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NEEDIEST INDIAN FAMILIES TO BENEFIT FROM REVISED BIA HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM PROCEDURES

The Bureau of Indian Affairs' Housing Improvement Program (HIP), which provides a safety net for needy American Indian families who do not qualify for assistance from other housing programs, is streamlining its procedures to ensure that those with greatest need will receive safe, sound, and sanitary housing more quickly.

"We look forward to enacting these new procedures because they will speed the delivery of decent housing to the neediest tribal members," said Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Kevin Gover.

The new rules will be published in the Federal Register on March 2 and will become effective 30 days after publication. The BIA has revised the procedures governing the Housing Improvement Program to clarify and simplify the conditions and terms for providing housing assistance and to allow additional flexibility in administering the program. The HIP focuses on the repair and renovation of existing substandard housing. Other Federally sponsored programs, such as those sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, are responsible for most new housing construction in Indian Country. Approximately 85 percent of the tribes with active Housing Improvement Programs operate them through Self-Determination agreements or Self-Governance compacts.

Significant changes to the procedures include:

- Reducing the annual income levels for eligible program applicants to focus program services on the most needy families who cannot qualify for other housing resources.
- Eliminating one program service, the down-payment assistance category, to refocus the program on repairs and renovations that result in safe, sound, and sanitary homes.
- Increasing from $20,000 to $35,000 the amount of funds that can be expended to renovate an existing home.
- Allowing for regional differences in construction and labor costs.