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INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDES RECORD NUMBER OF BOOKS FOR INDIGENOUS FAMILIES

*A grant from the agency will support twice as many Reach Out and Read books
at Indian Health Clinics across the country*

BOSTON (Nov. 1, 2023) – A generous grant will allow national nonprofit Reach Out and Read to distribute tens of thousands of children’s books to medical clinics on tribal and native sites for an entire year. Nearly doubling past efforts, Indian Health Service (IHS) has awarded Reach Out and Read \$200,000 to purchase more than 31,000 high-quality, inclusive, diverse children’s books that represent and celebrate the lives of indigenous families. Books are distributed among 45 IHS clinics nationwide free of charge to families at well-child visits.

This ongoing partnership is key in addressing social injustice and health disparities for families in rural and Indigenous areas through Reach Out and Read’s work in the medical system. Reach Out and Read’s providers offer not only books, but also guidance to parents/caregivers about how shared reading with young children builds important family bonds.

“It’s always exciting to see a child’s face light up when they receive a book at their appointment and immediately engage to read with their families,” said Dr. Tina Pattara-Lau, Maternal Child Health Consultant, IHS. “Thanks to Reach Out and Read, we have books available for families at IHS sites across the country, including Arizona, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and South Dakota.”

The collaboration with IHS is part of a larger initiative that aligns with Reach Out and Read’s vision to help underserved families in hard-to-reach locations. The nonprofit serves 212 tribal sites nationwide, including the 45 IHS sites that will benefit from this grant. Reach Out and Read works with publishers who specialize in Indigenous writers and illustrators so that children at tribal clinics can see themselves reflected in books that feature Indigenous characters and are written in half a dozen different Native languages.

“Children and families new to our clinic are always thrilled to learn that we are a Reach Out and Read provider,” said Dr. Jane Oski of Sacred Peaks Health Center in Flagstaff, Arizona. “Since we provide books in dominant tribal languages, such as Navajo and Hopi, families pass

the word to other tribal members in the greater Northern Arizona region. Not only are families visiting the clinic to get that free book, they are now also ensuring that their child is getting up-to-date medical care like immunizations.”

Access to early literacy resources is only one part of what makes Reach Out and Read’s model a [proven success](#). Children who are read to more often have improved language and listening skills, experience stronger emotional connections to their loved ones, and gain a lifelong love of reading. Reading with children creates moments that feel safe and secure, builds a lifelong bond between caregiver and child, and leads to better physical and emotional well-being.

A [State of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Families Report](#) outlines how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) include aspects of a child’s environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding. The data indicated American Indian/Alaska Native children experience a disparate number of ACEs, which link to poor physical, mental, and behavioral health outcomes.

In a 2021 [policy statement](#), the American Academy of Pediatrics emphasized research showing that safe, stable, and nurturing relationships can be a protective buffer against the biological harms of ACEs on children. The statement — which recommends a public health framework that includes support of positive parenting styles, developmentally appropriate play, and shared reading — recognizes Reach Out and Read specifically.

During routine well-child visits from birth to five years old, Reach Out and Read clinicians not only give age-appropriate, culturally responsive books to families, but they also discuss with parents how to use those books to engage with their infants and young children. This approach strengthens parent-child relationships and mitigates those adverse childhood experiences while also promoting healthy brain development and furthering language acquisition.

“Reach Out and Read’s model works best when it is integrated into systems that support the child and the entire family, like the Indian Health Service,” said Marty Martinez, CEO of Reach Out and Read. “What happens in the first few years creates the foundation of a child’s life. We’re excited to work with IHS and Indigenous families during those important first years, helping build strong relationships, supporting Native heritage, and increasing equity.”

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About Reach Out and Read: Reach Out and Read is 501(c)3 nonprofit that gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. As the only evidence-based national pediatric model focused on emotional connections endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Reach Out and Read serves children in all 50 of the United States through 6,000 clinics and 33,000 clinicians. For more information, visit reachoutandread.org.

About Indian Health Services: The IHS, an agency in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides a comprehensive health service delivery system for approximately 2.8 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who belong to 574 federally recognized tribes in 37 states. For more information, visit ihs.gov.