



Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Tribal Nursing Home Best Practices

Cultural Sensitivity

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Introduction

Across Indian Country, long-term care facilities operated by tribes and American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) organizations provide culturally appropriate care for AI/AN elders. In these care settings, elders receive support with activities of daily living while remaining connected to the communities they call home. Maintaining ties with their communities, families, cultures, and traditions promotes quality of life for elders as they age.

Many tribal nursing homes and assisted living homes have developed strategies for providing culturally sensitive care that other tribal facilities can incorporate to enhance the wellbeing of their elders. A person-centered approach is important to successfully providing culturally sensitive care. Person-centered care acknowledges and seeks to accommodate individual lifeways and preferences, rather than applying a broad definition of cultural sensitivity.

This report describes the approaches to culturally sensitive care of four tribal long-term care facilities. It outlines tips for providing person-centered care, honoring traditions, coordinating cultural activities, supporting elders' spiritual wellbeing, training staff to provide culturally sensitive care, and leveraging community support and partnerships to provide care rooted in culture and tradition.

Program Profiles

The following sections discuss the approaches several tribal long-term care facilities take to provide culturally appropriate care, including:

- Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility
- Utuqqanaat Inaat Nursing Home
- Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility
- Yukon Koskokwim Elders Home

Each of these long-term care facilities offered guidance to support other tribal programs in providing culturally sensitive care for elders. Their recommendations, which are detailed in the sections below, include emphasizing person-centered care; hiring a cultural liaison to coordinate traditional activities; seeking input from elders, their family members, and employees about how to approach care in a culturally appropriate way; and providing training for employees that familiarizes them with the elders' cultures and helps them communicate effectively.

Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility

OPERATED BY: TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION

LOCATION: SELLS, AZ

“Culture—that’s the core of your being. That’s who you are, how you grew up, how you were raised, your family traditions, your tribal traditions. If that core is not supported through a culturally appropriate environment that understands that culture and will support that culture, then you’re just caring for a shell, rather than the entire individual.”

Rick Richards, Director of Operations

Person-Centered Care

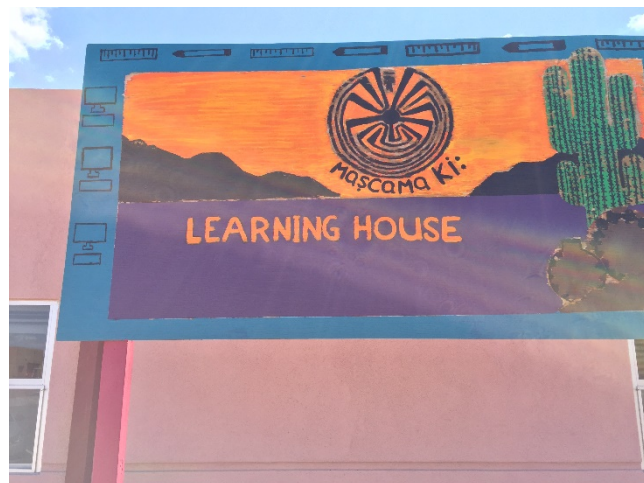
To provide culturally sensitive care at an individual level, staff at Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Home inquire about individual preferences. Staff ask questions about when elders would like to wake up, what time they want to shower, and whether they want their bedding changed that day. Residents are encouraged to voice their preferences and to keep similar schedules as they would have followed at home.

To help residents maintain connections to their families and communities, the facility helps visitors feel welcome. The nursing home accommodates large groups of family visitors. In a recent example, about 20 family members joined a resident for dinner in the nursing home dining room.

The nursing home has a resident council, which represents the elders’ voices and advocates for their needs. The nursing home administrator meets with the council to hear first-hand about residents’ preferences, needs, and concerns. Additionally, the nursing home gathers information on the residents’ experiences through quarterly surveys of residents and their families.

Traditions

Many AI/AN elders grew up eating the same traditional foods that provided sustenance to their ancestors and are connected to their land and cultural ways. By serving traditional foods and providing access to traditional medicine, the nursing home helps residents stay connected with their traditional lifeways. The kitchen prepares a variety of traditional meals, with at least one traditional dish served daily. Additionally, the nursing home sets aside funds to staff a traditional medicine person who cleanses the facility regularly and supports residents as requested.



**Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility
Education Building**

Tribal Nursing Home Best Practices

Cultural Sensitivity

Communication

Languages spoken at the facility include O'odham, English, and Spanish. Many of the nursing home employees speak O'odham with residents. The nursing home prioritizes communication with residents in O'odham, since their traditional language is an integral part of their culture.

Cultural and Spiritual Activities

The facility employs a cultural liaison who organizes activities and shares information between residents and staff. Cultural activities for residents at Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility range from classes held by other elders in the community to attendance at the tribal rodeo and parade. The nursing home provides transportation to many cultural events. In recognition of the importance of spirituality to elders' wellbeing, the cultural liaison arranges for religious services to be held for various faiths.

Staff Training

Staff training sets a foundation for culturally appropriate care. During orientation, employees learn about traditional Tohono O'odham lifestyles and how to honor cultural considerations when caring for residents. They are encouraged to inquire about residents' needs, preferences, and concerns, rather than waiting for the elders to speak up. The traditional medicine person works with staff to help them understand Tohono O'odham culture and interact with the elders in culturally appropriate ways. The nursing home's ongoing engagement with staff to listen to their concerns and ideas helps ensure they are empowered to provide high-quality, culturally sensitive care.

Partnerships and Community Support

The nursing home receives financial support from the Tohono O'odham Nation, Medicaid, and Medicare. The Tohono O'odham tribal council works closely with the nursing home's board of directors to ensure the residents receive culturally appropriate care. Each year, the tribal council holds a monthly council session at the nursing home, so elders can participate.

Other partners include the local hospital, clinics, senior centers, and schools. Children from local schools and senior citizen councils from each Tohono O'odham district visit the residents regularly. In return for the community's support, the nursing home supports the community by offering community meals and meeting space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership of the Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility offered the following cultural sensitivity recommendations for other tribal nursing homes.

- Hire a cultural liaison who is familiar with the community and understands the elders' culture and traditions.
- Employ tribal citizens to the greatest extent possible.
- Prioritize native language, traditional food, and spirituality.
- Seek feedback from the elders and listen to their needs.
- As part of training, take employees to visit different parts of the community to familiarize them with how nursing home residents may have lived.
- Develop a short training video that discusses effective communication with elders, including appropriate communication styles and which topics or phrases to avoid.

Utuqqanaat Inaat Nursing Home

OPERATED BY: MANIIAQ ASSOCIATION

LOCATION: KOTZEBUE, AK

“The elders here are very much respected in the community, and it’s important that we do the same thing. That means understanding their tribal values and their subsistence lifestyle, who they are.”

Val Kriel, Administrator

Person-Centered Care

The Utuqqanaat Inaat Nursing Home works to honor tribal values and individual preferences and needs in caring for elders. Since Alaska experiences drastic changes in daylight hours from summer to winter, sleep patterns often change with the seasons. To accommodate individual sleeping patterns, the facility provides flexible meal times and medication times. The nursing home employs nursing assistants from local tribes who understand cultural considerations for tribal elders in the Maniilaq area and can provide culturally appropriate care.

Traditions

Nursing home residents have the option to receive medical care from a traditional tribal doctor. To further incorporate tradition into care, the nursing home serves a variety of traditional foods, such as caribou, moose, musk ox, and shiifish. In addition to providing traditional medicine and first foods, the facility also maintains an environment that reflects the elders’ culture by displaying local Alaska Native artwork.

Communication

The nursing home employs an Iñupiat language speaker to ensure residents can communicate in their traditional language, if desired. With the help of a local translator, the nursing home produced Iñupiat language versions of the resident rights document and the resident handbook. The documents were also translated into braille for visually impaired elders. Additionally, the nursing home developed a small Iñupiat language dictionary to help staff interact with residents using common Iñupiat words and phrases.



Utuqqanaat Inaat Nursing Home

Cultural and Spiritual Activities

Through cultural activities like berry picking on the tundra or ice fishing, the nursing home provides opportunities for residents to continue the lifeways they followed at home. To help elders maintain their family and community ties, the nursing home transports residents to various community events, such as basketball games. Elders also help the community prepare for the Kobuk 440, a Kotzebue-based, long-distance sled dog race. In acknowledgement of the importance of spirituality to

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residents' overall wellbeing, the facility holds Christian church services on Sundays, since most of the residents are Christian. Spiritual leaders of other faiths are asked to visit periodically.

Staff Training

All Utuqqanaat Inaat Nursing Home staff receive cultural sensitivity training. To orient new staff members, the facility developed a training video that showcases culturally appropriate communication styles. For example, new employees learn that some Inupiat elders prefer not to maintain eye contact while they speak. The nursing home's board of directors oversees cultural sensitivity training and reviews the training materials to ensure content is culturally appropriate.

Partnerships and Community Support

Community partners work with the nursing home to ensure that elders can participate in a variety of community activities. Every Wednesday, the Inupiaq language immersion school brings students to the nursing home to talk and sing with the elders. LaVonne's Fish Camp, a culture camp that educates people about subsistence living, often involves nursing home residents in salmon fishing and traditional meals. The Inupiat Heritage Center shows weekly movies about Inupiat culture, which residents are encouraged to attend. The center offers a special early viewing for elders, if desired. Each year, the city carves out ice roads for the elders to use for ice fishing. These activities help elders remain connected to the communities where they grew up.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership of the Utuqqanaat Inaat Nursing Home offered the following suggestions to other tribal nursing homes that are working to promote culturally sensitive care.

- Listen to the elders and take time to learn about their cultures in their own words.
- Develop cultural sensitivity training based on this information.
- Train staff to communicate according to the elders' culture, rather than expecting the elders to deviate from their culture to communicate with staff.

Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility

OPERATED BY: A CONSORTIUM OF THE VILLAGE TRIBES OF KOYUKUK, NULATO, KALTAG, RUBY, AND GALENA

LOCATION: GALENA, AK

"It starts with our philosophy, our mission, and our values, which were developed and adopted by our board of directors. We're Athabascan here, so those are based on our cultural values and practices."

Agnes Sweetsir, Administrator

Person-Centered Care

The Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility values residents' independence and honors individual care preferences to the greatest extent possible. When residents relocate to the facility, the assisted living home's staff discusses with them how they would like to be treated and what kinds of activities or traditions are important to them. For example, the facility may inquire about the elder's preferred traditional foods and how they celebrate certain holidays.

To tailor care to individual cultural preferences, the assisted living home gathers feedback directly from residents through surveys. The assisted living home also surveys residents' families, care providers, and others who visit the facility. The surveys include specific questions about the levels of cultural sensitivity in the care provided.

Traditions

The Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility is situated on the banks of the Yukon River, a core element of Athabascan culture, where many elders grew up. To help elders continue living according to their Athabascan traditions, the facility incorporates traditional songs and dances into the care setting. Additionally, they serve traditional foods, such as moose, beaver, grouse, and salmon.

Communication

While most of the residents at Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility speak English, their traditional language is an important link to their culture. Staff who do not speak Athabascan learn how to exchange common phrases with residents and ask questions in their native language. The assisted living home reminds staff and care providers who visit the facility about culturally appropriate communication styles, such as sensitivity to eye contact. They also learn how to communicate effectively with people who have dementia by slowing down the pace of interactions and being comfortable with moments of silence.



Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility

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Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural and Spiritual Activities

The assisted living home strives to offer cultural activities that help elders remain connected to their traditional lifeways. For people with dementia, the Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility provides music, food, artwork, and photographs, as cultural reminders of their younger years. To support residents' spiritual wellbeing, the facility asks about elders' spiritual beliefs and practices when they first move to the facility. The assisted living home offers various church services to accommodate a variety of faiths.

Staff Training

The assisted living home trains all staff on appropriate communication styles for interacting with elders. During staff orientation, new employees explore their family trees to discover how they are related to the elders they work with. This context encourages employees to provide high-quality, person-centered care. During training, employees learn about the importance of hospitality in Athabaskan culture and how to apply it in caring for the residents. They also learn how to cook the elders' favorite traditional foods. Ongoing training occurs during regular staff meetings. Additionally, training is available for residents' family members on how to communicate effectively with elders during visits.

Partnerships and Community Support

The community supports the assisted living home and the elders by providing traditional food sources, visiting the facility to play traditional music or participate in holiday dinners, and donating art from local artists. Through a partnership with the local high school, students visit residents about three times per week to play games, learn beadwork or knitting, and listen to stories from the elders. A local store provides walk-in freezer space where the facility can store game donated by the community. This support helps the elders remained connected to their culture and traditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The administrator of the Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility presented several recommendations for other tribal long-term care facilities working to enhance cultural sensitivity.

- Understand that culture is defined individually.
- Explore the culture and beliefs of each resident.
- Provide care according to the culture residents with dementia would remember from their younger years.

Yukon Kuskokwim Elders Home

OPERATED BY: YUKON-KUSKOKWIM HEALTH CORPORATION

LOCATION: BETHEL, AK

“See who your staff members are, see who your family members are, and see what’s important to the elder, like whether they like to smudge a room when they come in.”

Gerald Hodges, Administrator

Person-Centered Care

Respecting individual preferences is a central care principle at the Yukon Kuskokwim Elders Home. To the greatest extent possible, the facility encourages residents to maintain the same schedules and patterns they followed at home. For example, residents are encouraged to sleep in, if they prefer. The facility retains flexible visiting hours, since Alaska’s fluctuation in daylight hours can lead to mostly late evening visits.

Traditions

To help elders remain connected to their traditional lifeways, the nursing home permits traditional cleansing of residents’ rooms. They also serve a variety of traditional foods. When a resident passes away, the nursing home provides a traditional feast to honor that person.

Communication

Whenever possible, the nursing home hires staff from the same culture as the residents, so the elders can speak and be understood in their traditional language. The nursing home manages staff schedules to ensure a Yupik speaker is available on every shift. Further, interpreters are always available during resident council meetings, so all elders can participate.



Surrounding landscape near the Yukon Kuskokwim Elders Home

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Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural and Spiritual Activities

To help elders continue to engage in cultural activities, the nursing home transports residents to community events, including the Cama-i Festival, a large Alaska Native dancing festival. The nursing home also coordinates opportunities for elders to participate in hunting and gathering. In support of the elders' spiritual wellbeing, the nursing home invites ministers from various faiths to visit the facility.

Staff Training

During staff orientation, the nursing home trains all employees on Alaska Native traditions and culture, such as the importance of family time. To promote culturally sensitive interactions between staff and elders, the nursing home trains staff on appropriate communication styles, such as slowing down the pace of the conversation and allowing ample time for the elder to finish speaking.

Conclusion

Long-term care programs across Indian Country provide culturally appropriate care that keeps elders connected to their communities and traditions. By honoring individual cultural preferences, these facilities provide person-centered care that helps elders continue to live according to the lifeways they followed at home. Traditional foods and ceremonies, cultural activities, communication in elders' native languages, and spiritual support further help elders maintain quality of life as they age. Cultural sensitivity training empowers staff at long-term care facilities to provide respectful care rooted in tradition. Through community partnerships, elders at long-term care facilities can continue to engage in community events and activities. Lessons learned through the cultural sensitivity approaches of these tribal long-term care facilities can help guide other tribal programs in promoting culturally sensitive care for their elders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The administrator of the Yukon Kuskokwim Elders Home provided the following cultural sensitivity recommendations for other tribal programs.

- Gather input on how to provide culturally appropriate care from staff members familiar with the culture.
- Seek input from family members on how to best care for their loved ones.