

**STATEMENT
OF
SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE
CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
JULY 10, 2002
HEARING
ON
ELDER HEALTH ISSUES**

The Committee meets this morning to receive testimony on an on-going study that is being conducted by the National Resource Center on Native American Aging, within the Center for Rural Health at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

This study examines the long-term care and health care needs of America's Native American Elders.

Despite the fact that the American Indian population is one of the fastest growing populations in the United States, the status of elderly Native Americans is – to put it simply – poor.

As the testimony today will indicate, almost three out of five elderly Native Americans live well below the poverty line.

Diseases such as diabetes afflict Indian Elders at epidemic rates, and the mortality rate from diabetes is five times higher than the national average.

Deaths associated with kidney disease are three times the national average amongst Native American Elders.

The statistics are overwhelming and the need for age-sensitive health care and for long-term care is obvious.

Unfortunately, the long-term care options for most Native American Elders are minimal at best, and often require a decision that breaks families apart.

With few long-term care facilities available on most Indian reservations, Elders requiring such care may have to be placed hundreds of miles from their homes and families.

Poor families don't have the means to travel back and forth to visit their grandmothers and grandfathers, and sadly, we know that many families in Indian Country are constrained in this way.

Home health care alternatives are also extremely limited in most Tribal communities.

So while families may ultimately decide that it is best to keep their loved ones at home – like most families across America, few have the professional training to adequately care for their Elders.

These are the tragic circumstances that many Native Elders face as they enter into their twilight years.

Today, we hope that the testimony will shed some light not only on the conditions in Indian country as they affect the elderly, but what can be done to better address their needs.

As one who qualifies under almost any definition as an Elder, I take these matters very seriously, and I look forward to the constructive solutions that we anticipate will be forthcoming from the testimony received today.