acupuncture, palliative care, functional medicine, just culture, quality management and patient safety. Dr. Christensen is board certified in general surgery and a fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

Dr. Christensen's appointment as chief medical officer comes after the retirement of Rear Adm. Michael Toedt, M.D., who served in the role from June 2017 through July 2021.

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](#).

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