



Elderly Protection Team Department: Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

“Every tribe needs [an elder abuse] department because the elders are [vulnerable], and something has to be done to help them.”

—John Red Bear, Department Director

The Elderly Protection Team Department is comprised of full-time staff and a volunteer “Elderly Protection Team” that helps the department review cases. The department has the responsibility and legal authority to investigate reports of elderly abuse, provide protective services, and initiate tribal court actions on behalf of elders who are unable to consent to protective services.

Operated by: Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

Location: Fort Yates, ND

Area served: 8 Standing Rock Sioux communities

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Program Description

- The Elderly Protection Team Department has served its community for over 25 years.
- The department is authorized to serve as an elder’s advocate, liaison, or guardian.
- In order to intervene, the department must receive a written complaint. They address complaints of any type of elder abuse from anyone who suspects abuse, not just from victims.
- The department has a volunteer Elderly Protection Team made up of social workers, behavioral health specialists, law enforcement officers, and others.
- In addition to monitoring the surrounding community, the department regularly checks on tribal elders residing in over 20 nursing homes across various states.
- The department has a financial management program that monitors elders’ finances. They can also serve as elder’s formal payee, if needed, in cases of severe financial abuse.

Successful Strategies

- Hosting frequent public meetings to increase elder abuse awareness and delivering presentations at national events have been helpful outreach strategies.
- The department also hosts informational booths at conferences and health fairs.
- The department makes a point to reach out to young people specifically with youth-focused activities, such as hosting a booth at a local high school health fair.
- The tribe has an elder abuse code in place, which allows the program to take the necessary programmatic and legal actions to address abuse.



Collaboration

- The department works with the Green Thumb Program, which helps elders participate in volunteer positions throughout the community.
- To ensure wide coverage on reports of suspected abuse, the department coordinates with other health organizations, such as the Community Health Representative program, to conduct home visits.
- The tribe spans two states: North Dakota and South Dakota. Therefore, the department's Elderly Protection Team includes a tribally appointed representative from each state.

Cultural Considerations

- The department shows sensitivity to a victim's gender. For example, it would send a female staff member to work with a female elder.
- Staff members include employees who can use the tribe's language when speaking with elders, to encourage elders to feel comfortable sharing their stories.
- Recognizing that many victims may hesitate to speak up, the department emphasizes multiple visits to a suspected abusive environment until the elder is ready to share.

"I'll sit down and just carry on a casual conversation. I'll talk about elder abuse stuff and I'll ask them, 'Are you OK? Is anything going on that I should know about?'...Eventually, they'll talk."

—John Red Bear, Director, Standing Rock Sioux Elderly Protection Program

Funding

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe funds the Elderly Protection Team Department's work.

Future Considerations

- Including representation from the tribal veteran's office on the Elder Protection Team.
- Increasing funding to add more staff, including an attorney and more social workers.
- Developing a home health care model that works for Standing Rock Sioux elders. It also hopes to establish a nursing home, assisted living facility, or elder village.

Lessons Learned

The program advises other tribal organizations to take these steps to create a successful program:

- Create an Elder Protection Team made up of different community stakeholders. This team can assess issues influencing elder abuse in the community, such as laws, current programs, and common forms of abuse.
- Establish an elder abuse code that is appropriate to the tribe.
- Look at a variety of available funding sources. Instead of depending solely on the tribe, whose budget will likely fluctuate, look for other grants that can supplement program funds.