Website Writing Style

The Indian Health Service (IHS) follows the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) web writing style, which can be found on the [HHS web style guide website](#). It is important to note the following capitalization rules that pertain to IHS:

Federal, local, native, natives, state, states, tribal, tribes - lowercase unless they begin a sentence or form part of an official title. Examples: tribal art, Hopi tribal leaders, Montana and Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council, federal agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Virginia native, Native Americans, American Indians, Indian Country, and Alaska Native Villages.

Plain Language

All website content must be written in plain language in accordance with the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#). Here are some tips for creating plain language content:

- Write for your audience
- Use Active Voice
- Keep it short and to the point
- Group content or topics using headings and bullet points
- Avoid:
  - Bureaucratic and legal language
  - Jargon
  - Abbreviations
  - PDF or document overload

Plain language resources include:

- [Plainlanguage.gov](#)
- [Center for Plain Language](#)
- [IHS Health Communications - Plain Language](#)

Technical Web Style Standards

Fonts and Font Sizes
Arial and Verdana fonts are acceptable. Use 11-point font size for Aria and 10-point for Verdana.

Exceptions:
A font size that is one or two points smaller than the approved points above may be used in the following situations (but never smaller than an 8-point font):

- In data tables
- In PDF documents
- In a navigation bar that presents secondary information/links
- For footnotes and the footnote superscript indicator within the text body
- For notices or disclaimers
- To present information and/or links in the footer of a webpage

- To present secondary information that describes a prime link or piece of content.

Signatures on the Web

For security reasons, images of an original official signature should not be displayed on a website. The proper way to indicate an official signature for a document on a website (when required) is the **S-signature**, which is a typed signature, inserted between forward slash marks. For example: */Dr. James T. Jones, III/*.

The signature is only official if the person whose name appears between the slash marks actually types it in.

Text and Background Colors

Use black (preferable) or other dark text on a white or off-white background when presenting text information on webpages, including headers, captions, and prose text.

Colored background shading may be used in text boxes, panels, tabs, and other elements of a webpage, but there must be high contrast between the text (foreground) and the background. You must use color combinations that can be discriminated by users with color deficiencies/color blindness.

Body Content

Do not use all caps. This applies to headlines, headers, and links, as well as body content.
If a phrase is intended to attract the user's attention, display the phrase in bold **or** italics. Only use these methods to emphasize one or two words, or a short phrase.

Table elements should align on each page and also be consistent from page to page.

"Page under construction" messages are not permitted. Pages must be in final format to be present on the IHS.gov domain.

All external links must be free from hate, bias, and discrimination. In addition, they may not contain misleading or unsubstantiated claims, or information that conflicts with the mission of IHS.

The <title code> for all IHS.gov websites must follow the format of <Site Name - Page Topic>.

Also, titles and headings should not have "IHS" or "Indian Health Service" in them since they are on the IHS website. For example: *Behavioral Health Services*, not *IHS Behavioral Health Services*.