



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE

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DHW, Nez Perce create process to ensure communication

The Department of Health and Welfare and the Nez Perce now have a blueprint for doing business and working together.

Representatives from each entity signed a tribal consultation agreement on April 29 that creates a system for collaboration. It takes effect immediately. Idaho does not have statutory requirements for working with or communicating with the tribes, which is part of what makes this agreement historic.

"This is an important step I've been wanting to do for many years," said Richard Armstrong, director of the Department of Health and Welfare. "We built this arrangement between us, and then will use it to work together on important issues."

The agreement outlines the communication process that must happen between the department and the tribe before changes can be made to programs or services that will have a direct impact on the tribe's social service or health programs. It designates a single point of contact from each that will make collaboration and communication easier. The agreement also outlines a system of quarterly meetings between tribal and department leadership for Medicaid, Welfare, Family and Children's Services, Child Support and Health.

"I hope this is one of several important agreements between the six tribes in Idaho and the department," said Joyce Broadsword, the current North Idaho regional director who is working with other tribes in Idaho on similar agreements. "I'm feeling really positive about the impact this agreement can have in prospering solid working relationships. It's a great tool."

Ron Beecher, former North Idaho regional director, started working with Roberta Bisbee, a former tribal councilwoman, to create the consultation agreement in May 2012. Bisbee was a member of the Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee in 2010, the first tribal advisory committee established to advise the Health and Human Services secretary in matters relating to the tribes in the United States.

"This is a real leap forward for the department," Beecher said. "This instrument helps to put in place a process to alert the tribal council, and then to give them the opportunity to let the director's office know they'd like to discuss a policy change."

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