



# Native Aging Visions

A Resource for Native Elders

A Publication of the National Resource Center on Native American Aging  
located at the University of North Dakota Center for Rural Health  
School of Medicine & Health Sciences

Volume 7, No. 1 Winter 2007-2008

## Director's Column

Our tribal values concerning respect for children, elders, veterans, and visitors are similar for many of our tribal nations. These values are ingrained in our language and culture and provide the basis for community norms in how we treat the living and how we process the passing of our friends and relatives. The National Resource Center on Native American Aging (NRCNAA) and the Indian Country lost a national leader and advocate for Native elder issues through the passing of Dr. Alan Allery. Our staff continues to process Alan's passing and we are constantly thinking of ways to continue and build on the good work of Dr. Allery to increase the quality of life for Native elders throughout our nation.

My name is Leander "Russ" McDonald, Ph.D., and I have been appointed as the NRCNAA director. My father is enrolled with the Spirit Lake Dakota Nation and my mother is an enrolled Arikara with the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nations. I have been working with Alan and Richard Ludtke, Ph.D., Research Director, in various capacities since 1997. Both Alan and Rick have been mentoring me in providing elder directed research training, grant writing, program evaluation, elder advocacy, and policy development. I think this history of being directly involved in the work produced at the NRCNAA will greatly assist the staff and me to maintain the NRCNAA work at all levels.

We are working through a transitional period and we made the following changes to increase the efficiency of the office. Kim Ruliffson was promoted from project assistant to project coordinator; Twyla Baker-Demaray remains in her position as research analyst; Rick Ludtke will continue to serve as the research director, and Ann Miller was hired as the new administrative assistant. Additionally, one graduate research assistant, Mary Gattis, will be maintained to fulfill our mission of being a training ground for those interested in Native aging.



Leander "Russ"  
McDonald

The following Native Aging Visions newsletter has a number of articles that we hope you will find interesting and useful at the community level. One article is about the Standing Rock Reservation Cancer Screening Program. We conducted calls during the summer to create a Native Elder Service Locator database to share with Indian Country about projects that may be used as models for the provision or development of services. Lastly, we want to ask you to nominate individuals who have impacted the lives of elders in your

*(Continued on next page)*

## Directors Column *(Continued from front page)*

communities. The project is entitled *Heroes* and seeks to honor individuals who have dedicated time, talent, and energy to help address elder needs. Please visit our web site at <http://nrcnaa.org> to complete a simple nomination form. **Entries are requested by March 3, 2008.**

I hope it went well for you over the holidays and that you prosper in this new year. The NRCNAA staff wishes you a belated happy holidays and blessings and look forward to when we will see you again.

*Hau' Mitakuye Owasin (All My Relatives).*

— Russ McDonald

---

## Outstanding Program: Standing Rock Reservation Cancer Screening Program

Residents of Standing Rock Reservation have had better access to cancer screenings since 1997 thanks to a partnership of the Women's Way program, Tribal Community Health Representatives, Indian Health Services, and Custer Health Women's program.

"We have screened women for breast and cervical cancer since that time and have scheduled screening events throughout the year," said Jodie Fetsch, RN, from Custer Health.

In 2003, the program expanded to include men through a grant from Spirit of EAGLES.

"We screen the men for prostate and colorectal cancer," said Fetsch. "We have four to five days per year at two different Indian Health Service units."

"This has been a great success," said Fetsch. "The partnerships are the key element. The men's and women's programs run differently because of funding sources, but the model of screening is the same."

Fetsch and Elaine Keeps Eagle, Community Health Representatives at the



Standing Rock Reservation have taken this model to multiple cancer conferences to share the concept and paperwork so other reservation communities can learn from their success.

If you are interested in their model of screening please contact: Elaine Keeps Eagle, Community Health Representatives, Standing Rock Reservation at 701-854-3856 or Jodie Fetsch, RN, Custer Health at 701-667-3370.

### AoA 2008 Exemplary Program Recognition

The Administration on Aging (AoA) will recognize exemplary Title VI programs at the Training and Technical Assistance Forum to be held in Minneapolis, MN from April 28 to May 1, 2008. For more information, visit <http://olderindians.org/Exemplary08.cfm>



---

## The Importance of Population

by Richard Ludtke, Ph.D.

Population figures are both important and elusive for Native communities. Population figures are necessary as communities make applications for Title VI funding or other grants for their elders. The following brief discussion is intended to address some of the questions people have about population and to clarify important aspects of population changes occurring in the past, present and future.

### **Why is population important?**

Population serves as the basis for a wide range of planning and funding activities. When one asks to construct buildings or develop services for the elders, one of the first questions they encounter is “How many elders do you have?” This is often followed by a second question, such as “How many of those elders need this service?” These questions are fundamental and when no answers are provided, the doors of opportunity may be closed.

### **How does one determine the accurate number of elders for a community?**

Unfortunately, for Native communities, the source for population numbers has not been adequately developed over time. The census bureau is the primary source for most agencies looking for data to serve as the foundation for forecasting future populations. Issues regarding under-counts have resulted from the lack of trust of the government and census takers. The result is an understating of the true size of Native populations. Additionally, Native populations have been difficult to follow due to shifting definitions employed in each census. So, what should one do?

Use the census figures for your community as a starting point, but don't assume they are accurate. Look for other sources of information that would provide a count of

the elders. For example, tribal enrollment records that determine who is enrolled and living within your community boundaries are usually very accurate. If the enrollment number is higher than the census or census-based forecasts, use the enrollment data and make sure it is clear that records are being used because the census based-reports under-count the true number of elders.

### **The general population is experiencing slower increases in the aged from the Great Depression and soon the *baby boomers* born after WW II will fuel rapid growth in the elder population. Is this the same for Native elder populations?**

The population structure for American Indians is relatively young compared to the total population of the nation. In the census of 2000, only 5.6% of the American Indian population was 65 years of age or older compared to 12.4% for the total population. The population under age 18 was also much greater among the American Indians with 33.6% as compared to 25.6% for the total population (Census 2000). The *baby boom* occurred after World War II and followed a generation of people born during the depression. During the depression, birth rates for the nation dropped substantially as people delayed getting married and postponed having children because of the high rates of unemployment and poverty. This occurrence produced smaller numbers of people in the age groups born during the depression while the *boom* produced very large numbers born after the war when people married and had children at high rates. That is how the nation inevitably produced a small sized group of seniors who are now in retirement

(Continued on page 5)

## Outstanding Elder: Alfreda Morin

Linda Wright, Aging Services Division Director, submitted information about an extraordinary lady, Alfreda Morin, who serves the aging population at Turtle Mountain reservation in Belcourt, ND.

Alfreda is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and has 4 children, 2 stepchildren, sixteen grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. She is the primary caregiver to her husband who has diabetes and requires dialysis three days a week.

She has a nursing background and was hired as the project director of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Nutrition and Supportive Services where she has worked for almost 17 years.

She is dedicated and attentive to Native elders' needs. In October 2005, a blizzard hit North Dakota and lasted two days. Alfreda attempted to get to the meal site on the first day of the storm but roads were impassible. Alfreda called the Tribal Chairperson who called the local casino. The casino's kitchen staff cooked and delivered meals to the retirement home. Alfreda and her granddaughter were able to get to the meal site the next day and cooked all of the meals for the elders. This is a wonderful example where tribal entities work together to provide service to older persons.

Alfreda and her staff have provided outdoor barbeques to the Turtle Mountain Retirement home residents. In September 2006, Alfreda, her staff, the retirement

home staff and a Community Health Representative organized a Senior Fun Day. Fiddlers provided the music and the seniors danced. Alfreda, being a good sport, took part in the popular water game dunking machine!

Alfreda is the project director for Title III/Title VI Services and the administrator of the Family Caregiver Support Program. With the help of Donna Olson, the regional aging services program administrator, Alfreda created a Program Policy and Procedure Manual that was so well written that it was shared with the other Title III and IV Programs in North Dakota and Alfreda has asked for a copy of the manual to be shared with other states to help those in her position across the nation.

Donna Olson said, "I have had the pleasure of working with Alfreda Morin for the past fourteen years in the provision of Title III services. Alfreda is truly an advocate for older persons of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. She has good rapport with older persons and she and her staff are working hard to provide them with quality services. They genuinely care about the older persons on the Turtle Mountain reservation."

"Alfreda is one of the longest serving directors of the Title VI Older Americans Act program in the nation and has earned the respect of not only her peers but also the Administration on Aging and the Aging Services Division," says Linda Wright.

---

## New Researcher to the NRCNAA Team: Joelle Ruthig



In collaboration with the late Alan Allery, Joelle Ruthig recently completed a research paper that focused on contrasting Native American elders' self-rated health with a measure of the severity of their existing chronic disease conditions. Results showed that elders who had multiple or severe chronic diseases benefited from optimistic health appraisals in terms of

greater functional ability, greater social engagement, and fewer hospitalizations.

In conjunction with the NRCNAA, Ruthig is currently working on a research paper focusing on perceived barriers to health care access and health behaviors as predictors of Native elders' self-rated health. Preliminary findings suggest that exercise and nutrition are particularly important factors associated with positive health appraisals among the elders.

## Heroes Project: The National Resource Center on Native American Aging is Looking for Your Hometown Heroes

The Heroes Project was developed by the late Dr. Alan Allery, National Resource Center on Native American Aging at the University of North Dakota, and the Administration on Aging (AoA). In conjunction with the upcoming 30th anniversary of the AoA Title VI program, we are looking for your hometown heroes. We are seeking nominations from Title VI directors and other program workers for individuals who you feel have impacted the lives of elders in your community. The project seeks to honor individuals who have dedicated their time, talent, and energy to help our elders, to solve local problems, and build stronger communities.

**Eligibility** — Any individual in your community who has worked with your Title VI or elder's program is eligible to be nominated. At this time, organizations are not eligible for nomination. Separate

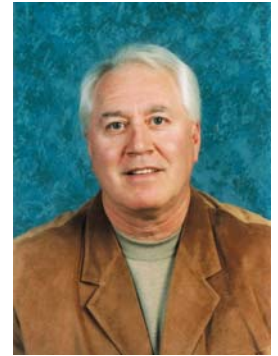
nominations may be submitted for as many different individuals as desired.

Nominees who are selected will have their stories published in AoA literature, and on the NRCNAA web site.

**How to Nominate** — Complete the form online at <http://nrcnaa.org> or call us for a nomination form at: 800-896-7628.

If possible, please provide a digital or high quality photo of the nominee.

Email/mail your nominations by **March 3, 2008**. Selected honorees will be contacted individually after their selection in early March 2008.



Alan Allery



### The Importance of Population *(Continued from page 3)*

and a very large group approaching retirement.

The resulting *baby boom* in Native American communities appears to have played out differently. The radical decline in birth rates as a response to the poverty produced by the depression was not experienced by people who already had a history of poverty. The impact of the depression was less for them, as poverty was not new, and consequently adjustments were not required; however, the post war boom, produced an explosion of births similar to that found across the nation as the Native Americans, who served in very high numbers, returned home to marry and have families.

### What is likely to happen over the next generation (20 years)?

The pattern for this *boom* suggests that **American Indian communities have rapidly aging populations now** and the impact of the general population boomers will begin in 2010. When this current rapid growth of senior citizens is combined with the recognition of elder status at age 55 for Native communities, one can expect that the growth already occurring will accelerate in the future and that this rate of change will be greater than that found in the general population.



Center  
Rural Health

National Resource Center on Native American Aging  
School of Medicine & Health Sciences Room 4535  
501 North Columbia Road Stop 9037  
Grand Forks, ND 58202-9037

NON PROFIT  
ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Grand Forks, ND  
58201  
Permit No. 10

*Address Service Requested*

---

## New Product: Elder Service Program Locator

The National Resource Center on Native American Aging conducted phone calls throughout the summer to determine services that each Title VI recipient tribe/village/homeland provides to their elders. All program site and contact information will be provided on an interactive web site as a resource for those interested in elder services. Booklets will also be available. Additionally, the web site can be used as a source of information to learn about the elder services available within other tribes/villages/homelands.

The information will also be used to enhance the Cycle III needs assessment to identify the existence (and/or lack) of services at tribal entities. In addition, the data has been shared with the Eldercare Locator, a public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging. Visit the web site to learn more: <http://www.eldercare.gov>. You can also speak with information specialists toll-free at 1-800-677-1116

weekdays, 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (ET). The service links those who need assistance with state and local area agencies on aging and community-based organizations that serve older adults and their caregivers.

*Native Aging Visions* wants to hear about outstanding people and programs that provide health care and other services to Native American elders. If you know of any that deserve recognition, please contact Kim at [kruliffson@medicine.nodak.edu](mailto:kruliffson@medicine.nodak.edu) so we can share the information. We hope to highlight some of these people and programs in the upcoming issues.

If you receive duplicate copies of *Native Aging Visions*, please route to others who do not receive addressed copies or call us at (800) 896-7628.

