

LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN SERVICES TO TRIBAL ELDERS

State Ombudsmen are responsible for leading and assisting ombudsman representatives (LTCO) in responding appropriately to long-term care consumers, including tribal elders. Ombudsmen are likely to provide information or services to tribal elders¹ living in facilities in a number of communities and states. Despite an increasing number of tribes with long-term care facilities on tribal lands, ombudsmen are more likely to encounter tribal elders living in long-term care facilities in urban areas.² Ombudsmen need to be equipped to serve this population.

Ombudsman skills and knowledge related to listening, individualized care, person-directed advocacy, empowerment, community resources, and long-term care systems, provide a good foundation for working with tribal elders. To improve the accessibility and effectiveness of LTCO services, Ombudsman Programs can connect with other programs currently serving tribal elders such as other LTCO programs, the Indian Health Service, and the Urban Indian Health Institute. Ombudsman can gain information on communication tips, information on specific tribal culture and practices, implications of the tribal holistic view of health, applicable resources, and suggested approaches.

Learn About Tribal Elders Your State

- Learn about the tribal elder population in your state and the numbers of elders living in long-term care facilities. Use the resources on the NORC website to increase your knowledge, to gain tips on how to begin communication, and to consider options for outreach. Click [here](#) for resources.
- Do you have tribes?
- If there are tribes in your state:
 - Are they federally recognized?
 - Are they state recognized?
 - Are they unrecognized tribes?
 - Which are grantees under Title VI?

Are There Long-Term Care Facilities on Tribal Lands in Your State? Are LTCO Services Available?

- Title VI of the Older Americans Act permits tribal organizations to use Title VI funds for ombudsman services, provided the services will be “substantially in compliance” with provisions of TITLE III (SECTION 614(A)(9) OF OAA).” Title III and Title VII funds may also be used to support ombudsman services to tribes. Click [here](#) to view the Older Americans Act language.
- Check the AGING Integrated Database (AGID) for a report of Title VI Ombudsman Services and for the locations of tribal organizations by state.
 - If any services are reported for your state, contact the tribal organization’s leadership and begin a dialogue. To check your state, click [here](#) for a link to the Title VI Services, click on Units, under Data Element, Supportive Services, Ombudsman Services.
 - Check the locations of tribal organizations in your state through AGID via State OAA Programs, State Profiles.
 - Remember that tribes are sovereign nations. Outreach, communication and services must respect this difference. Learn about tribal sovereignty, government, and working effectively by working through the short curriculum modules, *Working Effectively with Tribal Governments*. Click [here](#) to begin.
 - Contact the Title VI Directors regarding outreach, communication, services, and coordination with tribal organizations in your state. Each tribe has a director. Click [here](#) for a link to obtain current contact information for the Title VI Director(s) for the tribes in your state.
 - Refer to [resources](#) on the NORC website for information regarding specific tribes, communication tips and additional information. Curriculum modules are included.

¹ In this TA Brief, the term *tribal elders* also includes Native Alaskans, Native Hawaiians.

² Jolie Crowder, Research & Evaluation manager for IA2, email communication, 09/18/15. [LTCO] might be more likely to encounter Native Americans who have moved to an urban setting than dealing with issues in tribal facilities. 71% (or more) of American Indians actually live in urban areas. It’s a slightly smaller number when you narrow down to elders, but still more than half are in urban areas.

How Can Ombudsmen Better Serve Tribal Elders Living in Facilities Not on Tribal Lands or Operated by Tribal Nations?

- Seek to recruit tribal ombudsmen, as staff or volunteers, capable of providing culturally competent services to residents who are tribal members.
- Contact the Indian Health Service (<http://www.ihs.gov/>) and Title VI Directors covering your state to learn more about tribal elders living in long-term care facilities.
 - Ask questions, regarding any outreach, typical issues, and ombudsman services that may be helpful. What can you learn from them?
 - How may the LTCOP assist them with providing long-term care information and/or advocacy or support?
- Provide leadership, training, and support for LTCO in more effectively serving tribal elders.

Quick Tips from LTCOPs Serving Tribal Elders

Communication

- Communication, verbal *and* non-verbal, is different, including personal space. Learn more before you begin.
- Learn how to show respect and gain trust.
- Help caregivers learn about the elder's life and prior routines and activities.
- Be prepared for a slower pace in conversation and leave space for silence.
- Go slow, tread lightly, and try not to interrogate.

Additional Tips for Practice

- Elders in facilities may feel a sense of cultural dislocation because their family is not nearby or may not have transportation. A phone conversation with family or friends may boost quality of life.
- Having items from home in a tribal elder's room or familiar foods may be very important. The services of a Medicine Man may be essential for spiritual well-being or addressing issues.
- Use resources such as the Indian Health Service for information, and potentially for outreach and a list of translators or for translating residents' rights.
- Do not assume that there is a set of shared beliefs or approaches among tribal groups. Even individuals from the same tribe may have different beliefs. Continue to focus on person-directed advocacy.
- Working with tribes as a state employee/program may be challenging due to historical factors regarding tribes and the government.
- If an elder is not connected with the tribal health organization, check with them and make a referral with permission. The connection may help with any sense of dislocation and provide new options.

Coordination and Leadership

- Engage your ACL/AoA regional specialists and Title VI Director in discussing how funding may be used to support ombudsman services to tribes and the coordination with the LTCOP that must occur.
- Be thoughtful, begin by learning from available resources, make contacts, and work to increase LTCO Program outreach and effectiveness in serving tribal elders.
- LTC advocacy is needed for tribal elders and LTCO services are important. Create LTCOP policies and procedures that support services to tribal elders and train LTCO in cultural practices and resources.
- Cultural understandings of common [NORS](#) definitions may vary. Be aware of this if contracting with tribal entities for services or when working with staff or volunteers. Identifying a complaint or a resolution outcome may require a different approach.

RESOURCES

Ombudsman Services and Tribal Elders Issue [Page](#) (NORC) contains key resources on ombudsman services, outreach and cultural competency, training modules and presentations, and a list of resource centers. As new resources become available, this page will be updated.

CONTACT US

If you have questions about this brief or would like to share some of your LTCOP's activities or challenges regarding ombudsman services to tribal elders, please email ombudcenter@theconsumervoice.org or call 202-332-2275.

This project was supported, in part by number 900M002, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC 20201. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration for Community Living policy.