

NATIONAL INDIAN ELDERS CONFERENCE

List of Symposiums

Monday, August 2 @ 11 a.m.

SYMPOSIUM 1: Title: *“The Role of Tribal Leaders in Reaffirming the Value of Elders in Preserving Tribal Cultures”*

TOPIC: Major changes are occurring in Indian Country. Social, political and economic pressures emanating from within and without Indian Country is exacting alarming effects. Across Indian Country, tribes through their leadership are embracing their “Indianness” and advocating for better access to health care, education, language preservation, culturally sacred sites and the return of sacred ceremonial objects to their rightful owners. This symposium seeks to share, through the ideas and thoughts of tribal leaders who have taken ownership of these efforts. The elders of their tribes are the last bastion of this historical knowledge and are/should be used to preserve what is left of their “Indianness.” This symposium will provide insights on how tribal leaders view the role of elders in maintaining the tribes’ “Indianness.” Additionally, this symposium will address what they view as the next generational issues that future elders will be facing.

- Aaron Payment, Chairman, Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians
- Arlan Melendez, Chairman, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony

Monday, August 2 @ 1 p.m.

SYMPOSIUM 2: Title: *“Becoming an Elder: A Traditional Tribal Perspective on Aging in Indian Country”*

TOPIC: The American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) elderly population in the United States is growing and with this growth, issues and opportunities have also grown as it relates to this population. Presenters will discuss the concept of aging from a traditional tribal perspective. The understanding of this conceptual framework will assist those working for tribal elder programs and those working with tribal elders understand the philosophical underpinnings of tribal worldviews and perspectives on what it means on becoming an elder. In the non-Indian world, for example, there is an emphasis on “staying young and looking young”; this symposium will present a comparison between these perspectives with those held by tribal views and perspectives. These include the role of elders in the preservation and protection of language, cultural, and traditional practices, their intergenerational responsibilities and the application of these traditional concepts to the modern-day world.

- Rex Lee Jim, Traditional Practitioner, Navajo Nation
- John Eagle Shield, Jr., Traditional Leader, CHR Director, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

Tuesday, August 3 @ 8 a.m.

SYMPOSIUM 3: Title: *“Native American Veterans: Issues and Concerns as they Age”*

TOPIC: According to the Associated Press and many other sources, Native Americans serve in the military at a higher percentage than any other ethnic group. It is estimated since 9/11, the percentage of Native Americans who have served in the military is 19 percent compared to 14 percent of all other ethnicities. Many served in WWI, more served in WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf. They fought for this country; some came home, and many did not. During WWII, 45,000 enlisted in the armed services. They earned 71 Air Medals, 34 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 51 Silver Stars, 47 Bronze medals and 5 Congressional Medals of Honor. During the Vietnam War, 42,000 Native Americans volunteered. 226 died

in action and 5 received the Congressional Medal of Honor. These veterans fought and protected our country and yet, many feel they have been forgotten. What does it mean to be a “Native American Veteran?” What are the medical, social, financial and mental health needs that have risen to the surface as the number of aging veterans increase – specifically from those who served in Vietnam? How are these different from those veterans from earlier wars? This symposium will provide an insight to these questions from the warriors who served.

- Stephanie E. Birdwell, Director, Office of Tribal Government Relations, Veterans Administration
- Peter MacDonald, Navajo Code Talker, Former Chairman Navajo Tribal Council
- Andrew Joseph, Jr., Tribal Councilman, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

Tuesday, August 3 @ 2:30 p.m.

SYMPOSIUM 4: Title: “Future Elders: An Intergenerational Perspective on Aging ”

TOPIC: Native American communities and the Native population have endured a year of stress, anxiety and cultural challenges. In this year, Native peoples across the country looked back at their histories, cultures, customs, traditions and languages; and in this process of looking back, all those values and concepts resided in the memories of the elders of their respective tribes. It is all those things which define a tribe and whether it continues to exist as a distinct tribe or become an extinct tribe. The future of tribal communities lies in the hands and efforts of tomorrow’s leaders of their respective communities. This symposium and the panel of young Native Americans is for the youth to share their thoughts about their future, their tribe’s future and Indian country as a whole. All this within the context of their respective education, the technological environment and the demographic changes that are occurring in Indian country.

- Desiree Lapahie, M.S., Data Analyst, NICOA, Navajo Nation
- Cole Ward, MA, Doctoral Student Florida State University, Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe
- Everett George, Youth Activist & Youth Care Worker, Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe

Wednesday, August 4 @ 8:30 a.m.

SYMPOSIUM 5 Title: “Brain Health: Initiatives in Indian Country”

TOPIC: Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias were words that didn’t have any meaning or relevance among the nation’s Indian elderly population a mere 40 years ago. Today, as more research is being conducted on this disease, its consequences and its long-term impact on the elderly population – including Indian elders. It is no longer a disease that is “over there”, but a reality that is now affecting native populations. It is estimated that one in three Native elders will be diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, compared to one in five among the general population. In this symposium, attention will focus on some of the initiatives that have been started in the last few years at the national level, state level and at the tribal level. Among some of these initiatives is the Center for Disease Control’s “Healthy Brain Initiative: Road Map for Indian Country” a publication specifically for Indian communities to address this disease. There are also state level activities that complement these initiatives and an example of how one tribe took action to educate and address this disease.

- Dave Baldrige, Executive Director, International Association for Indigenous Aging (IA2)
- Jennifer Carson, Ph.D., Sanford Center on Aging, University of Nevada-Reno
- Carla Eben, Project Director Pyramid Lake

Wednesday, August 4 @ 1 p.m.

SYMPOSIUM 6: Title: *“Lifelong Learning: Tribal Colleges and Aging Native Elders”*

TOPIC: In the 45 years since the National Indian Council on Aging was established, the Native elderly population has changed dramatically. Among these changes: the population has increased from approximately 108,000 in 1980 to over 945,000 who identify themselves as Native American or Alaskan Natives alone and/or in combination with other racial groups. Of this number 549,000 identified themselves as American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/NA) alone without other racial combinations; the population shift from reservation/rural to urban/off-reservation has reversed since 1980 when 70 percent of the AI/NA population resided on tribal land whereas in 2020, 70 percent now reside in urban/off reservation communities; and even more indicative of the changes has been the educational attainment of today’s elderly population with 84.4 percent had at least a high school diploma, 20.8 percent having at least a bachelor’s degree and 7.8 percent held an advance graduate or professional degree. There are 35 tribal colleges and universities in Indian country. It has long been held that learning is a lifelong endeavor and with increasing numbers of elders who will be more educated than those of the 1980’s, the question is how can these colleges and universities transform themselves to be relevant to this population. This symposium will explore these and other issues related to education and the aging population.

- Elmer Guy, President, Navajo Technical University
- Sam Deloria, Former Director, American Indian Law Center, University of New Mexico
- Vivian Arviso, Educational Consultant, Navajo

Thursday, August 5 @ 1 p.m.

SYMPOSIUM 7: Title *“The Aging Network: Legislative and Political Challenges and Opportunities in the Next Decade”*

TOPIC: Services and programs designed to benefit older Americans and older American Indians and Alaskan Natives rely on funding from the federal, state and local governments. The organizations that provide these services include governmental agencies, tribal departments and non-profit organizations. These organizations are part of the system referred to as “The Aging Network.” As most tribes know, funding of these programs depends on the direction the wind is blowing politically. Administrations change every four years in the Executive Branch of the U.S government and when it does, new priorities are established which becomes the basis for funding priorities. On January 20, 2021, a new administration took office. The question that comes to the forefront is what this administration is contemplating in terms of priorities especially as it relates to the Aging Network. This symposium will provide updated information that will be useful to tribal elders and tribal leaders as they advocate for additional resources and programs. Moreover, Congress plays a role in the formation of program priorities and the potential of success or failure of the initiatives being sought by the Administration.

- Bob Blancato, President, Matz, Blancato & Associates, Washington, DC
- Bill Benson, President, International Association for Indigenous Aging (IA2)
- Sandy Markwood, CEO, National Association for Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)