



American Indians, Alaska Natives & Native Hawaiian Elders
**National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska
Native and Native Hawaiian Elders**
At the University of Alaska Anchorage, College of
Health & Social Welfare

**Reliving the Past: The Experience of Historical &
Cultural Trauma by Alaska Native Elders**
ASo/NCoA Anaheim 06

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Collaborations

- ANTHC
 - Joint Advisory Committee
- ANPSY
- ANSRPH
- AoA (Administration on Aging)
- Alaska Commission On Aging
- National Indian Council on Aging
- NRC Native American Aging- Univ. of North Dakota
- Institute of Social and Economic Research
- Alaska Native Heritage Center

Purpose



- To gain insight from Alaska Native Elders in the development of health care programs, empower Native communities and recognize underlying cultural values.

GOALS



- Record and describe values held by Native Elders to better understand appropriate Native Elder-care standards



- **Record and describe expressed clinical, behavioral and educational needs of Elders and caretakers to empower Elders to direct their own care, and the care of Elders within their communities.**



- **Work with Native communities in conducting assessments of Elder's desires for their own care through capacity building and empowerment.**



- **Seek out and identify “best, promising and emerging practices” of the current incorporation of culture-based Native Elder-care services**



- **Provide an arena for community discussions on Elder physical and financial abuse, exploitation, neglect and violence as part of a process to assist communities in formulating their own plans to reduce, control and eliminate occurrences. Submitted a joint project proposal with North Dakota & NRC Alaska.**

Brief History on the Center

- **Funded Fall of 2003 – emphasis on Alaska**
- **Funded 2nd & 3rd year – continue Alaska projects**
 - Elders comments being used to write grants and for journal publication
 - Received 4th year funding

METHODS





- **Hold community Conferences of Elders in most regional center of Alaska to:**

LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF OUR ELDERS.

- **To hear their thoughts, wishes and wisdom about their own care**



- **....We listened to Elders at the Airports.....**



-We used local radio to invite Elders to the Conferences of Elders and to talk about Elder-care issues.....at Bethel, Dillingham, & Anchorage



....We visited with Legislators in Juneau....



-We visited Elders in Senior Centers to hear their voices....



-We braved the cold...but enjoyed the warm hospitality of all we visited
- Point Barrow, the Top of the World

Sharing the Findings



First Year

- **Summary papers on**

- Native Elders Views of Dignified Aging, Kathy Graves, Ph.D.
- The Health Status of Alaska Natives, Brian Saylor, Ph.D., and Susan Doucette
- Best, Promising and Emerging Practices, Bernie Segal, Ph.D.
- Elder Abuse Among Alaska Native Elders, Bernie Segal, Ph.D.
- Above paper edited by Stacy Smith, MFA



2nd Yr. Summary Papers

- Achieving Best Practices in Serving Ak. Native Elders by Kay Branch
- Long Term Care Needs of Ak. Nat. Elders by Kay Branch
- Boarding School: Historical Trauma among Ak. Nat. people by Jim LaBelle
- Traditions of Listening: Patterns of the Past-Guidelines to the Future by Kathy Graves & Louise Shavings
- PAPERS= www.elders.uaa.alaska.edu

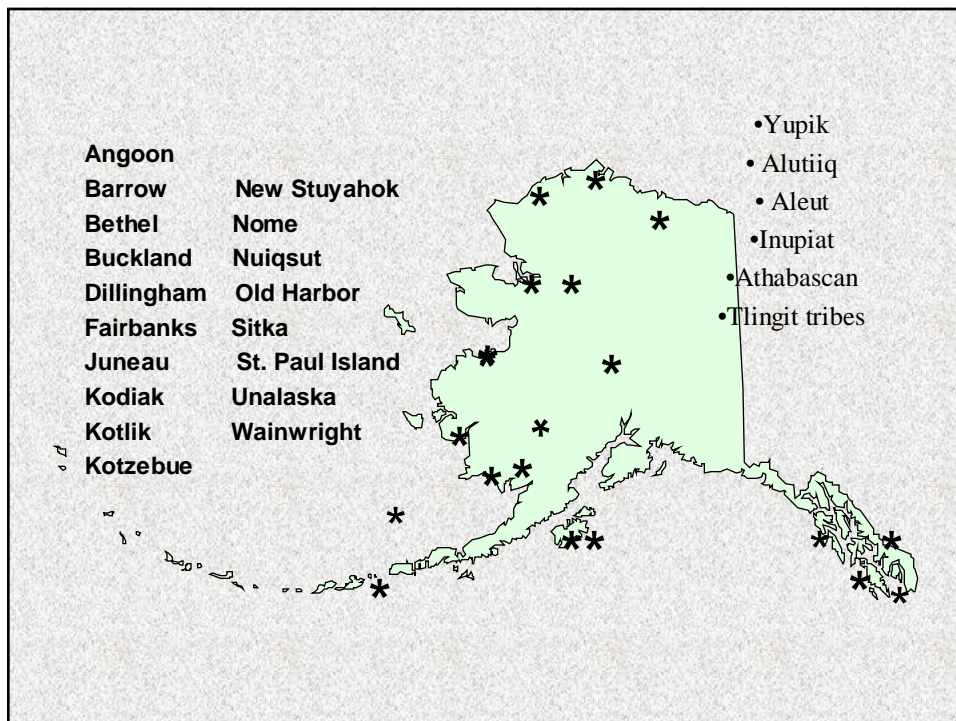


Regional Interviews

Native Views of Dignified Aging

Methodology

- 450 Alaska Native Elders at tribal organizations and senior centers were interviewed utilizing open-ended qualitative interviews
- Data was analyzed using a grounded theory approach – allowing for rich descriptions from the Elders to be systematically coded using Atlas.Ti qualitative software
- Use of cultural consultants to verify data



Emerging Themes

Theme 1: Alaska Native Elders are concerned primarily about the welfare of the entire group not themselves

- Elders teach cultural knowledge to youth, family, community and tribe
- Elders have acquired cultural knowledge & maintain their ancestral worldview of individual sacrifice for the benefit of the entire group
- Elders act as transmitters of wisdom from the past to the present

Theme Theme Theme Theme
1

Emerging Themes

Theme 2: Historical trauma has impacted the Elder's ability to acquire and transmit cultural knowledge

- Boarding school and missionary era brought disruptions in parenting, loss of language, and suspension of the dissemination of cultural knowledge
- Elders concerned that youth are not interested in learning the traditional ways. Cultural values are taught through the involvement in traditional activities.
- Many rural communities are beginning to reinitiate healing programs using elders in teaching traditions to the adults and youth

Theme Theme Theme Theme
2

Emerging Themes

Theme 3: Elders want services that are reflective of their cultural values

- In the past, care for the elderly was the responsibility of the entire community and their family
- Elders want to live with their family members or independently
- Removing elders from their villages has had negative consequences on the elders, families and the community
- Native food is essential for the elder's physical, mental and spiritual well being.
- Elders want health care workers who understand their culture, language and customs

Theme Theme Theme Theme

3

Emerging Themes

Theme 4: Elders report that Elder abuse needs immediate attention

- Substance abuse, financial abuse, and neglect are the most prevalent forms of abuse
- Elders want community networks to address the issue of abuse, rather than outside governmental agencies

Theme Theme Theme Theme

4

Discussion

- Wellness of community, families and Elders enhanced through utilizing contributions/worldview of the Elders
- Need to clearly delineate between Elders and the elderly
- Elders are living longer lives but not necessarily healthier lives/ increased the need for senior services

Discussion (cont.)

- When Elders disengage from their role and function in their communities, there can be a negative impact on the youth, elders, communities, and families.
- For Elders living in institutions, maintaining traditional roles and activities may increase mental, spiritual, social, and physical wellness.

Discussion (cont.)

- Health care workers need to become aware and sensitive to non-verbal communication patterns, English as a second language, and silences.
- Tribal, community & family healing will be enhanced when Elders returned to position of respect and authority.

Dissemination

- **Website**
<http://www.elders.uaa.alaska.edu>
- **Speakers at UAA Geriatric Education Summer Institute**
- **Summary video tape of project in progress**
- **Listserve to send e-mail papers to 448 locations**
- **White House Conference on Aging**



“Elder Respect and Absence of Respect Among Alaska Native Elders”



- **Elders want to be respected, to be listened to, to be given opportunities to share their knowledge, wisdom and their stories to have them passed down to the next generation**

- **Elders want to be with other Elders, their friends....**



- **Elders want to be able to participate in traditional activities (ceremonies) and teach younger ones the “signs” and “Native Ways of Knowing”**



- Elders want good nutrition
- “Subsistence is more than nutrition.” from Janelle Smith’s doctoral dissertation
- Spiritual connection to food sources



- Elders want to celebrate their years



- **Elders want to stay in their home communities near family and trusted friends**



- **Elders want to celebrate milestones in their history**

Progression of Elder Abuse Activities

- Plans for Expert Panel
- Conversations regarding the true nature of the problem
- Joint project with North Dakota Resource Center originally with AoA and NRCs.
- Current focused interviews

The Alaska Native Experience



Time of Contact for Alaska Native Groups

Unangan/Aleut	1750-1780
Siberian Yup'ik	1760-1790
Yup'ik/Cup'ik/Sugpiaq	1780-1840
Tlingit, Haida, Tshimsian	1785-1800
Athabascans	1800-1870
Inupiaq	1850-1870



The Great Death



Dislocations

- Economics (gold & copper mining, changes in hunting & fishing activities)
- War (WWII, Cold War)



Impact of Missionaries and Christianization of Indigenous People



Boarding Schools

1930s to 1970s

Additional trauma from
diseases, long term care



Substitution of Western Values for Indigenous Values



Displacement of Medicine People and Healers in Education and Health Care



Substitution of Western Christianity for Spirituality



Joint Proposal to National
Institutes of Aging with the
North Dakota University
Elder Resource Center On
Respect & Absence of
Respect



Focused Interviews on Elder
Respect/Disrespect in Third
Project Year



Staff

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