



TSLGBTQ
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World Elder Abuse Awareness Day and Two Spirit Elderly

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World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) is held each year on June 15. WEAAD began in 2006 with the support of the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the World Health Organization of the United Nations. When the National Indigenous Elder Justice Initiative (NIEJI), the national resource center for Indigenous elder abuse prevention, was established in 2011, it began encouraging WEAAD events in Indian Country in 2012. Numerous tribes have begun offering WEAAD activities, whether on June 15 or with elder abuse prevention conferences sometime during the year. Since 2012, NIEJI has co-sponsored WEAAD events with many tribes on WEAAD and other times during the year. We broke new trails in 2012 by live casting a half-day of speakers on elder abuse over the internet. Last year with the pandemic and shut down all over the country, NIEJI presented a WEAAD panel on Facebook which subsequently had hundreds of shares and views within the week.

Over the past 10 years, I have often described working on elder abuse prevention in Indian Country as the adage of “How do you eat an elephant?” but it is more like “How do you eat a whole herd of stampeding elephants?” When NIEJI began in 2011, there were not any resources on elder abuse that were culturally relevant for U.S. Indigenous people living in tribal communities or urban areas, and only 40 of the 565





federally recognized tribes at the time had elder abuse codes. Additionally, training was not available for U.S. Indigenous communities to develop tribal codes, increase awareness of elder abuse, or develop models for elder abuse prevention programs. Today we have culturally informed resources, trainings, and continue to develop materials as our communities need them. But there is still a great need to understand the risk and protective factors and identifying interventions that effectively prevent abuse.

When we look at the needs of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) elders, at the top of the list of needs are safety, housing, and caregiving. There is very little research on AI/AN elderly in general, and there is even less research or data for Two Spirit older adults. Many Two Spirit AI/AN elderly live in urban areas with less social support and frequently travel back and forth between urban and reservations settings (circular migration) (1). Any data is difficult to separate when looking at Two Spirit health and welfare indicators, especially in urban locations since AI/AN represent a small percentage of the total population and often the sample size is too small for analysis. What we do know is the U.S. general population research indicates that abuse is common and under-reported, with 10 percent of elderly experiencing abuse (2). We do not have a clear indication of elder abuse rates among AI/ANs, but we know it is occurring (2) (3). Elder abuse in AI/AN communities is often unreported due to a lack of resources and hesitancy to report to protect abusive family members or friends. Moreover, elders often do not identify as victims as the concept does not align with cultural values. In some instances, they fear they will be institutionalized, abandoned, or retaliated against if they report abuse (3).

Violence against Two Spirit AI/AN people and safety are closely related. The high rates of violence make it difficult to find safety in housing, caregiving, and community. In one state survey, almost one-in-three (29.4%) TSLGBTQ+ AI/AN reported experiencing hate violence (2). This is a rate higher than any other LGBTQ group. AI/AN Two Spirit, lesbian, and bisexual women experienced sexual assault (85%) and physical assault (78%) at extremely high rates (3).





There are also significant housing challenges. Almost half (47%) of AI/AN transgender have been denied housing and experienced housing discrimination (3). AI/AN elderly prefer to age in their own homes and their own communities. Unfortunately, there are less than twenty residential facilities for AI/AN elderly in tribal communities in the entire U.S. and many staff in other residential facilities lack understanding of culture and diversity in the care of AI/AN elderly. When we look at rural and remote tribal communities, they may lack electricity and running water and only be accessible by dirt roads that are poorly maintained (4). The issues of TSLGBTQ+ AI/AN elderly in long term care facilities include potential rejection or neglect by the caregivers, lack of acceptance and respect by fellow residents, and feelings that they must hide their sexual orientation (5).

When it comes to health status, TSLGBTQ+ elderly are at higher risk of negative health outcomes than other AI/AN who already experience adverse health outcomes (3). In 2016, there were an estimated 259,000 AI/ANs over the age of 65, with a projected growth to 649,000 by 2060 (6). With approximately 80 percent of AI/AN elderly living in urban areas or circularly migrating many are receiving care from non-Indigenous caregivers that lack cultural awareness and sensitivity. The lack of cultural awareness may increase the stress burden resulting poor quality of life and health outcomes, especially among TSLGBTQ+ AI/AN elderly. It is imperative that we focus on helping our elderly address advanced care planning so that their spiritual, medical, and end-of-life wishes are known and can be prepared for before caregiving and other services are needed. Advanced care planning is one of the best resources to help to prevent elder abuse among our most precious and most vulnerable.

During WEAAD, take the time to learn more about TSLGBTQ+ AI/AN elder abuse, ways to prevent elder abuse, educate others, and attend a WEAAD event in your community or a virtual event. Knowing more helps preserve, protect, restore respect and dignity of our TSLGBTQ+ elders! For more information, please visit <http://www.nieji.org/>.





If you suspect that abuse has occurred or is occurring, please tell someone. Relay your concerns to local/tribal adult protective services, long-term care ombudsman, or the tribal police.

Works Cited

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