



JUL 05 2018

Indian Health Service  
Rockville, MD 20857

Dr. Lynn Malerba  
Chairwoman  
Tribal Self-Governance Advisory Committee  
c/o Self-Governance Communication and Education  
P.O. Box 1734  
McAlester, OK 74501

Dear Chairwoman Malerba:

I am writing to provide updates to the recommendations and questions raised during our Indian Health Service (IHS) Tribal Self-Governance Advisory Committee (TSGAC) meeting held on March 28-29 in Washington, DC. Please see the enclosure for these updates.

I appreciate the work and collaboration of the TSGAC in helping us meet our mission. If you have any questions, please directly contact Ms. Jennifer Cooper, Director, Office of Tribal Self-Governance, IHS, by telephone at (301) 443-7821 or by e-mail at [jennifer.cooper@ihs.gov](mailto:jennifer.cooper@ihs.gov).

We look forward to our next quarterly meeting on July 18-19, 2018, in Washington, D.C.

Sincerely,

RADM Michael D. Weahkee, MBA, MHSA  
Assistant Surgeon General, U.S. Public Health Service  
Acting Director

Enclosure: IHS Responses on Follow-Up Items from the Tribal Self-Governance Advisory Committee Meeting, March 28-29, 2018.

**Indian Health Service**  
**Tribal Self-Governance Advisory Committee Second Quarterly Meeting**  
**March 28-29, 2018 – Washington, D.C.**

**TSGAC Meeting Attendance:** The TSGAC expressed concern that when the Indian Health Service (IHS) Acting Director is unable to attend the TSGAC quarterly meetings, decisions that affect Self-Governance policy, legislation, budget, and program issues are delayed. The TSGAC requested that the IHS Acting Director attend each TSGAC quarterly meeting. If the IHS Acting Director is unable to attend, the TSGAC requested that the IHS Acting Director send an IHS representative empowered to make decisions on his behalf so that the TSGAC can continue to make progress on the most pressing Self-Governance issues.

***IHS Response:*** The IHS Acting Director will continue to attend TSGAC quarterly meetings. The IHS will communicate with the TSGAC in advance if the IHS Acting Director is unable to attend any future TSGAC quarterly meeting. If the IHS Acting Director cannot attend, the IHS will send a senior staff representative with decision-making authority to represent the Agency.

**Timeliness of responses to TSGAC:** In the October 30, 2017, letter to IHS, the TSGAC suggested that midway between quarterly meetings would be a reasonable goal to receive written responses on issues identified during the quarterly meetings from the IHS so as to allow enough time for Tribal leadership to review and prepare comments. The TSGAC suggested that even up to 8 weeks following a quarterly meeting to receive official correspondence from the IHS with written responses on issues identified would allow sufficient time for the TSGAC to prepare for the next meeting.

***IHS Response:*** The IHS appreciates the suggestion on timeliness of sending official Agency correspondence to the TSGAC and will make all possible efforts to provide written responses on issues identified during each TSGAC quarterly meeting at least 8 weeks following each TSGAC quarterly meeting.

**Selection of a Permanent Office of Tribal Self-Governance (OTSG) Director:** The TSGAC suggested that in the future the IHS should ensure that Ms. Jennifer Cooper, Director, Office of Tribal Self-Governance (OTSG), has the support necessary to hire and fully staff the remaining open positions within the OTSG.

***IHS Response:*** Effective April 1, 2018, Ms. Jennifer Cooper became the permanent OTSG Director. The IHS appreciates TSGAC support for the OTSG Director and staff. The remaining open positions within OTSG are in active recruitment. The IHS will provide updates as they become available.

**Elimination of the Community Health Representative (CHR) and Health Education**

**Programs in the FY 2019 President's Budget Request:** The TSGAC registered strong concerns at the elimination of these two programs from the budget request "to prioritize direct health care services and staffing and operating costs for new and replacement facilities." The TSGAC is also concerned with the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation process with Tribes and the resulting President's Request.

***IHS Response:*** The President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget is a proposed budget. The IHS recognizes the value of the CHR Program as a vital component of our health care system. Considering the process of budget formulation and embargoed information, the proposed discontinuation was released after the President announced the Budget. Since then, the IHS has heard directly from Tribes about concerns that reflect the critical services the CHR program provides and the importance of continued access to direct health care services by American Indians and Alaska Natives. While the Agency's budget has not been finalized, the IHS continues to work in close collaboration with Tribes to ensure Tribal health priorities are addressed, especially with regard to the proposed budget impact of the CHR program.

The Health Education program is essential to promoting culturally appropriate evidence-based programming. The IHS consults with Tribes on the IHS budget regularly. Since then, IHS has engaged in discussions at various meetings including: Monthly All Tribes Call, FY 2020 Budget Formulation work session, Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee Meeting, and other forums where IHS heard directly from Tribes regarding their concerns about the program's discontinuation and the critical services that the Health Education Program provides in fostering direct health care access to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

**Request Funding for the Office of Information Technology (OIT) Planning in the FY 2020**

**Budget Request:** The TSGAC appreciates the frequent updates and opportunities for input on the future of the Resource Patient Management System (RPMS). Tribes have prioritized OIT resources as a high priority in the FY 2020 IHS Budget Formulation process. The TSGAC continues to emphasize the need for the IHS to obtain appropriations for its modernization requirements directly as well as to collaborate with and leverage the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) resources and purchasing power. The TSGAC requests that the IHS work to quantify the additional staff and resources needed each year for the next 5 years. This will not only maintain functionality and compliance for the existing system, but also support any conversion to another system. A suggestion during the last TSGAC meeting was to possibly compare staff and resources with those of the VA to provide a point of reference for appropriations. The TSGAC requests that the IHS consider a leadership role such as a "Chief Medical Informatics Officer" that would work across the IHS organization.

***IHS Response:*** The IHS is working on completing these requests and will provide any updates as they become available.

**Tribal Consultation on the Sanitation Deficiency System (SDS) Guidance Document:**

The TSGAC has requested verbally and in writing during the past year that Tribal Consultation be conducted on the Sanitation Deficiency System (SDS) guidance document. The TSGAC has requested a timeline and process be identified for the Tribal Consultation process.

***IHS Response:*** On July 2, 2018, the IHS initiated Tribal Consultation on proposed updates to the IHS SDS Guide – *A Guide for Reporting Sanitation Deficiencies for American Indian and Alaska Native Homes and Communities* – with a 30-day comment period through August 14, 2018. A copy of the letter to Tribal Leaders with associated enclosures is available on the IHS Tribal Leaders Web site, available at: <https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/triballeaderletters/>.

**Tribal Consultation on the IHS Strategic Plan:** The TSGAC discussed that a *Federal Register* Notice does not consist of Tribal Consultation and requested that the IHS consider sending a “Dear Tribal Leader” letter with the draft Strategic Plan as soon as it is prepared, along with a Tribal Consultation plan and timeline.

***IHS Response:*** The IHS does plan to send a Tribal Leader Letter and Urban Indian Organization Leader Letter shortly after the *Federal Register* Notice is published. This letter will include information about upcoming Town Halls for Tribal Consultation and Urban Indian Organization Confer sessions. The IHS will continue to explore the possibility of in-person Tribal Consultation sessions during the 30-day comment period.