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## **Interior Department Announces Behavioral Health and Wellness Program for Tribal Schools**

*Bureau of Indian Education schools will receive virtual counseling and on-site crisis services*

**WASHINGTON** – The Department of the Interior today announced the Bureau of Indian Education awarded an additional five-year contract to increase access for behavioral health and wellness support to all students and staff at Bureau-funded schools and programs. Initially designed to increase access to services during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Behavioral Health and Wellness Program provides virtual counseling and on-site crisis services.

“The Interior Department is committed to creating positive, safe and culturally-relevant learning environments. I am proud of the hard work by the Bureau of Indian Education to ensure that Indigenous youth have the support they need in a culturally-relevant and supportive environment for their physical, mental and emotional well-being,” said **Secretary Deb Haaland**.

The BIE’s [Behavioral Health and Wellness Program](#) provides students and staff at all Bureau-funded schools and programs with Indigenous focused, evidence-based and trauma-informed behavioral health and wellness supports. Services are tailored to meet the unique and diverse mental, cultural, spiritual, emotional and social needs of Indigenous communities served by BIE.

“Our schools play an important role in the lives of students, faculty and staff, and Tribal communities. By providing these resources, we will help our students and BIE team succeed inside the classroom. Even more importantly, we will help promote the mental and physical wellbeing of entire communities,” said **Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland**.

“Mental wellness is a key component of every student’s success,” said **BIE Director Tony Dearman**. “We will focus these resources on the unique issues that face our Indigenous students with a clear emphasis on suicide prevention, crisis services and behavioral health through an Indigenous lens. We believe this will have a significantly positive impact throughout Indian Country by supporting future leaders, reducing generational trauma and promoting healthier lives.”

Services include tele-behavioral health counseling focused on providing short-term, solution-focused, and culturally sensitive virtual counseling, a BIE-specific 24/7 crisis hotline, and onsite crisis support. The program's clinical team is primarily staffed with Indigenous clinicians, who have direct experience serving Native communities.

Virtual and onsite crisis support will provide a comprehensive and systemic approach to assisting individuals or groups with critical incidents or traumatic events. Virtual services provide a way to overcome challenges such as limited onsite providers, minimal transportation options, long wait times, and limited scheduling options for caregivers.

The program also provides various types of technical assistance and hosts trainings to promote suicide prevention and other resiliency-focused topics. Staff at BIE-funded schools will continue to have access to training and certification for Youth Mental Health First Aid, virtual talking circles, monthly behavioral health webinars, and professional development opportunities.

In order to ensure continuity of services and implement counseling and crisis service supports, the BIE awarded the additional five-year contract to Tribal Tech, LLC, a Native American owned small business, supporting efforts through the Buy Indian Act to promote economic development opportunities in Indian Country.

*The [Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs](#) advises the Secretary of the Interior on Indian Affairs policy issues; communicates policy to and oversees the programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Education, and the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration; provides leadership in consultations with Tribes; and serves as the DOI official for intra- and inter-departmental coordination and liaison within the Executive Branch on matters concerning American Indians and Alaska Natives and the federally recognized Tribes in the United States.*

*The Bureau of Indian Education implements federal Indian education programs and funds 183 elementary and secondary day and boarding schools serving approximately 47,000 students. BIE oversees the operation of two postsecondary schools, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute and Haskell Indian Nations University. BIE administers grants for 29 Tribally controlled colleges and universities and two tribal technical colleges. For more information, visit the BIE website at <https://www.bie.edu/>.*

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