



Wisdom Warriors

Living Wise.....Living Strong

Since 1994, The Northwest Regional Council (NWRC) Tribal Outreach Program has successfully linked Native American Elders with services and information on aging. Serving the Lummi, Nooksack, Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, Swinomish, Upper Skagit, and Tulalip Tribal communities, this valuable program ensures services to Elders and provides Information and Assistance Elders in Tribal Communities. This focused outreach uses culturally appropriate materials and a culturally relevant approach to make services available and effective for Native American Elders.

NWRC is partnering with tribal communities throughout Washington to implement an ongoing Tribal Preventative Health Program. Over four hundred (400) participants have made a commitment to living a healthier lifestyle! This number continues to grow as more communities come together to prioritize health and wellness and Intertribal Wisdom Warrior monthly meetings have been started.

This program is designed after the “*Wisdom Steps*” model. *Wisdom Steps* is a very successful program in Minnesota and has over 1000 tribal members enrolled. Please see their web page for a better understanding of their program. Listed below are the *suggested* participation requirements and incentives received once goals are completed. Each tribe follows the basic structure of the program but is welcome to customize their program to best suit their members. We want the tribal coordinators from each tribe to design the program to best suit their tribes’ needs.

The goal of the program is to provide an ongoing, incentive driven program that provides Elders the education, support and tools to make healthy choices resulting in lifestyles that promote self-care, good choices and longevity. The Elders are rewarded with the Program medicine bag, beads, charms, and most important, more active control of their own health and wellbeing.

Suggested Program Participation Requirements

The first step in joining the program is for tribal members to participate in the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP). The Wisdom Warrior program then echoes the lessons learned in CDSMP, which provides education and tools for living with chronic disease and practicing proactive, healthy living choices.

Upon completion of the CDSMP the participant receive a medicine bag signifying their commitment to their health. The medicine bag is designed with fringe where beads earned by elders are added to signify their success in the many areas of wellness. In addition, the tribes could offer a tribal pin, a pin for veterans, cancer survivors, clean and sober, positive parenting or grandparenting, etc. Tribal members can earn beads by completing or participating in various activities established by their tribal elders program using the suggested program areas listed below. After participating in the program for one year and earning various beads, the Wisdom Warrior would earn a special charm relevant to Native American traditions in your participating region.

To make the program easily recognizable and fair, each tribe will use the same style medicine bags, Wisdom Warrior pins, and charms so that anyone will be able to see, at a glance, which beads have been earned and their significance.

The beads and the charms earned are identical for each tribe participating, this helps others recognize accomplishments and gives others the incentive to join and earn their own charms. An example would be a feather charm would signify you have completed your first year in the program; a bear paw would tell others you have completed the second year of the program, etc. The medicine bags could be well decorated and colorful after just a few years.

The beads and awards/prizes can be awarded at monthly meetings given by each tribe, for their own Wisdom Warriors. At the luncheons we should always celebrate and acknowledge the Wisdom Warriors' work but also strongly encourage other folks to join the program! This is a great opportunity for the clinic staff, police, tribal council and Elders' advocates to join in the celebration of the Wisdom Warriors success! It is very beneficial to the Wisdom Warriors to have a circle of care and support team in their communities and will encourage them to strive for better health.

As the program becomes larger and funds are available, once a year, all participants would gather and "experts" would provide health-related seminars. Wisdom Warriors could earn beads for attending those seminars. At the culmination of the annual health fair, the Wisdom Warriors would receive their charms and recognition of their journey to wellness, in a special celebration honoring their achievements. This ceremony would be a wonderful and memorable celebration that shows support and recognition of the Wisdom Warriors achievements. Presently, the annual tribal dinners would be an avenue to explore for Wisdom Warrior recognition.

Earning Beads

In order to make the beads identifiable by topic, the following categories have been created to support wellness.

Medical Checks (Blue Bead)

The Blue Bead signifies the Wisdom Warriors participation in medical and preventive care. It could be earned by having a physical exam, mammogram, prostate exam,

colonoscopy, oral health exam, or any other “wellness” healthcare activity. Individual tribes could structure this together with their health clinics to assure that the community needs identified by the clinic are met within the constraints of the program.

Self Care (Black Bead)

The Black Bead represents those activities that a healthy participant must embrace to assure that they are properly managing their health care. These activities include such things as checking their blood sugar regularly, weight loss or gain, keeping a current list of medications, keeping medications in a locked box, learning about traditional healing and herbs, 12 step meeting, support groups or other self-care activities.

Exercise (Red Bead)

The Red Bead represents physical activity. This bead could be earned by participating in a fitness class, chair exercise class, a tribal fitness challenge, a walking group, or a story exercise program. We propose using the Wisdom Steps model for participants to keep track of their steps to earn a bead:

Choose and meet one of the following exercise goals by exercising regularly

1. **46,000** steps or equivalent using the provided conversion chart
2. **150,000** steps or equivalent using the provided conversion chart

| 30 Minute Activity Equals | Steps |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Gardening/Yard work | 1,000 |
| Chair Exercises | 1,000 |
| Canoe/boat rowing | 1,500 |
| Strength Exercises, Mechanical Equip. | 2,000 |
| Strength Exercises, Weights | 2,000 |
| Station-to-station exercises | 2,500 |
| Dance, Ballroom, Pow wow | 2,500 |
| Bike Riding | 3,000 |
| Walking/Traditional Gathering | 3,000 |
| Water Aerobics | 3,000 |
| Regular Aerobics | 3,000 |
| Jogging | 4,000 |
| Swimming/Lap | 4,000 |
| Bowling | 2,000 |
| Golf | 3,000 |

Nutrition (Green Bead)

The Green Bead signifies eating a healthy diet. This can be done in a variety of ways, but some suggestions include participating in Title VI meals twice per week, eating five servings of fruits and vegetables daily for a period of time, eating one traditional food weekly, or giving up a “negative” food such as energy drinks, soda, candy, or high fat foods.

Spiritual/Cultural (Yellow Bead)

The Yellow Bead represents spiritual cultural connections to health. Participants can earn this bead through regular participation with their faith community, cultural activities such as namings, smoke house, first salmon and other ceremonies, canoe journey, and learning and teaching cultural activities.

Inter-Generational Activities, (Orange Bead)

The Orange Bead emphasizes the importance of Elders to younger tribal members. It celebrates the contributions that Elders make to the health of the entire community. Intergenerational activities could include volunteering at the school, HeadStart or daycare, mentoring, attending a support group or participating in a Positive Parenting class.

In Minnesota, the program began small and grew larger rather quickly once the tribal members got interested. Each tribal program will be a little different, but the colors of beads, charms, and the medicine bag style would be the same for all. Tribes could identify themselves through the use of their tribal pin, or other methods.

The program, based on the teachings of the **Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP)** developed by Stanford University will help Elders to participate in their own wellness, take pride in their culture, and live wise.....live strong.

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