

IHS mobile health units services improve access for tribal members

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The Indian Health Service announced three new mobile health units to serve patients in the Mid-Atlantic Service Unit service area on Sept. 6. The mobile units will provide various services, including vaccines, vital signs, COVID-19 screening, oral health, and mental health counseling and referrals.

“These new mobile health units will improve access to care for American Indian and Alaska Native communities in the region served by the Mid-Atlantic Service Unit,” IHS Nashville Area Director Beverly Cotton said. “The service unit provides an important link between the community and primary, dental and behavioral health care by increasing health care accessibility, especially for rural areas.”

The mobile units will each provide primary, behavioral health and dental care, and plan to expand services over time. The units will be the primary source of services offered by the Mid-Atlantic Service Unit until the Mid-Atlantic Tribal Health Center and the Monacan Health Center are built.

IHS broke ground on the Monacan Health Center in October 2021 and it is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2023. The mobile health units will supplement the services provided by the Mid-Atlantic Tribal Health Center. Plans are underway for that center.

“We are really excited to bring these services to our communities,” Mid-Atlantic Service Unit CEO Kara Kearns said. “In order to provide quality care, including much-needed prevention services, we knew that we needed an innovative model to meet those needs. Mobile health units benefit our more remote populations by providing access to care and promoting health equity.”

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The Mid-Atlantic Service Unit serves seven mid-Atlantic tribes who share territory with the Commonwealth of Virginia. The seven tribes are the Pamunkey, Chickahominy, Chickahominy Eastern Division, Upper Mattaponi, Rappahannock Indian Tribe, Monacan Indian Nation, and Nansemond Indian Nation.

The Pamunkey Tribe received federal recognition in 2015 while the other six tribes received recognition in 2018. The IHS Mid-Atlantic Service Unit started in 2020 soon after the tribes received recognition. The service unit serves approximately 3,000 American Indian and Alaska Natives.

The mobile units will serve the Pamunkey Reservation, Nansemond Indian Nation and Rappahannock Indian tribal grounds. Upper Mattaponi will receive dental and substance abuse services. The mobile units will operate on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

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