



SEP 17 2010

Dear Tribal Leader:

On behalf of the Indian Health Service (IHS) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), we write to update you on our mutual work to provide mental health and substance abuse programs for American Indians and Alaska Natives. On March 23, 2010, President Obama signed into law the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). Among its many benefits to improve health care in the United States, the Affordable Care Act also included the long-awaited reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCA) which *permanently* reauthorized the IHS and its programs. The law puts into place comprehensive health reforms that will hold insurance companies more accountable, provide coverage for 32 million more people, lower health care costs, guarantee more health care choices, and enhance the quality of health care for Americans.

The impact of the Affordable Care Act will forever change how the Department of Health and Human Services operates in the administration of services and resources to the Nation. IHS and SAMHSA will continue to serve American Indian and Alaska Natives as they always have, with ongoing direct services and targeted support for a wide array of mental health and substance abuse treatment and prevention programs. What will change, however, is that we will provide those services and supports with more cooperation and coordination than before. As the SAMHSA Administrator and IHS Director, it is our firm commitment to provide American Indians and Alaska Natives with high quality services and innovative programs. To accomplish this goal, we are committing our agencies to communicate, collaborate, and work in as seamless a fashion as possible.

It is sometimes difficult to discern how our functions and services work together. IHS is the primary Federal provider of comprehensive direct personal and public health services, including mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment, for American Indians and Alaska Natives. SAMHSA is the primary Federal agency for substance abuse and mental health services for the Nation, and has responsibility for translating behavioral health research into practice to improve the specialty and general health care systems. Together with our Tribal partners, who now directly operate over half of the mental health services and almost 90 percent of substance abuse services for American Indians and Alaska Natives, we are the health care team providing mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services and programs.

The mission and purpose of IHS encompasses all health care services but with a targeted population for American Indians and Alaska Natives, while SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of mental illness and substance abuse on all of America's communities. Working together promotes each agency successfully achieving its mission while working collaboratively with the larger Tribal behavioral health care system in a collegial, team environment.

SAMHSA and IHS have already begun the closer collaboration between our agencies by identifying six areas of activity over the coming year:

- Tribal Communications – communicate with Tribes and Tribal programs on common issues affecting them, i.e., suicide, substance abuse, and violence and trauma.
- Performance Measures – determine strategies to capture common data that enhance performance management and program effectiveness for American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- Conferences/summits/major meetings – coordinate support for, or participation in, significant events that leverage limited resources for the greatest benefit.
- Funding Opportunities and Award Processes – ensure funding is not redundant and determine opportunities for joint assistance to support programs, especially on suicide prevention and substance abuse.
- Technical Assistance (TA) – share information on providers, types of TA, and the target recipients of it to better coordinate and address common Tribal TA needs across the system.
- Behavioral Health Leadership – share best practices, approaches and innovations in behavioral health to improve services for communities and maintain resiliency in the workforce.

The results of our work may not always be obvious, but the processes we have begun will lead to enhanced internal improvements and cooperation between our agencies that ultimately will benefit Tribes and Tribal programs.

As colleagues striving to improve the Indian Health Care System, we will provide periodic updates to all our partners. We have a long-standing history of combined Federal and Tribal efforts, and a true sense of partnership that will be instrumental to our success in assisting the Indian Health Care System as the Affordable Care Act and Indian Health Care Improvement Act are implemented. Together we will create a wider reach and range of services than a single agency can provide working alone.

Page 3

We encourage you to share your thoughts and ideas on ways to help us meet the challenges of service for your communities and among American Indian and Alaska Natives. With the permanent reauthorization of IHS and the unprecedented opportunities provided by the Affordable Care Act, we look forward to creating partnerships and programs to benefit American Indian and Alaska Native communities in the coming years.

Sincerely,

/Pamela S. Hyde/

Pamela S. Hyde, J.D.
Administrator
Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration

/Yvette Roubideaux/

Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H.
Director
Indian Health Service

Enclosures: IHS Agency Summary
SAMHSA Agency Summary