



The Voices of Survivors: Policy Recommendations Based on Lived Experience



STRONGHEARTS
Native Helpline



National Resource Center
on Domestic Violence



MISSION:

The 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.

VISION:

Safe Housing For All Our Relatives



Basic Housing Needs

- The need for safe and affordable housing is one of the most pressing concerns for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) survivors of violence and abuse, as domestic and sexual violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children.
- Housing is a **basic human right**, yet AI/AN survivors of gender-based violence frequently report access or sustainability issues, leading to layers of vulnerability and increased risk of new or continued victimization



Housing and Shelter Access Issues

Problematic mindsets around who should have access to housing and shelter

Housing and shelter that is not sustainable

Lack of Shelter Options

Virtually No Housing Inventory

Spaces that are un-safe and not trauma-informed

Housing that is not Habitable

Little to No Transitional Housing

Spaces that are not culturally-rooted



SHTARS

STTARS FRAMEWORK

- Housing is a basic human right
- Navigating western systems out of necessity (short term)
- Centering Indigenous lifeways throughout the housing spectrum
- Looking at housing and GBV through an Indigenous lens
- Housing stability and access is in an ongoing crisis in Indian Country (both historically and presently)
- Understanding and dispelling colonial constructs



Preventative Work is Work that Centers

Disability Community

Elders

Climate
Change

Public Health

Two-Spirit
and LGBTQAI

Mental
Health/Substance
Misuse

Youth

Incarcerated/Formerly
Incarcerated

Especially centering those aging
out of foster care



STTARS

Ongoing Barriers to Safety

- Jurisdiction
- Invisibility
- Lack of Resources for Direct Services
- Substance Abuse
- Mental Health
- Prolific Access to Justice Issues
- Objectification/Dehumanization
- Extreme Poverty
- Inadequate (non-local/underfunded) Law Enforcement Responses
- Unavailability of Housing/ Homelessness



Poverty Rates

- 22% in metropolitan areas
- 28% in surrounding communities
- 32% in tribal areas (double the National U.S. Average)

Study focused on problems and needs in Indian Country

- System deficiencies (plumbing, heating, kitchen and electrical).
- Condition problems, including structural deficiencies.
- Overcrowding, defined by having more than one person per room

Housing in Indian Country





GBV and Housing Instability

- The need for safe and affordable housing is one of the most pressing concerns for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) survivors of violence and abuse, as domestic and sexual violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children
- 50% of 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 their 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
- "Sexual assault is both a precursor to and a consequence of homelessness"
- Intersection between CW/Housing





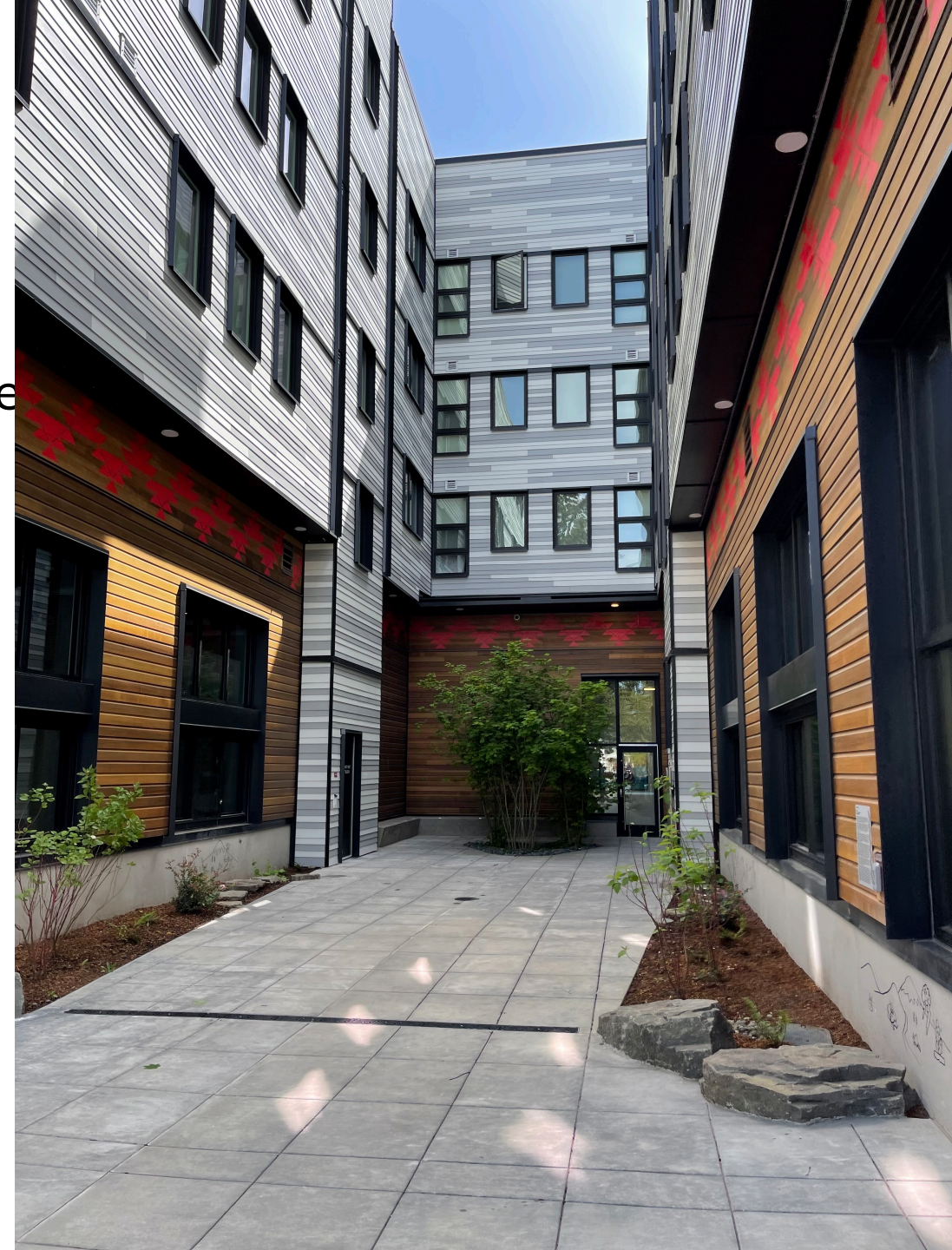
Resulting Harm

- For the domestic or sexual assault survivor, access to safety means access to shelter/housing.
- The shortages illustrated, as well as the information provided regarding the expanded VAWA protections, show that housing in Indian Country is yet another vulnerability that American Indians and Alaska Natives have inherited.
- Without adequate housing on tribal lands, victims are often forced to:
 - Leave their ancestral home, land of significant cultural meaning
 - Leave their tribal community (resembles removal)
 - Enter non-tribal shelters or shelters that cannot address their needs on a peer-to-peer basis (lacks cultural relevance)
 - Return to their abuse



Shelter in Indian Country

- Nationally there are over 2000 domestic violence shelters in the United States
- Despite there being 574 Federally Recognized and despite the disparate rates of violence in AI/AN communities, nationally there are fewer than 50 Tribal domestic violence shelters






Our Work Approach

- Listening Sessions with Survivors
- Site Visits
- Podcasts/Factsheets/Brochure/Webinars/Resource Development
- Newsletter/Listserv
- Key Informant Interviews
- Facilitation of Workgroup
- Training and Technical Assistance
- Resource Library
- Speakers' Bureau
- Tribal Safe Housing Clearinghouse
- Strategic Partnerships/MOUS



The image features a stylized illustration of five women standing in a line, viewed from behind. They are wearing purple, long-sleeved dresses with a textured, marbled pattern. The background is a vibrant, abstract landscape with shades of blue, green, and teal, suggesting a natural setting like a forest or a mountain range. At the top of the frame, a large, textured brown circle, resembling a sun or moon, is partially visible. The overall aesthetic is artistic and somewhat ethereal.

Housing Spectrum, Generally

- Emergency shelter (DV or homeless)
- Transitional housing
- Permanent supportive housing
- Public housing
- Affordable rentals
- Homeownership
- Housing that is habitable



What Has Been Left Out

- Living with abuser
- Street living
- Doubling-up/intergenerational
- Youth shelters
- In-patient treatment/sober-living
- Foster home/group home/relative placement
- Prison/incarceration
- Institution/mental health facilities
- Accessible housing (disability)
- Nursing homes/respite care/assisted living/long-term care facilities
- LGBTQ-focused housing



FY2022 Listening Sessions

The following questions were developed to help guide the conversation:

1. What are some of the barriers, obstacles or challenges you have experienced when it comes to finding or maintaining safe, affordable, and acceptable housing?
2. How would you describe your ability to access resources, services, supports when it comes to finding shelter or housing in your community? What are the major challenges or issues?
3. Do you have access to a Tribal or Native domestic violence shelter? Do you think there is a need?
4. Are there some good or great resources, services or programs in your community? Are there any harmful or concerning practices you have encountered?
5. Do you participate in cultural and traditional practices in your community?
6. What are some solutions, suggestions, observations, or recommendations to address housing insecurity or homelessness in your community? What changes would you like to see?

Major Themes

Quality of Life in Shelter and Transitional Housing

- Policies do not consider the nuanced experiences of many Native people
- Rules and regulations of shelters and other public housing options
- Numbered that survivors mention not being able to simply keep up with them.
- Rules that severely limit how a survivor access the space or that result in eviction/removal.

Lack of Support for Grandmothers Caring for Grandchildren

- Grandmothers appear to be over-represented in the unhoused populations that we spoke with.
- There is a clear absence of resources available to help support them as caretakers within shelters, such as emotional, financial, legal assistance, and the possibility for transitioning into housing that is more sustainable.
- There is a heightened risk of child welfare state system involvement.





Major Themes Continued

A House is Not A Home

- Survivors report that even though they may be housed or sheltered, these spaces do not feel like a home.
- Survivors shared that “home checks” were frequent, invasive, disruptive and further traumatized them as Indigenous survivors of gender-based violence.
- Survivors felt that they were being constantly monitored by neighbors and that neighbors reported them to managers.
- Survivors shared a lack of a sense of community due to the surveillance and this contributed to their experience of trauma.
- There is an apparent lack of trust of survivors by property managers.

Major Themes Continued

Lack of Identity-Affirming Spaces

- Survivors frequently reported that overt racism was a common visitor to their space, creating a lack of safety and retriggering their trauma responses.
- Survivors shared examples of policies that reinforced the prevailing view that non-Native/non-Tribal shelter and safe housing is largely set up to accommodate white women.
- Survivors stated that policies in place at non-Native shelter and housing failed to protect them and were therefore not intended to create spaces where Indigenous survivors of gender-based violence felt safe, comfortable and affirmed and culturally supported (as Native people). We repeatedly heard that non-Native shelter and housing was not merely unsupportive, but harmful.
- Survivors continually referenced the mental stigma they felt in non-Native/non-Tribal shelter and housing. They also shared that this mental stigma is a part of the ongoing historical trauma and genocide experienced by Indigenous peoples in the United States.
- Negative experiences within shelter and housing, they felt were rooted in racism, oppression, and colonization.
- Survivors reported feelings of guilt (that they have a roof over their heads when so many of their relatives and other Indigenous survivors continue to experience homelessness).



Major Themes Continued

Lack of Resources to Address the Specific Needs of Survivors

- Survivors in both cities reported a desperate and urgent need for Native/Tribally-run domestic violence shelters.
- Survivors and advocates reported that there were immense difficulties in finding resources in their communities.
- Survivors reported little desire to access available resources, because those resources cause harm, make survivors jump through impossible hoops (with no prospect of housing or shelter), and use survivor data without providing access to services.
- Resources, like tiny homes, are not safe for survivors (in terms of communal bath/shower/kitchen space, easy access by abusers, and incredibly vulnerable to elements and weather) and feel like a consolation. They are also not affixed to a specific place, so they inherently lack a sense of permanency. Furthermore, they are not made for survivors with children or grandchildren.
- Survivors shared that they experienced extreme feelings of isolation in many spaces, which resulted in continued trauma.
- Survivors reported having to be creative to maintain their housing, essentially becoming their own systems advocates. They also become advocates for one-another. There was a high level of mutual support and shared resources between unhoused survivors.
- Survivors consistently stated there is a lack of support for other financial considerations (application fees, bus passes, food, childcare, medical care, behavioral health, utilities, and maintenance, etc.).



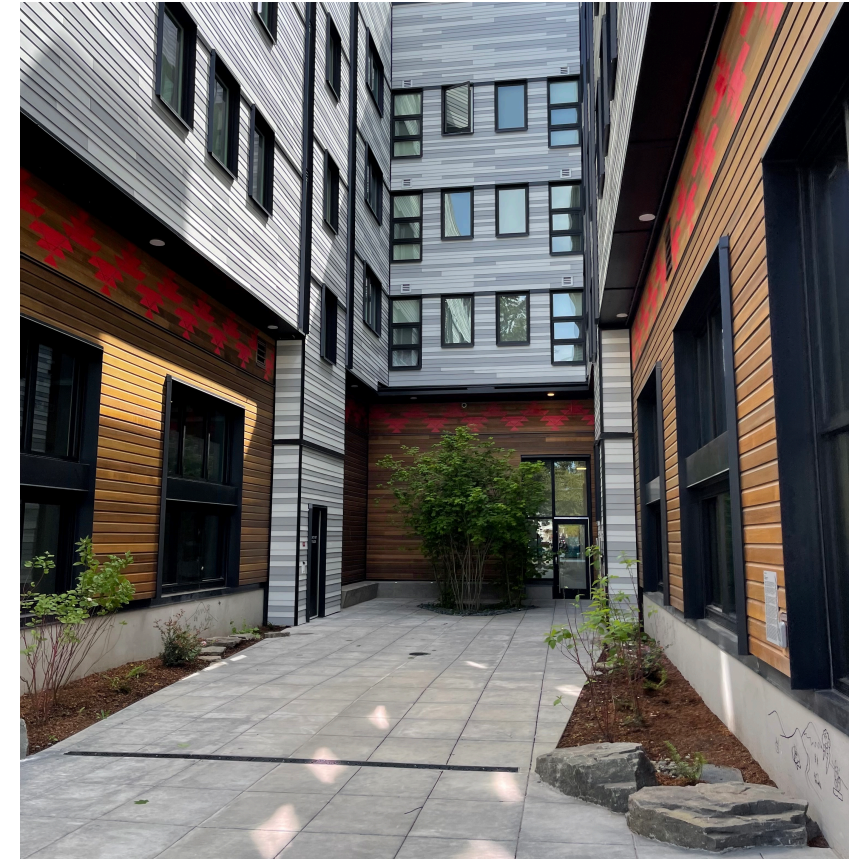
Key Issues

Survivors with Legal/Carceral System Involvement

- Survivors with carceral system involvement at both sessions reported near prohibitions to accessing safe shelter and housing. This led to further criminalization and deepened their inability to find consistent and safe employment.
- Survivors also stated the need to address those who would not qualify for certain resources because of a criminal record.

Survivors with Disability

- Survivors reported a general lack of concern for people with disabilities accessing shelter and housing
- Survivors repeatedly stated that not all disabilities are visible, and that lack of trust of survivors informed people's ignorant views of their lived experiences.
- Survivors with disabilities shared that housing and shelter is often not created with disability access in mind. These spaces were not identity affirming. They reported situations in which they felt that their sense of dignity had been detrimentally impacted by their experiences in shelter and public housing.

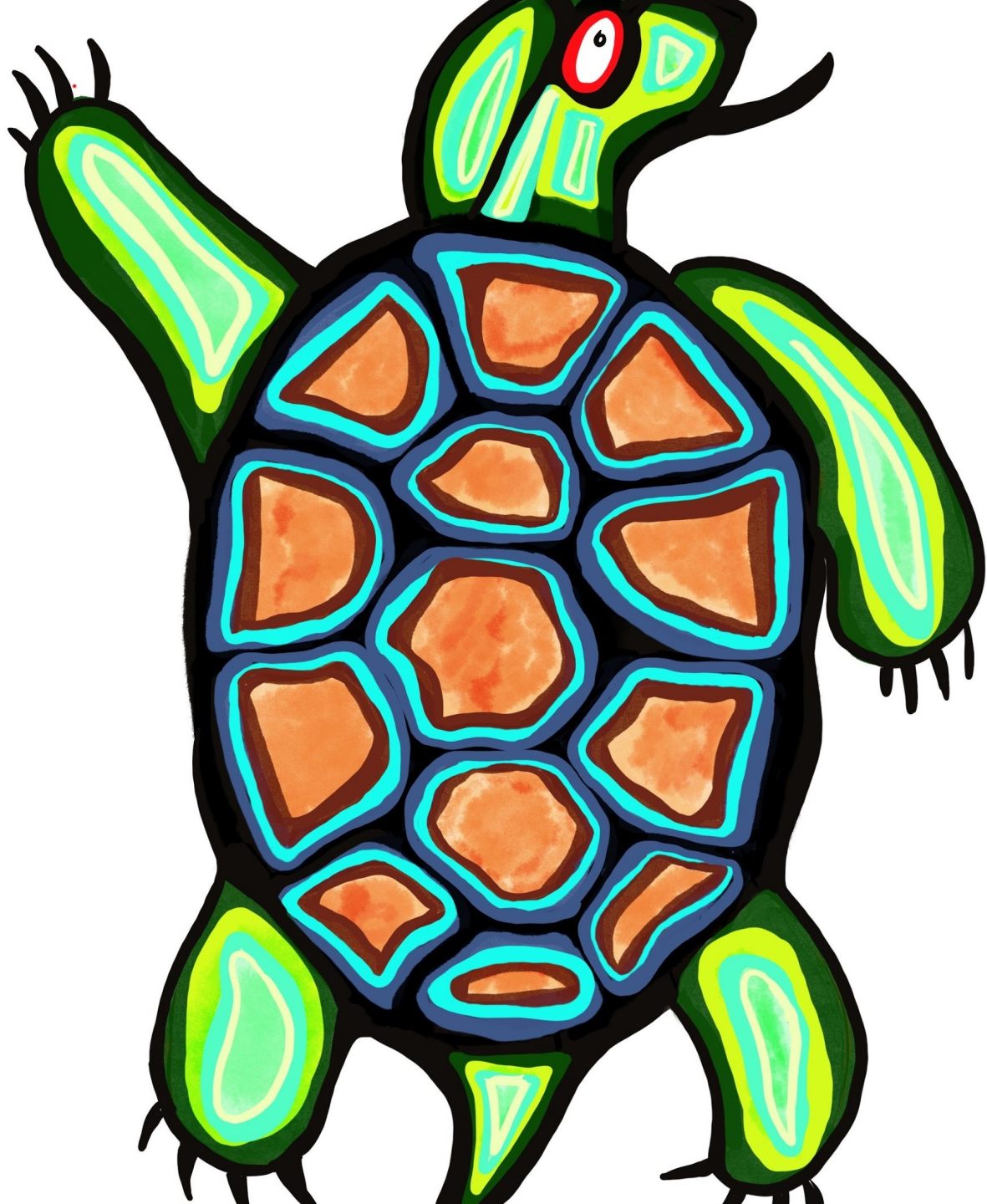




Key Issues Continued

Survivors who Identify as LGBTQAI/Two-Spirit

- Survivors in Minneapolis shared that there was a disproportionate rate of Indigenous survivors who identify as LGBTQAI/Two-Spirit who are experiencing homelessness.
- Survivors in Minneapolis shared that the resources available were not safe, accessible, or identity affirming.
- Survivors reported having to address stigma around their identity in ways that detrimentally impacted their experiences in shelter and public housing, making them feel “othered” in supposedly safe spaces.



Workgroup Update



Issues:

- There is an urgent and persistent need for Native/Tribally-run domestic violence shelters
- Not enough people to staff transitional housing
- Human trafficking and drug trafficking is impossibly complicating access to safe housing
- Racism in the United States was greatly impacting advocates and survivors
- There is a serious lack of Native/Tribally-run domestic violence shelters
- Rent is not affordable anywhere, even in public housing
- Incredibly low inventory of transitional housing
- Housing authorities (Tribal and Tribally designated) are not educated on gender-based violence
- Permanent supportive housing is not meeting the need because they are staffed by non-programmatic people
- VI-SPDAT
- Unnecessary cruelty (law enforcement cutting up government issued identification cards and throwing away belongings and possessions)
- Artificial rules act as complete prohibition to accessing shelter and safe housing (unnecessary credit checks)
- There little to no Native owned property management companies
- Landlords may exclude certain individuals from their units
- Housing first models and DV housing first models do not necessarily meet the needs of Indigenous survivors in regard to services (which are inconsistent, non-existent or not culturally responsive)
- Political oppression and political divide were exacerbating trauma in severe ways



Needed Training and Technical Assistance:

- We need an emphasis on traditional ways of life
- Training specific to shelter creation and sustainability
- Shelter policies
- Advocate training to understand the housing spectrum of housing available and strengthening housing advocacy
- Advocate training on street outreach
- Cross-training opportunities for advocates and housing authorities
- Because VAWA is a compliance issue for certain Tribal Housing Entities (THEs) or Tribally Designated Housing Entities (TDHEs), advocates training on working with THEs and TDHEs.
- Training to respond to overdoses (Narcan delivery)
- Permanent supportive housing staff need training on domestic violence and sexual assault
- Training for housing authorities on gender-based violence
- Programs need specific training and support regarding the Fair Housing Act and Indian Preference (how to ensure that Native people are able access units intended to meet their specific needs)



Policy Recommendations:

- Increased funding for transportation vouchers (bus tokens and taxis/car apps)
- Increased substance abuse supports (there are more women with opioid use disorder, and they are increasingly requesting MAT services and overdose prevention)
- Legislators should refrain from enacting laws that criminalize homelessness
- Increased funding for transitional housing in Indian country
- Funding for housing/DV advocates
- Funding for housing navigators
- Funding for legal advocacy
- Funding for financial assistance programs
- Increased funding for project-based vouchers (each unit)
- Remove artificial rules (credit checks should not be a bar to housing/shelter access)
- Indian country needs a tax base
- Rent control
- Rent cancellation
- Flexible funding for survivors
- Flexible funding for programs

What is MMIW?

- A serious and urgent issue
- A manifestation of settler colonialism
- A heart issue--- what are our shared values?
- A movement led by Native women/A call to action

We have to think about MMIW in terms of scope, in terms of where, and in terms of who.

We also have to think of it in terms of **prevention**, intervention and response.



What is the scope of the problem?

- Anecdotally
- Statistically
 - The National Crime Information Center reports that as of 2016, there were 5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls. (UIHI 2018)
 - Underreported

Prevention –
NOT
EXHAUSTIVE

Firearms

Services

Housing



- Black and American Indian and Alaska Native women experienced the highest rates of homicide (4.4 and 4.3 per 100,000 population, respectively) (Petrosky et al., 2017).
- This data is likely under-representative of American Indian and Alaska Native victims due to the issues surrounding reporting.
- The CDC report further concluded that there was a strong link between homicide and intimate partner violence, **finding that 55.4% of the cases involving American Indians and Alaska Natives were at the hands of an intimate partner and 38% of those killed by an intimate partner were killed via firearm.**

Access to Services

Major resource gap in Indian Country

Geographic constraints

Law enforcement constraints

Prejudice/Racism

Sane/Sart

911 issues

Lack of peer to peer or culturally rooted services



Housing- All in Crisis

- Emergency Shelter
- Transitional Housing
- Public Housing
- Affordable Housing
- Accessible Housing
- Housing that is Habitable

The Intersection of Housing and GBV 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.



Advocacy in Action: Restoring Safety of Indigenous Women



Contributors



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A group of approximately eight people are silhouetted against a large, glowing orange and yellow light source, possibly a fire or a large screen. The scene is set at night, with a dark sky and a dark foreground. The word "Recommendations" is overlaid in white text across the center of the image.

Recommendations

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



Housing Authorities Continued

- 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 impacts 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, criminal justice issues, PPO access, substance misuse, mental health issues, etc.) and strive to make policies and practices reflective of this understanding.
- Accountability is a practice, not a response.



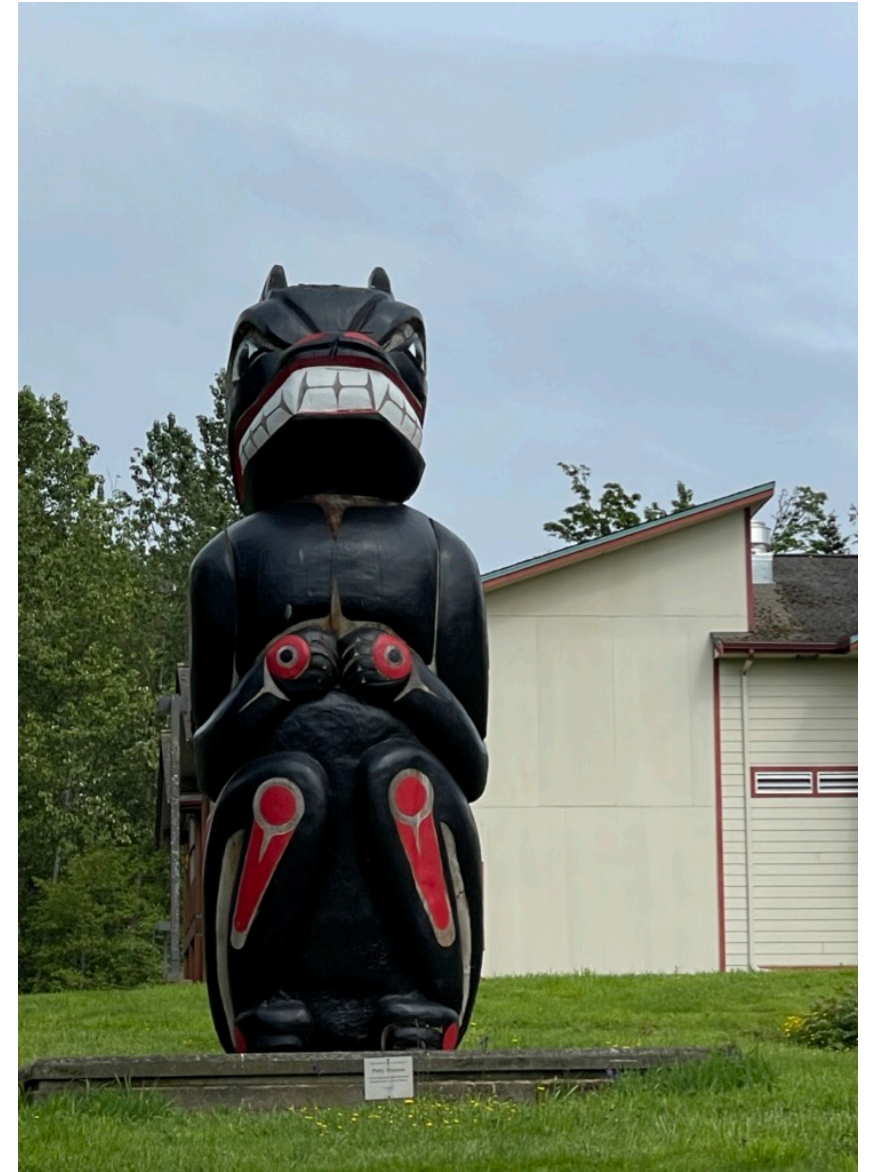
Property Managers

- Be a good relative
- Know the law around filing a missing persons report
- Be aware of implications of filing a report for special populations: ie juveniles with prior foster care involvement.
- Language barriers create serious safety impacts and make spaces inaccessible, so have a language access plan
- Trust survivors
- Bring 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
- Ensure 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



Property Managers Continued

- 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.
- Consider collaborations with DV advocates and programs



Property Managers Continued

- Post hotline information and have supports readily available
- Know the requirements in the Violence Against Women Act around confidentiality and ensure that you comply 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 emphasis on lived experience
- Ask yourself these questions: What do you do if you are culturally appropriate? What does it look like in 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 legislative and policy spaces



Tribal Council

- Be a good relative
- Fund housing projects
- Start a domestic violence shelter or other emergency safe places
- Apply for Rapid Rehousing and Transitional Housing Funds
- Fund DV/SA programming and services
- Support the needs of families when someone goes missing
- Pass laws that promote prevention (ensuring access to safe housing/VAWA compliance/Domestic violence leave policies)



Tribal Council Continued

- 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
- Create a membership services program 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/gender-based 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





Tribal Law- Self Governance

- **As sovereigns, Tribes may:**
 - Enact codes and statutes;
 - Have separate constitutions;
 - Define domestic violence;
 - Issue protective orders;
 - Enforce protective orders (if jurisdiction);
 - Define their membership); and
 - Govern.





Tribal Housing Code ClearingHouse

- What are we collecting?
 - Tribal Housing Codes (Tribal HUD/DV provisions related to housing or intersectional provisions)
 - Tribal Codes/Ordinance/Regulations/Admin or Executive Orders Relating to Covid Responses and public health issues
 - Standard Operating Procedures/Polices/Practices of Care
 - Best Practices
- How are we collecting?
 - Human Rights Clinic
 - Form! tinyurl.com/SSTARSHousingCodesForm



Pidamaya! Miigwetch!



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