

Strengthening Services for Native Elders Act

Senator Tina Smith (D-MN) and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

There are over 26 million American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) adults over 65 living in the United States.¹ Unfortunately, tribal elders face significant health disparities. Tribal elders are more likely to confront mortality at a younger age, and have higher mortality rates due to alcoholism, diabetes, and suicide than the general population.² AIAN elders are also more likely to live in poverty and lack access to health care.^{3,4} Given these disparities and our responsibility to tribal elders, the federal government has invested in programs and services that support Native American elders.

AIAN elders across the country receive support from their tribes to continue aging in their own homes and communities. The Older Americans Act (OAA) provides grant funding for more than 250 aging programs to deliver nutrition and supportive services to tribal elders across the country. According to a recent survey, these Native American aging programs mostly offered nutrition services, but they have limited funding and staff capacity to offer money management, home modification, transportation, chore assistance, legal support, and other supportive services that AIAN elders need.⁵ In addition, while Native American aging program staff provide efficient services through limited means, program administrators report that they are in need of greater technical assistance and support to better serve AIAN elders.⁶

The *Strengthening Services for Native Elders Act* would strengthen support for AIAN elders within the OAA by:

- Adding a new grant program with additional funding for tribal organizations to provide a wider range of home and community-based services, including transportation, information and referral, case management, health and wellness programs, legal assistance, and other services that support the independence of AIAN elders.
- Enhancing training programs and technical assistance to support Native American aging programs through program management, data development and use, basic business skills, grant development, program and service innovations, and training and certification.

This legislation is supported by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A) and responds to a top-10 priority of the Leadership Council on Aging Organizations (LCAO).

¹ 2017 American Community Survey Estimates.

² National Congress of American Indians. (2015). Health Care: Reducing Disparities in the Federal Health Care Budget. Retrieved from http://www.ncai.org/policy-issues/tribal-governance/budget-and-appropriations/07_FY2016_Health_NCAI_Budget.pdf

³ Braun, K.L. & LaCounte, C. (2019). American Society on Aging (ASA). The Historic and Ongoing Issue of Health Disparities Among Native Elders. Retrieved from <https://www.asaging.org/blog/historic-and-ongoing-issue-health-disparities-among-native-elders>

⁴ Kaiser Family Foundation. (2018). Health and Health Care for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIANs). Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/infographic/health-and-health-care-for-american-indians-and-alaska-natives-aians/>

⁵ National Association for Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) & Miami University Scripps Gerontology Center. (2017). National Title VI Program Survey: Serving Tribal Elders Across the United States. Available at https://www.n4a.org/Files/Title%20VI%20Survey/Title%20VI%20Program%20Survey_508.pdf

⁶ Ibid.