

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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HHS AWARDS \$1.2 MILLION TO BUILD NEW CLINIC IN CHENEGA BAY, ALASKA

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today announced a \$1.2 million contract to build a new health clinic on an isolated island in Prince William Sound, Alaska. The new clinic will replace a 17-year-old facility serving the Native Village of Chenega, an Alutiiq Native community with fewer than 100 residents.

The contract provided by HHS' Indian Health Service was awarded to the Chugachmiut Regional Health Corporation to build the new Chenega Bay Health Clinic. The project's cost reflects the difficulties in transporting building supplies and workers to the island -- which is only accessible by air and water.

"This new clinic will provide a vital resource to the people of Chenega, who are literally a 14-hour ferry and car trip away from the nearest Indian Health Service hospital," Secretary Thompson said. "Once completed, the clinic will provide the community with a reliable place to go for routine health care for years to come. It reflects our commitment to improving the quality of health care for all Americans, including those in rural communities."

A trained health aide will staff the new clinic and will be able to provide urgent care treatment and other services, including health education. The clinic will be linked via satellite, radio and computer to the Indian Health Service's Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage to allow real-time consultations on cases. It will have two examining rooms and overnight quarters for visiting specialists, who would provide eye, dental, laboratory, pharmacy and physical therapy services. Emergency care and more complex services would still require the patient to be transported to the hospital.

"Delivery of health services in remote areas is a challenge because of shortages in basic medical and business infrastructure, not to mention the unpredictable and harsh weather conditions," said Dr. Charles Grim, Director of the Indian Health Service. "For the Native Village of Chenega, this facility is the only medical service on the island and the only business infrastructure is a small oyster farm. Through local access to medical services the community will be able to sustain a higher level of health status."

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