



# Indian Health Service Press Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**STATEMENT BY  
Robert G. McSwain  
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Regarding National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day 2009**

March 20, 2009, marks the third annual National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is a national mobilization effort facilitated by native organizations and community members and designed to inform all of us about the presence of HIV/AIDS in native populations (American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians). This day marks an ideal time to encourage native populations to empower themselves through HIV education, knowledge of their health status, and involvement in HIV prevention efforts.

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) continue to be ranked third in the nation in the rate of HIV/AIDS diagnoses. We face additional health disparities and co-risk factors, such as high rates of substance abuse and sexually transmitted infections, which can contribute significantly to HIV transmission. It is known that HIV/AIDS exists in urban and rural native populations (and on or near tribal lands); yet many of those with HIV are not aware of their status. This can change.

These statistics, risk factors, and opportunities for screening illuminate the need for the Indian Health Service (IHS) to continue to raise *awareness* about HIV and to demonstrate the success of ongoing initiatives that help to make HIV testing, education, and care a routine part of our health services. Over the last three years, new initiatives have begun and programs have expanded. We are changing the way we provide services for HIV, changing the way we integrate our programs, and more firmly establishing our linkages to care. The IHS is committed to pushing these critical issues forward and to doing its part to reduce sensitivities and disparities around HIV. With this change, support has come from many tribes, tribal entities, and native people. The IHS strives to proactively change the HIV/AIDS status quo of our native population and ultimately protect our future generations.

Each year, this day also gives me the opportunity to thank dedicated staff and community members who continue to improve services, foster linkages, and advocate for more initiatives in light of resource constraints. Please take the time to reflect on their hard work, share positive experiences with friends and family, encourage testing, and celebrate life in honor of the day.

Tribes, community organizations, and health departments will be holding many events on this day of advocacy, so please review the National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day activities across the country at: <http://www.nnaapc.org/news/nhaadmap2009/nationwide.htm>. I encourage all staff and community members to take part in this special day and help us protect our people and improve our health.

For Mr. McSwain's press statement and information on National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, please visit our IHS HIV Program website <http://www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/HIVAIDS/> or the AIDS.gov website [www.AIDS.gov](http://www.AIDS.gov). To locate a testing site near you, please visit [www.hivtest.org](http://www.hivtest.org).

NOTICE TO EDITORS: For additional information on this subject, please contact Dianne Dawson at 301-443-3593.