Disrespect: Addressing Elder Abuse in Indian Country on Turtle Island
Jacqueline S. Gray, Ph.D.
Center for Rural Health
University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences

Background
As shown by Table 1, the elderly population is expected to increase to an estimated 72.1 million persons by the year 2030, twice the size of their population in 2000. Among American Indians, the population of elders is expected to increase from 7% to 15% by the year 2050 and will represent more than 1% of the older population by the year 2050. The increase in elderly population brings an increase to the attention of abuse of elders and the need for abuse services. Though there are limitations of elder abuse and neglect studies in Indian Country, it is evident that there is an increasing trend of abuse and neglect. Existing literature provides information on contributing factors and the cultural paradox of elder abuse in Indian Country and the types of elder abuse. Elder abuse among Indian Country and other Indigenous populations has come to the forefront of social well-being through projects such as the National Indigenous Elder Justice Initiative (NIEJI) and the National Resource Center on Native American Aging (NRCNAA). The NRCNAA has produced a social and health needs assessment in which indicators for elder abuse in Indian Country are suggested.

Methods
During the four years of the NIEJI program, the program has worked with over 250 federally recognized American Indian tribes, Alaskan Villages, and Hawaiian Homesteads in the United States and discovered several model community based programs that are successfully addressing elder abuse and prevention in indigenous communities. Some of the programs are highlighted below.

Results
Table 1
Population and Projection of Older American Indian and Native Alaskans Aged 65+: 2014 to 2060
(numbers in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2030</th>
<th>2040</th>
<th>2050</th>
<th>2060</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>2400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2040</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>2600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2050</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td>2800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2060</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td>2800</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Types of Elder Abuse
- Physical Abuse
  - The use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. Includes striking, hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, kicking, pinching, and burning.
- Sexual Abuse
  - Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an elder. Includes unwanted touching, sexual assault or battery, rape, coerced nudity, sodomy, and sexually explicit photographing.
- Emotional/Psychological Abuse
  - The infliction of anguish, pain, or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts. Includes verbal assaulted, insults, threats, intimidation, humiliation, and harassment.
- Neglect
  - The refusal or failure to fulfill any part of a person’s obligations or duties to an elder. Includes failure of fiduciary responsibilities or failure to provide necessary care.
- Abandonment
  - The desertion of an elder by an individual who has assumed responsibility for providing care for an elder.
- Financial/Material Exploitation
  - The illegal or improper use of an elder’s funds, property, assets, or medications. Includes cashing elder’s checks without permission, forging and elder’s signature, stealing an elder’s possessions, or deceiving an elder into signing any document.
- Spiritual Abuse
  - Anything that interferes with spiritual growth including the corruption of another person’s value system or Soul Wounding.

Model Programs
- Interdisciplinary Elder Protection Team
  - These teams are made up of social services, law enforcement, prosecutors, health care providers, caregivers, housing, hospital and long term care staff, elder/senior services, and most important the elder and family members. The teams plan for the best interest of the elder with their permission to provide the best outcome.
- Elder Council
  - The elder council goes back to a traditional approach of a person being brought before the council of elders to address inappropriate behaviors and to determine what they are expected to do. In the case of elder abuse, the abuser goes before the council and is told what their behavior and actions are to be and what the consequence will be if they don’t do as told.
- Family Restoration
  - The family restoration program is a type of restorative justice in which the Adult Protective Services social worker works with the family to find resources and resolve conflicts and differences to increase the chances of the elder remaining in the home. The social worker is also involved and can recognize when there is no chance of family restoration and other solutions must be pursued.
- Project Golden Shield
  - Project Golden Shield is a community policing initiative by Bureau of Indian Affairs police and social services identified elders who were at risk of elder abuse or neglect. When the police were not on other calls they would visit the elders on the list just to talk and see how they were doing. At Christmas, they presented them with gifts as their Christmas angel, for Thanksgiving they brought the elder a prepared meal, and for Valentine’s Day they provided a treat as their Elder Sweetheart! These interactions strengthened the elders’ relationships with the police and made it more likely there would be knowledge of abuse or neglect before it became severe or repeated.

References

Conclusion
These are just a few of the model programs that are being developed at the community level by American Indian tribes, Alaskan Villages and Hawaiian Homesteads to stay with the traditions of honoring and respecting the elders.

Acknowledgements
Thank you to the many elders, senior services directors, and providers that shared their knowledge to make this poster possible. This project was supported in part by the Administration for Community Living Contract #90EM0007-01-00 for NIEJI. Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings/conclusions. Points of view/opinions do not necessarily represent official DHHS policy.