Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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A newly developed automatic data processing system for the Bureau of Indian Affairs' social services programs will be implemented October 1 in all areas except Alaska, Interior Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Ken Smith announced today.

With the new system in place, the processing of a request for general assistance, which in the present manual system takes 3-6 weeks before delivery of the first check, will be completed in 2-3 days.

Smith said the new system will eliminate some emergencies now created by the time lag in delivery of services; will give social workers more time for clients by cutting down paperwork time; will give management immediate data needed for analysis and planning; and will provide accurate, timely audit and program reports required for budgeting and reports to Congress. The system will also work in conjunction with other existing and planned local operating level systems.

Smith said that he was especially pleased with the development of the Bureau's social services automation program because it "came from the users ... It didn't' start with the planners."

Ray Butler, director of the Bureau's Social Services programs, said the laborious manual system has not been able to keep up with the growth of the programs. He noted that the social services budget grew from $1.5 million in the 1950s to $20 million at the end of the 1960s to approximately $90 million in 1981. The number of people receiving general assistance grew in this time from 12,000 to 58,000.

Butler said that the Bureau's Phoenix area office played a leading role in the development of the new ADP system through pioneering a conversion to the system in October 1979. The system has been thoroughly tested in the Phoenix office, which serves 46 reservations in Arizona, Utah and Nevada. Operation of the system will be delayed in Alaska past October 1 because of some special telecommunications problems, but will be operational in all other areas by October 1.

The Bureau's general assistance and child welfare programs are for eligible people living on or near a reservation who are not able to receive such assistance through state or local public welfare agencies. The Bureau's social services program also includes providing assistance to Indian communities through tribal work projects child in helping with the (similar to so-called "workfare" projects); child welfare services in helping with the placement of Indian children in adoptive or foster homes; family services; assistance to Indians to enable them to get needed services and assistance from state and local agencies; and helping community agencies away from the reservations to understand the needs of Indians.