



## **STTARS MMIW Practical Responses for Housing Authorities, Property Managers, Residents, Tribal Council/Leadership, Community**

The STTARS Indigenous Safe Housing Center prioritizes safe housing and shelter for Indigenous survivors of gender-based violence. Safe housing and shelter access is key to preventing instances of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG). MMIWG is a serious and pervasive issue that impacts Indigenous peoples in both on and off reservation communities. The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center and countless other families, advocates, organizations, and researchers work towards addressing MMIWG from a framework that considers prevention, intervention and postvention. At times, the law enforcement response and the collection of data has been prioritized to address MMIWG. ***These responses are critical to analyze and implement, however the prevention framework must be urgently prioritized.***

STTARS holds true that housing is a critical preventative response to MMIWG. Being an unsheltered relative represents an incredible risk for victimization, and there is a clear, strong correlation between domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and stalking and MMIWG. Survivors of domestic violence rely on safe housing and shelter access when experiencing abuse. In fact, 63% of all homeless women are survivors of domestic violence. This means that the vast majority of individuals who utilize public housing, tribal housing, and emergency shelter services have unique needs related to their experiences of violence. It also means that Tribal Housing Authorities, Tribal Designated Housing Entities, property management companies and other employees must have a certain degree of awareness of domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, sexual assault, violations of protection orders and human trafficking. They should certainly receive training on culturally appropriate and trauma informed care, confidentiality, and safety. Residents and community members also play key roles.

It is also necessary to view the safe housing and shelter crisis both on and off reservation with its historical context. Colonialization introduced the violent thought that land and bodies could be owned. All of this is rooted in white supremacy. The same mindset that says black and brown bodies are inferior and should be owned or assimilated is the same mindset that says land should be put towards its best use to serve imperial or commercial purposes. It is this same mindset that upholds extraction with no regard for the next generations, our drinking water, our airways, or how Indigenous peoples in the United States can continue to practice culture and tradition on our lands. It is the same mindset in which imperialistic governments enter into treaties and ubiquitously breaks them. It is a mindset that fully ignores consent, autonomy and sovereignty, both on the part of Tribal Nations and native women's bodies. Acts of violence against native women and violence against Land cannot be viewed as randomized or even consequential

occurrences, but rather as manifestations of a larger goal: the eradication of Indigenous people from their lands.

This mindset is best seen perhaps in the MMIW space, where the violence itself has culminated into death. MMIW is about more than the law enforcement response or lack of response to violence in Indian country (though those pieces are certainly detrimental and a critical component of both intervention and response to violence). The crux of MMIW is the length of time in which American Indians and Alaska Natives have been continuously devalued, fetishized, dehumanized, and discarded and about how genocide and colonization have informed and served as underpinnings in federal policy. MMIW is also a symptom of the culmination of the federal government's failure to fulfill its trust responsibilities, including the obligation to assist Indian tribes in safeguarding the lives of Indian women, and its role in historically degrading tribal sovereignty.

Violence against the land, the treatment of land as a commodity, the dispossession and expropriation of land, and violence against Native women are tethered. Framing this as state violence is fair. If we consider the arch of the United States' history in regard to safe housing and shelter for Native people, we see massive land theft from the Indigenous populations that existed here long before 1776, forced removal of Indigenous people from their homelands, Supreme Court opinions that memorialize and create precedent out of the now denounced Doctrine of Discovery and manifest destiny, the Indian Civilization Act (1819), the Homestead Act (1862), the Dawes Act (1887), the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (1920), the Indian Relocation Act (1956), failed consultation, unpermitted pipelines, failed responses to natural disasters, failure to appropriate congressional dollars to Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (1996), failure to allocate Victims of Crime Act dollars to Tribal governments until 2018, the federal relocation of Tribes and villages due to the climate crisis and so on. These laws and policies are an abject failure of the United States to meet its obligation to Indian people and Indian Tribes.

This document provides general statistics, practical responses and best practices in regards housing and MMIWG, along with a list of helpful resources.

### **General Statistics:**

#### **The Experience of Gender-Based Violence for AI/AN survivors:**

[National Institute of Justice Research Report May 2016: Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men](#) and [2010 Findings from Nat'l Intimate partner & Sexual Violence Survey:](#)

- More than 4 in 5 American Indian and Alaska Native women (84.3%) have experienced violence in their lifetime. This includes:
- 56.1 % who have experienced sexual violence
- 55.5 % who have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner
- 48.8 % who have experienced stalking
- 66.4 % who have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner
- Impact of Violence Among American Indian and Alaska Native victims of lifetime physical violence by intimate partners, stalking, and sexual violence:

- 66.5 % of women and 26% of men were concerned for their safety.
- 41.3% of women and 20.3% of men were physically injured.
- 92.6% of women and 74.3% of men had talked to someone about what the perpetrators did.
- 49.0% of women and 19.9% of men needed services because of what the perpetrators did.
- 40.5% of women and 9.7% of men had to miss days of work or school because of what the perpetrators did.
- The most common service needed was medical care
- 38.0% of female victims and 9.3% of male victims were unable to access medical care
- 38.2% of American Indian and Alaska Native women and 16.9% of American Indian and Alaska Native men were unable to get the services they needed.

### **The Intersection of Housing and Gender-Based Violence for AI/AN Survivors:**

- Though Native women experience violence at incredibly disparate rates, it is just as alarming that only [38% of those women](#) reported they were unable to access necessary services (such as a shelter and legal assistance).
- There are 574 federally recognized Tribes and less than 50 [Native domestic violence shelters](#) nationwide.
- 50% of the homeless population identify domestic violence as the primary cause
- Between 22% and 57% of homeless women report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of the homelessness
- 92% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives
- 63% of homeless women have been victims of domestic violence
- 38% of domestic violence victims will become homeless at some point.

\*\*For Native women, the majority of these statistics are under-representative.

### **Best Practices:**

#### **Housing Authorities**

- Hire Native property managers
- Employ flexibility in requiring application fees and credit checks
- Remove barriers for survivors who have past convictions
- Prioritize gender-based violence survivors on housing waitlists (identify and implement a process for identifying survivors that also keeps their information confidential as required by federal law)
- Language barriers create serious safety impacts and make spaces inaccessible, so have a language access plan
- Create policies that support survivor safety and confidentiality
- Seek out training from Native domestic violence and sexual assault organizations to understand the intersection between domestic violence/sexual assault/gender-based violence and homelessness/housing insecurity
- Be community aware
- Implement practices and policies that create safety and security
- Avoid making survivors feel surveilled, which can impact their sense of security in detrimental ways

- Employ flexibility in resident requirements and compliance with rules (i.e. enforcement of fines)
- If an agency standard does not feel right or is impacting your community in a disparate way, advocate for a change or clarification.
- All employees must have ongoing training on what culturally appropriate assistance/services are and why they are ESSENTIAL for responding to intersectional issues in both on and off reservation communities
- Do not conflate Diversity/Equity and Inclusion with direct action in response to Anti-Indigeneity/Oppression (different than a racial lens as well).
- Understand intersectional issues (like child welfare impacts, legal issues to encompass criminal and civil frameworks, PPO access, substance misuse, mental health issues, etc.) and strive to make policies and practices reflective of this understanding.
- Accountability is both a practice and a response.

### **Property Managers/ Program managers**

- Be a good relative
- Know the law around filing a missing persons report and DO NOT allow law enforcement to qualify the report/diminish it. Be aware of implications of filing a report for special populations (i.e. juveniles with prior foster care involvement).
- Language barriers create serious safety impacts and make spaces inaccessible, so have a language access plan
- Trust survivors
- Collaborate with Tribal DV/SA advocates and programs and shelters
- Also consider bringing in non-dv/sa related organizations that address interrelated/intersectional issues as needed and build meaningful relationships with local programs
- Utilize policies that screen in rather than screen out
- Locate or develop culturally appropriate screening tools that are local-specific
- Ensure that leadership and staff are engaged in intentional internal work around bias and prejudice
- Create safe and secure spaces for documents (ID's, social security cards, tribal IDs/enrollment documentation, medical records, court records, etc) and make sure that even temporary residents have meaningful access
- Diversify staff so they represent the community they serve
- Stop evicting/fining for infractions such as noise complaints/residents being behind in utilities/having other individuals in the unit
- Make sure staff and are receiving cultural safety training
- Know the resources in your community (in particular, culturally rooted resources that address domestic violence and sexual assault/other forms of gender-based violence)
- Craft policies that create a strong sense of community and that prioritize safety
- Seek out and receive ongoing training from Native domestic violence and sexual violence organizations to understand the intersection between domestic violence/sexual assault/gender-based violence and homelessness/housing insecurity.
- Post hotline information and have supports readily available
- Know the requirements in the Violence Against Women Act around confidentiality and ensure that you are in compliance if required

- Practical considerations: good lighting in common spaces, ring doorbells (or alternatives), key fobs, community safety supports, creating common time together (meals, ceremony, etc.)
- Receive ongoing training on harm reduction/trauma informed care
- Hiring practices should place an emphasis on lived experience
- Ask yourself these questions: If you are culturally appropriate, what do you do? What does it look like on a daily practice?
- Do not conflate Diversity/Equity and Inclusion with direct action in response to Anti-Indigeneity/Oppression (different than a racial lens as well).

## **Residents**

- Be a good relative
- Awareness of surroundings and routines
- Observe and report (but do not surveil fellow residents)
- Lead awareness activities
- Document barriers
- When possible, provide mutual aid and support
- Advocate for necessary changes
- Claim the power of your voice in community and public spaces on legislative and policy issues

## **Tribal Council**

- Be a good relative
- Fund housing projects
- Start a domestic violence shelter or other emergency safe place
- Apply for Rapid Rehousing and Transitional Housing Funds
- Fund DV/SA programming and services
- Support the needs of families when someone goes missing such as creating space to work, make copies, give access to a communications/media specialist if you have one, bring in coordinators and therapeutic services
- Pass laws that promote prevention (ensuring access to safe housing/VAWA compliance/Domestic violence leave policies)
- Avoid political interference in Court processes/law enforcement/community or family services
- Be aware of the vulnerabilities that are experienced by some families even if it is not the experience of the majority of your community members
- Enhance and expand tribal members service programs and victim/survivor services that includes legal services
- Seek out and receive ongoing training from Native domestic or sexual assault organizations to understand the intersection between domestic violence/sexual assault/gender-based violence and homelessness/housing insecurity
- Commit to hiring practices that sufficiently vet individuals who will have access to vulnerable community members

## **Community**

- Advocate for increased housing options and lower barrier access to housing and shelter

- Organize
- Locate pro bono lawyers who work in your community
- Work to create a “know your rights” campaign (reach out to STTARS for training/TA)
- Being community aware and acting on that awareness
- Educate others on the intersection of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, stalking and dating violence and homelessness/housing insecurity
- Address trauma
- Care for your community/your people (mutual aid where available)
- Ensure that you are familiar and up to date with local resources
- Claim the power of your collective voice in community and public spaces on legislative and policy issues
- Build relationships with tribal, local, state and federal policy makers (tribal council, city commissioners, city council, local agency leads, state representatives, Congress members).

### **Resources:**

“MMIW and the Need for Preventative Reform”

<https://www.niwrc.org/restoration-magazine/february-2019/mmiw-and-need-preventative-reform>

“Connections: Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence” (Gwendolyn Packard)

<https://www.niwrc.org/restoration-magazine/february-2019/connections-substance-abuse-and-domestic-violence>

“National Workgroup on Safe Housing for American Indians and Alaska Native Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: Lesson’s Learned” (Gwendolyn Packard and Caroline LaPorte)

<https://www.niwrc.org/resources/report/national-workgroup-safe-housing-american-indian-and-alaska-native-survivors-gender>

“Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (UIHI)”

<https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf>

“Effective Use of the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUS) for Case Resolution”

<https://www.niwrc.org/resources/webinars/effective-use-national-missing-and-unidentified-persons-system-namus-case>

“2021 MMIW National Briefing- Advocacy in Action” (NIWRC)

<https://www.niwrc.org/resources/webinars/2021-mmiw-national-briefing-addressing-national-crisis-missing-and-murdered>

CDC Fact Sheet- Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native People

<https://www.niwrc.org/resources/fact-sheet/cdc-violence-against-american-indian-and-alaska-native-people>

GAO Report – Missing or Murdered Indigenous Women

<https://www.niwrc.org/resources/report/gao-report-missing-or-murdered-indigenous-women-new-efforts-are-underway>

Journal of Federal Law and Practice, U.S. Department of Justice- Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons: Legal, Prosecution, Advocacy & Healthcare

<https://www.niwrc.org/resources/journal-article/doj-federal-law-mmip>

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