



**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

Office of Public Affairs  
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 461-7600  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

# **News Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 6, 2012

## **VA and Indian Health Service Announce National Reimbursement Agreement** *Native Veterans Able to Access Care Closer to Home*

WASHINGTON -- American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans will soon have increased access to health care services closer to home following a recent Department of Veterans Affairs and Indian Health Service (IHS) joint national agreement.

"There is a long, distinguished tradition of military service among tribes," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "VA is committed to expanding access to native Veterans with the full range of VA programs, as earned by their service to our Nation."

"The President has called on all Cabinet Secretaries to find better ways to provide our military families with the support they deserve, and that is exactly what we are doing today," said Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans benefit from this agreement, which provides increased options for health care services."

As a result of the national agreement, VA is now able to reimburse the IHS for direct care services provided to eligible American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans. While the national agreement applies only to VA and IHS, it will inform agreements negotiated between the VA and tribal health programs. VA copayments do not apply to direct care services provided by IHS to eligible American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans under this agreement.

"The VA and IHS, in consultation with the federally-recognized tribal governments, have worked long and hard to come to an equitable agreement that would ensure access to quality health care would be made available to our Nation's heroes living in tribal communities," said Dr. Robert Petzel, undersecretary for health, Veterans Health Administration. "This agreement will also strengthen VA, IHS and tribal health programs by increasing access to high-quality care for Native Veterans, particularly those in highly rural areas."

"This reimbursement agreement between the VA and the IHS will help improve health care services for American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans and further the IHS mission and federal responsibility of raising the health status of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level possible," said Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, director of the Indian Health Service. "This IHS-VA agreement will allow our federal facilities to work with the VA more closely as we implement this critical provision in the recently reauthorized Indian Health Care Improvement Act, passed as part of the Affordable Care Act."

The agreement between the two agencies marks an important partnering achievement for VA and the IHS and is consistent with the Administration's goal to increase access to care for Veterans.

To view the national agreement, please visit: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov). To find out additional information about American Indian and Alaska Native Veteran programs, please visit: [www.va.gov/tribalgovernment](http://www.va.gov/tribalgovernment) and <http://www.ihs.gov/>.