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A national conference of area directors of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Indian Health Service (IHS) culminated here October 20 with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that updates a 1988 agreement and spells out the management framework for implementation of a national strategy the two federal agencies are undertaking to prevent and treat alcohol and substance abuse among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

"This is an historic meeting that builds on the cooperative efforts between BIA and IHS to fight the scourges of alcohol and substance abuse among American Indians and Alaska Natives," Interior Assistant Secretary Eddie F. Brown said at the signing ceremony. "This MOA reaffirms a management framework that recognizes alcohol and substance abuse as a disease which is both preventable and treatable."

"This agreement was a positive effort to reinforce the long-standing cooperation between IHS and BIA," remarked IHS Director and Assistant Surgeon General Dr. Everett R. Rhoades. "Both agencies consistently strive toward the betterment of American Indian and Alaska Native Peoples."

The first-ever meeting between the two principal agencies providing services to more than one million American Indians and Alaska Natives in 35 states, put in motion plans for joint implementation of the MOA in each of the areas served by BIA and IHS. Plans will be coordinated with the Indian tribes in each of the 12 areas served by BIA and” areas served by IHS to insure involvement and participation of the entire Indian community.

Rhoades and Brown complemented the staffs of the two federal agencies for working together in such a cooperative way to carry out the mandates of the Indian Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. The two leaders agreed that "Indian communities faced no greater problem or threat to their survival than alcohol and substance abuse" and ''we must not let up until we have it under control."

While previous mandates have spelled out responsibilities of IHS (treatment) and BIA (prevention), discussions during the two-day conference centered on cooperative responsibilities having to do with budget, staffing and costs of programs and facilities, tribal input, possible joint requests for Congressional appropriations, and the continuum of activities -- law enforcement education, juvenile detention centers and emergency shelters, and child, abuse -- intertwined with the prevention and treatment of alcoholism and substance abuse.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs has approved 11 juvenile detention centers, the first: of which is expected to be completed in January, 1993 at the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation in Eagle Butte, S.D. Fifteen of the 31 planned emergency shelters to be operated jointly by the BIA and IHS have been completed. Fourteen are in operation.

The newly signed Memorandum of agreement updates the original Agreement signed in 1987 between the Secretaries of Health and Human Services and the Department of the Interior and amended in

1988. It reaffirms a management framework for the coordination of data collection, resources and programs of the BIA and IHS to assist American Indians and Alaska Natives to achieve their goals in the prevention and treatment of alcohol and substance abuse.

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