

CONSULTATION & PARTICIPATION BY TRIBES

ISSUE

The involvement of tribal government in activities of the Indian Health Service (IHS) is mandated by law.

BACKGROUND

The Federal Government's relationship with American Indian and Alaska Native tribes is a government-to-government relationship based in treaties, law, Presidential Executive orders, and numerous court decisions. An integral part of this relationship is the requirement that agencies of the Federal Government consult with and involve tribal leaders in decisions and activities that affect tribal governments and members of their sovereign nations. In 1997, the Director, IHS, promulgated the first comprehensive Tribal Consultation and Participation Policy in the Federal Government. The policy establishes a minimum set of expectations for IHS staff with respect to consulting with tribal leaders and involving them in IHS activities.



SITUATION

Throughout the year, the IHS conducts a variety of consultation forums with tribal leaders and representatives of tribal governments (national meetings, regional inter-tribal consultation sessions, meetings with delegations of leaders from individual tribes, etc.). In recent years, tribal leaders and representatives have come to play an important role in the annual formulation and prioritization of the IHS budget and health priority focus at the national and regional levels. The IHS has also established an element under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) that is intended to determine the satisfaction of Indian leaders with the IHS consultation process and policy.

The increased involvement of tribes in advising and participating in the decision-making process of the agency has resulted in stronger collaborations between the Federal Government and Tribal Governments; innovations in the management of programs; effective and relevant issues brought forward for consideration by the agency; the Administration, and the Congress; and reduced disparity in the political presence of tribal governments.

OPTIONS/PLANS

Consultation practices within IHS will be strengthened. The agency will continue to assist other agencies in the Department as they develop improved communication linkages with tribes. Continuous review of IHS consultation practices will allow the process to improve.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For referral to the appropriate spokesperson, contact the IHS Public Affairs Staff at 301-443-3593.