



NOV 5 2003

Dear Tribal Leader:

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has established November 19, 2003, as the first annual National Native American Health and Fitness Day. As part of this program, the Indian Health Service (IHS) Health Promotion/Disease Prevention (HP/DP) committee is inviting all Tribal Leaders and Tribal communities to join us in the Just Move It (JMI) program on this very special day. Imagine thousands of people in Tribal communities walking together for wellness all on the same day, all across the country. As a Tribal Leader, you and your community can help make this happen.

November 19 will be the kickoff of a year-long series of JMI events and programs to promote regular physical activity among all American Indians and Alaska Natives. You are invited to join NCAI in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on November 19 for a Wellness Walk with other Tribal Leaders. This event gives Tribal Leaders the chance to "walk the talk" and demonstrate the importance of regular physical activity by taking part in a 1-mile or 3-mile walk.

In addition to the kickoff event in Albuquerque, we encourage you to organize wellness walks or other fitness events in your home communities on the same day. You may not be able to attend the NCAI annual meeting, but you can help promote the health benefits of regular physical activity. Our people are looking to their leaders to show the path towards wellness and away from chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, which affect so many of our families. Community members and Tribal Leaders walking together on the same day across the country will send a powerful message.

Posters to help your community sponsor a local wellness walk on November 19 are enclosed with this mailing. Work with your local community to select a time and a place to hold a wellness promotion event. Choose any distance for a walk or run, or choose another type of event - perhaps a group aerobics class, a western or swing dance class, or a health fair. Write the time, place, and contact information at the bottom of the enclosed posters. Complete the enclosed reporting form to let us know about your local event. Mail the form to JMI HP/DP Department, Highway 491 P.O. Box 160, Shiprock, NM 87420, or send your information by e-mail to: justmoveit@shiprock.ihs.gov.

Tribal communities continue to experience growing health disparities as our families are affected by increasing rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Regular physical activity is one of the proven strategies that can reduce the risk of these chronic diseases. Research has shown that as little as 30 minutes of physical activity 5 days a week can cut the diabetes risk in half for people at high risk for this disease. Unfortunately, not enough people participate in daily physical activity. We hope the National Native American Health and Fitness Day will motivate many of our community members to begin or continue on their personal path towards wellness.

We know that this will take more than a one-time effort. With our partners, we will be sponsoring a variety of opportunities for community wellness programs and events over the next year with the theme of JMI. Interested communities and individuals can sign up at the President's Challenge Web site (www.presidentschallenge.org) to set personal goals and track progress. Other ways of keeping track of physical activity in your communities will be made available as part of this year's JMI program.

Our cultural, social, and economic well-being is dependent on our individual and collective physical and behavioral health. We know that your endorsement as a Tribal Leader is critical to the success of this effort. Therefore, we urge you to commit to participate as well as involve your community in wellness promotion events over the next year. If you have questions or suggestions, please submit them to justmoveit@shiprock.ihs.gov. Following are several questions and answers regarding the JMI program.

What is the HP/DP Initiative? I established the IHS HP/DP Initiative to build and strengthen healthy families and communities. More information is available at www.ihs.gov/HPDP.

Who are we? The HP/DP Initiative is a partnership involving Tribal leadership and communities, national and local governments and organizations, and IHS staff. An IHS prevention task force and Tribal health workers are guided by the Policy Advisory Committee consisting of Tribal Leaders.

What is Just Move It? It is a physical activity promotion campaign emphasizing through community partnerships that fitness can be fun and an inclusive approach to motivate everyone at every age to get up and JMI. The program began in 1993 with the Navajo Nation; it has grown every year to include more than 25,000 participants in 2003.

How can you join? Start by organizing a Leaders Wellness Walk or other event on November 19. You can request an information packet or make suggestions at justmoveit@shiprock.ihs.gov.

Thank you for your help in this endeavor!

Sincerely yours,



Charles W. Grim, D.D.S., M.H.S.A.
Assistant Surgeon General
Director

Enclosures