



Native Aging Visions

A Resource for Native Elders

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Enjoy this deliciously sweet recipe.

Title VI Spotlight: Swinomish

By [Cole Ward, MA](#)

For most, as fall turns to winter, and touches of crisp air began to reach most of Indian Country, an opportunity to relax from the busy summer awaits. However, this opportunity is absent for most Title VI programs.

In November, Amanda Buck, the Title VI Director for Swinomish, made time to share some of her day-to-day tasks with the National Resource Center on Native American Aging (NRCNAA). In doing so,

spotlight was shed on some of the unique ways her program operates. As soon as the interview began, it was apparent there were numerous daily tasks, and the interview would have to coincide with their busy day. It seemed every 5-10 minutes someone was walking in and out of the office, asking questions or bouncing ideas off each other for further discussion. Yet, the questions and ideas were all for a common good, to make sure the Elders in the area were taken care of.



Keeping Elders Active

At the Swinomish Title VI program, there are events planned all month long. For example, some days they do shopping trips other days they do inter-tribal luncheons. At times, the inter-tribal luncheons can bring together over 500 Elders from Swinomish and other tribes around the area. The most recent one was in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. In May, Swinomish will host their inter-tribal luncheon. The luncheons and the events that follow are well-known in the Pacific Northwest and have been known to draw in Elders from Canada as well. Through events like these, Elders are able to socialize, which helps strengthen their social, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being.

On other days, tribal members or Elders will teach classes at the Senior Center. These classes, which are all free for Elders, range from salmon canning, ribbon skirt making, tai chi, visiting Winco (a supermarket) or visiting with an attorney about estate, wills, and power of attorney. Then, there are days filled with games. One popular game, "Slahal Bone Games," involves bones, sticks, singing, and drumming to create confusion. For those who do

not know how to play, local Elders are quick to teach them. And, when it is not raining out, Senior Center team members will go to local parks with Elders.

And, of course there is the food for Elders, which comes from Title VI funding. At Swinomish, all of the funding from Title VI goes to the betterment of their Elders – other expenses and salaries come from other resources such as the tribe.

Further along in the interview, Amanda mentioned several needs for their Elder community: food and financial security. Elders in the area depend on the food program and during meals they will have the opportunity to fill out the “Identifying Our Needs: A Survey of Elders” (also known as the Needs Assessment Survey). The assessment allows Elders to voice their opinions and highlight the needs of the Title VI program. As an additional incentive, through the use of other tribal program, Elders are able to receive \$40 worth of shelf stable food to help them with food security.

At the Senior Center, meals are provided Monday through Thursday. In the early morning, around 5:00 am, staff begin meal prep and others show up around 8:00 am to make sure that meals can be loaded up for delivery at 10:30 am. These meals are especially important for Elders in the area that do not have a permanent address and couch surf. For a transient person, especially an Elder, a meal provided during the day can make a great deal of difference.

As the conversation with Amanda continues, she mentions one of the first things she was tasked with when she was hired was to complete the Needs Assessment Survey. When she got the results back, they indicated there was a need to provide transportation to and from medical appointments, which allowed her to hire additional staff members. As her program grows to meet the needs of Elders, the survey will grow with it, to provide data, supporting additional resources as needed.



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Remembering Deb Johnson-Fuller (Gaagiigebinesikwe)

By [Michelle Meyer](#)

It is with heavy hearts that we remember Deb Johnson-Fuller (Gaagiigebinesikwe), the former director of Wisdom Steps, who passed away in September 2024. Deb was a dedicated leader, a mentor, and a beloved member of the community whose contributions to the well-being of others will be remembered for years to come.

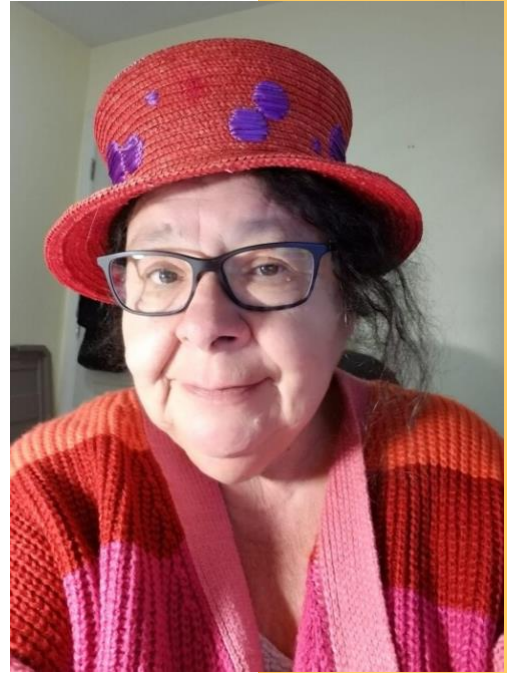
Deb's vision and leadership were instrumental in shaping programs that addressed the health and wellness of Native Elders, embodying her commitment to improving lives in a culturally grounded way. Her work reflected her profound respect for tradition and her unwavering dedication to creating healthier, stronger communities.

Her Anishinaabe name, Gaagiigebinesikwe—Woman of the Forever Flying Thunderbirds—perfectly captured her indomitable spirit. She was known for her deep wisdom, humility, and the compassion she showed to everyone she encountered. Those fortunate enough to work alongside Deb witnessed her steadfast commitment to fostering collaboration and understanding, always leading with grace, integrity, and humor.

Beyond her professional achievements, Deb was a source of inspiration to many. She embraced her role as a mentor and Elder with kindness and a genuine desire to uplift others. Her shared stories, wisdom, and encouragement will continue to resonate with all who had the privilege of learning from her.

Deb's legacy lives on in the lives she touched and the programs she helped build. She leaves behind not only a legacy of her achievements but also a reminder of the power of compassion, cultural pride, and unwavering dedication.

Miigwech, Deb, for your tireless efforts, your wisdom, and your spirit. You will forever remain in our hearts.



Introducing the Resource Center for Native Aging and Disability (RCNAD)

By [Michelle Meyer](#)



Resource Center on
Native Aging and Disability

RCNAD

Native Elders are the fastest-growing population across Indian Country, and Indigenous communities continue to experience higher rates of disabilities than the national average. The need for long-term services and supports and home and community-based services

(LTSS/HCBS) has never been greater, yet funding remains limited. Despite the well-documented demand, the Indian Health System (IHS) lacks dedicated federal funding for aging and disability support, with the only assistance coming from Title VI grants under the Older Americans Act—which reach only half of Native communities.

To address these critical gaps, the Administration on Aging's Office of American Indian, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiian Programs launched an initiative to fund a National Resource Center dedicated to aging and disability services in tribal communities.

The [Resource Center for Native Aging and Disability](#) (RCNAD) is a five-year initiative led by the [National Resource Center for Native American Aging](#) (NRCNAA), designed to help Native communities develop sustainable, Medicaid-reimbursable HCBS programs that support aging in place. Medicaid HCBS waivers represent a crucial funding stream to ensure Elders and people with disabilities receive the care they need—where they want it most, at home and in their communities.

RCNAD's Mission and Key Objectives

- ✓ Create an advisory committee with Native leadership, Elder care experts, and Medicaid policy specialists to guide the project.
- ✓ Analyze Elder needs data and conduct listening sessions to identify urgent and LTSS priorities.
- ✓ Develop a comprehensive HCBS program guide to help Native communities establish sustainable Medicaid-reimbursable services.

- ✓ Provide direct assistance through a navigator network spanning the three national resource centers for Native American aging.
- ✓ Launch four pilot programs to help Tribal Nations of all sizes design HCBS models tailored to their unique needs.

As Native communities continue to take charge of their health and well-being, RCNAD will serve as a vital resource in ensuring Elders and individuals with disabilities receive the care they deserve—while remaining in the places they call home.

Stay connected for updates and opportunities to collaborate!

Cowlitz Elder Recipe: Forest Pie

- 1 Cup Huckleberry
- 1 Cup Blackberry
- 1 Cup Currant
- 1 Cup Heirloom Blackberries
- ½ Cup Sugar
- ¼ TBS Cinnamon
- 2 TBS Vanilla
- 2-3 TBS Flour

*If you need to - add some more sugar.

Combine frozen berry mix with sugar, flour, cinnamon and vanilla. Toss so all berries are covered, layer in a pie shell of your choice with butter. Cook the pie at 350 degrees for 40-60 minutes. And can add strudel to the top of the pie.



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