

Understanding the Connections between Sexual Violence and Housing in  
Indigenous Communities

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# STTARS Staff



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# *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.



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# STTARS Mission & Vision



## **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*



# 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



**SHTARS**

# Housing and Shelter Access Issues

Problematic mindsets around who should have access to housing and shelter

Housing and shelter that is not sustainable

Little to No Transitional Housing

Lack of Shelter Options

Virtually No Housing Inventory

Spaces that are un-safe and not trauma-informed

Housing that is not Habitable

Spaces that are not culturally-rooted



**SHTARS**

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# Sexual Violence

- Can happen to anyone
- Can create immediate housing needs and housing needs throughout the lifespan
- Most sexual assaults take place in or near victim's homes including (friends/relatives)
- Also occurs in areas such as schools, shelters, prisons, faith communities, anywhere etc

Let's link it to housing...

# Gender-Based Violence in Indian Country

**More than 4 in 5 American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime.**

- 56.1% who have experienced sexual violence
- 55.5% who have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner
- **96% of women who have experienced sexual violence were assaulted by at least one interracial perpetrator (Relevancy-Oliphant v. Suquamish)**

**Native women have a greater need for services, but less access to services. Among American Indian and Alaska Native female victims:**

- 41% had physical injuries
- 49% needed services
- 38% needed medical care

**Among American Indian and Alaska Native female victims who needed services:**

- **38% were unable to access services**



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# Links to Homelessness

- Living on streets puts individuals at increased risks of assaults
  - Survivors of sexual assault may need housing due to threats, unsafe situations, not feeling comfortable
  - Survivors may need a place to stay and process next steps
  - Some may lose their housing due to the situation that occurred, landlords not helping survivors feel safe, teens being kicked out due to disclosures
  - Trauma of assault impacts their way of life mentally and physically and creates rippling barriers where housing can be jeopardized
- \* Not many shelters or housing programs are specifically dedicated for sexual violence survivors

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# Relocation

- Someone sexually assaulted may need to move for their safety.
- The person that assaulted them may know where they live,
- Seek healing from the trauma
- 11% reported it happened in their home
- 8% of women who experienced IPV and over 7% of women who experience rape need housing services.
- Over 50% of women who needed housing services did NOT receive them
- \* a study conducted with 100 low-income women living in public housing or sec 8 voucher program, 16% had experienced sexual harassment or other problematic sexual behaviors from a landlord.

# Homelessness

- Sexual assault, abuse and harassment can be risk factors for homelessness.
- Homelessness can be a risk factor for sexual assault.
- People of color and Indigenous individuals overrepresent the homeless populations.
- Little research has looked at the connections between sexual violence housing and race.

## General Population<sup>8</sup>



One in five adults (19%) who are homeless reported being physically or sexually assaulted while homeless.<sup>9</sup>



Almost 40% of homeless female and 3.3% of homeless male veterans experienced military sexual trauma.<sup>10</sup>



Twenty-five percent of adults who are homeless experienced child sexual abuse (36% for women vs. 14% for men).<sup>9</sup>

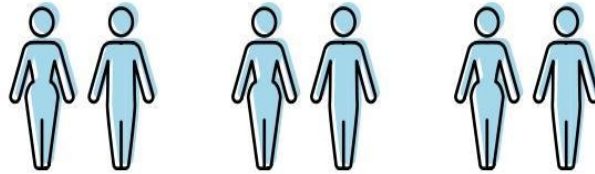
## Experiences in Shelters

Homeless shelters may not recognize the need to address trauma related to sexual assault.



**17% OF TRANSGENDER PEOPLE**

Seventeen percent of people who identify as transgender were sexually assaulted while staying in a homeless shelter.<sup>11</sup>



**BLACK 33%    MULTIRACIAL 25%    WHITE 10%**

**Black and multiracial transgender people reported higher rates of sexual assault at shelters than white transgender people.<sup>12</sup>**



**WOMEN 26%    MEN 15%**

Transgender women were more likely (26%) than transgender men (15%) to report sexual assault at shelters.<sup>12</sup>

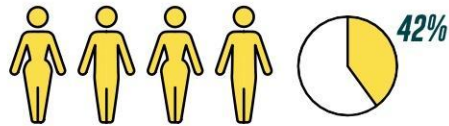
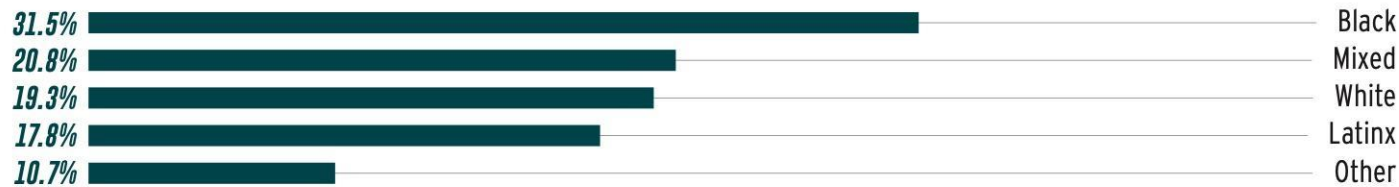


People providing services related to homelessness rarely ask about experiences of sexual assault or rape. In one study, **over 70% of homeless women were not asked by homeless shelter staff if they ever experienced violent victimization.**<sup>13</sup>

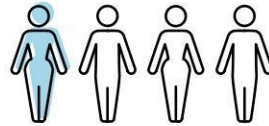
## Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness

Young adults experiencing homelessness typically have a history of being raped or sexual assaulted prior to leaving home and being victimized when on the street.

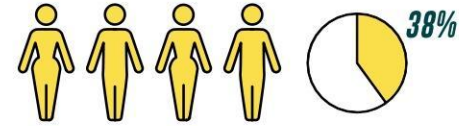
### Homeless young adults (ages 18-26) who experienced forced sex while homeless<sup>14</sup>



Almost 42% of homeless youth (ages 14-24) have experienced child sexual abuse prior to running away.<sup>15</sup>



Twenty-three percent of homeless young adults (ages 18-26) had engaged in the sex trade.<sup>14</sup>



Thirty-eight percent of LGBTQ homeless youth (ages 13-25) were forced to have sex as compared to 15% of non-LGBTQ youth.<sup>16</sup>



Over 33% of homeless or precariously housed youth (ages 13-25) reported experiencing child sexual abuse prior to being homeless, and 13% reported experiencing sexual assault since becoming homeless.<sup>17</sup>

*For more information on the connections between sexual violence and housing, visit [safehousingpartnerships.org](https://safehousingpartnerships.org). To view the other infographics in this series, visit [nsvrc.org/SexualViolenceandHousingInfographics](https://nsvrc.org/SexualViolenceandHousingInfographics).*

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# What other links do you see between sexual violence and housing?

- What are you seeing in your communities?



Voices of Survivors



# Housing Spectrum, Generally

- Emergency Shelter (DV or Homeless)
- Transitional Housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Public Housing
- Affordable Rentals
- Homeownership
- Housing that is Habitable



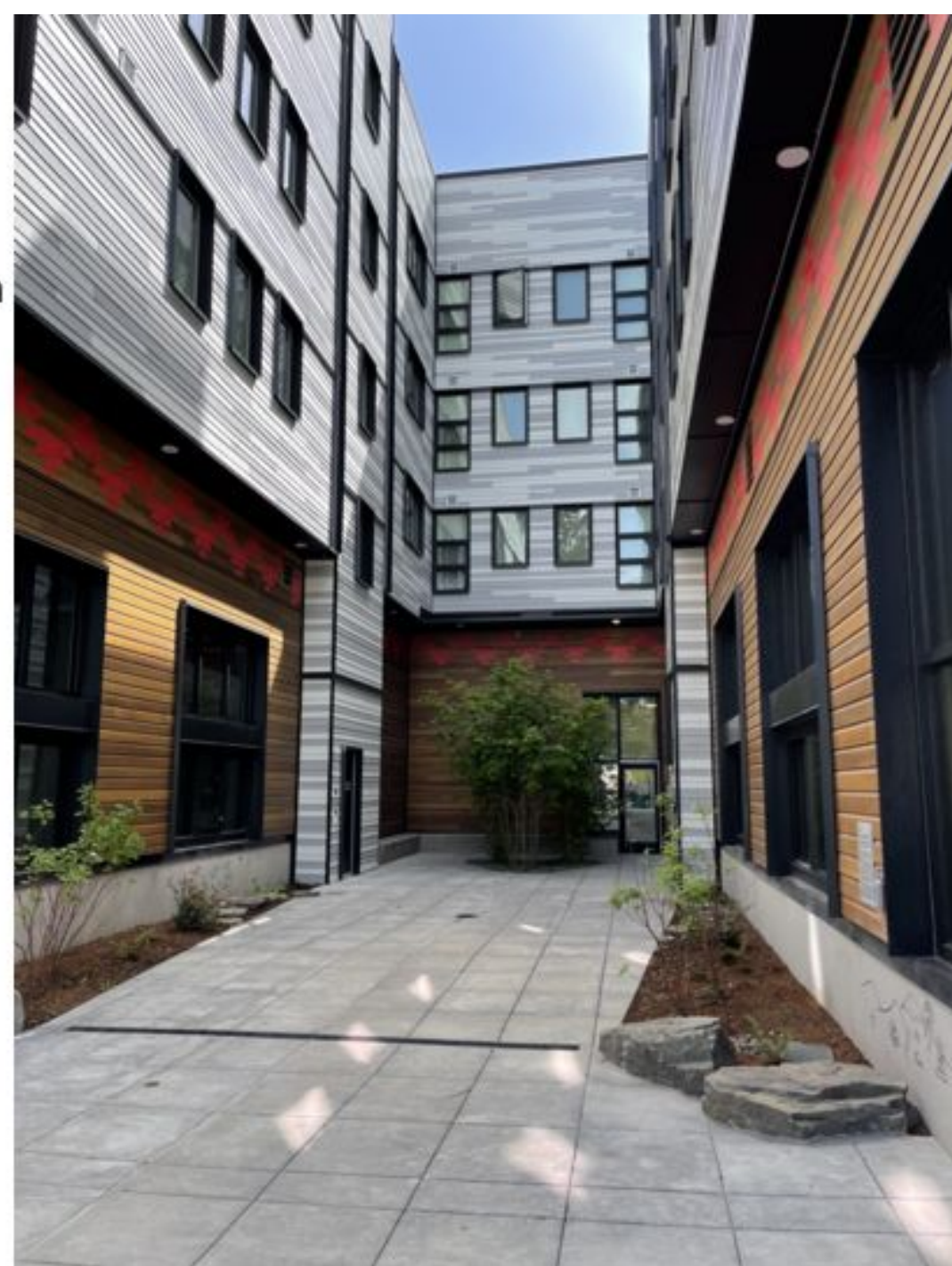


# What Has Been Left Out

- Living with Abuser
- Street
- 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
- Veterans

# Shelter in Indian Country

- Nationally there are over 2000 domestic violence shelters in the United States
- Despite there being 576 Federally Recognized and despite the disparate rates of violence in AI/AN communities, nationally there are fewer than 50 tribal domestic violence shelters





# 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 abuser



# Listening Session Questions

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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 were so numerous that survivors mention not being able to simply keep up with them.
- Rules that severely limit how a survivor can 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.



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## **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.

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## 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).



# Continued

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## 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.).**



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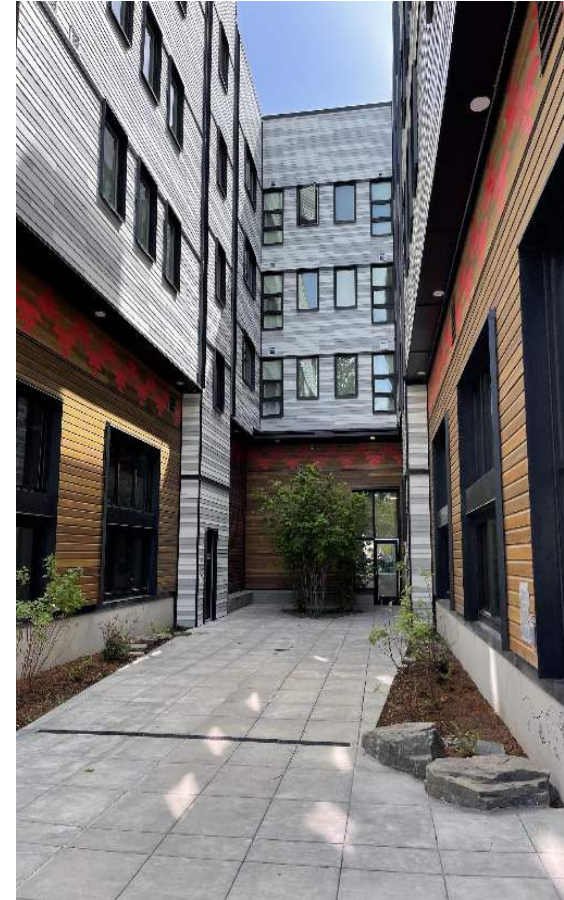
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## Survivors with Legal/Carceral System Involvement

- 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.



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## 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.**

**What services or support, besides housing and shelter do you think survivors need in your communities?**

# Barriers Facing Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in HUD-assisted Tribal Housing are Structural

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Housing can be time-capped

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Requirements to maintain housing are overburdensome

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Funding is limited and does not meet the disparate need of AI/AN/NH survivors

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Housing is not habitable

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Housing inventory is severely limited

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Rent is exceptionally high and increasing

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Economic and community development and lack of jobs or employment impacts on maintaining and sustaining housing

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COVID related assistance is ending

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Eviction moratoriums ended

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Western practices are pervasive (either as part of funding requirements or around the idea of maintenance/care/access/sustainability/affordability/etc.).



# Problematic Provisions

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Nuisance Ordinances

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One-Strike Laws

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Expedited Eviction Codes (usually related to substance misuse)

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Requirement of certain disclosures (prior convictions/other application disclosures regarding systems interactions)

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Financial barriers to accessing housing (application fees, prior evictions, lack of employment)

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Access to information can be limited or restricted by internet access/sometimes not publicly available

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Rigid rules around care/maintenance of housing units

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Rigid rules regarding pets (prohibition against pets)

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Limitations regarding who can reside in a unit

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Citations and fines for garbage/maintenance/upkeep

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Lack of ADA compliance or similar regulations/ordinances

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Substance abuse/misuse policies (need a clean UA)

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# VAWA

**Enacted in 1994** (reauthorized in 2000, 2005 and 2013 and 2022).

\* In 2005- adds **Safety for Indian Women Title** and includes findings that recognize tribal sovereignty.

\* In 2013- **partial Oliphant fix**

**Implementing tribes can now prosecute non-natives for the following offenses if committed on tribal land**

Dating Violence

Domestic Violence

Violations of a protection order

**Tribes must implement protections for defendants**

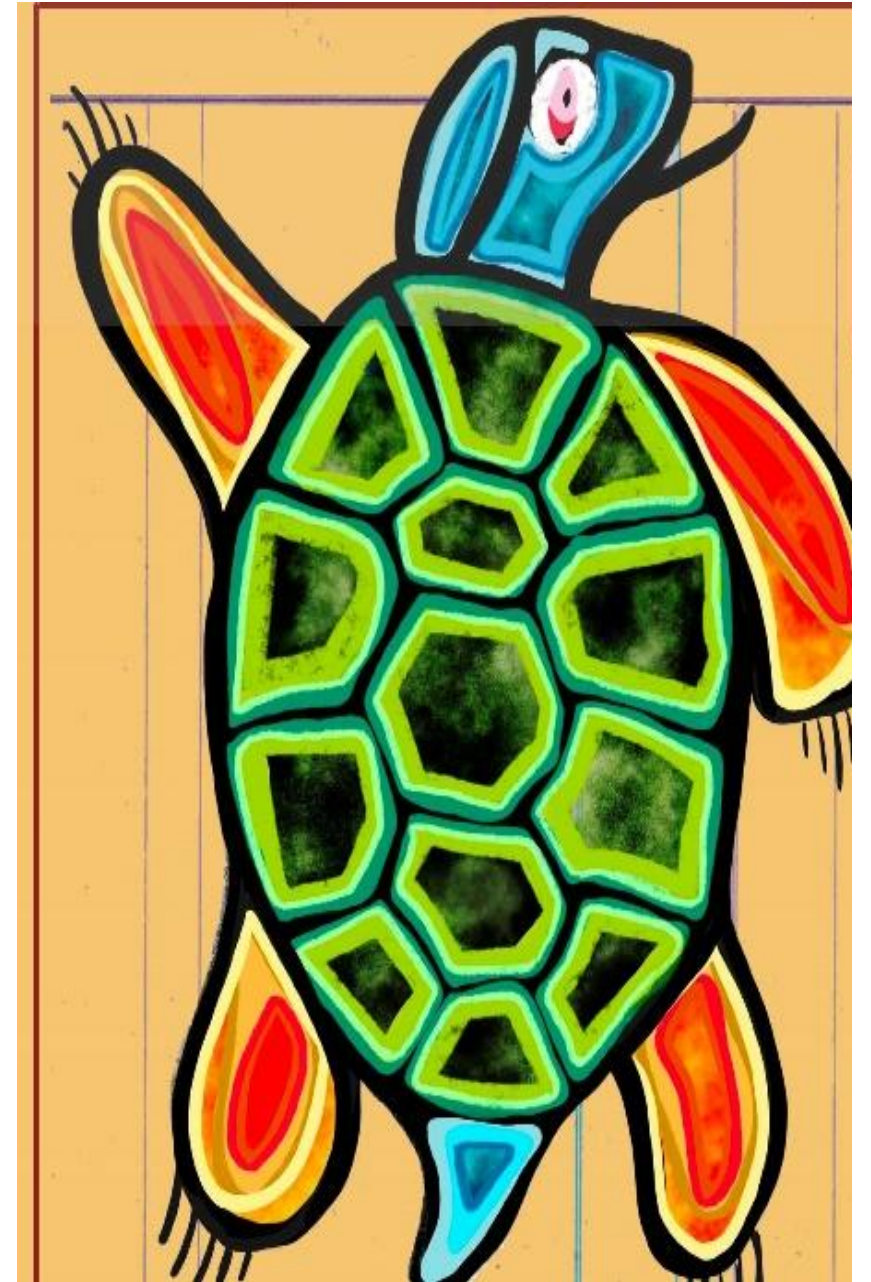
**Does not address**

Sexual violence

Child abuse

Crimes committed while interacting with the system (ie: assaulting the arresting officer)

\* **2022- expanded Oliphant Fix and additional housing provisions**



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## VAWA Core Protections Around Housing- 2005

\* Survivors not denied assistance  
as an applicant

\* Survivors not evicted or have  
assistance terminated due to  
having been a victim of domestic  
violence

## VAWA Core Protections Around Housing-2013

- Emergency Transfers (allows for survivors to move to another safe and available unit if they fear for their life and safety)
  - HUD adopted model emergency transfer plan
- Protections Against Adverse Effects of Abuse
  - Intersectional piece, actually codified (contemplates economic and criminal consequences that a survivor may experience)
- Low Barrier Certification Process
  - In most instances, a survivor need only self-certify in order to exercise their rights under VAWA.

# VAWA Update



- Where can I find the Safe Housing Provisions in VAWA?

Section	Section Title
Section 601	Housing Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking
Section 602	Ensuring Compliance and Implementation; Prohibiting Retaliation Against Victims
Section 603	Protecting the Right to Report Crime from One's Home
Section 604	Transitional Housing Assistance Grants for Victims of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, or Stalking
Section 605	Addressing the Housing Needs of Victims of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault or Stalking
Section 606	Study and Report on Housing and Service Needs of Survivors of Trafficking and Individuals at Risk for Trafficking



# VAWA Update

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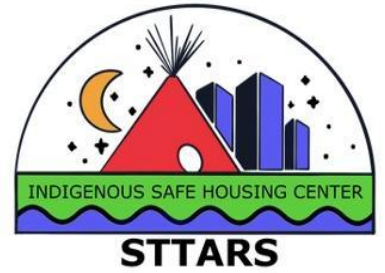
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# Section 605

- Amends the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
- “Homeless” means:
  - any individual OR FAMILY
  - who is experiencing trauma OR a lack of safety related to, or fleeing or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking or other dangerous traumatic or life-threatening conditions related to the violence against the individual or a family member in the individual’s or family’s current housing situation,
    - including where the health and safety of children are jeopardized;
- has no other safe residence;**
- AND lacks resources to obtain other safe permanent housing**

# VAWA Update

- What Additional Provisions Should I Know About?



Section	Section Title
Section 206	LGBTQ Specific Services Program (see Section B(2)(A))
<b>Section 701</b>	<b>Findings for Title VII (Economic Security for Victims)</b>
Section 704	Study and Reports on Barriers to Survivors' Economic Security Access (See Section C(1)(B))
Section 604	Transitional Housing Assistance Grants for Victims of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, or Stalking
Title X- Improving Conditions for Women in Federal Custody	Prohibition on Placement of Pregnant Prisoners or Prisoners in Post-Partum Recovery in Segregated Housing Units (See Section 1001(C))
Title XI- Law Enforcement Tools to Enhance Public Safety	Some provisions throughout, including for Native Hawaiians.

# Easiest Places to Start

- Self-certification process
- Confidentiality
- Connecting with tribal/local domestic violence/sexual assault programs and advocates
- Non-discrimination/non-retaliatory
- Protection of right to report crime from one's own home
- Receiving and incorporating ongoing mandatory training on gender-based violence
- Post hotlines in visible spaces
- Be knowledgeable of resources in the community
- Review housing codes for problematic provisions or best practices



# 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



# Policy Recommendations:

- 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
- Address student loan crisis
- Extend child-tax credits
- Advocate for low barrier access

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# Safety Planning



Ongoing safety concerns can be ongoing for survivors of sexual assault.

Brainstorming ways to stay safe can reduce the risk of future harm.

Planning for future crisis, making decisions about next steps can help survivors stay safe.

Planning can also help with healing.

Plans and actions should not increase the risk of harm.



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## Safety plans are situational and are based on the needs of survivors

- Become familiar with environment settings
- Computer safety awareness-clearing cache, history and cookies
- Support network- finding supportive and trusting individuals is also an important for staying safe
- Staying safe at home-assist survivors in identifying ways they can safety plan in their home (keep a bag packet, lighting system, code word)





**STTARS**

QUESTIONS?

# Miigwetch!



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