



# Indian Health Service Press Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Indian Health Service and Veterans Health Administration Launch Webpage for Indian Veterans

The Indian Health Service (IHS), an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Veterans Health Administration, an agency of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), are launching a webpage on the IHS website with links to the VA regarding health resources available to American Indian and Alaska Native veterans. The page is located at <http://www.vha.ihs.gov>.

The HHS and the VA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on February 25, 2003, to encourage cooperation and resource sharing between the IHS and the VA. The goal of the MOU is to use the strengths and expertise of both organizations to deliver quality health care services and enhance the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native veterans. The purpose of this website is to share information about the agreement and the collaborative initiatives developed under this joint effort. Like other American veterans, Native veterans are entitled to services at 157 VA medical centers and other VA facilities throughout the nation.

"American Indians and Alaska Natives have served this country with distinction in every war it has ever fought, and have proven their dedication to the strength and survival of our nation," stated Dr. Charles W. Grim, IHS Director. "We anticipate that this webpage will be one of the most important ways of communicating with Indian veterans and providing information about their health care services."

"The VA is proud to serve American Indian and Alaska Native veterans. This new webpage will improve our ability to serve these heroes, and will strengthen our partnership with the Tribes and the Indian Health Service," said Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin, Under Secretary for Health, Veterans Health Administration.

Indian veterans have a distinguished history of exemplary military service to the United States. A strong tradition of duty and service exists within many Tribes and Indian families. Indian veterans frequently cite these traditions as a motivating factor in their decision to join the military. Owing to this and other factors, a higher percentage of Indian people serve in the armed forces compared to the general U.S. population (24 percent compared to 19 percent). Surveys conducted on Vietnam era veterans indicate that Indian people frequently served in forward combat areas, and 42 percent were exposed to heavy combat. As a result, these veterans have a high level of service-related health care needs, including the highest rate of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among all ethnic groups surveyed by the VA. Despite the potential to receive care from either IHS or VHA, Native veterans are four times more likely than other veterans to have unmet health care needs.

To begin to address these needs and diminish disparities in the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native veterans, five mutual goals were set forth in the MOU: improve beneficiaries' access to quality healthcare and services; improve communication between the Indian veterans and Tribal governments with assistance from the IHS; encourage partnerships and sharing agreements among IHS Headquarters and facilities, VHA Headquarters and facilities, and Tribal governments in support of Native veterans; ensure the appropriate resources are available to support programs for American Indian and Alaska Native veterans; and improve health promotion and disease prevention services to American Indians and Alaska Natives.



NOTICE TO EDITORS: For additional information on this subject, contact the IHS Public Affairs Office at 301-443-3593. Additional information about the IHS is available on the IHS website at <http://www.ihs.gov> and <http://info.ihs.gov>