

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
2009 HHS TRIBAL CONSULTATION

FY 2011 Administration on Aging Budget Recommendation

Testimony by
James T. DeLaCruz, Sr., Chairman
HHS 11th Annual Tribal Budget Consultation
April 29, 2009

For fiscal year 2011, the National Indian Council on Aging recommends support for three initiatives: Nutrition and Supportive Services to Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian Organizations, Tribal capacity building to support elder access to services, and protection of vulnerable Indian elders.

Priority 1: Title VI, Aging Grants to Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian Organizations, including Part C, Native American Caregiver Support Program and for training of Title VI service providers from funds other than those appropriated for Title VI programs.

Funds for grants to Indian tribes have a history of being well spent and at the same time being woefully inadequate. At stake is the dignity and quality of life for a segment of the American population that is sorely in need of assistance.

The Older American Act specifically states "it is the purpose of this Title to promote the delivery of supportive services, including nutrition services, to American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians that are comparable to services provided under Title III (grants for state and community programs on aging). The provision of "comparable services," however, has not been achievable due to insufficient funds for this entitlement.

Approximately 2/3 of the grants to Indian tribes or consortia of tribes are for less than \$100,000. This funding level is expected to provide services for a minimum of 50 elders for an entire year. Those tribes receiving \$100,000 serve between 200 and 300 elders. Many tribes are unable to meet the five days a week meal requirement because of insufficient funding and are serving congregate meals only two or three days per week. Tribes are also reducing home delivered meals because of the sharp increase in gasoline prices.

Indians comprise the most economically disadvantaged elderly minority in the nation. Even so, their needs for in-home and community-based services are not available through Title VI programs, although funding for these services is provided to other populations through Title III. Some Title VI programs are forced to close for several days each week, unable to provide basic services such as transportation, information

and referral, legal assistance, ombudsman, respite or adult day care, home telephone visits, homemaker services, or home health aide service. Recent gasoline price increases also severely reduces the ability of Title VI service providers to provide home delivered meals and related supportive services to home bound Indian elders. Additionally, the Administration on Aging takes a percentage of the Title VI funding off the top to fund training for Title VI staff.

We recommend that the training, which is critical to have skilled personnel working with Indian elders, have its own line item and funding in order to ensure the maximum amount of resources are still available to support nutrition and other supportive services for Indian elders.

Funding for the Native American Caregiver program is inadequate in two respects. The grant amount provided to particular tribes is often so low to make it impractical to plan and implement adequate caregiver programs in the tribes. Also, there is practically no training to tribes to use caregiver funds effectively.

Title VI, Part A and B

Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2010

Department of Health and Human Services

Administration on Aging

Aging grants to Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations

The Committee recognizes this program as the primary vehicle for providing nutrition and other supportive services to Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian elders and provides \$30 million for this purpose.

Title VI, Part C

Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2010

Department of Health and Human Services

Administration on Aging

Native American Caregiver Support Program

The Committee recommends funding for \$7,000,000 in FY 2010 for this program and supports partial use of these funds for training of tribal recipients on planning and implementing effective caregiving programs.

Training for Title VI Service Providers

Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2010

Department of Health and Human Services

Administration on Aging

Aging Network Support Activities

The Committee recognizes the need to provide training for Title VI service providers and provides \$1 million for this purpose.

Priority 2: Title IV—Community-based (Tribal) Capacity Building in Indian Country

Language and cultural barriers severely restrict Indian elder access to federal programs to which they are eligible. Typically these senior Americans have limited access to and participation in programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. The National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) has a long history of working with tribal and other community-based aging organizations to increase their capacities to serve Indian elders. Funds are needed to advance NICOA's capacity building activities that began in the 1990s but have been suspended for the past several years due to a shift in emphasis by the Administration on Aging. Funding will enable NICOA to restart its work with existing community-based aging organizations to prepare communities to better match seniors' needs with existing services. These efforts will include training tribal staff on assisting Indian elders' access to Medicare, Medicaid, housing, congregate meals, and veteran benefits. Efforts will also include working with tribal leaders to leverage existing funds and programs to sustain support for elders. The overall intent is to strengthen local organizations in serving seniors.

Suggested Language

Increasing the Capacity of Community-based Organizations to Serve Minority Seniors

Department of Health and Human Services

Administration on Aging

Aging Network Support Activities

Report Language: The Committee supports the role of national minority aging organizations in building the capacity of community based organizations to better serve minority senior Americans who face high barriers to federal programs for which they are eligible and provides \$3,000,000 for this purpose.

Priority 3: Title VII—Allotments for Vulnerable Elder Rights Protection Activities, specifically, Subtitle B-Native American Organization Provisions.

Subtitle B of Title VII of the Older Americans Act authorizes a program for tribes, public agencies, or nonprofit organizations serving Indian elders to assist in prioritizing issues relating to elder rights and to carry out activities in support of these priorities. Funds have never been appropriated for this purpose while funds for States have been funded at more than \$20 million per year. State programs seldom reach Indian elders due to cultural and geographic barriers. Indian tribes have little or no access to the agencies, departments, ombudsman, or other programs that are available to states. Further, tribes have no additional source of mandated federal funding for elder protection activities. Anecdotal evidence provided by those involved with elder services in Indian country suggests a high incidence of elder abuse in Indian country. It is commonly acknowledged that “abusers” are often family members, and that elders often do not know they are being abused and if they do know, they are reluctant to disclose this information. Outreach and education programs are needed to increase awareness of elder abuse and to help tribes devise ways to minimize abusive behavior.

Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2008

Department of Health and Human Services

Administration on Aging

Protection of Vulnerable Americans

The Committee is aware of the growing incidence of elder abuse in Tribal communities, especially financial exploitation and neglect, and recommends \$2,000,000 for grants to Tribes for protection of vulnerable Indian elders.

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