



Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: An Action Plan for Alaska Native Communities



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Concept: When a woman goes missing in our community, or dies unexpectedly from suspicious circumstances, our communities go through a series of emotions from grief to anger. We are sad for the loss of our loved ones and we often have so many questions and concerns and no place to turn for answers. If she is missing, we are concerned about where she might be and who can help us find her. After days, weeks, months or even years go by without adequate answers, we are angered by the lack of support. The missing and murder of Indigenous women, or “MMIW” is gaining national recognition and the federal and state governments are now working to increase awareness, to develop a plan to for collecting data on the missing and murdered Indigenous people, and to ensure families and communities know who to reach out to for support should a loved one goes missing or is murdered.

Alaskan Indigenous communities are encouraged to use this Toolkit as a guide for developing a plan of action that will include awareness, prevention, and intervention strategies. This toolkit can also be used as a guide for community organizing when someone goes missing. The suggestions in this Toolkit are not a checklist but rather a collection of ideas, tasks and suggestions of *what* can be done within a community to support a family facing crisis - and ways to respond in an organized manner when one of our mothers, aunties, sisters or children have gone missing or is found murdered. This Toolkit will be continuously updated and will evolve as new resources are found and strategies are developed.

The Alaska Native Women’s Resource Center (AKNWRC) hosts monthly calls for the purpose of informing and discussing current developments and issues around MMIW, to educate and review legislative efforts and policy issues, and to hold dialogue with Alaska communities on healing, prevention and action in response to the crisis of our missing and murdered women and children. Please email info@aknwrc.org to be added to the email list to receive more information on these monthly calls.

Intervention

What to do When Someone Goes Missing

Community Organizing and Response

Take immediate action. The first 72 hours following a disappearance is a critical time to take immediate action.

- A. Report the disappearance as soon as possible.** Do not wait 24 hours before reporting or filing a report with local law enforcement concerning the person who has gone missing. If a law enforcement agency is resistant or refuses to take a missing person report, insist that a report be made. Our families report that sometimes it can take multiple attempts to get law enforcement to take the information so if they continue to refuse, it is advised to go up the chain of command.

Establish a timeline. Document in as much detail as possible from a week before or the day she went missing:

- Where the person lives
- When she was last seen (date and time)
- Who last saw her
- What she was wearing when last seen
- Who she was seen with
- What she was doing at the time of disappearance
- Daily habits and places she frequented
- Most recent social media activity

It will also be important to describe what the victim looks like such as height, weight, distinguishing marks, hair color, eye color, tattoos, etc. It is also helpful to share a current picture of the missing person.

If the individual has Facebook, Instagram, twitter, snap chat or other social media accounts, a search through their accounts may provide essential information and answers to some or of the questions listed above.

Note: It is important to not assume someone else is collecting this information. However, if you find that someone else is collecting this information, continue your own research and offer to combine your information together.

Notes: _____

Post public updates. Once all of the information of the missing person has been documented, share the information with others by posting fliers in the community, posting to Facebook and/or other social media platforms.

Update the post(s) frequently in order for the shared posts to also be updated. You may also want to establish a central Facebook page that can be viewed for all notices, information and updates.

There may also be central dedicated internet or Facebook accounts that could be used such as MMIWG Alaska, MMIW USA, MMIW AK or Seeking AK Missing (SAM). However, social media pages and links tend to change often so it will be necessary to search for new or modified accounts. Be sure to confirm the page/account is valid and accessible.

Original post locations: _____

Designate one or two family or community members as the main contact. This person(s) will be the main contact for law enforcement and other agencies. The purpose is to centralize information flowing to and from law enforcement and the family so that all relevant information gets to the family and the agencies assisting are not overwhelmed with calls from family.

Designated individual: _____

Create a log of actions. Keep a list of who you contacted, what agency, their name, phone number, a summary of the conversation, agreed to next steps, and when will you talk again.

B. Issue an alert. There are efforts throughout the state and the country to set up universal alert systems for missing persons that will operate like the Amber Alert for children or the Gray Alert for elders. Talk to the local law enforcement, State Trooper or municipal office to see if they have access to an alert system. If so, issue an alert for the missing person. Be sure to document this in the log.

C. Community organizing. Designate a core team that will be responsible for the activities related to finding the individual who has gone missing or murdered. Each primary contact should be sure to keep a communication log. You may consider assigning individuals as main contacts for:

- Family support activities (listed below in E.)
- Law enforcement
- Search and rescue
- Press
- Information and leads

Core Team: _____

Organizing Tools

Coordinated Community Response Team (CCR) -- CCR involves police, prosecutors, probation officers, battered women's advocates, counselors, and judges in developing and implementing policies and procedures that improve interagency coordination and lead to more uniform responses to domestic violence cases. Visit www.vawnet.org for more information.

Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) -- MDT involves a range of professionals, advocates and laypersons, from one or more organizations and fields, working together to deliver comprehensive services or care for an individual or family.

- D. Get the word out there.** Post on Facebook, Instagram, flyers in the community, etc. Organize a vigil or a walk which will help raise awareness. Be sure to update the alerts frequently.
- E. Candlelight Vigil.** The goal of a candlelight vigil is to raise awareness about the missing or murdered person and to support the family.
- Find a location that will most effectively maximize participation.
 - Be aware of rules and/or regulations as related to hosting large gatherings in the designated space.
 - Solicit a few speakers with the specific focus to address the needs of the community and create common goals.
 - Say the missing or murdered person's name frequently, if not culturally forbidden.

Verified speaker(s) and contact information: _____

- F. Community family support.** It is a devastating experience for families to have a loved one go missing or murdered. Communities can offer support to the grieving families in ways such as:
- Providing meals
 - Helping with funeral arrangements
 - Providing spiritual support
 - Providing emotional support
 - Helping with everyday chores and/or meeting obligations
 - Providing financial assistance directly
 - Creating a Go Fund Me for public financial contributions
 - Designating a record keeper to keep track of progress and have a record of phone calls, texts, emails, who said what to whom, chronology of events, efforts and actions. Maintaining these records is also a good way to track if progress is being made or not.

Local Contacts

Local law enforcement agencies. Document the name and contact information of the local law enforcement agencies that are available resources to your community.

VPSO or TPO Officer: _____

PSO or TPO Supervisor: _____

Alaska State Trooper (local): _____

City or municipal Officer: _____

Search & rescue: _____

FBI Liaison: _____

Other: _____

Other: _____

Local advocacy agencies/persons. Document the name and contact information for each of the available advocacy agencies or person(s) in your community.

Tribal victim advocate: _____

Social service agency: _____

Social service agency: _____

Elected official: _____

Clan or community leader: _____

Clan or community leader: _____

Clan or community leader: _____

Clergy: _____

Other community resource persons/agencies:

Someone to organize meals: _____

Someone to organize housing: _____

Possible liaison with LE: _____

Possible liaison with Family: _____

Possible liaison with community: _____

Other resource persons: _____

Other resource persons: _____

Other resource persons: _____

Law Enforcement (LE)

Protocols and how best to assist and/or demand LE response. Begin discussion with local LE now, before a missing or murder happens. Discussion can include the following questions:

- When can we report and what can we expect to happen?
- What is the protocol to get a search organized and begun?
- What frequency of communication can the family expect?
- At what point does a “missing” person become a criminal investigation?
- How best can the community and family assist with search or investigation?
- How best can law enforcement assist the family and/or community?
- Who are the one or two key designees to contact when an incident has occurred?

There are continuing efforts throughout the State and each region to develop protocols for LE to follow concerning responding to and investigating missing and murder Indigenous people. By having regular discussions and meetings with the local LE, the community can stay informed of this development and have the opportunity to contribute vital information that can improve the protocols in each locale.

What are the standard law enforcement responses or protocols that can be expected in each community? It is important to have this discussion with all LE in your area including the State Troopers, city or municipal police, and tribal or village Public Officer.

What to do when law enforcement refuses to assist, take a report, or initiate investigation

The State of Alaska policy allows for missing person reports to be filed immediately. This is important so that the various law enforcement agencies are notified and can begin to coordinate as soon as possible.

If with your first attempt to file a report, try asking to see or talk to the officer’s supervisor or contact another law enforcement agency located in or near the area.

If you still unable to file a report, contact: State Troopers central office for the region:
<https://dps.alaska.gov/AST/ADetachment/Home>.

Another contact is: Public Safety Commissions central office in Anchorage: 907-269-5086 or
dps.commissioner.office@alaska.gov

Notes: _____

Additional Considerations

Ceremonial Practice & Assistance. The ceremony or assistance to be provided will depend on and is specific to the region, community, and family. Each community will need to discuss needs for the following responses when there has been a death. It may also be helpful to discuss specific things that should be done when there is a body and when there is not. These discussions typically include elders, clan leaders, and community members.

Some things to consider:

Laying the body to rest— even without a body, what does the family and/or community need to have closure?

Men's role - Is there particular tasks or ceremony for the men to be engaged in?

Women's role - Is there particular tasks or ceremony for the women to be engaged in?

Collect and offer healing stories or examples of communities standing together.

Who in the community would be appropriate and/or healing to preside over any community or family ceremony.

Notes: _____

Awareness and Prevention

What to do BEFORE Someone Goes Missing

Policy Response

Laws, funding and accountability. Although the issue of MMIWG has reached the level of crisis, there continues to be a need for an Alaska state specific database so that organizations and advocates have more accurate data concerning the severity and extent of this issue. Data is required to better educate policy makers about resources needed.

The work of developing new policies and protocols, drafting new protective laws and implementing or modifying new approaches aimed at increasing public safety and decreasing women and girls from going missing, being kidnapped, trafficked, or murdered involves long range planning and organizing. This section provides preliminary options to get discussions and planning started in each locale.

A. Legislative

There are continual efforts to increase public safety and prevention of Indigenous women and children through new laws or amendments to existing laws. Follow these efforts through contact with your local legislator, their staff, or the AKNWRC at www.aknwrc.org.

You can also work with, support, and sign up for updates with the national and state organizations (see “Resources” below) that are lobbying and advocating for improved laws and policies about safety and prevention of violence against women and children.

B. Courts and Specific Cases

If you need information about a particular case that is either being investigated by law enforcement or is being prosecuted in the courts you can contact the following agencies:

- State District Attorney
- District Court
- Victims of Crime advocacy agency
- Victim services (for support as well as assistance with impact statements)

If you are unable to obtain information by simply asking for it, you may need to make an official request through the Freedom of Information Act. For information on this process see: <https://dps.alaska.gov/ast/pio/publicinformationrequest> or contact the National Freedom of Information Coalition at <https://www.nfoic.org/alaska-foia-laws>.

The local Tribe may also have specific judicial and victim advocacy services, including Peacemaking circles for healing.

C. March and Rally

A public march, walk and/or rally can bring awareness to the crisis of MMIWG. For example, organizing an awareness walk for May 5th would highlight the MMIWG issue in your community. Organizing a march, rally or walk can also bring attention to a particular case. These events can often be healing and help show support to the family.

If a public event is being considered, confirm with the family they requested the event or contact the family to seek approval, prior to setting plans in motion.

Some considerations when planning a public event.

- Local permits and communication with LE for route and street closures
- Advertising in radio, local newspaper, social media
- Alerting by way of the Press, social media, and posting pictures
- Rallying to raise awareness and support the family
- Encouraging community involvement with possible dancing, singing, prayers
- Selecting speakers with specific focus to address the needs of the community and create common goals
- Creating signs, banners, buttons, flags, picture posters to raise awareness
- Determining when and where to march. Where is an effective location that will maximize participation and get the message out? Are there any rules or regulations to be aware of?

Outreach and Education

- A. Press release/Communications -- create a plan.** Learn how to use social media or partner with an organization that knows how. A number of organizations, such as the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center and the Sovereign Bodies Institute, have developed media tools including sample press releases that are available online. (See Resources below).
- B. Community meetings - for education and call to action.** Focus on prevention of violence. Teach how to be respectful. Value "no harm" with words or physical. Involve clan leaders, elected officials and other community leaders.
- C. Education of policy reforms.** There are local, state, and federal policies that affect the issue of MMIW. It is important to educate leadership about these issues and how current policies create barriers to ensuring the safety of our women.
- D. Community awareness/outreach/education.** Create a small working group to create a letter of support and then ask the local and/or regional organization if they have capacity to help support educational or awareness activities or events.

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Resources

Alaska Native Women's Resource Center:

<https://www.aknwrc.org/>

Alaska State Troopers:

<https://dps.alaska.gov/AST/ADetachment/Home>

Data for Indigenous Justice

<https://dataforindigenousjustice.com/>

NamUs for data collection:

<https://www.namus.gov/>

National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC):

<http://www.niwrc.org>

Special Collection: <http://www.niwrc.org/resources/special-collection-missing-murdered-indigenous-women-girls>

Missing Sisters Initiative Tools:

https://www.niwrc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Resources/misti_full_workbook.pdf

Native Movement:

<https://www.nativemovement.org/>

Native Peoples Action:

<https://nativepeoplesaction.org/>

Priceless (Working with human trafficking victims and survivors in Alaska):

<https://www.pricelessalaska.org/>

Seattle Indian Health Board:

<https://www.sihb.org/>

Urban Indian Health Institute

MMIWG: We demand more:

<https://www.uihi.org/resources/mmiwg-we-demand-more/>

MMIWG Report (2018):

<http://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf>

Sovereign Bodies Institute:

<https://www.sovereign-bodies.org>

MMIWG2 & MMIP Organizing Toolkit:

<https://2a840442-f49a-45b0-b1a1->

7531a7cd3d30.filesusr.com/ugd/6b33f7_2585fecaf9294450a595509cb701e7af.pdf

Washington State Patrol:

Missing and murdered Indigenous women report (2019): <http://www.wsp.wa.gov/wp->

[content/uploads/2019/06/WSP_2951-SHB-](#)

[Report.pdf?fbclid=IwAR05POKbLCKjO0N4Yf9tHHivLAGHYPk-](#)

[9XWbaS0rwBPPrfO02aTbZRdfGS4](#)

White House initiative “Operation Lady Justice”:

Several fact sheets, data collection updates and law enforcement protocols:

<https://operationladyjustice.usdoj.gov/>

Additional local resources:

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