

## Native Elders' Longevity, Dignity, Empowerment, and Respect (ELDER) Act

### *Background:*

As of 2023 over 300,000 American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) people age 65 and older are living in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The older AIAN population is growing, marking a demographic shift. With a life expectancy of 65.2 years in 2021, AIAN people's life expectancy reflects the total population's in 1944.<sup>2</sup> Tragically, tribal elders face substantial health disparities at rates disproportionately higher than the general population and are affected by poverty at more than double the rate of all older Americans. With 47 percent of older Native Americans identifying as disabled,<sup>1</sup> aging in place is particularly challenging, especially in remote areas.

The Older Americans Act (OAA) Title VI provides grant funding for aging programs to deliver nutrition and supportive services to older AIAN and Native Hawaiian peoples. A recent survey revealed that tribal aging programs are limited in addressing the most common unmet needs among AIAN elders, including home modifications and home/personal care.<sup>3</sup> Addressing these inequities is especially challenging in the country's most remote areas, such as Alaska. Tribal aging program directors and staff, despite operating with limited resources, achieve effective results and depend on robust partnerships and coordination with other programs and agencies to meet elders' needs. Additional supports and improvements are needed to ensure the OAA is addressing the unmet needs of AIAN elders.

### *The Native ELDER Act would:*

- Authorize the Assistant Secretary for Aging to establish an Older Americans Tribal Advisory Committee. This committee would provide recommendations on how the OAA's programs can improve their services for Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Elders, consulting with various federal agencies and states to enhance coordination.
- Amend Section 644 to ensure set aside funds are implemented for supportive services focused on healthy aging and independence.
- Amend Section 636 of OAA to prioritize accessible home modifications and in-home services necessary for Alaska Native, American Indian, and Native Hawaiian elders.
- Amend Section 201 to enhance technical assistance to ensure tribes and tribal organizations have adequate capacity to deliver services.
- Require the Assistant Secretary to evaluate and report on the level of need for in-home services, including accessible home modifications.
- Direct the Assistant Secretary to conduct a feasibility study for modifying the Native American Caregiver Support Program, aiming to enhance elders' ability to age in place. This study will be carried out in collaboration with other federal agencies whose programs may serve as models.
- Direct the Secretary of Labor to submit a report to Congress on how recipients of funding under title V of the OAA are serving Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Elders.
- Direct the Assistant Secretary of Aging to evaluate and identify the barriers to Indian tribes accessing programs under Title VI of the Older American Act.

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<sup>1</sup> Administration for Community Living. (2021). 2020 Profile of American Indians and Alaska Natives Age 65 and Older.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). Facts for Features: American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month: November 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2023/ai-an-month.html>

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. (2022). Life Expectancy in the U.S. Dropped for the Second Year in a Row in 2021 [Press release]. Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs\\_press\\_releases/2022/20220831.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/20220831.htm)

<sup>3</sup> National Association for Area Agencies on Aging & Miami University Scripps Gerontology Center. (2020). National Title VI Program Survey: Serving Tribal Elders Across the United States. Available at <https://www.usaging.org/Files/TitleVI-Survey-Report-508.pdf>