



# Indian Health Service Press Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Indian Health Service Sponsors American Indian and Alaska Native Health Summit**

The Indian Health Service (IHS), an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in conjunction with President Bush's *Healthier U.S.* Initiative and HHS Secretary Thompson's *Steps to a Healthier U.S.*, has launched a Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (HP/DP) Initiative to reduce health disparities among American Indian and Alaska Native people.

The IHS Director, Dr. Charles W. Grim, has committed resources and staff to implement this initiative. The HP/DP Initiative is a strategic approach to strengthening prevention efforts to improve the health and wellness of American Indian families and communities through expanded collaboration with federal and non-federal partners.

As part of the HP/DP Initiative, the IHS is sponsoring a health summit, "Healthier Indian Communities through Partnership and Prevention," on September 22-24, 2004, in Washington, D.C.

"The American Indian and Alaska Native population is faced with many challenges. To effectively reduce the burden of chronic diseases and conditions, we must expand our partners to join forces and resources to enable Indian people to live longer and healthier lives," stated Dr. Charles W. Grim, IHS Director. "The goals of the summit are to create and expand partnerships that will result in enhanced resources for Indian people, to share best practices being implemented in Indian country regarding health promotion and disease prevention, and to demonstrate the IHS's commitment to eliminating health disparities through HP/DP efforts."

The IHS has made dramatic reductions in infant mortality and deaths from infectious diseases in the last few decades. Today, American Indians and Alaska Natives are faced primarily with chronic diseases and conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, cancer, and injuries, which result largely from lifestyle behaviors. The prevalence of obesity has increased dramatically among the American Indian population within the past 30 years, with approximately 40 percent of Indian children identified as being overweight. Poor diet and lack of physical activity contribute to obesity and other chronic conditions such as Type 2 diabetes, which is three times higher among Indian children than among non-Hispanic Whites. Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death for Indian youth, and the 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death for all American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The upcoming health summit will address chronic diseases and conditions such as substance abuse, accidental injury, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, obesity, and others. It will bring together Tribal leaders, community members and health workers, health professionals, academia, foundations, private corporations, and other federal agencies. It will provide opportunities to share information, present the health status and challenges in Indian country, and create and expand opportunities to share best and promising HP/DP practices. During the conference, there will be roundtable discussions with representatives from federal agencies, universities, private corporations, foundations, and professional health associations to enhance opportunities for partnership and discuss the application of new knowledge and implementation of new ideas.



NOTICE TO EDITORS: For additional information on this subject, contact the IHS Public Affairs Office at 301-443-3593. Additional information about the IHS is available on the IHS website at <http://www.ihs.gov> and <http://info.ihs.gov>

