



Indian Health Service Press Release

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New Quality Framework to Guide Delivery of Care at Indian Health Service

Plan outlines program to improve patient experience and health outcomes

The Indian Health Service (IHS) today announced its [2016-17 Quality Framework](#) outlining how IHS will develop, implement, and sustain an effective quality program that improves patient experience and outcomes, strengthens organizational capacity, and ensures the delivery of reliable, high quality health care at IHS federal-government-operated, direct service facilities.

“The IHS Quality Framework will guide our efforts as we continue to improve the level of service we are providing to our patients,” said IHS Principal Deputy Director Mary L. Smith. “This is an important milestone for IHS and tribal communities and will benefit patients by establishing a consistent approach to quality across all IHS facilities. IHS is committed to providing health care that patients trust.”

The Quality Framework was developed by assessing current IHS quality policies, practices, and programs, incorporating standards from national experts, consulting with tribal leaders and including best practices from across the IHS system of care.

Quality priorities outlined in the Framework are:

- 1) Strengthen Organizational Capacity to Improve Quality of Care and Systems
- 2) Meet and Maintain Accreditation for IHS Direct Service Facilities
- 3) Align Service Delivery Processes to Improve Patient Experience
- 4) Ensure Patient Safety
- 5) Improve Transparency and Communication Regarding Patient Safety and Quality to IHS Stakeholders

Specific objectives identified in the Framework include promoting a culture of patient safety in which all staff feel comfortable reporting medical errors, instituting processes to support learning from experiences, and reducing patient wait times for appointments. IHS, like other health care communities in the public and private sectors, works to identify issues and correct them before they affect patients.

The Framework will be reviewed and updated annually. The initial focus is on strengthening the underlying quality foundation of the federally operated facilities within the IHS system of care by building upon existing initiatives and programs.

Throughout this year, IHS has been collaborating with tribal leaders and local health partners on a series of actions to aggressively confront some long-standing health care service challenges, pursuing solutions that will bring sustainable improvements in quality of care at hospitals and facilities across the IHS system:

- IHS awarded a [one-year contract to The Joint Commission for accreditation, technical assistance and training in the Great Plains Area](#) to strengthen quality and patient safety;
- Implemented a program of mock surveys to assure up-to-date information on the status of every hospital was obtained and reviewed;
- IHS expanded efforts to ensure medical equipment used at IHS facilities is up to date, properly maintained, and reliable, through the establishment of a [new policy](#) on the minimum standards for medical equipment management, purchase, maintenance, and replacement;
- IHS announced a [\\$6.8 million contract to Avera Health to expand telehealth](#) in the Great Plains Area. This initiative is intended to bring tele-video healthcare services to the Great Plains Area IHS facilities, including additional emergency medical and specialty services;
- CMS included IHS hospitals in a nationwide [Hospital Improvement and Innovation Networks](#) (HIINs) contract for public and private sector hospitals to reduce adverse events by 20 percent and hospital readmissions by 12 percent;
- CMS awarded a [new contract to help support best health care practices](#) and other operational improvements for IHS federal government operated hospitals that participate in the Medicare program;
- IHS hired a new [Chief Medical Officer](#) and [Deputy Chief Medical Officer](#) for the Great Plains Area, to serve as the lead regional experts on IHS medical and public health services, providing technical leadership and guidance to facility chief medical officers and clinical staff in the region.

The IHS, an agency in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides a comprehensive health service delivery system for approximately 2.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. For more information, visit <http://www.ihs.gov>. Follow IHS on [Facebook](#).

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