



Elder Voices

Newsletter of the National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.

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Elders most at risk

Diabetes epidemic sweeps Indian Country

Type II diabetes, formerly called "adult onset" diabetes, is occurring in Indian Country at levels now described as "epidemic" by Indian health experts.

According to Dr. Kelly Acton, director of the national IHS Diabetes Program, "Diabetes is a worldwide problem, but it has reached epidemic levels in Indian communities. This is a chronic disease which often requires lifestyle change for treatment, so it makes sense that the solutions will be found in Indian communities (as opposed to 'at the health clinic'). The health care system needs to actively partner with local communities to explore new and culturally-relevant approaches to diabetes."

The disease results from the body's inability to use insulin effectively. Type 2 diabetes is not contagious--that is, you can't catch it from someone else--but it is related to several risk factors:

- Heredity (If both parents have it, you have a greater chance of getting it);
- Being overweight;
- Not being physically active;
- Not following a healthy meal plan;
- Age--elders have more risk than younger people.

Before World War II, there is little to suggest that Indian people had Type 2 diabetes. Since then, it is showing up in alarming numbers in Indian communities throughout the nation. Other minorities--African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Hawaiians--as well as the general U.S. population are also experiencing alarmingly high rates of Type 2 diabetes.

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Elders have higher diabetes health risks

- More than one out of five Indian elders has diabetes.
- The risk of developing diabetes increases with age.
- Rates of diabetes are highest in American Indians over the age of 65.
- In some Indian communities, more than half the elder population has diabetes.
- Indian elders suffer from higher rates of complications than other age groups.
- Diabetes is the third most common reason for Indian elder clinic visits.

--IHS Diabetes Program

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NICOA helps get data for tribes

Diabetes epidemic grows

Around the world, native populations are suffering from high rates of this disease. It is believed that the dramatic change in eating and physical activity patterns from an agricultural lifestyle to a more urban lifestyle has a big impact on the rising rates of Type 2 diabetes. The Type 2 version of the disease is also being discovered in more and more Indian teenagers. Type 2 diabetes is a chronic (doesn't go away) disease that can be successfully treated by a combination of 1) following a healthy, regular meal plan; 2) regular physical activity; 3) weight loss; and, 4) diabetes pills or insulin injections. Blindness, kidney failure, and amputations are the complications that can result from having Type 2 diabetes over a long period of time.

Recognizing the seriousness of this epidemic for Indians, Congress has appropriated \$150 million over the next five years for tribes, urban programs, and the IHS to address the prevention of diabetes in Indian Country. Most of this money has been designated for tribes across the nation.

The national office of the IHS Diabetes Program, headed by Dr. Kelly Acton, is coordinating Indian Country's efforts across the nation. Because diabetes affects elders more severely than other age groups, NICOA is providing its sophisticated data analysis services to help identify and report tribal efforts to combat this serious threat to Indian health.



Frankie Thompson NICOA featured employee

A smart and dynamic Chickasaw from Oklahoma, Frankie began operating NICOA's Phoenix SCSEP project on July 1, 1990. Her energy has built the Arizona project into one of our oldest and most successful projects.

Frankie originally managed 75 training slots, but today keeps 175-180 going! She also provides technical assistance to other state managers. Born and raised in Oklahoma, she completed her education there as well. Frankie previously worked for the Chickasaw Nation as a Community Health Representative, Alcohol and Drug Counselor, and as manager of a tribal convenience store.

Report from Frieda Clark, Program Director

SCSEP employs 839 elders

NICOA's Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) currently provides job training and wages for 839 elders in 14 states. At the mid-point of its tenth program year, the NICOA program is well on its way to meeting program goals established by the federal Department of Labor.

A recent SCSEP highlight, our all Indian Annual Training, was held on December 16 at the Avi Resort and Casino, which is owned by the Ft. Mojave Tribe. The meeting was a big success, with 92 trainees from Arizona, five from California, and 47 supervisors attending. Special guests included Alfretta Antone, NICOA's Phoenix Area board member, her husband, and Llewellyn Barrackman, Vice Chairman of the Ft. Mojave Tribe.



Six NICOA staff attended, presenting an enlightening program on social security, medicare, technology and tradition, and topics from our SCSEP handbook. Door prizes, given throughout the meeting, were contributed by supervisors.

Tony Sanchez from Pascua Yaqui received a certificate and a NICOA SCSEP Tenth Anniversary attache case in appreciation for his assistance in placing trainees into permanent jobs off our program. Since July Tony has helped place five trainees and is going strong. Congratulations, Tony! Bonnie Jackson was also presented with an attache case for her assistance in coordinating this event and for the good job she does for the Ft. Mohave Tribe. All NICOA SCSEP trainees who attend an annual meeting will be presented with NICOA's Anniversary attache.



Tony Sanchez, Pascua Yaqui, receives an award from SCSEP Director Frieda Clark at NICOA's recent all Indian Annual Training.

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