

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE AMONG NATIVE WOMEN: A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women are 2.5 times more likely to be raped or be victims of sexual assault compared to the rest of the country.<sup>1</sup> This public health emergency encompasses verbal, domestic, physical, and sexual violence that has lifelong effects on women and their extended community. A report released by the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI), a division of Seattle Indian Health Board, titled *Our Bodies, Our Stories: Sexual Violence Among Native Women in Seattle, WA*, details results from a survey of 148 predominantly homeless or low-income urban AI/AN women in Seattle, WA and revealed much higher rates of sexual violence than was previously known.

## THE DATA

- 94% had been raped or coerced into sex in their lifetime.
- 42% of victims of rape or coercion attempted suicide in their lifetime.
- 53% lacked permanent housing.
- 34% binge drank on a weekly or daily basis after they were initially attacked.
- 8% of cases of a rape victim's first attack ended in a conviction.
- 86% reported being affected by historical trauma.
- 49% misused alcohol on a monthly, weekly, or daily basis in the year prior to the survey.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- There is a dire need for sustainable investments in research uncovering the depth of sexual violence experienced by AI/AN communities.
- Findings from this report offer data that can be used when considering legislation that addresses violence against AI/AN women, including:
  - H.R. 6545: The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2018 (VAWA);
  - H.R. 4485 and S.1942: Savanna's Act;
  - S. 1986: Justice for Native Survivors of Sexual Violence Act;
  - S. 1953: Tribal Law and Order Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2017; and
  - H.R. 4608 and S.1870: Securing Urgent Resources Vital to Indian Victim Empowerment Act.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support Senator Jon Tester's (D-MT) call for Senate hearing on missing and murdered Native American women, many of whom were victims of sexual violence.
- Increase investments in the 12 Indian Health Service (IHS) Tribal Epidemiology Centers to collect, analyze, and report on sexual violence throughout AI/AN communities.
- Preserve and increase investments in the IHS Direct, Tribal 638, and Urban Indian Health Program (I/T/U) system of care, including in:
  - Domestic Violence Prevention Initiative to provide direct services, outreach and education services on intimate partner violence and sexual assault in AI/AN communities.
  - Direct health care and behavioral health services for AI/AN patients impacted by intimate partner violence and sexual assault.



Seattle Indian Health Board  
For the Love of Native People

Seattle Indian Health Board is an Urban Indian Health Program and a section 330 Federally Qualified Health Center. SIHB provides medical, dental, mental health, substance misuse, nutrition, pharmacy, and traditional health services to more than 4,000 AI/AN people annually, from more than 250 tribes.



Urban Indian  
Health Institute  
A Division of the Seattle Indian Health Board

Urban Indian Health Institute is a division of the Seattle Indian Health Board and supports the health and well-being of urban Indian communities through information,

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International (2006). Maze of Injustice: The failure to protect Indigenous women from sexual violence in the USA. Amnesty International