



# Elder Voices

*Newsletter of the National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.*

*Summer 2000*

*NICOA Conference 2000*

## Conference arrangements gain momentum

Final preparations for the 2000 NICOA conference continue. Staff meetings and conversations with our hosts at Fond du Lac ensure that conference plans run smoothly. Excitement continues to mount, and the cooperation between NICOA and our Fond du Lac hosts leads us to believe that this will be a great conference.

Recent meetings have focused on the registration process. Early registrations have increased from 1998. Early registration helps to keep elders from waiting in long lines at the conference, so please send them in.

One addition to the conference agenda includes the optional "Wisdom Steps Walks" on Monday, August 21. These walks remind us of the importance of physical activity to the health of our spirit. Look for more information about the walk inside.

Upcoming conference reminders include:

- The deadline for advance conference registration ended on July 14. Please note that NICOA will still accept registrations after July 14. However, any pre-conference registrations sent after this date will need to include the full registration amount. Even if you have not mailed your registration by July 14, please register in advance to avoid lines at the conference.
- When you register, please provide a copy of your C.D.I.B, Census #, or fill out the form below and have it signed by your tribal enrollment official.
- Don't forget to provide your date of birth and a phone number where you or the leader of your group can be contacted in case of any problems or questions our staff may have about your registration.
- Remember that conference time is also membership renewal time. Memberships for voting members are \$10 and are good for two years. In addition to the reduced rate conference fee for members, membership also enables you to attend the Business Meeting and to vote if your representative is up for election.

**PROOF OF ENROLLMENT FORM FOR VOTING MEMBERS ONLY (A tribal official must attest and sign):**

I hereby attest that (Print Name) \_\_\_\_\_ is a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ tribe, of

(State) \_\_\_\_\_ Enrollment # \_\_\_\_\_

Certified by \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

\*Please send a copy of this signed form, your C.D.I.B, or Census # with your pre-conference registration. Proof of enrollment is also needed for on-site registration in Duluth.

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**Name NICOA's Project**

A contest will be held at the conference for the best name for NICOA's outreach project. Some ideas elders have already presented are: "Walking the Path of Wellness," "The Moccasin Trail," "Closing the Circle of Wellness," "The Trail of Wellness," and "The Circle of Health."

*Rebecca Baca, NICOA Contractor*

## Outreach project

Elders throughout Indian Country have asked for an educational program to help them learn about the federal benefits they may be eligible for. Elders say they want more information about Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSA), Veterans Benefits, and basic information about how to prevent and/or manage diseases such as diabetes.

We are pleased to announce that NICOA will introduce the Education Program at the August 2000 NICOA Conference to address these concerns. The program will be introduced through a video presentation, overhead presentations, print materials, and a Learning Center at the conference. The Learning Center will feature displays and discussion with: the Administration on Aging (AoA), the Veterans Administration (VA), the Indian Health Service (IHS), the Indian Health Service Diabetes Program, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the Social Security Administration (SSA), and the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) for Medicare and Medicaid. The Learning Center will be open throughout the NICOA Conference so elders can learn about their programs from representatives of these organizations. We want to make sure elders can get the information they need about health and social service programs.

In addition to the conference Learning Center, NICOA is currently working with SSA and HCFA to develop an ongoing educational program throughout Indian Country. We will begin with the establishment of three to four demonstration sites, and eventually expand the program to other areas. During the conference we will be asking elders what they would like this program to provide and what they think of the materials presented at the conference. Program materials will include videos, overhead presentations, handouts, training manuals, etc.

In order to ensure these materials help elders understand program benefits, we need your input. Elders have advised us to develop a program that is presented in simple language with no acronyms (initials). Elders also want information presented in a way they can understand by community members they know and trust. We welcome further input after you have a chance to view the program materials presented at the conference.

We realize the importance of this program to our elders, and hope that both the Learning Center and the educational program will provide you with the information you need.

## NICOA proposes long-term care strategy

**A** growing number of elders and people with disabilities are reaching the age when some form of long-term care is more likely to be needed. NICOA board members and staff continue to hear from Indian Country about the lack of long-term care services, especially those that provide service with a regard for Native values and cultural preferences. Although a few nursing homes operate on Indian land, other forms of long-term care for elderly and disabled Indians either lack important services or don't exist at all.

In 1995 NICOA's *National Indian Aging Agenda for the Future* concluded that, "Long-term care is the single most critical issue facing American Indian elders in the 1990s." In 1997, the U.S. Administration on Aging, working with the University of Colorado's Native Elder Health Center and the University of North Dakota's National Resource Center on Native American Aging, reported, "The need for home and community-based long-term care in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities is extensive but is largely unmet." It is obvious that even as the new century begins, long-term care for Indian elders *remains largely out of reach*. While some tribes are having success in responding to the long-term care needs of their elders, frustration and disappointment continue to be the rule.

Although it would be ideal to depend on the Indian Health Service (IHS) for solutions, IHS says that it does not have the authority, nor the funds, to address long-term care. Therefore, NICOA believes that tribes should begin to take control of the planning and delivery of programs that would provide long-term care services for their elders and disabled members. In order for these programs to be successful, tribes must review the current services in their communities and determine their long-term care needs. The pros and cons of using already existing long-term care services should also be carefully weighed. For example, if Medicaid were to

cover the cost of nursing homes, tribes must carefully consider the strict federal and state rules that govern Medicaid, as well as the cost of financing the building and operations of a nursing home. Currently, South Dakota tribes are struggling to establish an Indian nursing home in the face of a state-imposed ban that prohibits the use of Medicaid payments towards the funding of new nursing homes. Many people don't know that while Medicare and Medicaid do cover some long-term care services, they remain largely inaccessible to Indian elders. These points may make options such as assisted living, residential care or adult day care better choices for a tribe.

NICOA is certain that a major national effort is needed to provide tribes with the technical expertise and support that will allow them to do something about their long-term care needs. In working towards this goal, NICOA has developed a major proposal and is presently seeking funds to educate and support tribes in their long-term care ventures. The project would help tribes develop a comprehensive plan or "blueprint" for developing and delivering long-term care services most beneficial and appropriate to the tribes needs.

NICOA is seeking funds from a variety of sources for the project. A proposal was recently sent to the Retirement Research Foundation in Chicago and we are hopeful that the odds are in our favor for a positive response. In addition, proposals will be submitted to several other funding sources to garner support in helping NICOA empower tribes to design and operate long-term care services unique to their needs. In an effort to keep you better informed, NICOA will publish news of our progress in future newsletters.

### CORRECTION

Official board election nomination forms must be post-marked by July 21. NICOA's recent conference reminder incorrectly listed this date as July 10. We regret the inconvenience.

## Breaking new ground for Indian elders

*"For a subject worked and reworked so often in novels, motion pictures, and television, American Indians remain probably the least understood and most misunderstood Americans of us all."*

-John F. Kennedy, President 1963

For the past six years the dedicated individuals of the NICOA map team have been working to put together a library of information about American Indian and Alaska Natives, focusing on Indian elders. There is much data on Indians, yet little of this information reaches Indian communities. By getting this data, analyzing it, and providing it to tribal groups, NICOA aims to bridge this gap.

The information put together by NICOA is perhaps the most complete of its kind. It is important for two reasons. First, it ties together both geographic (location) and statistical (numbers, charts, and graphs) information. Second, all of the information is computerized. It can be shared with individuals, groups, or organizations anywhere in the country. For Indian advocates as well as health care givers, researchers, educators, and program managers, these new tools could prove really helpful.

The first example of NICOA's data analysis projects is the Automated Diabetes Audit Pilot Program. Using our tools, these audits show IHS and tribal health managers how effectively they are providing diabetes care in ways that they have never seen before. Participating hospitals and clinics are getting "Automated Diabetes Reports," which analyze the results of 80 different measurements from every patient visit. The computerized audits give IHS and tribal health teams a tool they never had before - one that will directly result in better patient care. NICOA's vision has been to apply the latest computer technology, through projects like this, so that hospitals, clinics and caregivers are better informed about patient needs and progress.

Although this is a pilot project, there are opportunities for this system to be applied throughout the Indian Health Service.

A second promising opportunity for the NICOA method of assembling information is by identifying Medicare and Medicaid members in Indian Country. Since 1997, NICOA has been gathering information that would help tribes find out where their potential Medicare and Medicaid members live, how many are actually receiving federal benefits, and what services are being provided for them. For the first time, tribes will be able to obtain the same type of information the state gets on Medicare and Medicaid members. In addition to distilling the 1990 Census to capture tribal specific information, NICOA is also preparing to gather tribal data from the 2000 Census, so tribes can have this information at the same time it is made available to other organizations.

The final example of NICOA projects that have led to breakthroughs in understanding the health of Indian elders uses the most advanced computer technology available (called "GIS," or Geographic Information Systems). The true benefits of this technology will only be realized when the Indian health care system starts to make use of this information regularly and frequently. Towards this aim, NICOA is developing an "Interactive Atlas" that brings together many sources of data on one computer compact disc and which will answer user questions about the health, population, and economic status of Indians across the country. This project is a milestone in providing information to and about Indian communities.

By serving as a primary source of health information, to both Indian communities and others, NICOA is proud to be taking part in national efforts to make the benefits of the computer age available to Indians--especially our elders.

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Brooke Mosay Ammann, NICOA Assistant Director

## Elders talk: A Message to America

It wasn't often that I had to go out to the woods to cut a switch for my mom to swat my naughty cousins and I with, but I did have my moments. I know that the use of Ojibway "swear words" was one of the few times in which I was required to do so. There really are no true obscenities in the Ojibway language, and when innuendoes and slang are translated into English they are often more comical than bitterly harsh or obscene. So why did my mom and aunties want to whip us for "talking that way?"

Well, the lessons of childhood are constantly unfolding to me at age 25, and I am now able to understand why I shouldn't "talk that way." Like many others, I struggle with the complexity of the Ojibway language, but the other day my mother taught me something that transcends the average language lesson and has meaning for every aspect of life.

Our voices and language are gifts from the Creator, she explained. Therefore, we are not to abuse these gifts by speaking loudly or in an offensive manner. A simple conversation between two or more people is really a sacred event. I pass this lesson on to remind you of the power of your words and to invite you to participate in some 'sacred conversation'.

The National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) will hold its Year 2000 conference in Duluth, Minnesota from August 19-22. The purpose of this conference will be to develop and deliver a spiritual Message to America using the words of the nation's Native elders. I urge all the tribes of North America to send their elders to the conference to participate. Our nations are struggling in many ways, and we rely on the wisdom of the elders to connect us to the strength of our ancestors, especially as we move into a new century in which words flow through the air faster than thoughts.

I ask all of you who have taken on the responsibility that comes with being classified as an 'elder' to come and share the lessons your elders and your lives have taught you. My grandfather was a great elder, and I know how lucky I am to have had someone there to help me connect with my ancestors and understand my place in the historical continuum of Turtle Island. Yet I know there are many out there who are aching for this understanding.

Our ancestors suffered and fought in the hopes that their children would be able to come together, speak their language, wear their traditional clothes, and tell their stories.

Many of you, my elders, have suffered in the same way to make sure we young people can continue to do these things. So gather your languages, your traditional clothes, and your best stories and bring them to Duluth to share. We will engage in some sacred conversation and prepare a message that honors both our ancestors and the future generations.

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Brooke Mosay Ammann was hired as



NICOA's Assistant Director on April 1. A member of the St. Croix Band of Ojibwe, she is the granddaughter of Archie Mosay.

Brooke graduated from Dartmouth College in 1997, having been awarded the College's Native American writing prize and an academic citation for exceptional Education coursework. Her responsibilities at NICOA include producing this newsletter on a regular basis and increasing NICOA's contacts and visibility with its members.

### Messages to America

If you would like to mail your Message to America to NICOA, please do so by August 1. Otherwise, they may be submitted during the conference until 12:00 noon on Monday, August 21.