

## **Barriers to providing elder caregiver support to American Indian family members**

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The Administration on Aging administered a survey to 68 programs funded through the Native American Caregiver Support Program (NACSP) that identified multiple barriers faced by caregiver programmers. They include inadequate funding and staffing, geographic isolation, and the cultural mismatch of the NACSP focus on caregivers instead of on elders. The findings from our American Indian Caregiver Policy Study demonstrate additionally that structural barriers prevent Area Agencies on Aging and tribal social service directors from better serving American Indian elders and their family members in western Washington. The primary identified obstacle is a failure to engage each other in service coordination, a problem rooted in the historical structure of institutions that provide inadequate mechanisms for tribe/state/agency negotiation.

American Indians have cared for their elders for hundreds of years but enabling cultural elements are not identified as a basis for a caregiver support program, rather, the Native American Caregiver Support Program entails 5 components of caregiver supports that are identical to the components of the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP). There is little recognition through this policy that caregiving is a community process as opposed to an agency process, and that each tribe is a unique community. The word caregiver is a new name given to an age old practice in Indian country, yet ironically the name is fraught with meaning either unknown or threatening to many family or informal “caregivers.” Lack of personnel and training for coordinators to adhere to the Older Americans Act Title VI, Part C is endemic. Eligibility assessment procedures are experienced by elders and caregivers as invasive and coordinators identify a general confusion about the five components of the Native American Caregiver Support Program.

The Center for World Indigenous Studies is working toward a conference that will serve two purposes: 1) to disseminate the findings from the policy research; and 2) to provide an opportunity for a new model for discussions and exchange that will respond to and build upon the initial findings. The goal of this facilitated communication is to enhance access to services by those who need them, increase understanding of the opportunities and constraints faced by each affected party, and build working relationships for carrying out efforts beyond the conference.