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VA and Indian Health Service broaden scope to serve American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs and the [Indian Health Service](#) renewed a [partnership](#), Oct. 1, to help the country's nearly 145,000 American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans overcome health care access barriers.

The partnership, originally established in 2003, facilitates health care access and improves patient experience, information technology, resource sharing and will now open the door for these agencies to develop an operational plan to achieve four goals and objectives agreed upon with Tribal stakeholders.

"VA and IHS leadership engaged key tribal stakeholders during 90-day [tribal consultation sessions](#) in late 2020 and early 2021 to gain insights and feedback on how both agencies can better serve these historically marginalized patient populations," said Executive Director of Veterans Health Administration's Office of Rural Health Thomas F. Klobucar, Ph. D. "Through these collaborative efforts, we will continue to bridge existing gaps and provide equitable care delivery to American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans, and ensure they receive the high-quality care they have earned."

The four mutual goals of this partnership are to:

- Increase access and improve quality of health care and services for the benefit of eligible AI/AN patients served by VHA and IHS.
- Facilitate enrollment and seamless navigation for eligible AI/AN Veterans in VHA and IHS health care systems.
- Facilitate the integration of electronic health records and other Health Information Technology systems that affect the health care of AI/AN Veterans.
- Improve access for patient populations through resource sharing, including technology, providers, training, human resources, services, facilities, communication and reimbursement.

VA has made major strides for AI/AN Veterans to provide the care they need, including:

- The establishment of reimbursement agreements enabling VHA to reimburse IHS for care that AI/AN Veterans receive at IHS and Tribal Health Program facilities. Since its inception in fiscal year 2012 through the end of FY 2021, nearly \$149 million has been provided from VHA to IHS and THPs for the care of nearly 14,000 VA-enrolled AI/AN Veterans.
- The agreement to extend VA Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy services to VA-enrolled AI/AN Veterans who receive care at IHS clinics. Since its inception in FY 2010 through the end of FY 2021, nearly 6.8 million prescriptions have been processed for VA-IHS Veterans.
- The launch of several successful programs to serve AI/AN Veterans. The Rural Native Veteran Health Care Navigator Program will be a project under this new agreement. Through this program, Health Care Patient Navigators help AI/AN Veterans overcome health care access barriers by coordinating care across VA, VHA, IHS, federally recognized tribes, local communities and other state and federal agencies.

For more information about the VHA-IHS partnership and AI/AN Veterans, please contact the VHA Office of Rural Health at ORHcomms@va.gov or IHS at newsroom@ihs.gov.

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