

New Report Shows Increase in Homelessness Disproportionately Affects American Indian and Alaska Native People

Category: Policy Blog

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In December 2023, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published the [2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report \(AHAR\) to Congress](#), Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness. This report outlines the key findings of the Point-In-Time (PIT) count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) conducted in January 2023. Specifically, this report provides 2023 national, state, and Continuums of Care (CoCs)-level PIT and HIC estimates of homelessness, as well as estimates of chronically homeless persons, homeless veterans, and homeless children and youth.

- Overall, the report shows that there is an increase in homelessness across all genders, ages, ethnicities, and races, among individuals and families with children and in sheltered and unsheltered locations.
- The report also showed that this increase disproportionately affected American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people, and more specifically AI/AN veterans.

Background on the HUD Annual Homelessness Report

Each year HUD reports to Congress an [AHAR](#) that provides, “nationwide estimates of homelessness, including information about the demographic characteristics of homeless persons, service use patterns, and the capacity to house homeless persons. The report is based on Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) data about persons who experience homelessness during a 12-month period, point-in-time counts of people experiencing homelessness on one day in January, and data about the inventory of shelter and housing available in a community.”

Key Findings on AI/AN Homelessness

In order to be included in the PIT count, “a person needs to meet the definition of experiencing homelessness used by HUD... defined as lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” The data was collected during January 2023 in an effort to meaningfully collect data on all people experiencing homelessness to identify trends and inform policy makers about the current state of U.S. homelessness. Key findings on AI/AN homelessness include the following:

- Among all people experiencing homelessness, **4%** identified as American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous and were nearly **twice as likely** to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness than sheltered homelessness.
- The largest percentage increase of people experiencing homelessness between 2022 and 2023 was among people who identified as American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous, which increased by **18%** (1,631 more people).
- American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous populations also showed a large percentage increase in both sheltered and unsheltered experiences of individual homelessness between 2022 and 2023, both of which rose by **18-19 %** (or 2,860 people total).
- **3%** of all families with children experiencing homelessness in 2023 were American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Indigenous people.

- Unaccompanied youth who identified as American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous made up nearly **twice as large of the share** of youth located in unsheltered locations than sheltered locations (7% vs 4%).
 - The share of unaccompanied youth who identified as American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous was highest in other largely urban CoCs (8%) and largely rural CoCs (7%) and lowest within largely suburban CoCs (2%).
- Veterans who identify as American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous made up a **higher share** of the unsheltered veteran population than the sheltered (5% vs 2%).

Background on AI/AN Homelessness

Housing Challenges for Urban AI/AN Households

AI/AN people in urban areas are “[disproportionately disadvantaged economically and face cultural and experiential barriers to accessing services and achieving a measure of housing security and stability](#),” and when compared to all households, “[have a higher median rate of cost burden and severe cost burden . . . are more likely to live in housing that lacks complete plumbing and kitchen facilities . . . \[and\] are more likely to live in overcrowded housing situations](#).” Many experts link the [high rate of homelessness](#) in AI/AN communities to the high level of poverty in AI/AN communities. Among the [challenges](#) that AI/AN people face in accessing housing and housing related services in urban areas are the lack of service organizations which assist AI/AN people, a shortage of funding sources designed to support AI/AN housing services in urban areas, and little cultural competency among mainstream providers. AI/AN people in urban areas also report an urgent need for [temporary or transitional housing](#), especially for those seeking medical treatment, as well as a need for housing that reflects and accommodates AI/AN culture.

UIOs’ Unique Position to Address Homelessness and Social Determinants of Health

Congress has specifically declared that it is the policy of the United States, in fulfillment of its trust responsibility, to “[ensure the highest possible health status for Indians and urban Indians and to provide all resources necessary to effect that policy](#).” UIOs are uniquely positioned to assist HUD in supporting underserved communities, ensuring access to and increasing the production of affordable housing, promoting homeownership, and advancing sustainable communities among AI/AN people. In fact, some UIOs already provide [housing services](#). Further, all UIOs provide numerous other social and community services to urban AI/AN people. Providing housing services aligns with UIOs’ mission to provide quality, accessible, and culturally competent health and public health services for AI/AN people living in urban settings because [housing is a key social determinant of health \(SDOH\)](#). HUD has also previously acknowledged the need to [coordinate](#) health, housing, and social welfare services. UIOs have the cultural competency and community connections necessary to further support HUD’s mission and assist HUD in fulfilling its trust responsibility to all AI/AN people.

NCUIH Action

On January 26, 2022, NCUIH [submitted comments](#) to HUD, encouraging the agency to incorporate urban Natives in its FY22-26 Strategic Plan and focus areas. HUD provides housing resources and funding for Tribes, but these resources are very limited when it comes to urban AI/AN people, or not applicable at all.

NCUIH is also working to address homelessness among urban Native veterans and works closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS),

HUD, and the White House Council on Native American Affairs (WHCNA) on the implementation of the interagency Native American Veteran Homelessness Initiative (the Initiative). This Initiative's overall goal is to develop relationships between VA, IHS, and other organizations serving Natives. It aims to educate Native veterans about the resources offered by the VA and IHS, particularly focusing on those at risk of homelessness or currently experiencing homelessness. These resources include emergency and transitional housing services, permanent housing solutions, case management support, employment programs, and additional assistance.