

# Fact Sheet



## Technology Use Among American Indian/ Alaskan Native Elders

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**Wylee B. Azure, Melissa J. Wheeler, Jacqueline S. Gray, Randella Bluehouse,  
Terry Gomez, and Rebecca Owl Morgan**

### Background

The general age for elder status in the United States is 65 and over.<sup>1</sup> For American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) culture the age is 55 and over due to the lower life expectancy, although each tribe establishes their own age for elderly status.<sup>2</sup> The Elder Population of 2010 was 40.2 million which is 13% of the general population and is projected to grow to about 88.5 million by 2050.<sup>1</sup> The AI/AN elder population is 369,399 which is 0.009% overall population and 0.9% of elder population as of 2007.<sup>3</sup> This population has a projected growth up to about 918,000 by 2050.<sup>3</sup> The growth is largely due to “Baby Boomers” reaching retirement age.<sup>1</sup>

The field of Gerotechnology analyzes the relationship between elderly people and technology.<sup>4</sup> It is the interdisciplinary field of research and application involving gerontology, the scientific study of aging, and technology, the development and distribution of technologically based products, environment, and services.<sup>4</sup> Information technology (IT) is one mechanism which can provide assistance in meeting the needs of an increasing number of elders with a decreasing number of caregivers.<sup>5</sup>

This project presents information on AI/ANs’ access and use of technology such as computers, cellphones and email. Further, this project highlights those individuals who utilize technology in any of its forms to access information about their health or to sign up for health insurance through the Affordable Care Act Marketplace (ACA).

### Key Information

- There is a definite relationship between age and technology use. Elders over 55 presented the least amount of technology use while the 50-54 age group showed the most use.
- Elders in the 50-54 age group showed the highest use of technology: 85.7% indicated having access to computers, 93% own a cellphone, 93% use email, and 78.6% use the internet to learn more about health than the older age groups. See Figure 1.
- Elders in the >75 age group utilized technology the least: 48.4% reported having computer access, 78.2% own a cellphone, 33.9% use email, and 17.1% use the internet to learn more about their health.
- The Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace had the lowest percent use by elders of all age groups and of all technology based questions. There was 0% use in the 50-54 age group. Age groups 55-64, 65-74, and >75 years indicated that over 85% did not use the ACA Marketplace. See Figure 2.
- Of all technology related questions, “Do you have a cellphone?” showed the highest usage across all age groups with an average of about 88.5% of participants.

*The collaborative partners wish to thank the NICOA Elders for being an inspiration to us and for their contribution to the life of our people.*



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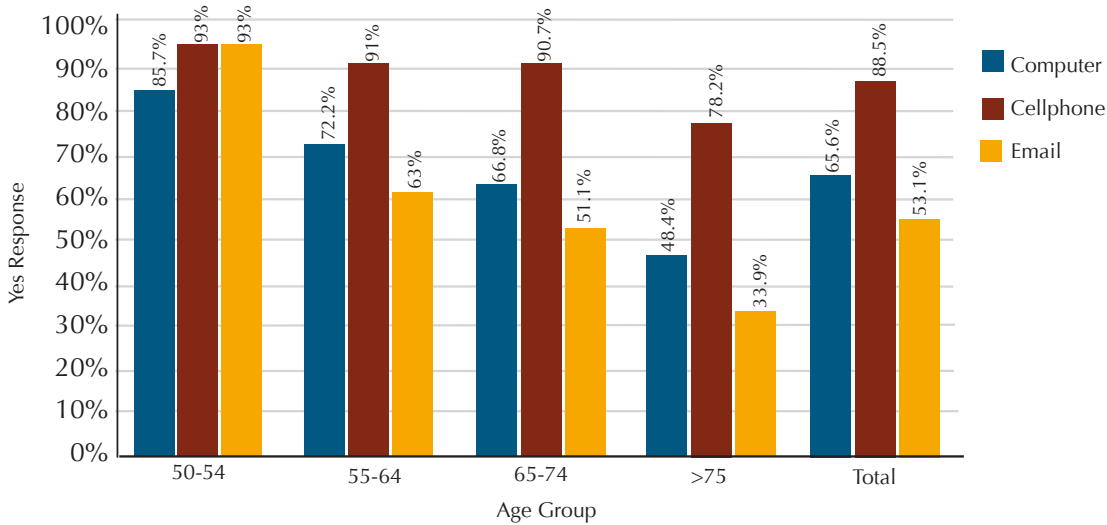
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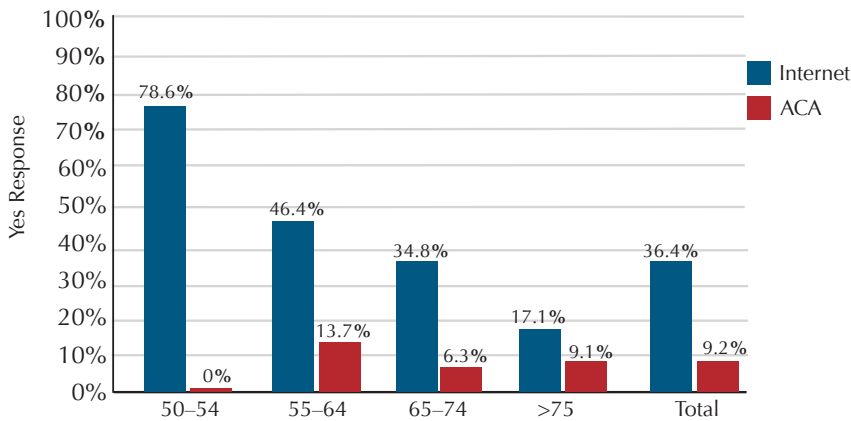
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*Honor ~ Respect ~ Dignity*

**Figure 1. Percent of Elders using Technology**



**Figure 2. Applications of Technology on Health**



## Conclusions/Implications

The hypothesis: elders will have a majority negative response for all technology related questions for all age groups, failed to be supported by the results. Evidence showed more elders use technology including: computers, cellphones, email, and the use of technology to learn more about their health. This aspect of the hypothesis was supported in that not many elders make use of the (ACA) Marketplace service. This may be due to lack of available information or the lack of knowledge on how to navigate the site. The youngest group, 50-54 years old, have the highest use of technology. Although this study is not fully representative of the entire AI/AN elder population, it points to emerging trends in technology use among Elders in Indian Country.

### *Possible barriers of Elder Technology Use*

- **Cost**-Elders may not be able to afford the latest technology.
- **Accessibility**-Elders may have diminishing eye sight, hearing, or fine motor skills, making it difficult to use cellphones or other computer devices.
- **Inexperience**-Lack of experience with technology may also inhibit use.
- **Location**-Tribal lands are often located in rural areas with limited or no access to internet cell services.

## References

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## Contact Information

For more information, contact: Jacqueline S. Gray, Ph.D. Director of the National Indigenous Elder Justice Initiative and the Seven Generations Center of Excellence in Native Behavioral Health or Randella Bluehouse, Director of the National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.

## Seven Generations Center of Excellence in Native Behavioral Health

501 N. Columbia Rd, Stop 9037 Grand Forks, ND 58202-9037  
800.896.7628 or 701.777.5382  
[www.sgcoe.org](http://www.sgcoe.org)

## National Indigenous Elder Justice Initiative

501 N. Columbia Rd, Stop 9037 Grand Forks, ND 58202-9037  
855.834.1572  
[www.nieji.org](http://www.nieji.org)

## National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.

10501 Montgomery Blvd., NE, Suite 210  
Albuquerque, NM 87111  
Tel: 505.292.2001 • Fax: 505.292.1922  
[www.nicoa.org](http://www.nicoa.org)