



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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President Nez and Vice President Lizer congratulate newly-appointed IHS Chief Medical Officer Dr. Loretta Christensen

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer congratulate Dr. Loretta Christensen, MBA, MSJ, FACS, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, for being appointed to serve as the new Chief Medical Officer for Indian Health Service. In her new role, Dr. Christensen will be the lead expert on medical and public health issues and help to guide the IHS Office of the Director and IHS staff across the country on health care policies and issues for tribal nations.

Prior to her recent appointment, Dr. Christensen served with the IHS as a General Surgeon and as the Chief Medical Officer for the Navajo Area Indian Health Service from 2017-2021. She previously served as the Chief Medical Officer for the Gallup Service Unit from 2014-2017, and also as acting IHS Chief Medical Officer from May to June of this year.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Christensen along with Navajo Area IHS Director Roselyn Tso, have worked closely with the Navajo Department of Health and the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 by implementing public health policies and practices on the Navajo Nation.

“We are very proud and thankful of the work that Dr. Christensen has done for the Navajo people, especially during the COVID-19. She is a frontline warrior and we will miss her as she moves on to another prestigious position with IHS. I am confident that her guidance, expertise, and leadership helped to save many lives. We had many meetings and discussions with Dr. Christensen and the Navajo Area IHS team throughout the pandemic and she provided tremendous insight and recommendations that led to the reduction of new COVID-19 cases and the high vaccination rate on the Navajo Nation. We are very thankful for her service and we will pray for her continued success in her new role,” said President Nez.

Dr. Christensen earned her undergraduate degree in biological anthropology from Harvard University and her medical degree from Hahnemann University Medical School, now the Drexel University College of Medicine. She completed her general surgery residency at Monmouth Medical Center in New Jersey and a fellowship in trauma and critical care at Cooper University

Hospital. She also holds a master of business administration from Georgian Court University and a master of jurisprudence with a specialty in healthcare law from Seton Hall Law School.

“We couldn’t be prouder of Dr. Christensen and all that she has accomplished. She is a champion for her people and we are happy that she will be able to serve even more people at a higher level. As the Chief Medical Officer for Navajo Area IHS, she played a major role in many public health policy decisions and most recently, played a significant role in overseeing the distribution and implementation of the COVID-19 vaccines on the Navajo Nation. We congratulate her and wish her the very best,” said Vice President Lizer.

Prior to her service with the Navajo Area IHS, Dr. Christensen served for 17 years as the clinical trauma director and associate director of the surgical intensive care unit at Jersey Shore University Hospital. She was also the director of integrative medicine and non-invasive pain management services, as well as an assistant professor of surgery at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. She has specialty training in medical acupuncture, palliative care, functional medicine, just culture, quality management and patient safety. Dr. Christensen is board certified in general surgery and a fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

Dr. Christensen’s appointment as chief medical officer comes after the retirement of Rear Adm. Michael Toedt, M.D., who served in the role from June 2017 through July 2021.

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