

IHS cuts off service to non-Native dependents

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Tundra Times

Some 6,000 to 8,000 non-Native people who were able to use Indian Health Service facilities because of their relation to Natives have been cut off from those services because of a change in the law.

The IHS in Alaska last week received notice from Washington, D.C. that the 1983 appropriations bill for the IHS

contained a provision that radically cuts back eligibility for non-American Indian and non-Alaska Natives throughout the country.

That means that non-Native spouses of Alaska Native will no longer be able to use IHS facilities in Anchorage. According to Jim Armbrust, contract health care officer for Alaska, the new law will affect from

(Continued on Page Nine)

IHS benefits for non-Native dependents cut back

(Continued from Page One)

6,000 to 8,000 people in this state.

Most of those people will be in the urban areas, said Armbrust, because the law does not cut off non-Native people living in remote areas.

The law will continue to allow persons fitting four requirements to use IHS health care. Those four situations are:

- * A non-Alaska Native woman who is pregnant with the child of an eligible Alaska Native male for the length of the pregnancy through the postpartum period;

- * Non-Native members of an eligible Alaska Native person's household if the director of the IHS facility decides that such treatment is necessary to control an acute infectious disease or a public health hazard;

- * In cases of emergency on a fee-for-service basis.

- * The Alaska Area Native Health Service will continue to provide health services to non-Native persons living in remote communities where the facility is the only source of medical care. In these cases services will be offered on a fee basis as established by law.

According to a spokesman for IHS, this regulation will not bar the children of an Alaska Native from receiving IHS medical service if one parent is Native and the other is non-Native.

American Indians living in Alaska who would not be classed Alaska Native will continue to receive IHS care with no problems.

Armbrust said that the provision allowing non-Natives

to receive health care if they live in remote areas includes IHS facilities in places such as Barrow, Kotzebue and Bethel — any place where “we (IHS) are the only health care provider.”

A non-Native person will be charged fees established by law, said Armbrust, but he said that he expects that those fees will be changed within 90 days. A sliding scale of fees will be established which will mean that a person using IHS facilities in Barrow probably will pay more than someone with the same problem at a Bethel facility because the cost of delivering health care in Barrow is greater.

If a non-Native person who is a dependent to an Alaska Native comes in to the IHS hospital in Anchorage with a

life-threatening emergency he “will be stabilized,” so the immediate threat to life is removed but that person will not be admitted, said Armbrust.

Anchorage has two private hospitals that a non-Native person could use — Providence and Humana Hospitals. But that person will not be turned away from IHS until health care workers are assured that the threat to life is removed, he said.

Armbrust said that if a person who lives in Anchorage travels to Barrow and needs health care while in Barrow, he will be treated and charged a fee. No residency requirement will be enforced, he said.

For the past two years, IHS treated any non-Native spouse of an American Indian

or Alaska Native. Prior to that only the female non-Native spouse was treated while a non-Native male spouse of a Native or Indian woman was refused treatment.

Armbrust said that in December of 1980, the U.S. Justice Department informed IHS that it could no longer defend that “discriminatory practice” so all non-Native spouses were treated.

However, in the past three years, the cost of operating IHS facilities across the country increased radically with inflation and many Native groups encouraged cutting back on the types of treatment offered.

An IHS press release said that the IHS is notifying people who will be affected by this ruling.