



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

Dear Tribal Leader:

On November 4, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) hosted a Roundtable with Tribal Leaders. Over 115 Tribes participated, and we were grateful for the opportunity to hear from you first-hand about your experiences interacting with the Department and your thoughts on improving our relationship. We have posted the summary of that session on our website at www.hhs.gov/ofta.

The next day, at the White House Tribal Nations Conference, President Obama signed a Presidential Memorandum outlining his direction to all executive agencies to come into compliance with Executive Order 13175, regarding consultation and coordination with Indian Tribal Governments.

HHS has taken its responsibility to comply with Executive Order 13175 very seriously over the past decade -- including the initial implementation of a Department-wide policy on Tribal consultation and coordination in 1997, and through multiple evaluations and revisions of that policy, most recently in 2008. Many HHS agencies have already developed their own agency-specific consultation policies that complement the Department-wide efforts. Our consultation policies have also benefited from the establishment of Tribal Advisory Committees, which serve many of our agencies and advise HHS leadership on how best to work with Indian Country in order to continue incorporating your ideas and recommendations into our policies.

However, we can and must continually work to improve our services, outreach, and consultation efforts to Indian Country. To ensure HHS is in full compliance with the President's recent memorandum, I am asking for your help to improve our consultation policy. Specific questions we believe need to be addressed, and on which we would like your input, are listed below. Of course, in addition to these questions, we recognize you may have comments and suggestions on other issues, and we welcome those as well.

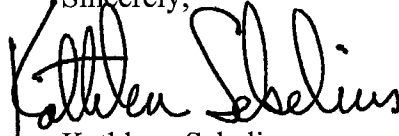
1. How do we improve the accountability of our consultation policy across the Department to ensure all agencies are participating appropriately?
2. How do we improve our communication and outreach regarding policy or program changes with Tribes?
3. How do we improve our annual regional consultations? Should we continue to have sessions every year or every other year, or should we host national sessions? Please provide us with your suggestions.
4. What comments or concerns do you have that will help us improve the Department's Tribal Consultation Policy?

We have posted the HHS Tribal Consultation Policy on our web site at www.hhs.gov/ofta for your review, and ask that you provide comments no later than January 8, 2009. Please email your thoughts to us at HHSIGA@hhs.gov, or call Stacey Ecoffey, Principal Advisor for Tribal Affairs, at 202-690-6060.

We plan to discuss the feedback we receive about the HHS Consultation Policy during our 2010 Regional Tribal Consultation Sessions, which will also include a discussion of the structure of these regional sessions and next steps for review and updates to our Departmental consultation policy. Dates and locations for the Regional Consultations will be finalized in early 2010.

Thank you for your continued support and hard work. I take the Department's responsibility with respect to Tribal consultation very seriously, and look forward to working with you as we continue to improve our relationship and build healthier communities.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Sebelius