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For Immediate Release: April 1, 1987
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Secretary of the Interior Don Hodel and Health and Human Services Secretary Otis Bowen, M.D., have signed a memorandum of agreement to coordinate implementation of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. A portion of the law is devoted to the prevention and treatment of alcohol and substance abuse among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

“This is the first step in a unified, coordinated approach to fight this devastating problem," Hodel said. "This Administration has demonstrated its commitment to achieving sobriety throughout America. Coordination of resources and expertise between our departments is a positive move in that direction.” “The IHS and BIA recognize alcohol and substance abuse as a disease which is both preventable and treatable," Bowen said.

"The IHS and the BIA recognize chemical dependency as a major serious health and social problem affecting the individual, family and tribe.”

The agreement coordinates the programs in the Interior Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and HHS' Indian Health Service (IHS), which were appropriated $45 million in FY 1987 for prevention, intervention, treatment and follow-up aimed at stopping substance abuse.

The act points out that Indians between ages 15-24 are twice as likely as the general population to die in automobile accidents, more than 75 percent of which are alcohol-related. It also notes that four of the top 10 causes of death among Indians stem from alcohol and drug-related injuries.

Interior's Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Ross Swimmer, said the BIA program has one goal -- sobriety.

The agreement identifies a number of short-term responsibilities required by the law. The two agencies will publish a newsletter, fund community training, identify available substance abuse resources and programs, determine the scope of the problem in Indian Country, set standards for establishing and opening emergency shelters, publish an annual comprehensive report for tribes, compile data on child abuse, develop curriculum on substance abuse prevention for Indian students, provide crisis intervention at BIA schools and develop a model juvenile code.

The BIA will be working with tribes as they develop tribal action plans that design local solutions to alcohol and substance abuse in Indian Country.

The MOA was published in the Federal Register March 26 and will be mailed to all federally-recognized Indian tribes.