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HHS Secretary Leavitt Signs Agreement With Canada To Improve Indigenous Health Care Delivery and Access

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Canadian Minister of Health Tony Clement today to improve the health status of indigenous communities through enhanced international collaborations, identification and reinforcement of best practices, and innovative approaches to learning opportunities.

The signing took place in the Humphrey Building, HHS' national headquarters.

The MOU, which continues the work of a similar five-year MOU signed in 2002 and completed this year, will focus on improving health care delivery and access to health services for American Indian and Alaska Native people of the United States, and the First Nation and Inuit of Canada.

"We have made important strides in raising the health status of indigenous people in the United States and Canada through the sharing of health information, education, and training over the past five years of this partnership," Secretary Leavitt said. "This new agreement holds much promise for future improvements in quality health care services and overall health promotion for Native communities in the United States and Canada."

"This MOU on Indigenous Health has led to tangible progress in the last five years on many important health issues such as maternal and child health, disease prevention and mental health and addictions," said Minister Clement. "The renewal of this MOU demonstrates Canada's commitment to continue working collaboratively with our American counterparts, Aboriginal partners, and others to improve the quality of life and promote a prosperous future for all Aboriginal peoples."

HHS' Indian Health Service (IHS) will administer the activities under the MOU for the United States. The IHS is the principal federal health care provider and health advocate for American Indian and Alaska Native people. It works with tribal and urban programs to provide health services to approximately 1.9 million American Indian and Alaska Native people who belong to 562 federally recognized tribes in 35 states.

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch is the IHS counterpart in Canada. It works with more than 600 First Nation and Inuit communities, other Health Canada branches, and other Canadian government departments to provide health programs and services to address health disparities.

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