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Subject: IHS Update: New IHS Policy for Prescribers on Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs

Importance: High

On behalf of Principal Deputy Director Mary Smith:

I have some very exciting news that puts IHS in the spotlight. IHS has issued a new agency-wide policy effective immediately that requires our opioid prescribers – including doctors, pharmacists and some nurse practitioners and physicians assistants – to check their state Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) database prior to prescribing and dispensing opioids for pain treatment. I am so proud to say that this is one of the first such actions by any federal agency in direct medical care, so we are paving the way for others to follow. IHS is leading the way in addressing addiction to opioid painkillers with this groundbreaking new policy.

Review the new policy: https://www.ihs.gov/ihtm/index.cfm?module=dsp_ihm_pc_p3c32.

With this policy, IHS opioid prescribers will utilize state Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs as a clinical tool for appropriate pain management, identifying patients who may have a problem with opioid use and helping prevent diversion of prescription drugs. PDMPs are state-based, electronic databases that collect data on controlled medications dispensed by registered pharmacies operating within the state.

This policy formalizes the IHS practice of ensuring safe and appropriate prescribing practices for prescription medications, including opioids, for more than 1,200 IHS opioid prescribers working in IHS federal-government-operated direct service facilities.

This is a continuation of our ongoing efforts to combat prescription drug abuse in American Indian and Alaska Native communities, including mandatory prescriber training on proper opioid prescribing and making [naloxone](#), a lifesaving medication for prescription opioid and heroin overdoses, more widely available.

As I wrote in a [post on the IHS blog](#) today, the [White House issued a fact sheet](#) sharing this good news. Our policy is also part of an overall strategy for HHS and these actions will build on the HHS Opioid Initiative and the [National Pain Strategy](#). At IHS, our ongoing efforts to support our clinicians are coordinated by the IHS Prescription Drug Abuse Workgroup, which makes [pain management best practices resources](#) available to clinicians and provides training.

Thank you for all the work you do for our Native peoples, and we can be very proud that IHS is a national leader in addressing the opioid epidemic.

Mary L. Smith
Principal Deputy Director