



# Elder Abuse Prevention Interventions Program: Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska

“The elder is a wisdom keeper...They’re going to pass [that] on to you, and then...when you get older, you’re going to be in the same place.”

—Thelma Whitewater, Program Coordinator

The Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska’s Public Health Nursing Office received the 2012 Elder Abuse Prevention Interventions Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to test interventions designed to prevent elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation in the tribal community.

**Operated by:** Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska

**Location:** Winnebago, NE

**Area served:** Tribal members age 55+

**Contact information:**  
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## Program Description

- The program coordinator offers home assessments during which she looks for signs of abuse.
- The program coordinator enlists public health nurses to help elders with medication management to monitor and prevent mismanagement of medication.
- Abuse is reported through the Nebraska Adult Protective Services (APS) elder abuse hotline.
- The Winnebago tribe has an agreement with the state that allows state investigators to look into elder abuse cases.
- Financial exploitation, often a result of elders sharing housing with other relatives, has been identified as the most common form of abuse reported.

## Successful Strategies

- The program provides elder abuse training to law enforcement, community health representatives, and public health nurses. It has also delivered several educational presentations to the general public, and hosts community trainings for caregivers.
- The program coordinator conducted a needs assessment to identify existing elder abuse educational materials in the community, and then created and published additional materials to provide information on issues and topics not already covered.
- To involve the community in its work, the program celebrated Elder Abuse Awareness Day with a traditional foods luncheon where it distributed educational materials. It also invited children to participate in an elder abuse awareness poster contest and displayed the winning poster on a community billboard.
- To get the word out on elder abuse to a wider audience, the program submits articles to the local newspaper and has developed audio clips that play frequently on the tribal college radio station.



## Collaboration

- The Winnebago Indian Health Service Medical Social Work Program has been a valuable resource for sharing information and networking. This program helped the Elder Abuse Prevention Interventions Program connect with the local hospice program and Nebraska APS.
- The program developed a multidisciplinary team consisting of 12 program representatives from tribal social and legal programs, law enforcement, and state representatives to propose revisions to the tribal code that would improve responses to abuse.

## Cultural Considerations

- All program messaging uses images and expressions relevant to the tribe's culture. The program emphasizes the key cultural themes of honor and respect for elders, the circle of life from child to elder, and the importance of elders as wisdom keepers.

## Funding

The program is funded through a 3-year grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Community Living. The funding helps provide educational resources to the community.

## Future Considerations

- The program would like to the tribe create and staff positions for a tribal elder abuse investigator, an elder abuse community educator, and an elder abuse victim advocate.
- The agreement with the state APS has resulted in several concerns that the program coordinator hopes will be addressed in the future, including:
  - The state, rather than the tribal community, takes elder abuse calls and investigations.
  - The program does not know the rate of investigation for reported abuse.
  - The APS investigator lives a significant distance from the community.
  - The state qualifies elders as age 60 and older, while the tribe recognizes anyone over 55 as an elder.

## Lessons Learned

The program's coordinator stressed the importance of simply being accessible to elders and making them aware that someone is available to help if they need anything.