

## VHA and IHS Join Forces to Serve American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and Indian Health Service (IHS) recently updated their [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) to include feedback from American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans.

Under the terms of the new MOU, VHA and IHS will coordinate efforts across health care access, patient experience, information technology and resource sharing initiatives to improve health care delivery for the country's nearly 145,000 AI/AN Veterans.

Prior to completing these updates, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a [summary report](#) that presents tribal feedback on proposed updates to the MOU. This input was provided by AI/AN Veterans during a series of tribal consultation sessions hosted by VHA and IHS in late 2020 and early 2021.



“Mutual Goals” outlined in the 2021 VHA-IHS MOU

**“The newly signed MOU is a crucial step forward to ensure our American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans receive the high-quality care they have earned,” said VA Office of Rural Health (ORH) Executive Director Thomas Klobucar. “Through the collaborative efforts of both VA and HIS, we can continue to bridge existing gaps and provide equitable care delivery to this historically marginalized Veteran population.”**

First signed in 2003, the MOU has helped guide this historic collaboration between VHA and IHS, resulting in key accomplishments such as:

- **Access to care:** Established agreements allow VHA to reimburse IHS for care that AI/AN Veterans receive at IHS and Tribal Health Program (THP) facilities, enabling patients to receive care at the most convenient facility

**Since agreements were established, nearly \$149 million has been reimbursed by VHA to IHS and THPs for care to almost 14,000 AI/AN Veterans**

- **Access to medication:** Eligible AI/AN Veterans can avoid burdensome travel and request medication be delivered to their front door through VA's mail-out pharmacy services, which are extended to cover medications prescribed at IHS and THP facilities

**Since services were extended, nearly 6.8 million prescriptions have been processed for AI/AN Veterans**

- **Access to transportation:** VA's Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG) program—which provides funds to organizations to transport Veterans in highly rural areas to their medical appointments—regularly extends its services to dozens of tribal communities across the country

**In the most recent fiscal year, the HRTG program served 26 tribal communities across nine states**

Under the new MOU, VHA and IHS will build upon these past successes to create a seamless patient experience where AI/AN Veterans feel understood and respected when receiving care across VA and IHS facilities.

To learn more about the newly updated VHA-IHS MOU, [click here](#) to read a press release or visit the ORH website at [www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/programs.asp](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/programs.asp). ♦