

Creating an Indigenous Safe Housing Center



**NATIONAL
INDIGENOUS**

WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER

niwrc.org/housing

515 Lame Deer Ave. Lame Deer, MT 59043 **Phone** 406.477.3896 **Toll-Free** 855.649.7299 **Email** housing@niwrc.org



fb.com/safehousing4all



[@safehousing4all](https://twitter.com/safehousing4all)



safehousing4all

FACT SHEET

Introduction

After years of grassroots advocacy to raise awareness and provide support for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian women impacted by the intersection of gender-based violence and housing instability, the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) is launching its latest project to establish the STTARS Indigenous Safe Housing Center (The Center). The Center will work to ensure safety and belonging through Indigenous lifeways and dismantle systemic and endemic barriers that impact housing access for survivors. The Center will accomplish this by elevating culturally-rooted resources, practices and policies, and centering survivors with lived experience, for real social change. It will also work across the housing spectrum and will prioritize the housing needs of all our relatives, including youth, elders, Natives with disabilities, Two-spirit relatives, and other intersectional identities. This fact sheet will provide an overview of the new Center, as well as information from our existing report on housing instability and homelessness for survivors of gender-based violence in our Indigenous Communities.

Land Acknowledgement –

We want to acknowledge

The one sun

The one moon

The one Earth Mother

The one People

Our winged, finned and four legged relatives.

We acknowledge all our relatives, the rocks, the mountains, the sacred waters, the insect world and the plant kingdom.

We take a moment to breathe and connect with the land we are on.

We take a moment to breathe and acknowledge the ancestors, those that are here and those that are yet to come.

We take another breath to acknowledge that our relationship with the land is reciprocal,

that this land does not belong to us...

we belong to the land.

Why We Started this Center

The need for safe, affordable and sustainable housing is a grave concern for AI/AN gender-based violence survivors, the advocates and services who seek to help them, and for their communities who value them. This is especially true considering that domestic violence and sexual assault are the leading causes of homelessness in most communities within the United States. The shelter and housing “crisis” in Indian country and for AI/AN and other Indigenous peoples is nothing new. Access to land and housing issues have been present since the moment our Indigenous ways of life and tribal communities were violated by colonization. A quick study on the eras of federal Indian law and policy makes it clear that inhumane practices towards AI/AN/Indigenous peoples and Indian Tribes have historically been the norm. Housing is certainly not an exception and the basic lack of housing for AI/AN peoples is factually the result of massive land theft, systemic removal, and other intentional acts across the timeline of the United States’ history.

Thus, the housing crisis in Indian country has to be viewed first as a historical injustice, one that has been utilized as a tool in the ongoing genocide of Indigenous populations. The same is true for the high incidence of gender-based violence in AI/AN populations. The housing crisis and the high rates of violence, lack of adequate resources and criminal justice response to that violence in Indian country and in communities where AI/AN people reside outside of Indian country, 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.

The need for safe, affordable, accessible, and stable housing is one of the most pressing concerns for American Indian and Alaska Native survivors of gender-based violence. Domestic and sexual violence are leading causes of homelessness for women and children generally. Housing is a basic human right, yet AI/AN survivors of gender-based violence frequently report access, habitability, or sustainability issues, leading to layers of vulnerability and increased risk of new or continued victimization. These issues are felt almost universally by the AI/AN population across the housing spectrum. Just as there are urgent issues for AI/AN survivors of gender-based violence who attempt to access shelters or emergency and transitional housing, the same issues are present with regards to the availability of housing assistance and affordable, habitable, sustainable, and stable housing.

Domestic Violence and Safe Housing for AI/AN Survivors

<60

Though there are 574 Federally Recognized Tribes in the U.S., there are less than 60 tribally-created or Native-centered domestic violence shelters.

32%

The poverty rate for AI/ANs living in tribal areas. The poverty rate for AI/ANs living in metro areas is 22%, and it is 28% in surrounding counties.

80%

The rate of unemployment on some reservations. The current unemployment rate of AI/AN is equal to the rate of unemployment during the Great Depression.



Generally in the United States...


- 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 in their lives.

1. StrongHearts Native Helpline, Resources One-Pager (January 2020).

2. Housing Needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives in Tribal Areas: A Report from the Assessment of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Housing Needs, The Department of Housing and Urban Development (2017): <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/HousingNeedsAmerIndians-ExecSumm.pdf>.

3. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, (2018). Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans. Retrieved from: <https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/2018/1220-Broken-Promises.pdf>

4. The Intersection of Domestic Violence and Homelessness (2017), Safe Housing Partnerships, https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/SHPHomelessness%20and%20DV%20Infographic_1.pdf Native Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: Lessons Learned 8 of 41 Gender-Based Violence: Lessons Learned



Preventative Work Centers...

**Disability community
Climate Change
Public Health**

**Incarcerated/Formerly Incarcerated
Mental Health/ Substance Misuse
Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+**

**Elders
Youth
Covid-19 Impacts**

How We Started

The impetus for this Center was created through our National Workgroup on Safe Housing for American Indian and Alaska Native Survivors of Gender-Based Violence. This workgroup was first brought together by the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center and the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, with our shared collaborative work truly starting in January of 2019. The goal of this workgroup is to bring together experts from Indigenous communities who work in the fields of domestic violence and housing instability/homelessness to develop policy and create concrete recommendations for technical assistance, resources and other supports for the sole purpose of increasing the availability of safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable housing for Indigenous survivors. At the core of the working group exists essential questions about how we can be good relatives to one another, to our non-human kinship and to the Land. Collectively we hold true that if housing stability is ever going to be fully realized, we must continue to ask and answer important questions about what it means to have a duty to one another, about what it means to do good work and to be good relatives. If we start from the framework that we all deserve safety, that we all deserve a place to belong, that we all deserve community, our vision of safe housing for all our relatives might one day be an actuality. If we can believe that housing and shelter are basic human rights, just as they are basic human

needs, we can start to see the outlines of what we need to change in our existing framework.

The Workgroup continues to remain an essential element of the STTARS Indigenous Safe Housing Center. The Center will to continue to bring together advocates from diverse fields, backgrounds, regions, and experiences to expand upon our thinking about what responsive training and technical assistance could look like at the intersection of housing instability and gender-based violence in our communities.

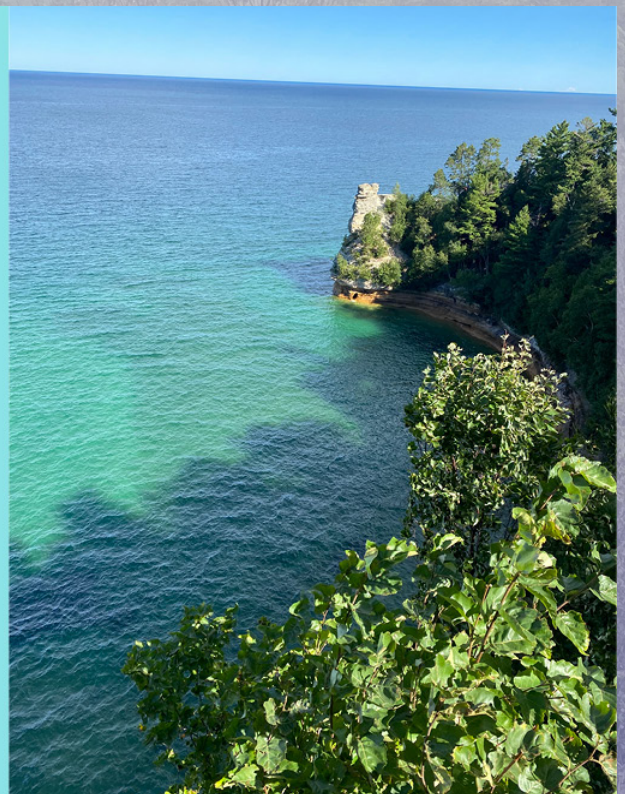
Housing Is a Human Right

The human rights framework is a legal approach that seeks to protect civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. In other words, it is the framework that is best equipped to address housing instability for AI/AN survivors because it is a framework that does not compartmentalize individual components of our lives. It is responsive because the full realization of one of the rights under the human rights framework rests on the full realization of every other right. The human rights framework accounts for dignity, for equality and nondiscrimination, for due diligence and accountability, and for prevention vs. remediation. It also places

Our Framework

Vision: Safe Housing for All Our Relatives

Mission: The STTARS Indigenous Safe Housing Center advocates for safe housing for all our relatives. We do this work through centering Indigeneity, acknowledging our relationship to Earth Mother, building on each other's gifts, resisting oppression and erasure, and acting upon the prayers of our ancestors to honor diversity and create belonging for us all.



primary focus on root causes and on accounting for historical injustices. As is relevant for AI/AN peoples and Indian Tribes, the human rights approach accounts for the rights of Indigenous peoples, specifically for sovereignty, self-determination, culture, the care of Land and of the environment, and on consent. Even further, the framework looks at systemic issues and reframes them as state violence. A human rights approach focuses on state responsibility to act proactively in order to prevent and protect against gender-based violence by both private and governmental actors. Finally, human rights specifically acknowledge that all people have the right to be free from violence; namely, that we ALL have the right to safety. At its core, the framework is simply one that promotes prevention. It is also a framework that is in line with the current Federal Policy of self-determination and promotion of tribal sovereignty with regards to Indian Tribes.

Conclusion

The work of STTARS Indigenous Safe Housing Center is collective in nature. We cannot do this work without Indigenous survivor led spaces informing our efforts. We need continued community and grassroots organizational involvement. Understanding the nexus between housing instability and gender-based violence in Indian country is complex and will require multilayered responses. For more information email us at **housing@niwrc.org** and sign up for our mailing list here: **<https://n8ve.net/ilX18>**. The Center also has dedicated social media channels. Find us on **Facebook**, **Twitter**, and **Instagram @safehousing4all**. Look out for our upcoming webpage! **niwrc.org/housing**

Resources:

- **Join the STARRS mailing list:** **<https://n8ve.net/ilX18>**
- **Watch**
 - Introducing A Tribal Safe Housing Center: **<https://n8ve.net/wmFbv>**
- **Read the report**
 - National Workgroup on Safe Housing for American Indian and Alaska Native Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: Lessons Learned: **<https://n8ve.net/RpedO>**
- **Read our article in *Restoration* magazine:** **<https://n8ve.net/wBqMG>**
- **Have any further questions? Email us at: housing@niwrc.org**



niwrc.org/housing

515 Lame Deer Ave. Lame Deer, MT 59043 **Phone** 406.477.3896 **Toll-Free** 855.649.7299 **Email** housing@niwrc.org



fb.com/safehousing4all



[@safehousing4all](https://twitter.com/safehousing4all)



safehousing4all