Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – As part of President Obama's Generation Indigenous ("Gen-I") and Tiwahe initiatives, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn today announced he is calling for September 10 to be known as Hope for Life Day to raise awareness in Indian Country about suicide prevention during National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. Suicide strikes Native youth especially hard. The suicide rate among American Indians ages 15 to 34 is more than two times higher than the national average.

"Suicide wounds every person, family and community it touches," Washburn said. "Native communities suffer from a suicide rate that is more than twice the national average. There is no greater tragedy in Indian Country. Our President has heard about the effects of suicide on Native communities, and has directed his Administration to work harder to address it. There are no easy cures and it will require a broad commitment to address it. Hope for Life Day will bring greater awareness of this issue in Indian Country, and provide information about suicide prevention to help save lives."

Last month, the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention's (NAASP) American Indian and Alaska Native Task Force announced the first National American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Suicide Prevention Hope for Life Day. Going forward, the Hope for Life Day will be held annually on September 10 in conjunction with World Suicide Prevention Day.

President Obama's Generation Indigenous initiative focuses on removing the barriers that stand between Native youth and their opportunity to succeed, using a comprehensive, culturally appropriate approach to help improve the lives and opportunities for Native youth. The *Tiwahe Initiative*, launched in Fiscal Year 2015, addresses family welfare and poverty issues, invests in education, economic development, sustainable stewardship of natural resources, and advances a strategy to reduce incarceration in Indian Country.

The Hope for Life Day is part of the Action Alliance's AI/AN Task Force's efforts to change the conversation about suicide and promote hope, life, cultural resiliency, and community transformation. It is an effort specifically designed for tribal communities to raise awareness about suicide and seek ways to address it, particularly among the teens and adults who are at a high level of risk for taking their own lives.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC):

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives ages 15 to 34 years, and
- The suicide rate among American Indian and Alaska Native adolescents and young adults ages 15 to 34 is 2.5 times higher than the national average for that age group.

The Task Force has developed the Hope for Life Day toolkit to assist health professionals and grassroots organizers working in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

The AI/AN Task Force is a public partnership formed to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention as it pertains to AI/AN communities. The Assistant Secretary is joined in coleading the Task Force by Indian Health Service (IHS) Principal Deputy Director Robert G. McSwain.

The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention is the public-private partnership working to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and make suicide prevention a national priority. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, through the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), operates the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which was launched in 2010 by former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates with the goal of saving 20,000 lives in five years.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which directly administers or funds tribally based infrastructure, economic development, law enforcement and justice, social services (including child welfare), tribal governance, and trust land and natural and energy resources management programs for the nation’s federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes.

The Assistant Secretary also oversees the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), which operates the federal 183-school system for American Indian and Alaska Native elementary and secondary students from federally recognized tribes and provides post-secondary education opportunities to them through higher education scholarships, operational support funding to over 20 tribal colleges and universities and two tribal technical colleges, and the Haskell Indian Nations University (HINU) in Lawrence, Kan., and the Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in Albuquerque, N.M.