

History of Wisdom Steps

1990-1994: Elders from Minnesota lobbied the MN Board on Aging for help to get the MN legislature to give the MN Board on Aging an Indian Elder Desk position. Key Elder supporters included:

Emily Peake, Urban American Indian Woman Serving on the MN Board on Aging (White Earth Band of Ojibwe)

Amy Flocken, Leech Lake Elder

Luella Seelye, MN Chippewa Tribe Indian Area Agency on Aging Director

The Minnesota Indian Council of Elders (MICOE) was instrumental in lobby efforts and worked to garner support from the MN Indian Affairs Council (Tribal Chairpersons and Urban Representatives).

1993-1994: Bill was authored by **Senator Skip Finn** and **Representative Karen Clark** to support an Indian Elder Desk position at the **MN Board on Aging in the MN Dept of Human Services**. The bill passed.

1994: Mary Snobl (White Earth Band of Ojibwe) was hired as the first Indian Elder Specialist with the position purpose to serve as the liaison between American Indian Elders, Tribal Communities and the State of MN with the purpose being to improve services for American Indian Elders. The **MN Chippewa Tribe Indian Area Agency on Aging Director**, Luella Seelye served as a mentor to the new Indian Elder Desk. The MN Board on Aging distributed Federal Title III Grants through the State of MN to the MIAAA, which managed grants for four Ojibwe Reservations of Bois Forte, Grand Portage, Leech Lake and White Earth. Some tribal communities chose to receive their federal dollars through Title VI grants for nutrition, transportation and supportive services which came directly to their tribes and did not come through the State of MN. The MIAAA worked with both Title III and Title VI Older American Act Grants/Programs for Tribal Elders.

1994: **National Resource Center on Native American Aging (NRCNAA)** instituted at the University of North Dakota with Alan Allery hired as their first Director. These two new state and national positions worked closely with the MN Chippewa Tribe and American Indian Reservations and Urban Communities to improve Indian Elder services. This new center did training for Title VI Older American Act programs and funding.

1995: Indian Elder Desk put out an RFP to all eleven tribal communities to be the host for a model project for Indian Elder Services. Mille Lacs Band and Fond du Lac applied to host the

model project with Mille Lacs being chosen. Elders in each of the three districts of Mille Lacs decided to do a Mille Lacs Band Directory of Services for Elders.

1994-1999: Indian Elder Specialist visited reservation and urban communities and met with Elders, Elder Tribal and Community Services, Area Agencies on Aging, Elder Resource Agencies and anyone interested in services to Indian Elders. Indian Elder Staff provided advocacy for Elders individually or community services that addressed Elder needs. The MN Council of Indian Elders (MICOE) meetings provided a resource to the Indian Elder Desk. Alberta Norris (Red Lake Band of Ojibwe/Urban) and Helen Cummings (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe) served as Chair of MICOE through these years.

1997: Urban and Reservation A.I. Elders were invited to Mallard Island on the Rainy River to a retreat to discuss what would help A.I. Elders across MN. Many ideas came out of this gathering of “talking circles”.

1997: “The Seventh Generation – Tomorrow’s Elders” Forum was organized to invite A.I. Elders, Elder Services Staff, Tribal Health and Human Services, Tribal Educators, Tribal Governments, MN Indian Affairs Council, Housing, State Indian Program Directors and interested A.I. Community members with the purpose of discussing ideas on how to improve access to services for A.I. Elders. These ideas were to be shared at a follow-up meeting with A.I. Elders from across MN.

1998: Each reservation and urban community were invited to send representatives to a meeting to discuss the ideas generated with Elders over the years and ideas from the Seventh Generation Forum. Discussion focused on the priority that services for Elders were addressing a disease model for Elder Health and that A.I. Elders wanted to start a project that would promote preventive health. It was voted at this meeting that this group would call themselves the Indian Elder Advisory Committee with staff support coming from the MCT IAA and the Indian Elder Desk at the MBA.

1999: The Indian Elder Advisory Committee decided to develop a preventive health program that would focus on the three areas of Health Screenings, Health Education and Healthy Living Activities. To give this program a name it was decided to host a contest to name this new project and invite anyone in A.I. Communities to send in logo ideas for a preventive health program. Rodney Allen, Leech Lake Tribal Member submitted the winning logo with the winning name “Wisdom Steps”. This original art work and name was voted on and accepted by all tribal and urban community representatives on the Indian Elder Advisory Committee. The artist explained that the moccasins represented the American Indian Culture, the tipped moccasins represented aging and the worn look to the moccasins represented the wisdom of the Elders.

2000: June 6, 2000 the name “Wisdom Steps” name and logo received official copyright certification from the United States Copyright Office.

2000: Resolution from the **Minnesota Indian Affairs Council** to create a Wisdom Steps Board. Each of the eleven Tribal Councils and the three Urban Affairs Representatives appointed one person to serve on the Wisdom Steps Board of Directors. Each Board member would have one vote so that no larger reservation or urban community would have more voting power than smaller reservations. Wisdom Steps would also have an Advisory Council made up of a minimum of one representative. Alternates from this Advisory Council would be recognized to vote in the absence of the Board member at quarterly meetings.

2000: Wisdom Steps was recognized as a Partnership between the Minnesota Board on Aging and American Indian Elders across eleven American Indian Reservations and three Urban Communities.

2000: Original Board Members were:

Bois Forte: Cathy Chavers Advisory:

Duluth: Pat Ells Advisory: Pat McClellan

Fond du Lac: Rod King Advisory: Mary Davis

Grand Portage: Lorraine Wipson Advisory: Jim Wipson, Marie Spry, Carol Hackett

Leech Lake: Helen Cummings Advisory: Amy Flocken, Rev. George & Angie Ross, Edna Whitefeather

Lower Sioux: Iola Columbus Advisory: Vernell Wabasha

Mille Lacs: Ginger Weyaus Advisory: Karen Sam, Frances Staples

Minneapolis: Barb Benjamin Robertson, Advisory: Simon & Ruby Beaulieu, Jerry Northrup

Prairie Island: Howard Wells Advisory: Mary Wells

Red Lake: Al Thunder Advisory: Nora Thunder

Shakopee: Gary Cavendar: Advisory: Gail Campbell

St. Paul: Don Blackhawk Advisory: Melanie Tobin

Upper Sioux: Verna Ross Advisory: Patsy St. Claire, Sherry Jensvold, Carrie Schommer

White Earth: Bev Karsten Advisory: Lucille Silk, Leonard Wells

2000: Developed a three year strategic plan that created awareness of Wisdom Steps and promoted preventive health activities.

2000: Partnered with NRCNAA for Elder Self-Assessments

2000: Committees were organized to develop model projects for each of the three focus areas. The Health Screening Committee project was developed by Wisdom Steps Board, Advisors and Community Elders from White Earth and Red Lake. White Earth Health Director John McArthur worked with the Elders and the Indian Desk to identify appropriate health screenings to be voted on by the Wisdom Steps Board. This committee recommended the idea of a “Medicine Talk” (a medicine management project), where Elders would be encouraged to review their medications with a pharmacist to make sure they understood why they were taking a med and that Elders were not mixing western, traditional and over the counter meds that could cause severe side effects. The full Wisdom Steps Board accepted the committee’s proposed model project, which included the development of a Health Screening Card with four mandatory health screenings of blood pressure, blood glucose, cholesterol and weight. Additionally, Elders were asked to choose a minimum of one of twelve listed screenings that was important to them in taking control of their health.

2000: The Health Education Committee project was developed by the Leech Lake Reservation and the Urban Community Elders. They recommended to work on a project that would help Elders pay for health costs that weren’t covered by Tribal Health or IHS. They decided to look at health insurance and developed the “Medicare in American Indian Community” model. Freda Terry from **Stratis Health**, who had the federal contract to provide Medicare Education, assisted the Elders and the Indian Desk to put together language about Medicare that they felt Elders could understand. Elders met twelve different times combing through language and changing it to words Elders could understand. (During the time that the Elders were developing Medicare Education language for Elders, the Indian Desk and Stratis Health were meeting with Tribal Health Directors to try to get Tribes billing for Part B Medicare.)

2000: “Portrait of Bois Forte Elders” was a pilot project initiated between the State Indian Desk and Bois Forte Tribal Health (Cathy Chavers, Patient Benefits Specialist) to identify how many Medicare eligible Bois Forte Elders would be eligible for the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary Program or the Select Medicare Beneficiary Program. These programs were available to pay for Part B Premiums for income eligible Elders. 7 of the 58 Bois Forte Elders were identified to have Part B Premiums paid through these programs. This pilot project was shared with Tribal Health Directors across MN and eventually the Medicare Project was shared across the nation.) Patient Benefit Specialists provided one on one help with Elder Medicare needs in their communities. Elders took a power point “Medicare In American Indian Community” home to their communities and showed it over and over until Elders were signed up for eligible Medicare insurance coverage.

Elders from Grand Portage, Fond du Lac, Duluth, Lower Sioux, Mille Lacs, Prairie Island, Shakopee and Upper Sioux joined these committees to help with recommendations and development.

2000: MN Board on Aging funded Wisdom Steps poster and brochure and materials.

2000: Wisdom Steps sponsored walk at the **National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA)** Conference held in Duluth. Fond du Lac Tribal Leaders and Fond du Lac MICOE was instrumental in bringing the national conference to Duluth.

2000: NICOA awarded Wisdom Steps the Dr. Patrick Stenger Award for the most innovative preventive health program across national Indian Country.

2000: **SmithKlineBeecham SHARE Innovation Award** of \$200,000 given to Wisdom Steps to fund its development. (1 of 12 international awards given)

2000: The Healthy Living Activities was initially developed by the Mille Lacs Reservation and Urban Elders from Duluth and Minneapolis/St. Paul with White Earth Elders joining the effort. The first Wisdom Steps Statewide Walk was held in Mille Lacs in cooperation with Peggy Frisch/Ginger Weyaus and other communities. The first Urban walk was held at the American Indian Center in Minneapolis with Harriet Denomie, Lou Rock, Waurine Dooley, Simon and Ruby Beaulieu, Sophie Monroe and Mary Ann Johnson organizing.

2000: **AARP** funded the first Wisdom Steps t-shirts for this walk and later for the first conference.

2000: An Incentive Program was developed for Elders to be “Honored for Sharing their Wisdom” by modeling good preventive health. To attend the first conference, and to be honored, Elders must receive a minimum of five health screenings, attend one health education session and walk in one organized walk.

2001: First Annual Wisdom Steps Conference was held at Mille Lacs Grand Casino Hinckley and much support came from Tribal Governments. Wisdom Steps celebrates First Anniversary.

2001: First Year Wisdom Steps Pins and First Year “Eagle” Charms award to 467 Elders.

2001: **Shriner’s Hospital** partnered with Wisdom Steps to sponsor health screening brochure.

2001: Elder Assessments were done across tribes with NRCNAA.

2001: First statewide “Medicare in American Indian Community” health provider training.

2001: Local Medicare education training sessions for Elders.

2001: Communities organized and hosted local Wisdom Steps walks.

2002: "We Walk Many Together" was recommended by the WS Board and they developed an organized walking program to get Elders more physically active and to encourage Elders to log their steps each day and keep a monthly log of steps. White Earth Elder Leonard Wells worked to create a conversion chart to support about fifteen physical activities, in addition to walking, that individual Elders were doing that could be converted to steps. A Step-O-Meter Pilot Project was organized by White Earth Elders.

2002: **AARP** was impressed with Wisdom Steps and gave them a grant and provided professional videographers to showcase Wisdom Steps Elders demonstrating healthy living activities and interviewed Elders about the importance of Wisdom Steps.

2002: Second Annual Wisdom Steps Conference was held at Mille Lacs Grand Casino Hinckley.

2002: First Year Pins and Eagle Charms and Second Year Wolf Charms awarded to 487 Elders.

2002: "Medicine Talk" model replicated by St. Paul Elders Lodge and funded by **Bremer Bank**.

2002: Second statewide "Medicare in American Indian Community" health provider training held. Local education sessions on-going.

2002: "Champion of Health Award" to Wisdom Steps from **Blue Cross Blue Shield**.

2002: "Award of Excellence" from **Minnesota Council on Physical Activity and Sports**.

2002: White Earth Medicine Talk Work Group received **Bemidji Area Indian Health Service (IHS)** Award.

2003: **SHARE** Recognition Award of \$75,000. (Wisdom Steps chosen as one of three of the original 12 international awards to get this second award.)

2003: New three year plan developed for next three years to enhance, expand and document outcomes for Wisdom Steps Model Projects.

2003: Wisdom Steps Committees organized.

2003: "Medicine Talk" information meeting for **Tribal and Indian Health Services pharmacists** under direction of Dr. Larry Patneau.

2003: Fund Raising plan developed to include grant proposals, Elder Calendar Project and Walk-A-Thon.

2003: First Wisdom Steps Golf Tournament was hosted by Mille Lacs at Grand National course in Hinckley.

2003: **Indian Health Services Elder Care Initiative** partnership with Dr. Bruce Fink initiated. (Purpose was to try to document statistics of health screening results.)

2003: Third statewide “Medicare In American Indian Community” health provider training and partnership developed with **MN Board on Aging Senior Linkage Line Staff**.

2003: Partnered with **Arthritis Foundation** and **NRCNAA** providing “Arthritis Self-Help” training for developing support groups.

2003: Minneapolis-St.Paul developing “Urban Elder Health” Screening Project.

2003: Partnered with **Woodlands Wisdom Tribal Colleges** and **University of MN Extension** to promote diabetes prevention through gardening and nutritious foods program.

2003: Partnered with **Pfizer Corporation, Arthritis Foundation, NRCNAA** and **Bemidji Area Indian Health Services (IHS)** to host a Health Literacy Project for tribes and urban communities. National Indian Health Services Director and Staff from across the nation attended. **Public Health Officials** presented from across the nation.

2003: Third Annual Wisdom Steps Conference will feature a traditional “Honoring Our Elders Pow Wow” and thank our Creator for the wisdom our Elders have shared.

2003: Wisdom Steps awarded the “**Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Beneficiary Services Certificate of Merit**”.

2003: National Resource Center for Native American Aging \$10,000 Grant

2003: **Self Development Marketing** Grant \$10,000. This grant initiated to provide funding for the development of a fund raising plan. The Wisdom Steps Discount Card was established. Contracts were solicited to all eleven Tribal Communities for casino, golf, hotel, restaurant, and waterpark promotions.

2004: Wisdom Steps Discount Card fund raising plan initiated.

2004: **Otto Bremer Foundation** Grant Award for \$50,000

2004: **Grotto Foundation** Grant for \$5,000

2005: Wisdom Steps Flute CD recorded by Jon Romer with Barb Smith Accompaniment

2005: Wisdom Steps celebrates Fifth Anniversary.

2005: Otto Bremer Foundation Grant \$5,000 for Retreat to do next 3 yr plan

2005: Jackie Dionne, (Turtle Mountain Chippewa Tribe) hired for the position of Indian Elder Desk following the retirement of Mary Snobl.

2007: Wisdom Steps Discount Cards on-going fund raising plan approved for three year use with the continuation of promotions provided by Tribal Governments.

2006-2007: Wisdom Steps undertook the process to establish a 501(c)3

2007: Wisdom Steps incorporated on October 26, 2007 as a 501(c) 3 Non-Profit Organization

2007-2008: Wisdom Steps Board contracted with **MAP for Non-Profits** to assist with the incorporation papers and 501(c) 3 IRS filing.

2008: Wisdom Steps Fifth Annual Golf Tournament hosted by Fond du Lac Black Bear Golf Course. (Fond du Lac hosted tournament since 2004.)

2009-2010: Wisdom Steps Staff worked with Dr. David Purdue to begin the development of the American Indian Cancer Foundation, which was to be a strong partner with Wisdom Steps.

2010: **NW Arthritis Foundation** Finne Award

2010: Wisdom Steps celebrates Tenth Anniversary.

2010: Wisdom Steps Discount Cards on-going fund raising plan approved for three year use with the continuation of promotions provided by Tribal Governments.

2010-2012: The **American Indian Cancer Foundation** was incorporated. (In 2012, Jackie Dionne resigned to take a position at the MN Department of Health.)

2013: Wisdom Steps Tenth Annual Golf Tournament at Fond du Lac Black Bear Golf Course.

2013: Wisdom Steps Discount Cards on-going fund raising plan approved for three year use with the continuation of promotions provided by Tribal Governments.

2015: Wisdom Steps celebrates Fifteenth Anniversary.

2016: Wisdom Steps Discount Cards on-going fund raising plan approved for three year use with the continuation of promotions provided by Tribal Governments.

2018: Wisdom Steps Fifteenth Annual Golf Tournament at Fond du Lac Black Bear Golf Course.

2020: Wisdom Steps celebrates "First Twenty Years".

Mission Statement:

The mission of Wisdom Steps is to foster community partnerships and coordinate resources to provide for the increased advocacy, health education, health screenings and healthy living activities and offers an incentive plan to encourage participation in preventive health programs that will improve the health of American Indian Elders.

Wisdom Steps

“Our Elders... Our Teachers”

What is Wisdom Steps?

Wisdom Steps is a preventive health program for American Indian elders and their communities. Elders are invited to “share their wisdom” and participate in activities that promote optimal health outcomes. It promotes incentives for elders to be involved in health screenings, health education and healthy living activities. It encourages the coordination of community resources and strives to motivate elders to participate in tribal and urban American Indian Community health and social initiatives.

Wisdom Steps encourages elders to visit with health professionals and to set a personal health goal. Elders are asked to take small “steps” that will improve their health. Model projects include:

“Medicine Talk” to assist elders to better understand the medications that help manage their health. Wisdom Steps promotes improving communication between elders and their health care providers and pharmacists.

“Medicare in American Indian Communities” project is intended to provide acceptable and simplified Medicare information for elders. Education packets include materials about Medicare and other programs and resources.

“We Walk Many Together” is intended to promote participation in walking and exercise programs of your choice. Elders are encouraged to set high, yet achievable goals. Wisdom Steps also encourages elders to take a young person with them to their exercise program or walk and teach them the language, customs, family history, nature or just to get to know each other.

“Wisdom Steps Health Screening Card” is a credit card size brochure that elders give to their doctor at a preventive health check-up. The card gives Elders written information, from their doctor, on their blood pressure, blood glucose, cholesterol, weight, hearing, vision, glaucoma, mammogram, pap smear, prostate, dental, foot clinic, colon rectal, flu shot, pneumovax and mental health that they are able to keep in their pockets for future reference.

Wisdom Steps Incentive Program

Each year at the Wisdom Steps Conference, Elders who have completed their health screenings, attended health education sessions and meet the physical activity criteria for Wisdom Steps receive a Wisdom Steps Logo Pin and Charm.

Eagle - Year 1 (2001) Charm
Wolf - Year 2 (2002) Charm
Bear - Year 3 (2003) Charm
Turtle - Year 4 (2004) Charm
Catfish - Year 5 (2005) Charm
Buffalo - Year 6 (2006) Charm
Loon - Year 7 (2007) Charm
Caribou - Year 8 (2008) Charm
Crane - Year 9 (2009) Charm
Otter Year 10 Charm (2010)
Dakota Butterfly Symbol – Year 11 (2011)
Sturgeon-Year 12 (2012)
Moose – Year 13 (2013)
Hawk – Year 14 (2014)
Flag – Year 15 (2015)
Deer – Year 16 (2016)
Lynx – Year 17 (2017)
Swan – Year 18 (2018)
Butterfly --Year (2019)