

Indian Aging Council Report

By MARIE MORRISON

The National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) recently held its board meeting in Anchorage to view services being provided for Alaskan Native elderly. Presentations were given by the State of Alaska Office on Aging, Alaska Native Area Health Service and Alaska Native non-profit associations to acquaint the board with problems of the Native elderly in Alaska.

According to the Office on Aging, the State's elderly population is 18,000, with approximately 3,806 being Alaskan Native. Under the Older Americans Act, each state receives program funding based on the total elderly population, without specific designation for ethnic groups. As the State has not conducted a study showing services provided for Native elderly versus non-Native, it was difficult to perceive if both were served equally, which is a major concern of the Council.

According to Juana Lyon, executive director of the Council, the problem of whether Native elders are getting equal treatment is serious both in Alaska and the Lower 48. The Council is currently presenting legislation to the U.S. Congress to alleviate the situation.

The legislation has been drafted by the Council to allow Indian tribes and organizations which

serve the elderly to apply for funds directly from the federal government but still have the choice to apply to the state as well. If the tribe or organization is awarded direct funding, the amount will be deducted from the State's allocation from the federal government.

The bill would also mandate the Commissioner of the Administration on Aging to establish an Office of Indian Programs which would have the responsibility of serving the Indian elderly and provide technical assistance to those tribes applying for aging funds in the area of grant applications.

The Council strongly feels after the two-day Anchorage meeting that this legislation would assist the non-profit organizations that serve the Alaskan Native. The Council urges Alaska Natives to support their legislation.

Information presented at the

meeting gave a brief picture of the problems of Native elderly in the areas of dental, outpatient care and the number one cause of death, which is accidents. It was interesting to note that though the statistics are grim, the Alaskan Native elderly are catching up to U.S. statistics in longevity and chronic diseases, such as heart problems and alcoholism. The August 1977 study also noted that the latent effects of tuberculosis are now surfacing in the form of many illnesses among the Native aged.