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## **MILLIONS OF AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES AT INCREASED RISK FOR TYPE 2 DIABETES**

### ***New Awareness Campaign Uses Testimonials to Help Reverse Diabetes Risk***

(Ada, OK) -- About 40 percent of adults ages 40 to 74 – or 41 million people -- have pre-diabetes, a condition that raises a person's risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. American Indians and Alaska Natives are 2.3 times as likely to have diabetes as non-Hispanic whites of similar age. To respond to this rapidly growing problem, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) launched a public awareness campaign today called "We Have the Power to Prevent Diabetes" at the new Chickasaw Nation Health System's Diabetes Care Center, an annex of the Carl Albert Indian Health Facility in Ada, Oklahoma. The campaign promotes the message that American Indians and Alaska Natives can fight the high incidence of type 2 diabetes in their communities if they take steps to lose a modest amount of weight by moving more, eating less, and making healthy food choices.

"We Have the Power to Prevent Diabetes" is part of NDEP's *Small Steps. Big Rewards. Prevent type 2 Diabetes* campaign, which targets groups at highest risk for diabetes. The campaign uses "real life" testimonials from American Indians and Alaska Natives who have made lifestyle changes to prevent diabetes and encourages others to take up the charge.

"Diabetes is a growing epidemic in our communities, especially for high risk groups," said Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni, Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). "If we are going to make a difference, we need to reach people where they live, work, and play, with information that is consumer-friendly and practical based on the proven science of diabetes prevention. Our goal is to empower those at high risk for type 2 diabetes to take steps to prevent this devastating disease."

"We are asking American Indians and Alaska Natives to fight back because of their increased risk for type 2 diabetes. We're showing them how to take action to prevent or delay the disease," said Dr. Griffin Rodgers, Deputy Director of the National Institutes of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) at NIH. "The key is regular physical activity and modest weight loss—as little as 5 to 7 percent of your body weight. We want to encourage people to take this message of good health to their families and their communities, so we can put an end to the diabetes epidemic."

Among testimonials featured in the campaign is one from Glenda Thomas Fifer, a participant in the Diabetes Prevention Program clinical trial from the Gila River Indian Community. She says: "I know everyone can do it, once they make up their mind. A lot of people out there know it runs in their family and they think, 'Okay, I'm going to get it.' No, it's not so. You can prevent it. If I can do it, you can do it." These motivational messages and healthy lifestyle advice are used in the campaign's tip sheets, radio and print public service announcements, and posters. Hundreds of public and private partners will help to distribute the materials throughout the American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

“Diabetes is ravaging our community. We, as Native Americans, must spread the word about the many ways we can beat this devastating disease,” said Tom John, Director of the Chickasaw Nation Health System’s Diabetes Care Center, who helped develop the campaign and took part in today’s announcement.

John was joined by Debra Jim, a member of NDEP’s “Small Steps. Big Rewards Team to Prevent type 2 Diabetes.” The team was assembled by NDEP to put a human face on the populations that are at high risk for the disease. Each member is actively working in his or her community to show some examples of lifestyle changes they have made to prevent diabetes. Ms. Jim sets an example for family members and co-workers at the Chickasaw Nation Health System where she is employed by working out at the fitness center in the new Diabetes Care Center.

“I adopted my healthy lifestyle and committed myself to informing my family and friends about the rewards it brings—freedom from blindness, from amputation, from daily injections of insulin,” said Ms. Jim. “My older relatives have it, so I am starting with myself and working with my children to break the cycle of this devastating disease in generation after generation. We do have the power to change. It’s within all of us.”

Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, Faculty at the University of Arizona’s College of Public Health and Chair of NDEP’s American Indian and Alaska Native Work Group, said the partnership of community-based healthy living programs, such as the Chickasaw Nation Wellness Center and a national public awareness campaign, is a prescription for making real inroads to stem the diabetes epidemic in the American Indian and Alaska Native communities. “This will make a resounding difference in the lives of American Indian and Alaska Native families,” said Roubideaux, a past president of the Association of American Indian Physicians (AAIP).

“This is a job all of us must take part in. American Indians and Alaska Natives do not have to suffer from diabetes and its complications. Knowing how to eat healthy and increase physical activity to lose a small amount of weight are the keys to longer, healthier lives. We must get the word out that type 2 diabetes prevention is proven, possible, and powerful,” said Roubideaux.

HHS’ NDEP is a federally funded program, co-sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and is a leading source for information about diabetes care and prevention. NDEP has more than 200 partner organizations that form a network to reach the health care community and those affected by diabetes at the federal, state, and local levels.

The Chickasaw Nation Health System is part of the NDEP’s partnership network. Its new Diabetes Care Center provides the Chickasaw Nation with a comprehensive program for helping to control and prevent type 2 diabetes. The 8,500-square-foot center includes a patient exam space, a fitness room, a patient education conference room, a teaching kitchen, and administrative space. A fully certified laboratory and pharmacy are also housed there.

For more information about the diabetes prevention campaign and free materials, including tip sheets and the *GAMEPLAN for Preventing type 2 Diabetes* – tools to help people lose weight, get active, and track their progress – visit the NDEP website at [www.ndep.nih.gov](http://www.ndep.nih.gov) or call 1-800-438-5383.

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