



JAN 17 2017

Dear Tribal Leader:

I am pleased to share an exciting update on our work with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to improve the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native veterans. Last week, on behalf of the Indian Health Service (IHS), I signed an amendment with VA to extend the period of a national reimbursement agreement for direct health care services through June 30, 2019. Extending the reimbursement agreement has been a major priority for Tribes and the IHS this past year.

This significant accomplishment will continue the positive impacts on the health care services for our Native veterans in future years. Our combined effort did not occur overnight and I want to thank Tribal Leaders and Federal staff at IHS and the VA for the hard work and extensive collaboration that resulted in this agreement. We met on several occasions across the country, including Tribal Advisory Committee meetings, national conferences, Tribal Consultation sessions, listening sessions and individual Tribal Delegation Meetings. Your input and involvement paved the path for this to happen. As a result, we exceeded our expectations by entering into an amendment that extends the agreement to June 30, 2019, which is six months beyond our initial goal of December 2018.

For those who may be less familiar with the national reimbursement agreement, I would like to point out that on October 1, 2010, the IHS and VA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the goal to improve the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native veterans. On December 5, 2012, the agencies signed a reimbursement agreement allowing VA to financially compensate IHS for direct health care provided to American Indian and Alaska Native veterans that are eligible for and enrolled in VA's health care system. Many Tribal Health Programs followed suit, signing similar reimbursement agreements. The Agency agreement was set to sunset in December 2017. To continue the partnership required an extension to the agreement. That brings us to today's announcement of this amendment.

To emphasize the value of our coordinated effort and partnership, I point to the fact that by the end of fiscal year 2015, the VA had reimbursed over \$16.1 million for direct care services provided by IHS and Tribal Health Programs covering 5,000 eligible Veterans. I encourage you to read more about the results of this partnership in the IHS-VA MOU Annual Report that is available on the VA website at: http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/docs/2015_VA-IHS_Report.pdf. The goals of the MOU are to provide eligible American Indian and Alaska Native veterans with access to care closer to their homes; promote cultural competence and quality health care; and focus on increasing care coordination, collaboration, and resource-sharing for eligible native veterans.

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Thank you for your partnership with IHS and VA to improve health care for American Indian and Alaska Native veterans across the country. A copy of the amendment is enclosed.

Sincerely,

/Mary Smith/

Mary L. Smith
Principal Deputy Director

Enclosure