



For Immediate Release

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New policy seeks to strengthen CDC efforts to improve health and well being of American Indian and Alaska Native people

In an effort to strengthen the involvement of American Indians and Alaska Natives in federal programs and policy decisions, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and its sister agency, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), are adopting a new policy that requires CDC and ATSDR programs to consult with Tribal governments when developing programs and activities that will affect Indian populations.

“We recognize the importance of seeking involvement and advice early from the people who may be affected by our programs and policies,” said Walter W. Williams, M.D., M.P.H., CDC’s Associate Director for Minority Health and Director of the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities. “Our new Tribal Consultation Policy helps us make that a standard operating procedure for our programs. This policy recognizes the need for engaging Tribal leaders and members of Indian populations as early as possible. Doing so helps everyone – it helps us build trust and understanding, and it helps everyone provide better programs and services.”

In the United States, a unique legal status and their special relationship with the federal government makes American Indians and Alaska Natives distinct from other traditionally defined minority and special population groups. Each of the more than 560 federally recognized Tribes is a sovereign entity with an inherent right to self govern. There are more than 4 million Americans who identify themselves as American Indians or Alaska Natives.

With this new policy, CDC and ATSDR become the first of eleven U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) operating divisions to establish consultation procedures that comply with the recently revised HHS Tribal Consultation Policy, released in January 2005. The CDC/ATSDR policy outlines the need for, and importance of, coordinating, communicating, and collaborating with Tribal governments on issues that affect American Indians and Alaska Natives. It also calls for the establishment of a standing committee of Tribal leaders, the Tribal Consultation Advisory Committee, to advise the agencies on issues relevant to Tribal consultation and the health threats facing Indian country.

The new CDC/ATSDR Tribal Consultation policy describes steps that CDC programs should take toward working effectively with Indian communities and organizations. The policy identifies when CDC programs should involve Tribal leaders and outlines specific responsibilities regarding program activities, including mutual participation in setting program and budget priorities. The policy also recognizes the importance and value of enhancing American Indian and Alaska Native access to CDC programs.

With assistance from the National Indian Health Board -- the largest and best known national Tribal health organization -- CDC and ATSDR will begin implementation of this consultation

plan immediately by educating and informing both internal program staff and external American Indian and Alaska Native stakeholders about the policy. Notes Dr. Williams, "Implementation of this policy will strengthen our Tribal partnerships and thus our ability to work together toward our mutual goals of reducing health disparities and securing the health and safety of all Indian people."

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