

Comments solicited on P.L. 94-437

The Federal commitment to close the gap between the health status of the American Indian and Alaska Native people and that of the rest of the Nation within the next seven years is spelled out in regulations proposed today by HEW's Indian Health Service.

The proposed regulations, published in today's "Federal Register," will implement the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. (Public Law 94-437.) The law, enacted on Sept. 30, 1976 provides for better Federal Indian health program services and facilities and greater Indian and Alaska Native participation in the programs.

In brief, the act does the following:

- Programs to increase the number of Indian health professionals serving Indians.

- Increase appropriation levels over a seven year period to help HEW's Indian Health Service eliminate backlogs of health services needs, renovate and build health care facilities and staff housing, and construct sanitation facilities for Indian homes.

- Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement to Indian Health Service facilities for services to eligible Indians.

- A program to identify Indians in urban areas and their health needs, and make urban health care more accessible to them.

- A study to determine the need for, and feasibility of establishing an American Indian School of Medicine.

The regulations, as proposed, have been developed in consultation with national and regional Indian organizations, Indian Leaders and other American Indian and Alaska Native people. Representatives of HEW's Indian Health Service, tribal and urban Indians, and other interested parties have participated in over 110 meetings across the country to discuss the Act, and to insure that Indian and Alaska Native interests are represented in the regulations and the implementation plan.

The comments and suggestions received within 45 days will further insure maximum Indian participation in the implementation of the programs and activities authorized by the Act. All comments received within this period will be considered. They should be submitted in writing to the Director, Indian Health Service, Room 5A-55, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, Maryland 20857, and should refer to specific sections of the proposed regulations.

The comments will be available for public inspection at Indian Health Service Headquarters during regular hours, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.