



Indian Health Service Bemidji Area Awards Ceremony

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Keynote Remarks

by

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Thank you Kathy (Annette). I appreciate your continued exceptional leadership of the Bemidji Area. I'm always very pleased to be here in your beautiful region and especially to take part in the Bemidji Area Awards Ceremony. It means a great deal to me to be here with you today to recognize these deserving award recipients. I know how hard you all work to provide the best possible care for our patients, and I appreciate your personal dedication to your jobs. Our patients sense your professionalism and caring. And this means a great deal to them on their way to wellness.

We are here today to honor those who have done extraordinary work in furthering our mission of raising the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native people to the highest possible level. Your Awards Ceremony theme "Above and Beyond" really describes the exceptional work ethic and dedication to the well being of our patients that today's award recipients have demonstrated.

These award recipients represent the high quality of professional staff that comprises the Indian Health Service (IHS). Their innovative and inspired contributions reflect their dedication to the IHS mission, and demonstrate the leadership abilities, exceptional professional skills, and creativity that I believe are characteristic of so many IHS employees. The men and women being recognized here today, as well as all of the dedicated IHS employees, have done much to bring improved health and wellness to American Indians in the Bemidji Area.

An annual awards ceremony takes a great deal of time and work from many people throughout the year. On that note, I would like to personally thank the Awards Committee

members who have work diligently throughout the year bringing this event together: Shelly Macdonald, Chairperson; Cindy Fowler, Cass Lake Representative; Jeremy Thomas, Red Lake Representative; Lenora Bedeau, Scott Snell, Mary Fairbanks and Kathy Bristlin, Bemidji Area Office Representatives; and Char Gordon and Dr. David Bellware, White Earth Service Unit Representatives. Congratulations to each of you for a job well done.

All of you who receive an award today serve as role models not only for other IHS and Indian health professionals, but also for the next generation of health care leaders who are watching you and learning from your good example. You have created a clear path for them to follow and set high standards to which they can aspire, and in doing so have helped ensure a healthier, brighter future for all Indian people.

The IHS and the HHS are focusing on building a better health care system in support of the goal of a safer, healthier, and more compassionate nation.

The IHS, together with other HHS agencies, is working in partnership with Tribal Nations and tribal organizations to institute innovative and effective health care delivery techniques to help provide access to high-quality health care and prevention services for American Indian and Alaska Native individuals and communities.

The three main health initiatives of the IHS fully support this vision of a healthier nation and healthier Indian people. The goal of these initiatives is to create healthier Indian communities by developing, coordinating, implementing, and disseminating effective health promotion and chronic disease prevention programs. These initiatives are directed at reducing health disparities among Indian people through a coordinated and systematic approach to preventive health.

One important part of achieving this goal is making maximum use of all available resources. The IHS is working to expand access to health care for American Indian and Alaska Native people through strengthening our collaborations with programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, as well as State programs.

The IHS continually strives to maximize its Medicare and Medicaid and other third-party collections and enrollments to supplement resources available for health care. Enrollment in the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit continues to grow in Indian Country. And the IHS continues to work with Part D plans to encourage them to develop tribal and urban program agreements with terms and conditions similar to those negotiated by the IHS.

The IHS also works to ensure that Indian people receive the maximum benefits they are entitled to from state health resources and programs. The IHS reviews state health reform initiatives for any legal or policy implications they might have on the IHS, tribal, and urban Indian health care system, and to determine the impact on access to health care for the Indian population of the state.

Prevention is an important part of building a healthier nation and healthier Indian people. The underlying principle of prevention in the IHS is that the best health promotion programs are those that are developed in consultation with our key stakeholders, the American Indian and Alaska Native people. We know that listening to those who are most affected by the outcomes helps us to best target the specific needs of each community.

Building on the existing strengths and assets of Indian people, families, and communities ensures the most effective use of resources and yields the best possible results, whether we are dealing with ongoing chronic conditions or emerging infectious diseases.

Thanks to all of you for attending this ceremony. And my congratulations go out to each of today's award winners and their families. Throughout my IHS career and my frequent travels to IHS and tribal facilities, I have observed firsthand that the Indian Health Service has some of the most competent, dedicated, and hard-working employees in federal service. Please accept my sincere and deep thanks for all that you do for the good health of Native communities throughout the Bemidji Area.

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