



2024 Agency Work Plan Second Quarter Summary Report

The Indian Health Service's mission is *"to raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level."*

Background: In January 2024, Indian Health Service leadership implemented the new [2024 Agency Work Plan](#), which includes 15 priorities. In addition to the 15 Work Plan priorities, IHS leadership transitioned 10 of last year's 2023 Work Plan priorities to operational action items that the agency will continue to monitor throughout this calendar year. The 2024 Agency Work Plan outlines critical actions the IHS has taken over the current year to address risk priorities. A workgroup has led each activity to identify root causes and work toward sustainable improvement to demonstrate a measurable impact on the agency. The goal is to complete the actions in the 2024 Agency Work Plan by December 31, 2024. The IHS remains committed to mitigating programmatic and operational risks before they arise. IHS leadership is focused on increased and effective communication with tribal and urban Indian organization partners on this work while developing sustainable actions.

Status: Communications about the 2024 Agency Work Plan include progress, barriers encountered, resources needed, next steps, specific timelines, and accomplishments. IHS leadership tracks progress for each activity and looks for sustained progress over time. IHS leadership is committed to providing improved transparency and clarity on information and initiatives that are being undertaken by the IHS, as well as in coordination with our partnering agencies. Results of the work are made public for our partners and stakeholders' awareness. IHS is providing quarterly updates on the progress of the Work Plan through the [IHS Work Plan Status Report](#).

Second Quarter Work Plan and Operational Priority Accomplishments:

- Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL): Sanitation Facilities Construction (SFC) Program Marketing and Rebranding – SFC leadership continued its work with a vendor contracted through the Office of Personnel Management to strategically identify SFC marketing and rebranding opportunities to support recruitment efforts at a national level. In April 2024 and following the vendor's deep dive discovery session with IHS staff to develop various options, IHS made its final selection of holistic marketing and rebranding roadmap initiatives based on the project budget.
- BIL: U.S. Public Health Service and IHS Interagency Workgroup – In May of 2024, the IHS and the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) launched a [seven-year strategic plan](#) to improve safe drinking water access and sanitation in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The partnership builds on an opportunity created by the BIL, which provides \$3.5 billion

to the IHS to develop critical infrastructure, including a safe supply of drinking water, reliable sewage systems, and solid waste disposal facilities. The strategy was developed by a workgroup established by the HHS Office of the Surgeon General and is led by CCHQ, IHS Division of Commissioned Personnel Support, and the SFC Program. The IHS and USPHS Commissioned Corps partnership represents a critical step on a federal level to advance health equity within tribal communities and create opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native families to thrive.

- BIL: SFC Engineer Internship Program – The SFC Program enhanced its recruitment efforts by creating a new engineer internship program by collaborating with the Department of Energy’s (DOE) Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE). A total of 16 aspiring candidates were officially selected and accepted SFC internship positions with IHS Area Offices throughout the United States. The SFC Program successfully navigated the process of establishing an interagency agreement with DOE, effectively collaborated with DOE/ORISE staff and applicants, and efficiently boarded 16 candidates. This was a significant accomplishment by the SFC team in partnership with the IHS Office of Human Resources and the DOE.
- BIL: SFC Project and Recruitment Videos – SFC Program leadership worked with IHS Public Affairs and the Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs to identify two SFC BIL-funded projects, including the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, to create SFC recruitment videos. The videos will focus on SFC safe drinking water and wastewater projects and will provide opportunities for tribal leaders, community members, and SFC staff to share their thoughts on the importance of safe drinking water, reliable wastewater systems, and sanitary solid waste disposal infrastructure.
- BIL: Division of Sanitation Facilities Construction Project Dashboard – In June 2024, the SFC Program updated its existing projects [dashboard](#) to incorporate Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024 project data along with additional adjustments to the site to improve the overall user experience.
- Employee Wellbeing and Resiliency – A workgroup was formed under the National Combined Councils to support visioning for reform, propose a framework for action, and establish norms to support prioritization of the work. A new agency-wide policy for employee wellness programs was developed and is under review. Structured employee surveys and feedback strategies have been proposed to track progress with interventions. Support across the agency is moving forward, including initial cohorts for the [Stress Management and Resiliency Training](#); and increased engagement with Employee Assistance Program leads to understand and leverage existing programming as well as improve communication about available [resources](#).

- Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and IHS Memorandum of Understanding Performance Measures: Improve External Communication – The VHA and IHS initiated tribal consultation and urban confer on the Draft Annual Operational Plan for FY 2024. The tribal consultation and urban confer was held on April 15 in Chandler, Arizona, with comments due on April 30. On June 27, a revised VA-Tribal Health Program (THP) Reimbursement Agreement template for the lower 48 states was released. The THP template will be [available on the VA's website](#).
- Evaluate and Improve Internal Communications – The IHS developed a playbook for use by IHS managers and supervisors and an accompanying training module emphasizing the core values of IHS for respectful internal communication. Training will be held in July and August 2024. The training is required for all managers and supervisors across IHS.
- Design a Policy Review Process: Policy Management System – To date, 181 of the 373 directives that are over five years old have been thoroughly reviewed by IHS headquarters offices. This represents a 49% accomplishment rate. The IHS has published 13 [Indian Health Manual](#) directives.
- Purchased/Referred Care (PRC) Authorization and Payment Process – The IHS revised PRC staffing guidance to promote additional staffing and inclusion of nurse case manager and budget analyst positions; and completed the classification of four position descriptions (medical support assistant, contact representative, nurse case manager, and budget analyst) to start addressing IHS's PRC vacancy rate of approximately 34% across the agency. There are 100% of sites reporting, with data being incorporated into a funding dashboard to provide informed decision-making. Active assessment and working of pended claims has resulted in a 23% decrease since December 2023. The IHS revised referral language for inclusion in Indian Health Care Improvement Act No Patient Liability Language to clearly state the patient is not financially liable for services authorized by IHS. The revised language also provides billing guidance to facilitate payments to the fiscal intermediary. IHS also began collaboration with the Office of Management and Budget and Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources to develop a patient experience survey and conduct a project to assess and improve the claims payment process.
- PRC Carryover – The IHS recently shared a major update to the [IHS PRC Medical Priorities](#)—the first in more than three decades. The update emphasizes preventive, mental health, chronic, and acute care, with priorities categorized into four areas. The IHS is committed to a patient-centered model and providing resources and training for staff, referral care providers, and tribal communities. A [video](#) has been developed to provide an overview of these updates. All three funding milestones have been completed and implemented. There is 100% completion of spend plans, which now drive decision-making. The IHS has demonstrated a 36% decrease in prior year area/service unit funds since the beginning of the fiscal year. This financial status demonstrates IHS's funding needs to maximize referred care. For example,

since 2016, the number of IHS sites covering all medical priorities has increased from 29% to 82% in May 2024.

- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategic Plan – There were two IHM directives issued, including 1) IHM, Special General Memorandum (SGM) 24-05, “[Indian Health Service Equal Employment Policy Statement](#),” on April 11 to communicate the IHS’s commitment to equal employment opportunity, and to a discrimination-free workplace; and 2) IHM SGM 24-06, “[Indian Health Service Anti-Harassment Policy Statement](#),” on April 26 to communicate the IHS’s commitment to maintaining a work environment that is free of harassment, including sexual harassment. On May 29 and June 18, an overview of the new [HHS Gender Identity, Non-Discrimination and Inclusion Policy](#) was provided to the IHS workforce. On June 25, the first of three virtual IHS Recruitment Information Sessions was hosted with a focus on the IHS’s hard-to-fill occupations, including health care, engineering, acquisitions, information technology, and human resources. There were nearly 100 participants. On June 26, the DEIA council chair was appointed.
- PRC Delivery Area Expansion – Two final Federal Register Notices (FRN) were published on April 2 for the [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians](#) and [Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation](#). There was one proposed FRN published on May 17 for the [Pokagon Band of Potawatomi](#). The [PRC Delivery Area Expansion website](#) tracker has been updated during the last quarter to reflect progress on expansion requests and listings when a PRC Delivery Area re-designation is published in the FRN.
- On May 2, IHS Director Roselyn Tso initiated [tribal consultation](#) and [urban confer](#) on the [Draft IHS Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2028](#). The virtual tribal consultation was held on May 29 and the virtual urban confer was held on May 30. A town hall was held on June 6 to seek feedback from IHS employees. The comment deadline was June 28.

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