



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

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PARRAN TEAM REPORTS ON ALASKA HEALTH PROBLEMS

The Department of the Interior is now studying a report on Alaska health conditions recently submitted by a team of specialists under the chairmanship of Dr. Thomas Parran, former surgeon general of the United States Public Health Service, Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay said today.

The findings and recommendations of the report will be given consideration by the Department in cooperation with other Federal and territorial agencies in developing a specific program of action to meet the serious problems existing in Alaska.

The report was made under a contract between the Department of the Interior and the Graduate School of Public Health, University of Pittsburgh, and is based on intensive studies made in the Territory during the summers of 1953 and 1954. Dr. Parran, dean of the Graduate School, headed the team on both of its field trips and supervised preparation of the report.

Drawing a sharp contrast between southeastern Alaska and the predominantly native area north and west of the Seward-Fairbanks Railbelt, the report strongly emphasizes the health needs and problems of the native population. "The indigenous peoples of Native Alaska," it states, "are the victims of sickness, crippling conditions and premature deaths to a degree exceeded in very few parts of the world."

Among the many subjects covered are the health program of the Alaska Native Service of the Bureau of Indian Affairs scheduled for transfer to the Public Health Service under existing law next July, the operations of the Territorial Department of Health, the existing institutional facilities for health care in the Territory, laboratory services, environmental health, tuberculosis control, control of other communicable diseases, mental health, maternal and child health, nursing services, dental health, and health education.

The report contains a large number of recommendations for the improvement of health service in the Territory, many of them dealing with organizational and technical details. Six broad recommendations of special importance are the following:

- (1) That resources of the Alaska Native Service and the Territorial Department of Health be pooled and placed under a single administration;
- (2) That "native" Alaska be subdivided into six health districts with headquarters at Barrow, Kotzebue, Bethel, Kakanak, Tanana, and Nome;

- (3) That responsibility for the execution of a contract for the care of the mentally ill be transferred from the Department of the Interior to the Public Health Service, and that the Territory of Alaska assume increasing responsibility for the cost of the program;
- (4) That Federal agencies concerned initiate at the earliest possible moment an emergency program of "Food for Health" utilizing surplus foods being stored by the Federal Government;
- (5) That Congress enact a law providing for modern commitment proceedings for the mentally ill.
- (6) That the present program for training native health workers be expanded, and that training programs for natives be introduced in new program areas.

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