



# **SOCIAL SERVICES**

*for Elders in Indian Country*

## **THE GENERAL POPULATION AND TRIBAL-SPECIFIC SOCIAL SERVICES ARE PROVIDED BY GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS, FOR-PROFIT OR NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.**

- The goal of social services is to prevent and alleviate elder abuse and neglect.
- Indigenous communities have developed tribally operated elder services and programs to meet their older or disabled adults' needs.
- In 1965, the United States Congress passed a federal bill, the Older American Act (OAA) to address the lack of community social services for older persons.
- The OAA provides federal funding for aging services, resulting in expanded services all over the country.<sup>1</sup>

## **OAA TITLE VI**

- In 1978 the OAA was amended to include Title VI, which established federal funding for elderly nutrition and supportive services for Native Americans (American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians).
- The program has expanded to include caregiver support services.

## **TITLE VI PROGRAMS PROVIDE FUNDING FOR THE FOLLOWING SERVICES IN INDIAN COUNTRY:**

### **Nutritional Services:**

- Congregate meals
- Home delivery meals
- Guest meals
- Voluntary contribution for meals

### **Supportive Services:**

- Transportation
- Outreach
- Health promotion and wellness
- Elder abuse education and prevention

### **Caregiving Supportive Services:**

- Information and assistance
- Counseling and training
- Support groups
- Respite services

## **TITLE VI PROGRAM AND ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION**

All social services outlines in the Title VI Program can be used to prevent elder abuse and neglect by:

- Encouraging participation by seniors in communal services
- Helping older and disable adult access financial help
- Balancing family support with older and disabled adult's independence<sup>1</sup>

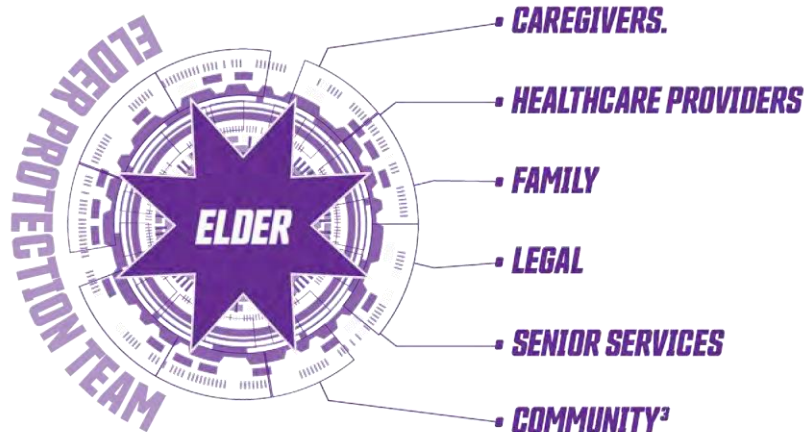
### **Screening for Abuse and Neglect**

- Screening for elder abuse and neglect is the first step in detection, management, and prevention.
- Best practice is to screen all older adults, especially those considered at risk.
- There are several established elder abuse and neglect screening tools that social service providers may use.
- The best screening tool adapted for Native Americans is the Native Elder Life Scale.
  - o It is used with the Hwalek-Sengstock Elder Screening Abuse Test.
- Some factors that make an older adult vulnerable to abuse and neglect include:
  - o Social isolation
  - o Frailty, functional disability, or cognitive impairment
  - o Pathology of the abuser
  - o Caregiver stress or anger
  - o Dependence of the older adults on the abuser
  - o Dependence of the abuser on the older adult
  - o History of violence in the family<sup>2</sup>

## ELDER PROTECTION TEAM

- An Elder Protection Team is a practical approach to addressing elder abuse and neglect in Indian Country.
- The Elder Protection Team addresses the issues of elder abuse and is dependent upon each specific tribe's resources.
- Possible responsibilities of an Elder Protection Team may include:
  - o Educating the community and conducting prevention activities
  - o Building collaboration and trust
  - o Maintaining confidentiality while responding to elder abuse
  - o Reporting suspected abuse and intervening when necessary
  - o Restoring respect of older adults

**MEMBERS OF AN ELDER PROTECTION TEAM:** It always includes the Elder. Due to the complexity of elder abuse, the team's makeup is individualized and may include:



## MANDATORY REPORTING

- Some tribes. Have adopted an elder abuse code or ordinance to protect tribal elders from abuse and neglect.
- Tribal elder abuse programs are limited, and little incidence data exists.
- If you suspect elder abuse or neglect, report it to your state or tribal APS office or local police department.
- If you need help locating a number to call to report elder abuse, please visit: <https://www.nieji.org/hotlines>

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- The terms disrespecting and bothering are commonly used by Elders when referring to abusive acts.
- Elders often consider emotional abuse equally as hurtful as physical abuse.
- Some Elders may believe they are deserving of abuse or neglect because they feel they are not meeting their role or expectations as an Elder.
- Becoming an Elder in many Native American communities is not typically a set age, but a distinct status is earned from wisdom, knowledge, and responsibility to others, to name a few traits and qualities.
- Be aware of cultural sensitivities and aspects of practice that differ from other ethnicities.
- Respect and allow spiritual practices like smudging, singing, and other forms of prayer.
- The older adult may prefer to communicate in their Indigenous language

**CALL THE POLICE OR 911 IMMEDIATELY IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN IMMEDIATE, LIFE THREATENING DANGER.**



If the danger is not immediate, but you suspect that abuse has occurred or is occurring, please tell someone. Relay your concerns to the local/tribal adult protective services, long-term care ombudsman, or the tribal police.

## REFERENCES

1. Administration for Community Living. (2020). Services for Native Americans (OAA Title VI). Retrieved on August 6, 2020 from <https://acl.gov/programs/services-native-americans-ooa-title-vi>
2. Jervis, L.L., Fickenscher, A., and Beals, J., and the Shielding American Indian Elders Project Team. (2014). Assessment of elder mistreatment in two American Indian samples: psychometric characteristics of the HS-EAST and the Native Elder Life Financial Exploitation and Neglect Measures. *Journal of applied gerontology: the official journal of the Southern Gerontological Society*, 33(3), 336-356.
3. Wewa, W. (2014). Multidisciplinary Team Approach on Elder Abuse. Presented at the Tribal Law and Policy Institute Pre-Conference in Addressing Elder Abuse in Indian Country, Palm Springs, CA.

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The NIEJI project has been retired, but they have granted NIJIJ permission to share materials.

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