



# Vision FOR THE INDIAN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Robert G. McSwain  
Indian Health Service Director

My vision for the Indian Health Service and the role it plays within the greater Indian health care system is to work in partnership with Tribal Governments; American Indian and Alaska Native people; and Federal, State, and local governments, agencies, and organizations to respond in every way possible to preserve and improve our health system for future generations of Indian people. This partnership effort must also include the active participation of patients and the entire Indian health system in our common vision of health care access to “medical homes.” A “medical home” is a patient-centered, compassionate, comprehensive, and culturally appropriate model of care.

Accomplishing this vision requires honoring tribal sovereignty, continuing meaningful consultation with Tribes, and doing everything possible to ensure that tribal self-determination in health delivery choices is honored and successful. This includes integrating Traditional Healing practices with modern medical science where the community and individuals desire it. Our shared goal is to attain healthier Indian communities – where children grow to fulfill their promise, where lives are lived healthier and in concert with traditions, and where elders complete their lives in respect and dignity. Our health care system is integral to achieving this vision of well-being for American Indian and Alaska Native people throughout the United States.

Our shared vision of preserving and improving the Indian health care system and carrying out the mission of the Indian Health Service guides our medical, research, and support efforts toward activities and programs that offer unique prospects for improving the health status of Indian people. Initiatives that will raise the health status of Indian people include Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Behavioral Health, Chronic Care, Trauma Care, Health Information Technology, Telehealth, Health Education and Training, and Environmental Health.

The future of our health system requires continuing evolution and adaptation to address historic and emerging health challenges. Powerful forces acting over decades have been inexorably shaping all health care models in the United States, including ours. Future success requires that we consider a broad array of options. These options include solidifying our community-oriented primary care model, transforming – not diminishing – services, equalizing access where feasible, balancing priorities for direct and contract health services, aligning eligibility rules, and effectively sharing infrastructure and support systems.

The beliefs, traditions, and customs handed down through many generations shape Indian values about life, health, and healing. We will remain respectful of these values of listening, mutual respect, generosity, compassion, and reverence in all our efforts to secure health resources and services, in caring for American Indians and Alaska Natives and their families, and toward one another. These values comprise the foundation within the Indian Health Service and shape a diverse and multi-cultural workforce into a partnership of dedicated and compassionate staff working daily to build a legacy of Indian health care for future generations.

**MISSION:** The mission of the Indian Health Service, in partnership with American Indian and Alaska Native people, is to raise their physical, mental, social, and spiritual health to the highest level possible.

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