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**Department of  
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Office of Public Affairs  
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 461-7600  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

## **News Release**

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### **Department of Veterans Affairs and Indian Health Service Sign Memorandum of Understanding**

WASHINGTON –Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and The Indian Health Service (IHS) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) which will help both agencies improve the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans. The IHS-VA MOU outlines a new plan for enhanced coordination, collaboration, and resource-sharing that will draw on the strengths and expertise of the two agencies.

“This memorandum of understanding is a renewal of the important partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Indian Health Service. It represents VA’s commitment to American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans through associations with the Indian Health Service and tribal facilities throughout the nation,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “The partnership further expands VA’s capability to serve those Veterans within their communities and provides increased access for Veterans in extremely rural areas.”

The MOU will facilitate greater innovation at the local level between IHS, tribal, urban, and VA programs. While recognizing the importance of a coordinated effort on a national scope, the MOU also emphasizes the necessity and importance of tribal consultation for local adaptation. This will be accomplished by increasing available services, improving the delivery of care by sharing programs, developing new models of care using the latest technologies, providing culturally competent care for beneficiaries, and increasing the quality of care through training and workforce development.

“This MOU between the IHS and VA provides a firm foundation for collaboration to meet the needs of the AI/AN Veterans who have served our nation,” said Dr. Yvette

Roubideaux, IHS director. “It is an important step forward in our work to better serve all American Indian and Alaska Native people.”

In addition, this agreement will address joint emergency, disaster, and pandemic preparedness and response planning. Implementation Work Groups will be established to address each of the main goals outlined in the MOU. An annual progress report will be produced the VA and the IHS. The VA and the IHS are now organizing workgroups to make progress on implementing elements in the MOU as soon as possible to benefit veterans.

The MOU expands the partnership initially established through a previous MOU in 2003 that improved communication between the agencies and tribal governments, and developed strategies for sharing information, services, and information technology.

The MOU can be viewed at <http://www.ihs.gov/announcements/documents/3-OD-11-0006.pdf>.

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