

# Native American Housing: Needs & Opportunity in the Denver-Metro Area



# Denver Indian Health and Family Services, Inc.

**Our Mission** is “To provide culturally competent services that promote health for American Indian and Alaskan Native families and individuals in the metropolitan Denver Area.”



# Overview

- Established in 1978
- 1 of 41 Urban Indian Health Program's funded by Indian Health Service
- Urban Indian Health Programs (UIHPs) were created in the 70s after the Relocation Era by Tribes advocating for treaty health rights off reservation
- Services: Medical, Dental, Behavioral Health, Pharmacy, Diabetes Prevention, Medicaid Enrollment Services, Outreach and Referrals

# Denver Indian Family Resource Center

**Our mission** is to strengthen vulnerable AI/AN children and families through collaborative and culturally-responsive services.



# Overview

- Established in 2000
- Serves families who self-identify as Native American who are involved in or at risk of being involved with the child welfare system
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) advocacy
- Family Preservation and Reunification Services
- Resource and Referral Services



# Denver Indian Center, Inc.



**Our Mission** “To empower American Indian, youth, elders, families, and community by promoting self-determination and economic, mental, and physical health through education, advocacy, and cultural enrichment”

# Overview

- Established in 1983
- Urban cultural gathering center for the American Indian / Alaska Native community
- Provide guidance for economic empowerment and self-reliance, programs that empower families and honor our elders, and space where Native culture can be preserved, remembered, and celebrated.
- Program & Services: Native Workforce Program, Honoring Fatherhood Program, Elders Program, Food Bank





# Native American Services

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless



# Philosophy of Service

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless believes all people have the right to adequate housing and healthcare. We work to remove the barriers that restrict access to these rights. Society benefits when adequate housing and healthcare are available to everyone.

We create lasting solutions to homelessness by:

- Honoring the **inherent dignity** of those we serve, affirming their capabilities and fostering their hope that a better life is possible
- Building **strong, caring communities** through the integration of housing, healthcare and supportive services
- Advocating for **social equity** and challenging the status quo on behalf of the individuals and families we serve
- Achieving excellence through continuous **quality assurance, innovation** and **professional development**
- Using **resources** judiciously and effectively



# Native American Services

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Native American Services provides **culturally-specific** support for homeless, at risk, and formerly homeless members of the Native American/Alaska Native community in a way that **honors the diversity and complexity** of all Tribes and Nations and is attuned to the historical and intergenerational traumas particular to this population.

- Last year, NAS served **190 unduplicated individuals** representing 38 different Tribes, for a total of 1283 encounters.
- Since adding dedicated housing case management to NAS in March 2018, we have housed or reunified with family **31 individuals**.





A person is holding a yellow pipe with a feather. The pipe is wrapped with a red string near the top. The person is wearing a black shirt with a colorful design. In the background, another person with glasses is visible. The scene is set indoors with a plain wall.

## Native American Services

The program provides:

- Case management support
- Connection to internal and external medical, mental health, behavioral health, and substance treatment services
- Housing navigation
- Wellbriety recovery programming
- Access to other vocational, cultural, and supportive services





# Talking Circles

The heart of NAS consists of weekly **Talking Circles**

- These are sacred spaces and times where participants can **share freely and confidentially** within the circle about their struggles and healing.
- Three weekly Talking Circles



# Denver's Native Community

- Denver was a relocation city
- Denver's Native community is incredibly diverse
- Native people are only 0.5% of the population in the metro-area, but are between **4.9% - 7.2%** of the homeless population

# Lack of Housing Access Impacts:

Health

Child & Family Welfare

Education and Employment

Housing Stability & Community  
Wellbeing



# Housing & Healthcare

- Members of Native communities face many barriers to receiving both mental and physical healthcare. These barriers have a negative effect on overall health
  - Chronic Illnesses
  - Infectious Disease and unintended injuries with high levels of co-morbidity and mortality
- For All American Indians, there are systemic issues that rise to health disparities.
  - Genocide, uprooting from homelands and tribal community structures, bans on cultural practices, language, racism, poverty, poor education, limited economic opportunity, and homelessness.
- Homelessness is a key determinant of poor health

# Housing is Healthcare

- Without housing, it is **nearly impossible** to maintain good health, or recover from an illness or medical treatment, or live a life of recovery.
- Access to **safe, affordable housing** is one of the foundational factors identified in Social Determinants of Health.
- Homelessness is a condition of profound disconnection
- Housing and culturally competent supportive services help people do the work of repairing connections in their lives.



# Barriers to Housing Access

- Systemic and social differences between urban centers and tribal communities / reservations
- Native people may struggle to access federal housing programs due to felonies, occupancy restrictions, and system fatigue
- Trauma, concerns about child welfare involvement, and cultural considerations may keep Native folks from accessing shelters



# Addressing the Barriers to Housing in our Community

- Coalition Building
  - Other Native partners: DIFRC, DIHFS, DICI, CHH Native Services
  - Community stakeholders
  - State & County agencies and supporters
  - Developers
- Research
  - Exploring what other Native communities are doing re: Homelessness prevention, Outreach and Engagement, Case Management, Rapid re-housing, Shelter referrals
  - Community assessment

# Addressing the Barriers to Housing in our Community

- Advocacy
  - Raise the profile of the Native community and housing need in the broader community
- Resource Mobilization
  - Raising the capacity of Denver's existing Native agencies to connect community members with housing

**Moving forward together!**

**How are you addressing the needs of Native Americans through your agency/program?**



**What are barriers to providing services to  
Native communities, families,  
and individuals in your agency/program?**

**How could we address these barriers?**