

Tribal Elder Protection Team



Introduction to Tribal Elder Protection Teams

The Tribal Elder Protection Team (TEPT) has been commonly referred to as a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) which is a group of professionals, family members, and community members from diverse disciplines. A key difference compared to MDTs is that TEPTs and EPTs specifically include the elder and try to exhibit person-centered practices when possible. A key difference between EPTs and TEPTs is that TEPTs try to utilize tribal resources and cultural practices and keep the elder in their chosen tribal community if possible. The TEPT provides comprehensive assessment and consultation in addressing elder abuse concerns. The TEPT also provides assistance to their clients to promote coordination among service programs available to elders. The TEPT seeks to improve lines of communication to efficiently address elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The TEPT increases relationships between tribal public service agencies while maintaining client confidentiality. Various professional disciplines are represented on the TEPT. Membership is limited and is not open to all service providers, or members of the public. The Tribal Elder Protection Team Toolkit will define the roles and responsibilities of the TEPT members.

- *We will primarily use TEPT in this toolkit but you may see EPT and MDT used interchangeably in some sections of the toolkit, as different tribes may refer to their teams as one or the other. The TEPT may be as diverse as their communities in which they serve. Remember that EPT include the elder where often MDT do not.*
- *Involving the elders as the central focus of the group is specific to Native American Elder Protection Teams as some non-Native teams do not include elders in the conversation and/or do not have practices centered around them.*

What is an Elder Protection Team?

One of the most successful models for addressing elder abuse in Indian Country is utilized by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs (CTWS) in Oregon. The CTWS-MDT representatives have served their tribal community since 1999 through a multidisciplinary team approach. This MDT provides assistance to their clients when coordinating with social service programs, health systems, and legal proceedings. The CTWS-MDT coordinates documentation, and evidence gathering efforts for legal procedures (civil and criminal cases) and assists in community crime prevention efforts.¹

The CTWS- MDT members include representatives from: The Senior Wellness Center, Tribal Police, Tribal Prosecutor's Office, BIA/Tribal Social Services, Tribal Housing Authority, Indian Health Service (IHS), Community Health Representatives (CHR), Victims of Crimes Office, Assisted Living, and the Oregon Adult Protective Services.¹

Why create an Elder Protection Team?

- To reduce stereotypes around elder abuse
- To address a lack of standardized protocols which may limit resources available to elders
- To improve appropriate responses to elder abuse
- To improve communication and coordination among service agencies, thereby saving valuable time locating advocates and addressing safety concerns for the elder
- To improve elder abuse training for professionals, thereby gaining trust in providers, and better utilizing them
- To reduce underreporting of elder abuse
 - In 2013, the Bureau of Indian Affairs reported that 1 in 23 cases of elder abuse were reported to any agency; only 1 in 44 cases of financial abuse were reported, and 1 in 57 cases of neglect.²

What to consider when creating a Tribal Elder Protection Team?

1. Defining the responsibilities and functions of the team such as:

- How often meetings are held (e.g., monthly)
- Location and time (e.g., Senior Center- meeting room at 6pm)
- Who chairs meetings (e.g., senior wellness director, etc.)
- Defining how client information will be recorded (e.g., each department will keep own records)

2. Defining criteria of membership and affiliation:

- Requirements for meeting attendance (e.g., each department selects a representative)
- Clearly agreed upon TEPT protocols for addressing elder abuse
- Limitations of report sharing (e.g., each members signs confidentiality agreement)
- How confidentiality will be maintained

3. Defining purpose of the TEPT meeting:

- Case review (e.g., each department reports case status to team)
- Intervention (e.g., coordination of resources by local senior/elder programs and other team members)
- Prosecution (e.g., implementing Tribal Elder Abuse Code(s), roles of law enforcement and the court)
- Prevention of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation

4. Defining roles and responsibilities of members:

- Define each team member's role (e.g., response protocol and mandatory reporting)
- Training needs and requirements
- Identify relevant jurisdictional issues (e.g., PL-280 state, tribal, federal, etc.)

5. Defining community awareness and prevention procedures for example:

- How will information be disseminated into the community? (e.g., holding press conferences, distributing informational pamphlets)
- Community outreach activities to address awareness of elder abuse, development of an elder abuse support group or coalition, meeting your elderly neighbors, and initiating projects with local schools.

Elder Protection programs vary across Indian Country in terms of:

- Available infrastructure including agencies and personnel responding to incidents
- Jurisdictional considerations
- Availability of traditional justice systems
- Tribal and/or State civil or criminal courts

Content for this document was adapted from presentation materials and correspondence with Wilson Wewa of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs from November 2016 through May 2017.

References

1. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Wilson Wewa (2014). *Multidisciplinary Team Approach on Elder Abuse*. Retrieved from www.nieji.org/pdf/multidisciplinary-team-approach-elder-abuse-presentation-121014.pdf
2. U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Services, Division of Human Services (2013). *Adult Protective Services Handbook: A Guide for Protecting Vulnerable Adult and Elder Indians from Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation*.

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