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The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA} and the Indian Health Service (IHS) have signed an agreement to join forces to combat drug abuse and other serious health problems among the nation's 1.4 million Native Americans Interior Assistant Secretary Ross Swimmer, who heads the BIA, joined IHS Director Everett Rhoades in Washington to sign the memorandum of agreement and discuss the ongoing relationship between their offices. IHS is an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services.

"The BIA provides a variety of important social and economic services to Indian people while the IRS offers quality physical and mental health care," Swimmer said. "It is essential that we work together to help young Indians deal with some of the problems reservation life presents."

Although they were brought together by a need to combat rampant substance abuse among Indian youth, the two agencies also will coordinate efforts in the areas of nutrition, teenage suicide, child abuse and neglect, teenage pregnancy, fetal alcohol syndrome, parental effectiveness, special education the needs of elderly, injury control and immunization. In addition, health promotion curricula will be developed and community leaders trained to deal with these problems.

"Alcohol and drug abuse is the most serious social and health problem facing Indian people today," Swimmer said. "Our statistics show that the majority of BIA and tribal arrests involve alcohol and drug abuse. Many of those arrested are juveniles."

A BIA alcohol and drug abuse study indicated that 50 percent of its schools have substance abuse problems. Five BIA schools found that 75 percent of their students used alcohol or drugs, and six other schools said student use was as high as 50 percent.

"This coordination between two major federal agencies will enable us to provide better services to Indian people," said Dr. Henrietta Whiteman, the BIA's deputy to the assistant secretary in charge of Indian education. Whiteman and Hazel Elbert, deputy to the assistant secretary for tribal services, will manage the BIA's portion of the project.

Under the agreement, the BIA will work with Indian tribal governments and organizations to implement local action plans aimed at promoting health and preventing disease.

The BIA will develop materials and training programs that can help teachers, community health representatives, tribal judges and law enforcement officials in their work with troubled adolescents. The bureau also plans to study the extent and costs of social problems among young Indians; identify youths in need of immunization; create a preventative alcohol and drug abuse program in kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools; and encourage parental and tribal participation in identifying social and health problems.

The IHS agreed to determine the extent and costs of Indian health problems among youth. The agency also will develop comprehensive Indian youth alcohol and drug abuse treatment services, provide immunization services, assess the status of nutrition awareness training for health, education and legal

professionals, develop curricula for a health promotion and disease prevention program, utilize its own maternal child health program to educate teenagers about child birth and develop local action plans.

The BIA and the IHS agreed to meet regularly to review activities and progress that result from their agreement.