



October 16, 2024

Dear Tribal Leader:

I am pleased to announce that today, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) approved four state section 1115 demonstration amendments that allow, for the first time ever, Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) coverage of traditional health care practices provided by Indian Health Service (IHS) facilities, Tribal facilities, and Urban Indian Organizations.<sup>1</sup> The approval will apply to IHS facilities, Tribal facilities, and Urban Indian Organizations in California, New Mexico, and Oregon, and will apply to only IHS and Tribal facilities in Arizona.

Today's action is an important step towards improving access to culturally appropriate health care and improving the quality of care and health outcomes for Tribal communities and others served by these facilities. These demonstration approvals also serve as a framework for other states that are interested in expanding coverage to include traditional health care practices in these facilities.

As you know, American Indians and Alaska Natives experience significantly worse health disparities compared to the general population, including higher rates of obesity, diabetes, cancer, mental illnesses, substance use disorders, and suicide. Traditional health care practices, which can vary among federally recognized Tribes in the United States, can include, for example, the use of sweat lodges, smudging, talking circles, or herbal remedies. Studies have shown that such practices can help to improve mental health symptoms, health outcomes, and quality of life, including for individuals with substance use disorders.

American Indians and Alaska Natives have long recognized the contribution of traditional healers and practitioners in aiding the healing process. Some Tribes see traditional health care practices as a fundamental element of the range of health care services that can help patients with specific physical and mental ailments. Today's demonstration approvals aim to improve health outcomes and access to culturally appropriate care for Tribal citizens.

Thank you for supporting CMS' mission and efforts to increase access to care for all American Indians and Alaska Natives. While there is still much work to do, today is an important milestone. CMS remains committed to improving the health care of all American Indians and Alaska Natives.

---

<sup>1</sup>Medicaid section 1115 demonstrations allow CMS to approve innovative projects that promote the objectives of Medicaid, which provides health coverage to millions of low-income adults, children, pregnant people, and people with disabilities. These demonstrations allow states the opportunity to test the effects of providing coverage for different types of services.

You can see the press release here: <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/biden-harris-administration-takes-groundbreaking-action-expand-health-care-access-covering>

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Chiquita Brooks-LaSure.

Chiquita Brooks-LaSure