

SLC is among the top 10 cities for cases of missing and murdered Indigenous people

We must take action. Native people cannot solve this issue alone.

For many years, it felt like missing or murdered indigenous people was an issue only Indigenous people knew about. However, in the past decade, more people have become aware that American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) individuals experience violence at extremely high rates.

In 2016, the National Institute of Justice published a report that noted that "more than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women and men have experienced violence in their lifetime." This study found that 84.3% of Indigenous women and 81.6% of Indigenous men experienced violence in their lifetime. Comparatively, 71% of non-Hispanic women and 61% of non-Hispanic men experienced violence in their lifetime.

These statistics show why everyone in our society should care about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR).

Where does Utah fit into this issue? In 2018, the Urban Indian Health Institute released a report that looked at 506 cases of missing and murdered women in 71 urban cities in the U.S. Salt Lake City was listed in the top 10 cities in this report.

The report also found that there is a "lack of available data on urban Indians," and little coordination between law enforcement agencies and tribal nations when sharing data on missing and murdered Indigenous people.

This lack of coordination leads to less accurate data about missing and murdered Indigenous people. The study also pointed out inadequate funding and research about missing and murdered urban Indigenous people that could help urban Indian organizations to better address the impacts on individuals, families and urban communities.

This report publicized this issue to many non-Native people,



Hundreds hold hands as they form a line of the edge of the Billings Rimrocks for Line the Rims in Red event to honor missing and murdered indigenous people on May 5, 2019.

and it highlighted systemic issues that needed improvement in order to reduce the likelihood that Native people would be impacted by a loved one going missing or being murdered.

In 2019, Utah's Legislature began taking steps to address MMIR. State Representative Angela Romero, D-Salt Lake City, sponsored a resolution making May 5 "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and LGBT+ Awareness Day," which passed.

In 2020, Utah Rep. Romero and Senator David Hinkins, R-Ferris, co-sponsored a bill to create Utah's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Task Force. Sen. Hinkins said the task force's goal is to "tackle these complex issues and prevent further injustices from occurring. [And to work] in partnership with tribal leaders and community

members to overcome barriers and create change around this important matter." The task force included representatives from Restoring Ancestral Winds, a tribal coalition that was instrumental in encouraging the Legislature and law enforcement to begin addressing the issue, the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake, the Paiute Indian Tribe and other state officials.

In 2024, the task force published a report that presented

findings based on interviews with key informants: listening sessions with family members of MMIR victims and community members in tribal communities across the state and in Salt Lake City; and reviews of existing federal and state legislation and relevant research literature.

The report's recommendations for prevention and victim services include many of the priorities that Urban Indian Center of

Salt Lake holds. We know that Native American communities experience missing and murdered cases at disproportionately higher rates than other racial groups, but we also know that Native people cannot solve this issue alone.

Our call to readers is to think about what you can do to work toward the elimination of Native people who go missing or are murdered. Take action by finding out more about the issue and organizations who work with Native people or to end MMIR; share that knowledge with others who do not know about MMIR; support MMIR awareness events in our community; volunteer with or donate to Native organizations; or share with your city, county and state politicians that the MMIR issue is important and should be addressed.

If you're looking for somewhere to start, two local MMIR events will take place on May 5. Please consider attending and sharing within your community.

At 10 a.m., Indigenous Health and Wellness Connections will host its Healing and Prayer event at Warm Springs Park. Find more information, and RSVP, at www.ihawc.org.

At 7:30 p.m., Restoring Ancestral Winds will host its Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Candlelight Vigil at the Chase Home Museum in Liberty Park. Find more information, and RSVP, at www.restoringawc.coalition.org.

Alan Barlow, Navajo Dine, MS, MSHR, serves as Urban Indian Center Salt Lake's executive director. He has more than 17 years of experience in leading federal, tribal and urban Indian programs. **Kristina Groves**, MSW, LCSW, is the interim director of behavioral health services at Urban Indian Center Salt Lake. She graduated from the University of Utah with a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in social work. She is a licensed clinical social worker.



ALAN BARLOW



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