



Indian Health Service Statement

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Statement from Rear Adm. Michael Weahkee on the IHS Acoma- Canoncito-Laguna Service Unit

The IHS supports tribal self-determination and self-governance to strengthen the government-to-government relationship between the United States and Indian tribes. The IHS respects the choices of tribes to assume the responsibility of providing health care services to their communities in accordance with federal law.

On September 29, 2020, the IHS Albuquerque Area entered into an agreement with the Laguna Health Corporation, for the corporation, on behalf of the Pueblo of Laguna, to administer and deliver a variety of programs, functions, services, and activities currently provided by the IHS Acoma-Canoncito-Laguna Service Unit, pursuant to Title I of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. The assumption date is February 1, 2021, when the Laguna Health Corporation is scheduled to open a new health center for citizens of the Pueblo of Laguna.

Since the IHS received the Pueblo of Laguna's proposal in July, the IHS has met with leaders from all affected tribes to inform them of the contract proposal and to begin discussions on the potential impact to operations and related health services.

With the reduction in federally operated programs, functions, services and activities, and accompanying funds, the IHS will redesign programs and services provided at the service unit. This redesign will be done in consultation with all affected tribes, including the Pueblo of Acoma.

To prepare for this transition, the IHS began the process of notifying employees that under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, a contracting tribe or tribal organization may elect to (1) directly hire IHS employees, (2) offer temporary assignment of federal employees under an Intergovernmental Personnel Act agreement, or (3) request assignments of USPHS Commissioned Officer personnel through a Memorandum of Agreement. The tribe or tribal organization may also elect to hire qualified individuals from the general public. In response to this process, a number of IHS employees and contractors have notified the agency of their intent to retire, resign, or transfer to other facilities.

As a result, the Acoma-Canoncito-Laguna Service Unit does not currently have sufficient staffing to provide inpatient and emergency department services. During the ongoing pandemic, there is a

nationwide shortage of health care providers, making it difficult to fill these positions. Primary Care and Urgent Care Services will continue to be provided at the Service Unit.

The IHS is committed to providing the retained services to the Pueblo of Acoma with the associated funding that will remain at the ACL service unit.

The Indian Health Service respects tribal sovereignty and is committed to tribal self-governance and self-determination. IHS recognizes that tribal leaders and members are in the best position to understand the health care needs and priorities of their communities. Today, over 60 percent of the IHS appropriation is administered by tribes, primarily through self-determination contracts or self-governance compacts. The number of tribal health program success stories grows each year, and the IHS supports this success by offering information, technical assistance, and policy coordination. We value our partnership with the tribes we serve and look forward to continuing to work together to provide access to comprehensive, high quality health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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