

PROJECT RESULTS

Among results or products of the Project were:

1. Formation of a permanent National Indian Task Force on Aging, incorporated as the National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA).
2. Establishment and maintenance of continuous communications between the Council and the Administration on Aging and other agencies and organizations capable of providing supportive services to the Indian elderly
3. A conference report listing i.a.
 - a. Problems and unmet needs
 - b. Recommendations for future or remedial action, including proposed legislative changes.

The National Indian Council on Aging, upon its establishment, assumed the functions of the National Planning Committee for the Project. As anticipated, the membership of the National Planning Committee was absorbed into the new national body.

Establishment and maintenance of continuous communication and cooperation between representatives of the National Indian Council on Aging and the Administration on Aging, as well as with representatives of other agencies capable of providing supportive services, was a product expected as a definite result of the conference. This should lead to more extensive utilization of available resources, both human and material.

The first conference (summary) report, issued in late 1976, summarized the conference proceedings and listed concrete statements of problems, unmet needs, suggestions or recommendations for further action.

Copies of the report were furnished to all conference participants, the National Network on Aging, the NTCA Executive Board and Area representatives, and all Indian tribes, Alaska Native communities, and major urban and national Indian organizations. In addition, it has been furnished on request to many interested agencies, organizations, and individuals, including the Congressional Committees on Aging, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives.

An overall result of the conference was expected to be the generation of greater sensitivity to the needs of the American Indian elderly, combined with a continuous, ongoing effort to meet these needs through cooperative action of service providers and client representatives.

The National Indian Council on Aging now acts in the role of client representative. Whether greater sensitivity to the needs of the American Indian elderly is being generated, only time will tell.

IMPLICATIONS

Put in simple terms, the implications arising from the findings of the first National Indian Conference on Aging Project are:

1. The Indian elderly, with few exceptions, are not receiving all service benefits for which they are eligible.

2. The present national service provider system is not meeting the needs of this constituency.
3. Criteria, policies, regulations, and administrative guidelines governing service provision lack the flexibility to meet the special needs of this constituency.
4. Funding levels, where funds are allocated at all, are generally inadequate.
5. Personnel in decision making and in most direct client contact positions lack sensitivity to the culturally-based needs of the Indian elderly.
6. Tribal governments are subject to discrimination by laws, regulations, or policies denying them the right, as units of general purpose local government, to serve as prime sponsors and administrators of programs for which their elderly constituencies are eligible.
7. Federally recognized Indian tribes are discriminated against by laws, policies, or regulations denying them a status equal to or higher than the states, to which they are entitled by reason of their legal status as quasi-sovereign domestic nations. This denies them access to direct funding from the national federal level for such programs as those funded under the Older Americans Act, the Social Security Act (e.g., Title XX), etc., for which the states are prime sponsors.

These problems must be resolved. The most important implication for national policy and program administration lies in the area of sensitivity—sensitivity to the special relationship between the Federal Government and the federally recognized Indian tribes and the concurrent service commitments, as well as to the special and unique service needs of the Indian elderly which are aggravated by extreme poverty, geographic and cultural isolation, poor health, and lack of access to support services. Coupled with this sensitivity must be the sincere desire to work for alleviation of these conditions through a coordinated, cooperative effort of all appropriate levels of the Congress and the service provider agencies.

FOLLOW-UP

The application for funding of a three-year project by the Administration on Aging was approved and, as of September 29, 1976, the National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) began consistent follow-up on all Conference recommendations, first from a temporary location in Phoenix, Arizona. The Council's national headquarters office was established in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in January of 1977. Juana Lyon, while continuing to function as Project Coordinator of the National Indian Conference on Aging, was named Executive Director of the National Indian Council on Aging. James Bluestone was appointed as Administrative Assistant. The full membership of the National Indian Council on Aging currently consists of thirty-nine Indian and Alaska Native individuals, of whom twelve constitute the Board of Directors, which

spans twelve different geographic areas coinciding with the twelve Areas of the National Tribal Chairmen's Association and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (See map on P. 235.)

The overall purpose of the National Indian Council on Aging is to provide advocacy for the Indian and Alaska Native elderly. As its specific objective, the Council has set itself the task to bring about the remedial action recommended at the National Indian Conference on Aging. A detailed overview of these recommendations is included on P. 7 of this report.

The National Indian Council on Aging will pursue four basic avenues to accomplish its objectives:

1. Encouragement of legislative amendments where required to bring about the remedial action recommended;
2. Communication and cooperation with service provider agencies which can make the necessary changes within the scope of their current administrative guidelines;
3. Dissemination of information to the Indian community on available supportive resources and, where necessary,
4. Intercession with the appropriate agencies to provide access to these resources.

At the same time, the National Indian Council on Aging promotes the flow of information to and from the national Indian community through its newsletter, through the local activities of its members, and by holding its quarterly Council and Board meetings in different geographic locations in the United States. Representatives of service provider agencies are generally invited to attend these meetings and to present an overview of the services they can offer.

PROGRESS REPORT

Since its inception, the Council has established and maintained cooperative relationships with a number of federal agencies. In addition to the Administration on Aging and the National Network on Aging, the Council works closely with the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The latter is providing a substantial in-kind contribution of office space, equipment, and telephone service to the Council. As other specific agencies capable of the remedial actions recommended are identified, they are contacted, and a working relationship is established.

Remedial action to serve the needs of the Indian elderly is not entirely contingent upon increased allocations of funds, although in a number of program areas this will undoubtedly be the case. A very important part of the total follow-up effort will consist of better coordination of the programs of a number of agencies and better utilization of available resources. (There are, e.g., many Indian elders who are unaware of their eligibility for certain Social Security or Veterans benefits.) Conversely, there may be federal, state, or local agencies which, for one reason or another, have

not assumed responsibility for serving the eligible Indian segment of their target populations.

During its first project year, NICOA held monthly Board meetings and quarterly meetings of the full Council in varying locations throughout the United States, ranging from Florida to Alaska. Invitations to these meetings went out to representatives of Indian tribes and organizations as well as to federal and state service provider agencies, who were requested to provide overviews of the services extended to the Indian elderly in their area.

In many instances, these meetings presented Indian elders with their first opportunity to meet with staff of agencies mandated to serve them. In a number of states, these meetings resulted in greater sensitivity to the needs of the Indian elderly, evidenced by inclusion of Indians in Advisory Councils on Aging, increased funding for Indian tribes or communities, or continuation of the dialogue established at the meetings.

Amendments to the Older Americans Act making its provisions more relevant to the national Indian elderly community had been high on the list of priorities established at the National Indian Conference on Aging. NICOA followed through by establishing close working relationships with the Senate Special Committee on Aging, chaired by Senator Frank Church, and with the House Select Committee on Aging, chaired by Congressman Claude Pepper.

In its report, *Developments in Aging: 1976* (Part 1) which is excerpted in the Appendix, and its report on a hearing on the Nation's Rural Elderly held in Denver, Colorado, on March 23, 1977, the Senate Special Committee on Aging gave prominence to NICOA's effort to improve services to the Indian elderly. The entire Summary Report on the National Indian Conference on Aging was included in the record of the Denver hearing, along with the testimony of the NICOA Executive Director.

In rapid succession, NICOA was invited to provide input into national legislation affecting the elderly, the President's reorganization effort, welfare reform, meetings with the Secretary and Assistant Secretary (OHD) of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the Commissioner on Aging, the activities of national organizations serving the aging, Congressional hearings, and a hearing of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on age discrimination.

On May 5, 1977, the Administration on Aging issued Information Memorandum 77-52 to the National Aging Network, announcing the establishment of the National Indian Council on Aging and transmitting the Summary Report on the National Indian Conference on Aging. (See P. 117.) This was followed on May 26, 1977, by Program Instruction 77-21 relating to the implementation of Section 303(b)(3) of the Older Americans Act as amended (Services to Older Indian Tribal Members). (See P. 118.)

The Program Instruction mandated each state having an Indian tribe within its boundary to develop an Action Plan for Serving Elderly Indians and to submit it as part of the State Plan for each fiscal year. According to this

Program Instruction, the Action Plan must provide assurances, found satisfactory to the Commissioner on Aging, that the elderly members of each tribe in the state will receive a level of services under Title III which will provide benefits equivalent to those to be received by all non-Indian elderly individuals in the state.

As the only organization actively working nationwide for the Indian and Alaska Native elderly, NICOA soon became inundated with requests for information and technical assistance from Indian tribes and organizations attempting to develop or improve services to their elderly constituencies. It became apparent that the two professional staff persons in the Albuquerque headquarters office could not provide the assistance needed on a national scope. A number of proposals were developed to fulfill this need and to follow through on the Conference recommendations to establish an "Indian desk" in the Administration on Aging and to bring about amendments to the Older Americans Act which would establish more appropriate criteria for serving the Indian elderly.

Following the determination by the Administration on Aging that it could not establish an in-house Civil Service position whose incumbent would occupy the "Indian desk" recommended, the NICOA proposal to establish the position of Indian Liaison Specialist on its staff and locate the incumbent in Washington, D.C., was funded and the position established as of July 25, 1977. The primary function of the Indian Liaison Specialist is to assist and advise the Commissioner on Aging in matters affecting the Indian elderly. In addition, he establishes and maintains close working relationships with Congressional Committees and with national organizations and service provider agencies working in the field of Aging and in related fields.

In order to document the need for change or greater flexibility in some of the general criteria established for programs funded under the Older Americans Act, the National Indian Council on Aging proposed to research conditions affecting the Indian elderly which make such changes necessary. Some of these are: lower life expectancy, physical deterioration at an earlier age than non-Indians (due to exposure to a harsher environment), geographic isolation, exclusion from services for whatever reasons, cultural factors, including monolingualism. Lack of state jurisdiction on almost all federally recognized Indian reservations and the attitude on the part of many states that Indians are a federal responsibility add to the either total or partial exclusion of the Indian elderly from support services funded under the Older Americans Act, although there are a few notable exceptions. E.g., the States of New York (see P. 139), Montana, Washington, and Utah have established Indian Area Agencies on Aging.

In late September of 1977, the National Indian Council on Aging was informed that its proposal to conduct the necessary research would probably be funded, although with a reduced budget. The proposal submitted for funding of the 1978 National Indian Conference on Aging was approved, as was the grant

award for Project Year 2 of the 3-year Model Project for general Council operations.

At the same time, NICOA was informed that its proposal to begin building the capacity of tribal and Indian organization staffs to identify and utilize funding sources and develop aging programs in their areas was disapproved by the Administration on Aging. This setback will seriously reduce the anticipated capability of NICOA to provide training and technical assistance in Indian communities and to motivate Indian students to enter gerontology related careers.

Not only at the 1976 National Indian Conference on Aging, but in many expressions from representatives of Indian communities nationwide, the urgent need to work for direct funding from the federal level to the governments of Indian tribes and Alaska Native Corporations continued to be stated. This method is provided in legislation governing other federal programs, e.g. Title IV of the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 (EDA), the State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act of 1972 (General Revenue Sharing), the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973, the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (Community Block Grants), etc.

The National Indian Council on Aging developed a draft of legislation entitled the "Older American Indians Relief Act" which would, in effect, amend the Older Americans Act so as to provide Indian tribes, Alaska Native entities and tribal organizations the option to receive funding for Older Americans Act programs directly from the federal level out of an Indian set-aside, bypassing the State Agencies on Aging. The draft bill also provides for the establishment of a permanent "Indian desk" staff group in the Administration on Aging, comparable to those in other federal agencies, and for the acceptance of tribal statistics, verified by an agency of the Federal Government, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as the base for funding allocations, rather than 1970 U.S. Census figures. This provision was necessitated by the extensive undercount of the Indian population in the 1970 Census and the resultant drastic inadequacy of funds allocated to serve the Indian elderly.

CONCLUSION

The National Indian Conference on Aging held June 15-17, 1976, in Phoenix, Arizona, was the first of its kind. There were many expressions of gratitude to the National Tribal Chairmen's Association for its leadership role in serving as the catalyst for this historic gathering of the Indian elders and to Dr. Arthur S. Flemming, Commissioner on Aging, for his wholehearted support, both financially and philosophically, of the first National Indian Conference on Aging. (Refer to Page 77 for an overview of Conference evaluations.)

As part of their evaluation of the conference, participants overwhelmingly expressed the hope that there would be other, similar national conferences in the future to ensure the continuity of nationwide Indian

involvement. The members of the National Indian Council on Aging consider it premature to hold a follow-up conference before 1978 since the conditions requiring remedial action call for concentrated efforts over a period of several years. Council members feel confident that, by 1978, they will be able to report progress in many areas of services to the Indian elderly.

A number of facts about conference participants emerged very early in the proceedings. There was generally expressed appreciation of the fact that, for the first time in the history of Indian conferences, individual Indian elders had the opportunity to express publicly *their* views on their problems, instead of being a captive audience for numbers of professional speakers.

The seriousness with which the Indian elders approached their participation could serve as a model to any group of conference participants. They demonstrated that they had given a great deal of thought to the subjects discussed and, in many cases, came prepared with resolutions and recommendations which had been developed at meetings of the elderly in individual Indian communities.

Another realization which emerged very clearly from the conference was the fact that the Indian elders, who once occupied the place of honor in the Indian society, are worthy of regaining that stature in full measure. Under the pressures of the surrounding non-Indian society, the younger Indian generation has gradually begun to adopt an attitude of neglect and disrespect of its elders, never giving thought to the fact that, as President Wendell Chino of the National Tribal Chairmen's Association pointed out, the Indian elders are the guardians and the repository of that cultural tradition which makes the Indian people unique.

In addition to the tangible improvements in services to the Indian elderly which will be the objectives of the National Indian Council on Aging, renewed recognition of the value of the Indian elders to the Indian

community is a goal which will be pursued at the same time.

Several years ago, a visiting politician addressed a group of elders on an Indian reservation. In rebuttal of an opponent's statement that Indians did not pay taxes and should, therefore, not be eligible for state services, he recited a long list of Indian contributions to American life and culture: medicine extracted from native plants, foods first prepared by Indians, sports originating in the New World, the basis of the Constitution in the articles of the Iroquois Confederacy, etc. One white-haired Indian raised his hand. "Senator," he said quietly, "you forgot one thing: we contributed the country!"

We have confidence in the sense of justice of the American people who realize that every service provided for an American Indian was contracted and paid for with Indian lives and Indian land.

The aging Indian, who has seen his way of life change from the stone age to the nuclear age in two or three generations, is bewildered by the outside influences which try to force him into an unfamiliar mold. We believe that the Indian elder has the right to live out his life in the comfort of his familiar environment and according to his own cultural traditions. We believe that his fellow Americans will give him that opportunity by recognizing the right of tribal governments to administer aging programs for their constituencies, based on locally determined needs and criteria.

The National Tribal Chairmen's Association takes pride in having provided a national forum for the Indian elderly as an expression of its respect for the Indian traditions and its abiding faith in the continuity of the Indian heritage preserved by these elders. We hope that the expression of their unmet needs will lead to fulfillment of their modest wishes and that they will be able to live out their lives with dignity and freedom from want.

