

From Awareness to Advocacy: Framing Obesity as a Health Equity Issue for Indigenous Elders

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Key Components of Health Equity for Indigenous Elders

Culturally Competent Healthcare

- Respecting Cultural Traditions
- Need for Indigenous Healthcare Workers

Access to Quality Healthcare Services

- Overcoming Geographic Barriers
- Addressing Transportation & Infrastructure Issues

Addressing Historical & Systemic Inequities

- Impact of Colonialism
- Institutionalized Racism

Access to Mental Health & Trauma Care

- Mental Health Disparities
- Trauma Informed Care

Key Components of Health Equity for Indigenous Elders

Chronic Disease Management

- Prevalence of High Rates of Chronic Illnesses
- Disease Prevention & Education

Addressing Social Determinants of Health

- Poverty & Housing Insecurity
- Environmental Health

Culturally Appropriate Elder Care

- Respect for the Role of Elders
- Support for Family & Community Caregivers

Improved Data & Research

- Accurate Data Collection
- Community-Led Research

Framing Health Equity Through the Lens of Obesity

Obesity Is a Chronic Condition for Indigenous Elders

A Fact Sheet by the American Society on Aging



Obesity was first designated as a disease by the American Medical Association in 2013, and this resolution was reaffirmed in 2023, stating that obesity is a disease state “with multiple pathophysiological aspects requiring a range of interventions.”¹ Despite this official recognition, Medicare does not classify the condition as chronic.

This leaves Indigenous elders and their families with no access to the full continuum of available weight-management and obesity-care options. Yet Indigenous communities and their elders have disproportionately higher rates of obesity than other populations in the United States, a statistic driven by lack of access to health insurance, transportation and healthy diets.²



During a series of roundtables with the American Society on Aging in the fall of 2023, more than 40 Indigenous elders, service providers and researchers shared knowledge, data and personal experiences with obesity in their communities and families.



These conversations highlighted that **obesity concerns span generations and cannot be addressed without consistent and equitable access to food, transportation and services delivered via cultural appreciation and trust.**

The United States' healthcare systems—both healthcare providers and insurance providers—must **acknowledge and meet the range of needs of all Indigenous communities.** With the designation of obesity as a chronic condition, Indigenous communities will be better suited to treat obesity in the manner that individuals and the tribal community feel are most appropriate.

48% of American Indian and Alaska Native adults were living with obesity in 2018³

Contributors to Obesity for Indigenous Elders

A Fact Sheet by the American Society on Aging



Obesity in Indigenous elders is caused by a constellation of factors, including **inconsistency in access to treatment, lack of funding and aid, and the loss of culturally appropriate care.** Each factor contributes to the disproportionately high rates of obesity in the Indigenous elder community.¹

During a series of roundtables with the American Society on Aging in the fall of 2023, more than 40 Indigenous elders, service providers and researchers shared knowledge, data and personal experiences with obesity in their communities and families.

These conversations highlighted that obesity is viewed as a lifelong, intergenerational issue and **cannot be addressed without consistent and equitable access to healthy food, transportation to service providers, and healthcare services that are delivered via cultural appreciation and trust.** There is great variance in resources between tribal communities, making treatment for obesity difficult to assess and solve for, but first, many elders feel that even their most basic needs are not being met.



The United States' healthcare systems—both healthcare providers and insurance providers—must **acknowledge and meet the range of needs of all Indigenous communities.** Then Indigenous communities will be better suited to treat obesity in the manner that individuals and the tribal community feel are most appropriate. These solutions also may vary greatly based upon an individual's or communities' values, but roundtable attendees expressed the desire to have **full access to all care options, and the ability to integrate traditional healing practices with Western care.**

Range in Care Options for Indigenous Elders with Obesity

A Fact Sheet by the American Society on Aging



Federally supported care systems currently in place for Indigenous elders do not recognize traditional ways of healing and medicine. There is a great need to change these care systems to match the variety in care options desired by elders and tribal communities. **Western healthcare (insurance providers and healthcare service providers) must recognize and incorporate into care options the traditional healing practices many communities have been practicing for centuries.**

During a series of roundtables with the American Society on Aging in the fall of 2023, more than 40 Indigenous elders, service providers and researchers shared knowledge, data and personal experiences with obesity in their communities and families. In these conversations, the value and importance of quality care was expressed, but access to it remains a serious problem. To provide better care specifically for obesity, Indigenous elders need more options covered by culturally cognizant insurance providers and care providers.



Providers and insurance services must acknowledge and meet the range of healthcare needs of all Indigenous communities. Then these communities will be better suited to treat obesity in the manner that individuals and the tribal community feel is most appropriate. These solutions also may vary greatly based upon an individual's or communities' values, but **roundtable attendees expressed the desire to have full access to all care options, and the ability to integrate traditional healing practices with Western care.**

THE MEDICINE WHEEL

The circle represents balance, connection, and the continuous nature of all creation.

A system of teachings and rituals used for passing down indigenous cultural knowledge.

SOURCE: THE INDIGENOUS MEDICINE WHEEL. SHELBY TAYLOR

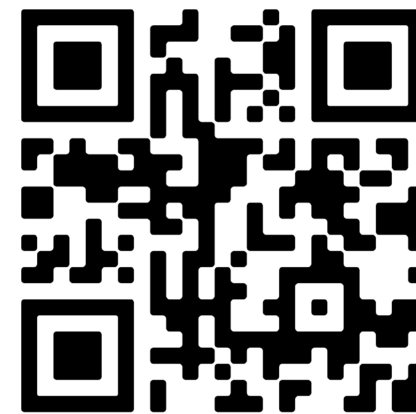


Fact sheets available on the EWA Conference app.

Hill Day 2024



Hill Day resources, including the 3 Fact Sheets and to read more on this topic in ASA's Generations publications.



SCAN ME

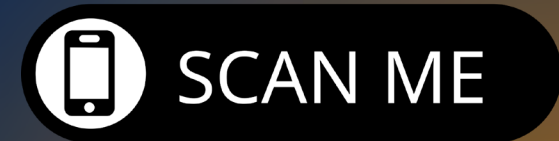
Hill Day 2024



Three steps we can take today to advance the health of Indigenous elders and tackle the obesity epidemic in tribal communities:

- 1) Provide nutritious & culturally appropriate foods in the Older Americans Act's Title III and Title VI programs.
- 2) Increase funding allocation for Indian Health Services (IHS) to allow for better access and culturally appropriate care.
- 3) Ensure greater access and options for obesity care treatment.

Hill Day resources, including the 3 Fact Sheets and to read more on this topic in ASA's Generations publications.

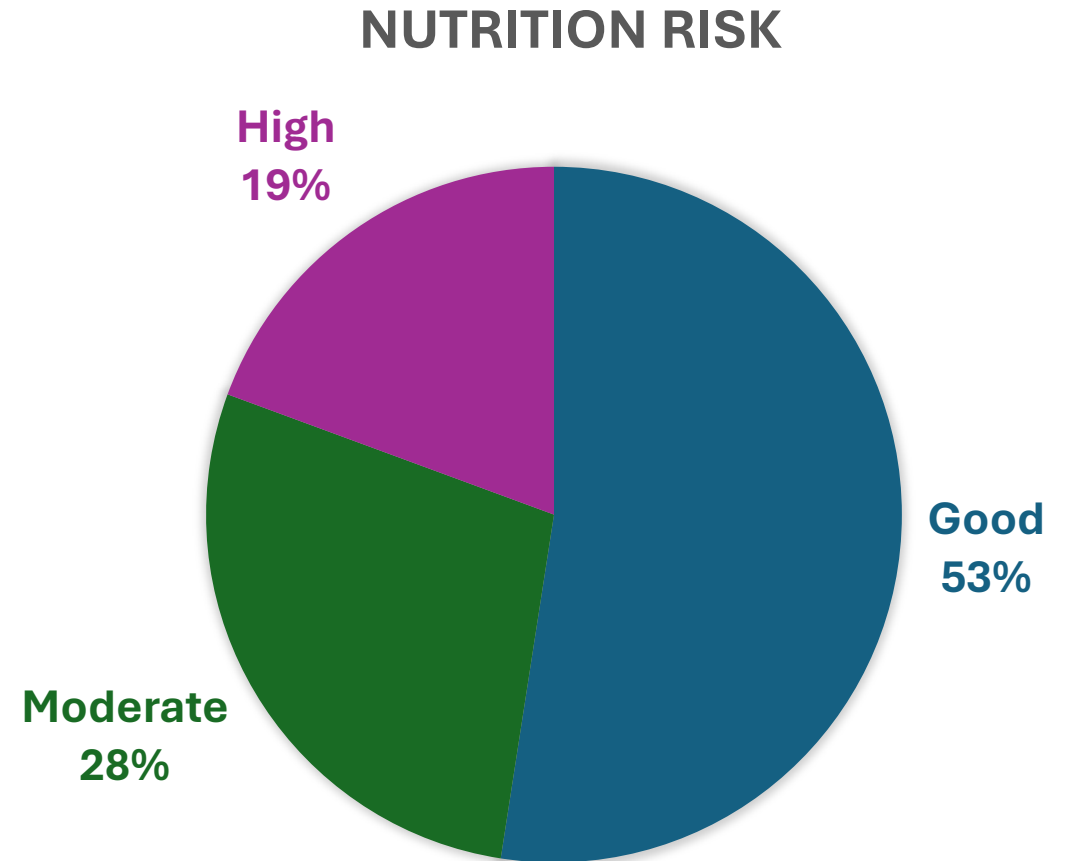
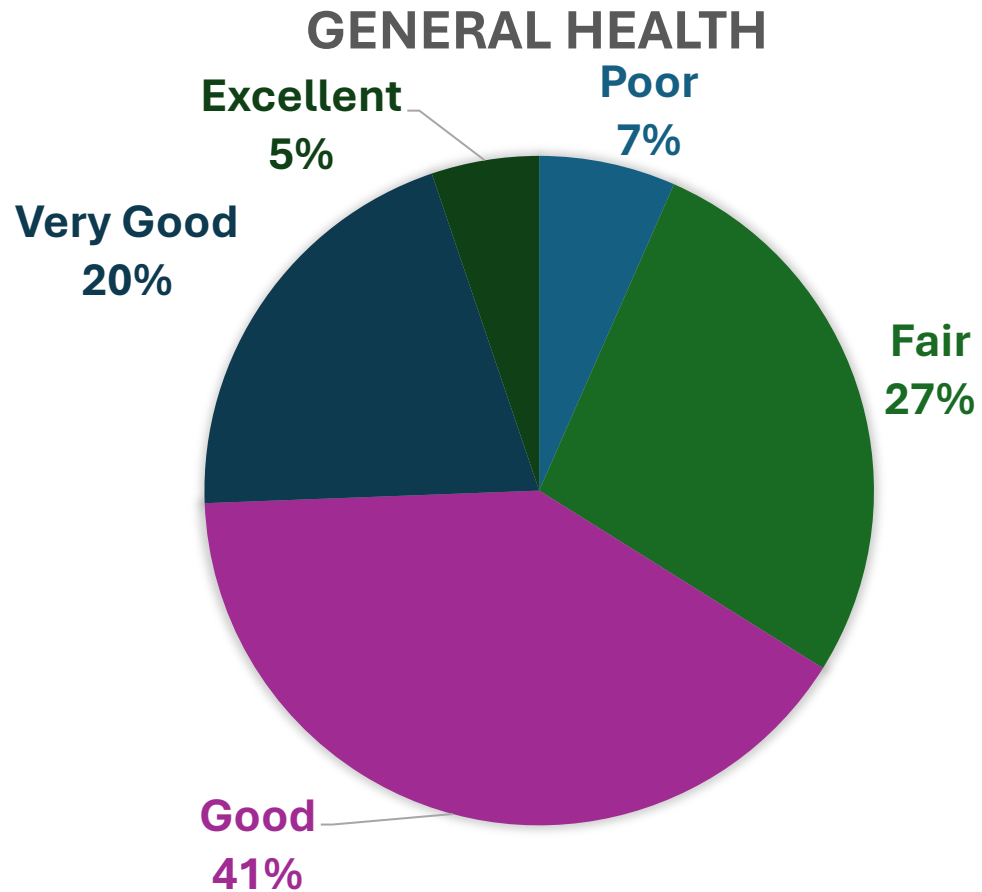




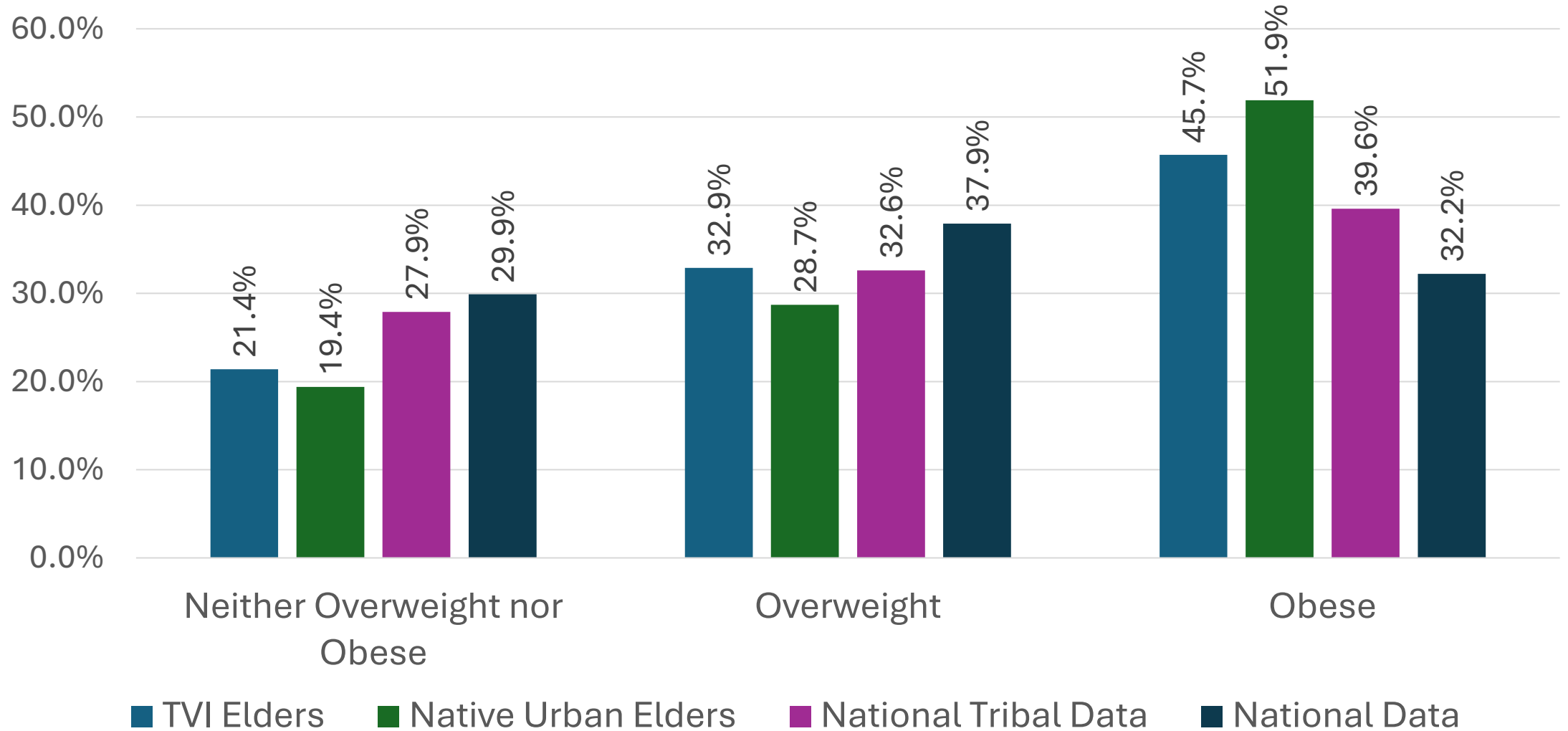
OAA Title VI and Obesity among Indigenous Elders

Heidi Robertson, MPH, RDN, LD
Engaging with Aging Conference
Wednesday, November 13, 2024

Client Profile – TVI Needs Assessment



BMI Categories of Tribal Elders



Transportation

53% Title VI grantees
have a tribal transit
program in their
community

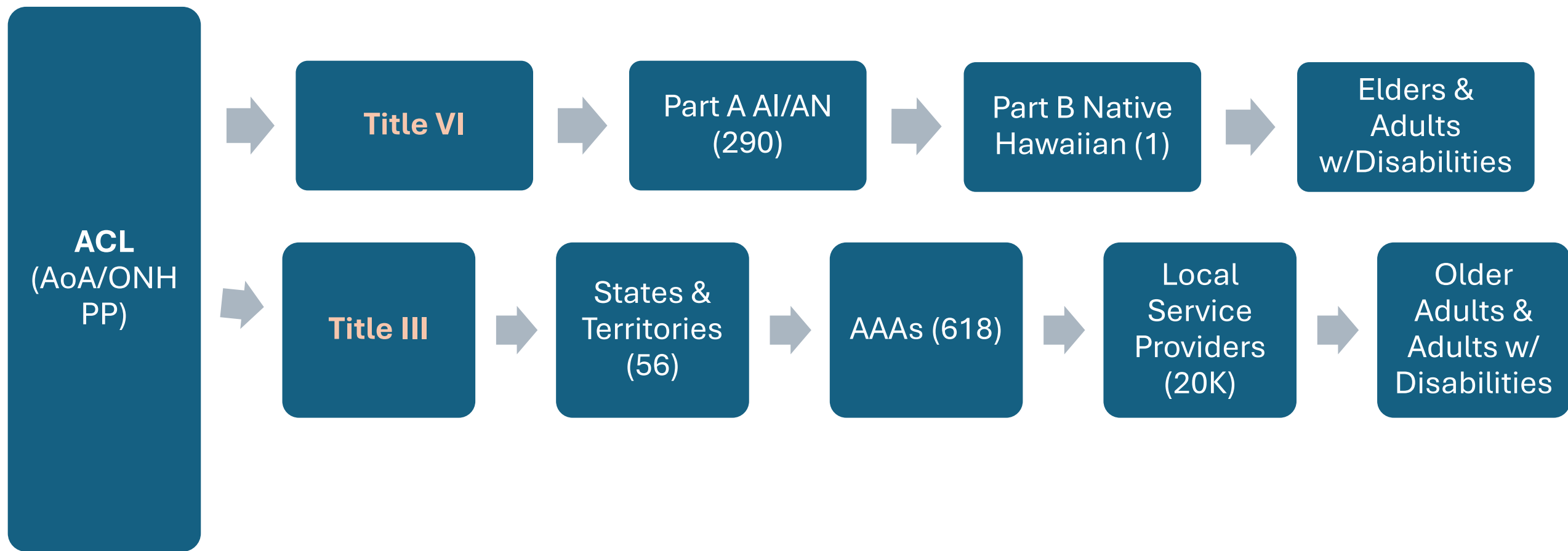
66% of Title VI
programs **coordinate**
with these programs
to **provide rides** to
elders

Approx. 50% of Title
VI programs have
access to a
wheelchair
accessible vehicle

The background of the slide is a close-up photograph of a dish. It features a large, golden-brown, textured patty, possibly a falafel or a veggie burger, which is the central focus. To the left and bottom of the patty, there are fresh green leafy vegetables, likely spinach or arugula, and slices of red tomatoes. The entire image is slightly blurred and has a dark, semi-transparent overlay to make the white text stand out.

The Older Americans Act Network & the Title VI Program

The Older Americans Act (OAA) Network



Intent of the OAA Nutrition Programs



REDUCE
HUNGER, FOOD
INSECURITY,
AND
MALNUTRITION



PROMOTE
SOCIALIZATION



PROMOTE
HEALTH AND
WELL-BEING



Title VI Eligibility

Title VI Program Eligibility

- All federally recognized Tribes with at least 50 elders, aged 60+
 - Those without 50 elders can form a consortium
- Complete an application, needs assessment, and tribal resolutions
- 3-year funding cycle.

Title VI Program Eligibility

- AI/AN/NH Elder
 - Part A grants (American Indian/Alaska Natives)
 - The tribe determines the age of eligibility – Usu. 55 years.
 - Part B grants (Native Hawaiians), eligibility set at 60 years.
- Reside in your designated service area

Note: TVI funding is based on the number of older adults aged 60 and over.

Title VI Services

- Congregate Meals
- Home Delivered Meals
- Nutrition Education
- Transportation
- Chore Service
- Information & Assistance
- Case Management
- Caregiver Support Services



Part A/B Grants - Other Permitted Nutrition/Health-Related Services

- Diet counseling
- Food banks/distribution centers
- Blood Sugar checks
- Diabetes education
- Foot Care
- Blood Pressure Checks
- Exercise Classes
- Evidence-based health programs
- Falls avoidance education
- Medication management
- **Traditional foods activities**
- **Other traditional activities**
- Support groups
- Socialization activities

“The elders roast sweet corn in an underground pit and, once cooked overnight, the elders would help to string them together for drying. This will be used during their traditional meals menu.”

Elders Involvement in Traditional Food Activities

Involvement	Percent (n-226)
Provide recipes	50
Teach others how to obtain, use or prepare traditional food items	47
Participate in elders program/senior center activities, such as berry-picking event	36
Gather traditional ingredients	22
Help plan menus	22
Participate in tribal or village activities, such as community fishing event	21
Volunteer in community garden	18
Elders are not involved in any traditional food activities	12
Other*	8

*Other ways that elders are involved in traditional food activities include suggesting foods, helping to cook, bringing traditional foods in potluck, gathering or donating traditional foods, participating in intergenerational activities and participating in surveys.

Resources

- [Tackling the Complex Issue of Obesity Among Indigenous Elders](#)
Heidi Robertson and Nanette Taho
- [Identifying Our Needs: A Survey of Elders Cycle VIII \(2020-2023\)](#)
- [| NRCNAA](#)
- [Traditional Foods Among Native Elders | NRCNAA](#)
- [Native Urban Elder Needs Assessment Survey \(NUENAS 1.0\) | NRCNAA](#)
- [Title VI Native American Aging Program Surveys | USAging](#)

Thank you!

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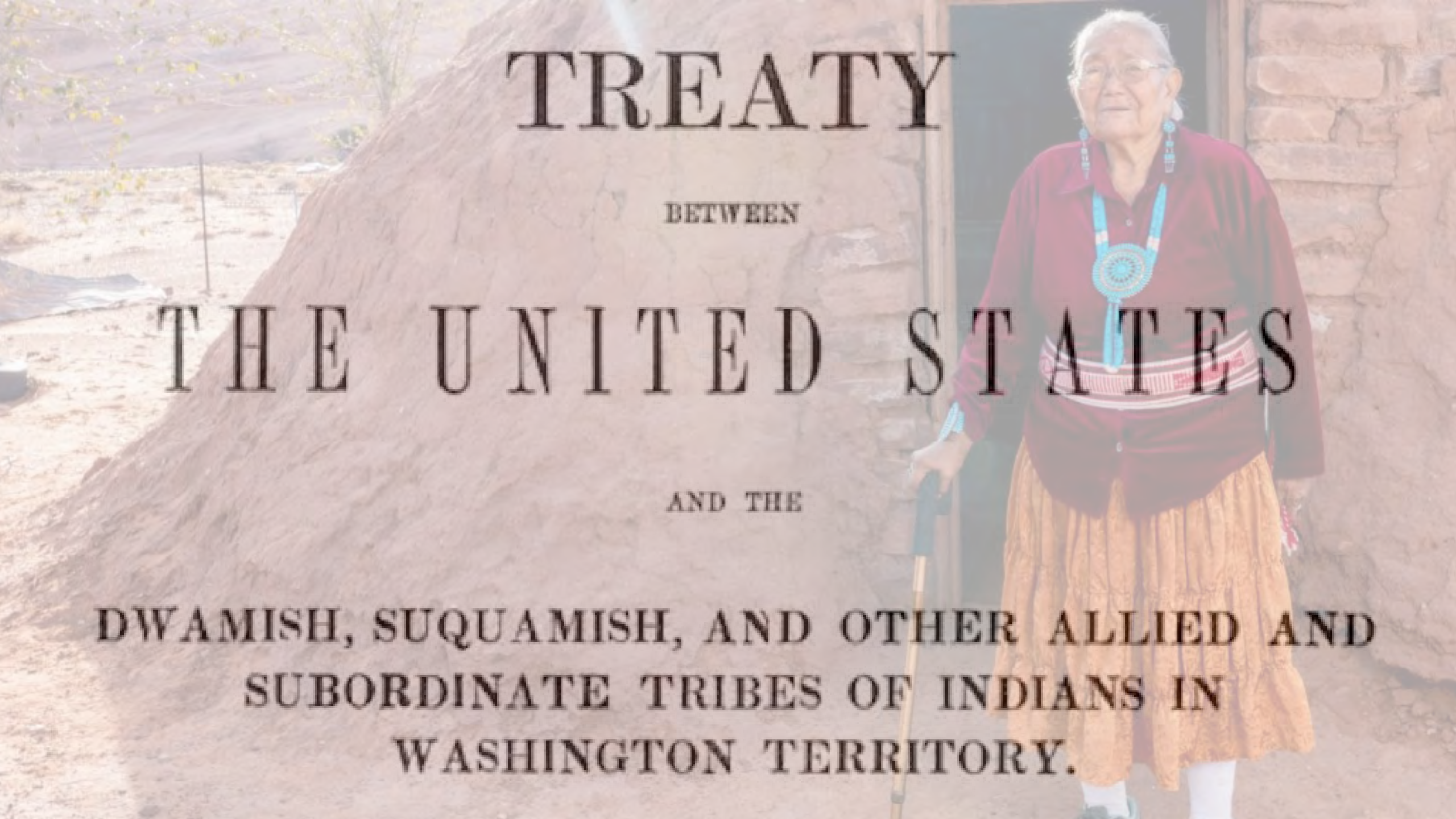
www.heritagehealthhi.com

Health Inequities on Native American Elders

Presented by Billie Tohee, Executive Director of the National Indian Council on Aging

NATIVE INDIAN TRIBES





TREATY

BETWEEN

THE UNITED STATES

AND THE

DWAMISH, SUQUAMISH, AND OTHER ALLIED AND
SUBORDINATE TRIBES OF INDIANS IN
WASHINGTON TERRITORY.



Photo Courtesy: Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium



Photo Courtesy: Indianz.com

Technical Assistance and Resource Center

You are here: [Home](#) / [Programs](#) / Technical Assistance and Resource Center

The National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) offers electronic and direct contact training modules for non-Native service providers to learn about working with tribes and American Indian and Alaska Native elders. Our trainings focus on

- Understanding the history and traditions of Native elders
- Best practices for success in Indian Country
- Finding creative ways to support and advocate alongside our elders
- Learning more about Native people living with disabilities and the resources available to them

If you are interested in receiving one of our trainings, **please contact us** to discuss the training needs of yourself or your organization.



“Caring for Our Wisdom-Keepers: Supporting Native Elders” lists the barriers to elder wellness and includes personal quotes from elders themselves. It discusses the importance of cultural competency and gives community and traditional solutions to advocate and support our elders. This training will deepen one’s understanding of the needs of our elders and help participants learn how to meet those needs and advocate by their side.

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With “Caring for Native Elders: Best Practices,” participants will learn about the history of Native communities’ post-colonization and how it impacts health outcomes. In this training, participants will gain the skills to identify, affirm, and effectively serve Native elders with a focus on building long-term relationships. It offers the opportunity to review successful community models, role play and apply their learning through discussion.



“Caring for Native Elders: History & Cultural Traditions” will teach participants to identify Native cultural traditions, as well as how to utilize key resources to incorporate Native traditions into their practice or organizational approach. They will gain an understanding of the history of Native peoples of the North American continent.

Contact us to learn the skills and best practices to serve Native elders more effectively in your community.

Resources



Fact Sheets

Download PDF fact sheets about NICOA, our programs, healthcare information, social services and economic well-being.

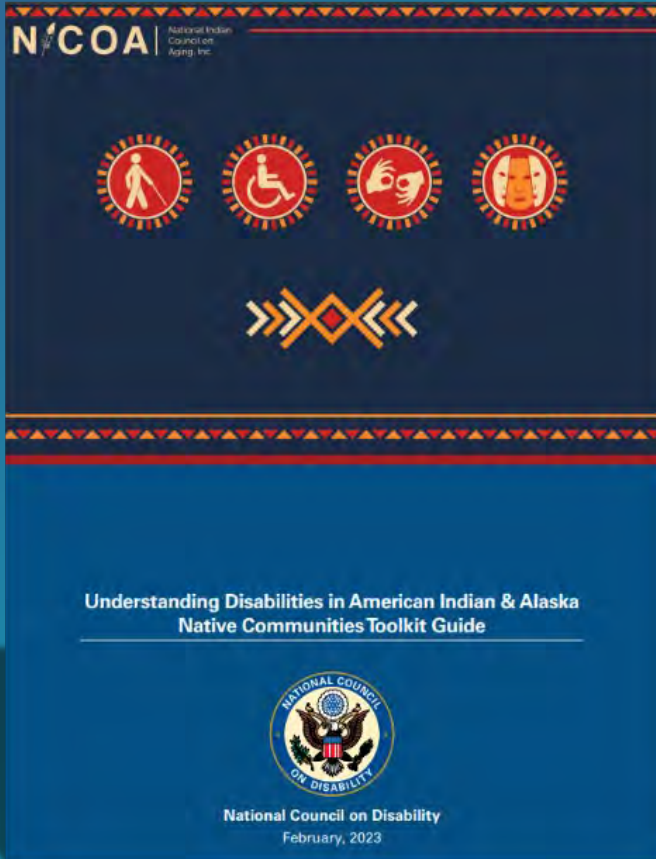
[Learn More](#)



Elder Resources

Read about the Aging Network, fall prevention, Indigenous foods, Alzheimer’s disease, caregiving, long-term care and more.

[Learn More](#)



Understanding Disabilities in American Indian & Alaska Native Communities

This project was supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$215,512.00 with 75 percentage funded by ACL/HHS and \$71,838.00 and 25 percentage funded by non-governmental source(s). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor are an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.



THANK YOU!

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Council on
Aging, Inc.

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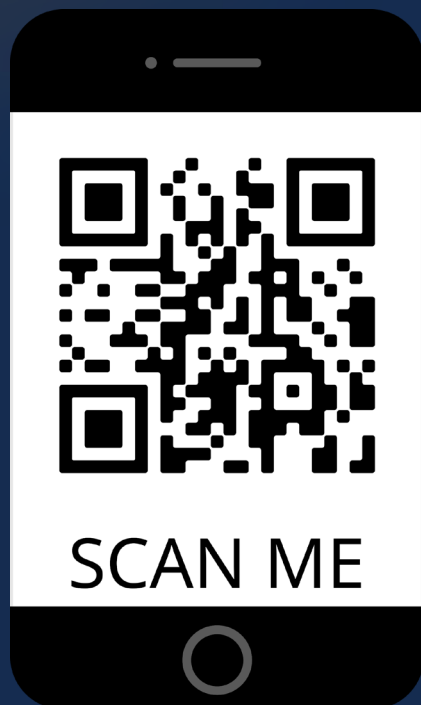
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