

## **November is National Native American Heritage Month**

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Each November, the United States recognizes the diverse history, cultures and traditions of this land's Indigenous people during National Native American Heritage Month, also known as American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month. Today, about 2.9 million people identify as American Indian and Alaska Native, with 573 federally recognized Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages located across the nation.

National Native American Heritage Month not only serves as an opportunity to celebrate Native cultures and lifeways, but also to understand more about the issues impacting Native people today. Native advocates continue to raise awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous women, domestic violence, and sexual assault against Native women, yet more support and understanding is needed to ensure all victims have access to justice and culturally grounded services in their communities.

### **Tribal sovereignty for Native victims**

It is important to understand federally recognized tribes and villages – also referred to as nations, bands, pueblos, or communities – are sovereign, meaning they have the inherent power to self-govern all matters involving the health, wellbeing and safety of their people and lands. Tribes maintain the power to determine their own forms of government, create and enforce laws, and establish their own police departments and tribal courts.

This nation-to-nation relationship between tribes and the federal government is closely tethered to all historical and contemporary issues impacting Native communities, particularly around crime, safety and justice. Nationally, the [rates of violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women](#) are overwhelming, where:

- more than 4 in 5 Native women (84.3 percent) have experienced violence in their lifetime;
- at least half of Native women (55.5 percent) have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner;
- one in two Native women (56.1 percent) have experienced sexual violence; and,
- of the estimated 1.5 million Native women who have experienced violence, 97 percent of the violence was committed by a non-Native perpetrator (ex. individuals of other races)

Because tribal members are citizens of three sovereigns - their tribe, the state in which they live, and the United States, Native victims of violence often face a maze of legal barriers when reporting crimes committed by non-Native perpetrators. Gaps in accessing culturally relevant supportive services such as tribal shelters, legal advocates or medical care further impact their experience. Upholding the power of tribes and villages to protect their people and create programs and services that are culturally grounded is crucial in supporting victims in tribal communities.

### **Be an ally for tribal nations**

There are several ways you can support the work to end violence against Native women by lifting up the collective voices of grassroots tribal advocates. Here are some ways to show your support during National Native American Heritage Month and beyond:

- **Offer culturally appropriate services whenever working with Native victims.** Find out whether there are tribal programs in or near your service area and reach out to make a connection. There is also the StrongHearts Native Helpline (1-844-7NATIVE, or 762-8483), which is a domestic violence helpline for Native victims available nationwide. Staffed by Native advocates, the [StrongHearts Native Helpline](#) provides emotional support and resources for Native people impacted by domestic violence and dating violence. A project of the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, StrongHearts is provided free of charge and is available daily from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Eastern time.

- **Learn more about emerging issues related to tribal sovereignty.** The *Restoration of Sovereignty & Safety* magazine is a publication dedicated to policy analysis and emerging issues impacting the safety of American Indian and Alaska Native women. The magazine promotes strengthening tribal sovereignty to ensure all perpetrators of violence are held accountable as a way to restore safety of Native women. Learn more about *Restoration* and [sign up for an annual print subscription here](#). Webinars, printed booklets and more culturally appropriate resources are also available on [NIWRC's Resources page online](#). Partnering with a tribal domestic violence or sexual assault coalition in your region is another great way learn more about the issues affecting Native victims locally. You can find a [list of tribal coalitions here](#).
- **Give to Native advocacy organizations.** The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center provides national leadership in the movement to end violence against Native women by supporting culturally grounded grassroots advocacy. NIWRC provides training and technical assistance, educational resources, and policy development—all of which is rooted in traditional beliefs and lifeways—for tribes and tribal programs. Each gift made to NIWRC strengthens their mission to end violence against Native women and vision of the restoration of sovereignty for tribes to hold perpetrators accountable. You can [make a donation here](#).