



Indian Health Service

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National High Blood Pressure Awareness Month “Taking the Pressure Off”

by

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May is National High Blood Pressure Awareness Month and I commend the Indian Health Service, tribal health programs, and urban Indian health teams for focusing on the prevention of heart disease and its risk factors, and encouraging every adult to be assessed for these risk factors—and to treat them if they are present. Your focus on the prevention, early detection, and effective treatment of blood pressure is saving lives.

High blood pressure is one of the risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD). In the last few years, CVD has become the leading cause of death among American Indians and Alaska Natives. The only way a person can know for sure if they have high blood pressure is to have their blood pressure checked. For most people, there are no symptoms of high blood pressure – over the years their body has been adapting to the high blood pressure at the cost of a shortened life span. Because there are no symptoms, nearly one-third of people with high blood pressure do not know they have it and are at risk for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease.

Our health teams provide information every day on how to control high blood pressure through measures such as a proper diet, weight control, exercise, and if warranted, medication. These tools can reduce or eliminate most heart disease problems and many of the modifiable risk factors (such as diabetes, abnormal cholesterol levels, and tobacco abuse) leading to heart disease. Controlling and lowering blood pressure needs to be as closely monitored as the risk factors that cause it. High blood pressure is not a temporary response to stress, illness, or the influence of others – it results from prolonged exposure to these and other health factors. This month I encourage everyone to attend at least one blood pressure activity to learn more about this preventable and controllable disease or to, at least, have their blood pressure checked.

To those who are making a significant difference in improving and maintaining the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives – thank you. To those who are taking measures to extend their years of healthy life, I am sure your loved ones offer a special thanks for your efforts.

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