

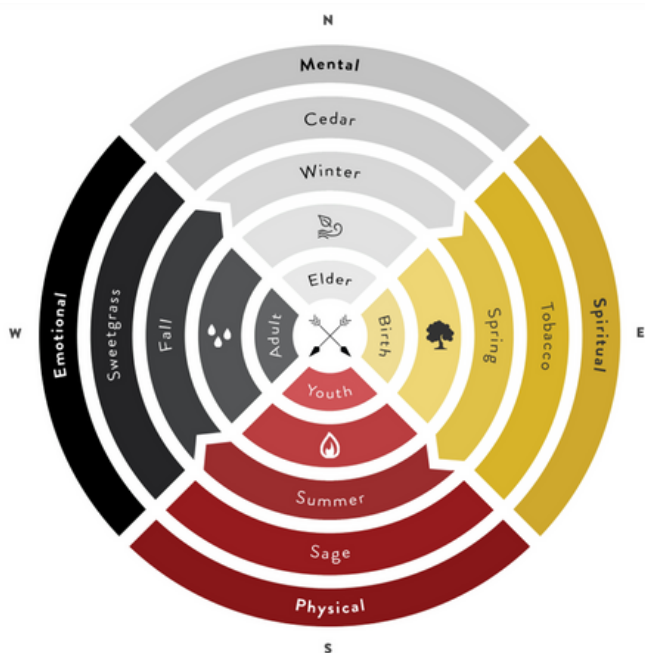
Range in Care Options for Indigenous Elders with Obesity

A Fact Sheet by the American Society on Aging

Federally supported care systems currently in place for Indigenous elders do not recognize traditional ways of healing and medicine. There is a great need to change these care systems to match the variety in care options desired by elders and tribal communities. **Western healthcare (insurance providers and healthcare service providers) must recognize and incorporate into care options the traditional healing practices many communities have been practicing for centuries.**

During a series of roundtables with the American Society on Aging in the fall of 2023, more than 40 Indigenous elders, service providers and researchers shared knowledge, data and personal experiences with obesity in their communities and families. In these conversations, the value and importance of quality care was expressed, but access to it remains a serious problem. To provide better care specifically for obesity, Indigenous elders need more options covered by culturally cognizant insurance providers and care providers.

Providers and insurance services must acknowledge and meet the range of healthcare needs of all Indigenous communities. Then these communities will be better suited to treat obesity in the manner that individuals and the tribal community feel is most appropriate. These solutions also may vary greatly based upon an individual's or communities' values, but **roundtable attendees expressed the desire to have full access to all care options, and the ability to integrate traditional healing practices with Western care.**



The MEDICINE WHEEL

The circle represents balance, connection, and the continuous nature of all creation.

A system of teachings and visual tool for passing down indigenous cultural knowledge.

Source: The Indigenous Medicine Wheel, [Tribal Trade](#)



Incorporate Two-eyed Seeing Strengths of Indigenous and Western Care

- Balance, in all aspects of life, traditionally has been highly valued in Indigenous communities. Merging and balancing more traditionally Western medical care models with Indigenous healing practices can have positive effects for everyone.
 - Individuals' connection to traditional healing practices varies. Some people may seek only traditional healers, some people may seek guidance from tribal elders on healthcare decisions, and some elders may be interested only in Western medicine.
 - Indigenous people want access to all options, seamlessly, accompanied by insurance coverage that is fair, easy to access and understandable.



Offering Consistent Care Through IHS to Achieve Better, More Equitable Health Outcomes

- Many Indigenous elders struggle to access consistent and effective care and providers through the Indian Health Service.

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There is frustration with the fragmented and inconsistent care offered through the Indian Health Service, which is also a very real barrier to seeking medical care.
—Elder

But when I call, you know, Indian Health Service, it might be a 3-month wait or a 6-month wait.

—Elder

Understanding Cultural Needs and Values

- Cultural competency in care is critical, but not always available in a Western healthcare setting.

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There should be some kind of training [for medical practitioners] prior to going into these, our, communities.
—Elder

It's very difficult to trust and go into that Western biomedical model when we're used to our traditional way. And when there's no collaboration between the two, that also makes it very difficult.

—Elder

Variety and Affordable Care Options

- Cost and insurance coverage is a consideration for all medications, for many people.
- In a few instances, some elders have access to weight-loss medications and bariatric surgery and are utilizing those options.

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Health insurance is holding us hostage.
—Elder