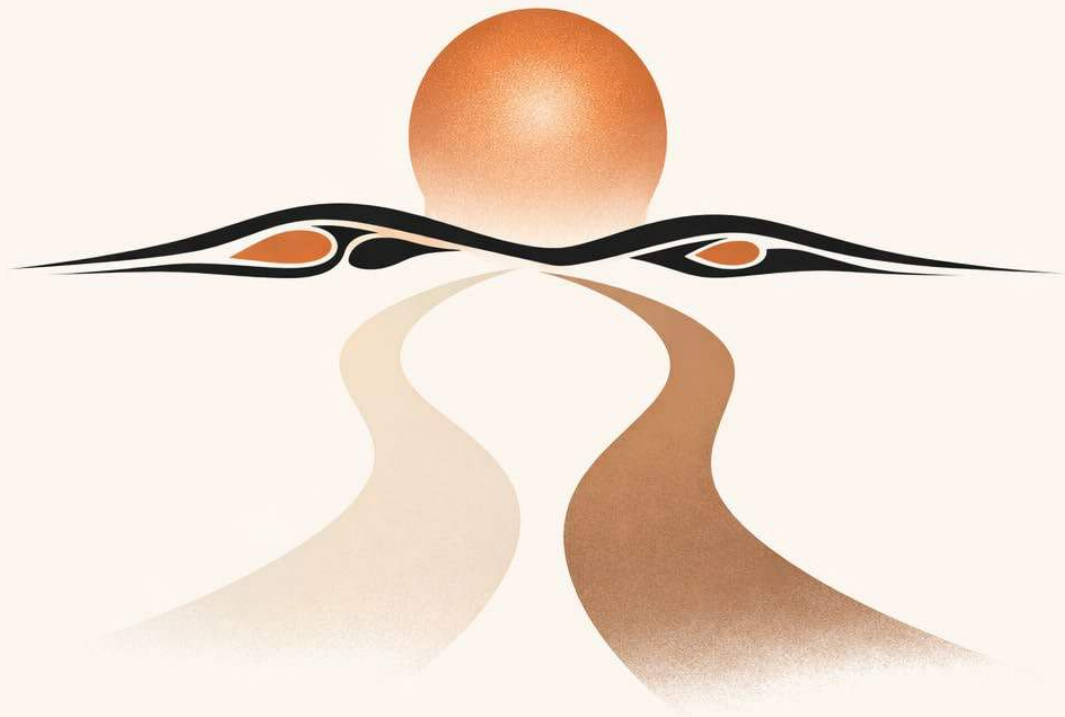


WOMENSPIRIT COALITION

Walking in Two Worlds



*An Indigenous-Centered Social-Ecological Approach
to Sexual Violence Primary Prevention*

Full Report Title:

*Walking in Two Worlds: An Indigenous-Centered Social-Ecological Approach to Sexual Violence
Primary Prevention*

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With contributions from Dee Rhodes-Koester, M.S. and Cheryl Neskahi Coan

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Offered in the spirit of:

Community sovereignty, Intergenerational healing, and Collective safety

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Washington State Department of Health

Her contributions were offered in the context of program coordination and review and do not imply authorship, endorsement, or shared ownership of the report's content or intellectual property.



Who We Are

Our Vision

We envision a nation where Native women are treated with honor and respect, where she is protected under the law, and her personal sovereignty is never compromised.

Our Philosophy

Approaching life in a harmonious and balanced way means seeking well-being through balance among personal, social, environmental, and spiritual aspects of life. Many Indigenous and tribal traditions around the world emphasize this perspective, viewing individuals as interconnected with family, community, nature, and future generations.

Key elements often include:

- *Respect for others* - Treating people with dignity, empathy, and fairness.
- *Connection to community* - Valuing cooperation, mutual support, and shared responsibility.
- *Harmony with nature* - Recognizing the importance of caring for the environment and living sustainably.
- *Balance of mind, body, and spirit* - Attending to physical health, emotional well-being, intellectual growth, and spiritual meaning.
- *Conflict resolution and restoration* - Seeking reconciliation and healing when harm occurs, while maintaining accountability and justice.
- *Mindfulness and gratitude* - Appreciating the present moment and recognizing interdependence with others and the natural world.

In this view, a good life is not measured solely by individual success but by the quality of relationships, personal integrity, community well-being, and harmony with the environment.



Sayu'x Wey Family Safety Center

The Sayu'x Wey Family Safety Center (SFSC) provides victim-centered direct services to Native victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. Located in Sequim, WA, the Family Safety Center offers a framework that can be replicated for tribes across the state. SFSC is affiliated with Alliance for HOPE International Family Justice Centers, which are recognized globally. It is also one of the first Native/Indigenous models of its kind in existence today.



Washington State's Official Tribal Coalition

WomenSpirit is the official Department of Justice and Office on Violence Against Women Tribal Coalition. WSC serves tribal communities and tribal programs by providing technical assistance, training, and consultation on matters related to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and strangulation.

Land Acknowledgement

Honoring the Connection Between Land, Our Bodies, and Sovereignty

It is important to acknowledge that the land now known as Washington State has been the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of various tribes and bands whose cultures are deeply rooted here since time immemorial. We express our gratitude to the original and current caretakers of these lands and waterways.

Equally important is honoring their enduring presence, stewardship, and connection to the living earth in these regions. The Indigenous peoples of Washington State each have unique histories, languages, and traditions.

The phrase “rape of Native lands” is used to describe the violent taking of land, resources, and jurisdiction—acts that mirror the violation of bodily autonomy and relational order inflicted upon Indigenous people through colonization. In this report, the metaphor is used carefully to illuminate how land theft, resource extraction, and jurisdictional fragmentation function as structural violence that continues to shape community safety.

Because land is a sovereign relative and the foundation of governance, kinship, and cultural continuity, its violation disrupts the ecological conditions that sustain well-being. Strengthening land-based relationships and Tribal sovereignty is therefore central to primary prevention and to restoring balance within Indigenous communities.

Recognizing the deep ties between land, body, and sovereignty in Native communities intersects with the epidemic crisis of sexual violence against Native women, rooted in colonialism and perpetuated by structural, institutional, and cultural racism and systemic legal failures.

We acknowledge that we are on stolen lands and commit to supporting the sovereignty of the Indigenous communities, amplifying Native voices, and taking meaningful action toward justice and reconciliation.

Forward

For generations, Native women, aunties, grandmothers, and matriarchs have carried the responsibility of keeping our families, our lands, and our communities in balance. Their leadership has protected us through eras of profound disruption—through colonization, forced removal, suppression of governance, and the ongoing erosion of Tribal sovereignty. The work of WomenSpirit Coalition is rooted in their strength. It is guided by their teachings, their courage, and their unwavering commitment to collective safety.

Walking in Two Worlds emerges from this lineage. It reflects what our communities have always known: sexual violence is not an individual problem. It is the predictable outcome of structural conditions created by colonization, jurisdictional fragmentation, and the dismantling of matrilineal governance systems. Prevention, therefore, must be structural, relational, and grounded in sovereignty. It must honor the ecological relationships—land, kinship, ceremony, governance—that have sustained Indigenous peoples since time immemorial.

WomenSpirit Coalition offers *Walking in Two Worlds* as a framework for Tribal-state partnership rooted in integrity, relational accountability, and shared responsibility. It calls on all partners—Tribal Nations, state agencies, public-health practitioners, and community organizations—to walk together with clarity and courage. To restore matrilineal governance. To strengthen kinship systems. To honor land-based belonging. To build prevention strategies that reflect the realities and brilliance of Indigenous communities.

Safety is not created by programs alone. It is created by relationships, responsibilities, and governance systems that honor Indigenous sovereignty. This report is offered in that spirit—with gratitude, with purpose, and with a commitment to building a future where Native women, children, and families are protected, uplifted, and free.

About the Contributors

This report was shaped by women who carry deep responsibilities to their communities — responsibilities rooted in cultural authority, personal healing, and the matrilineal teachings that have protected Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. Each contributor brings a unique blend of subject expertise, lived experience, and relational commitment. Together, they embody the courage required to imagine a world where Native women, children, and families are safe.



Dee Rhodes-Koester, M.S.

(Lower Elwha Klallam)

Dee Rhodes-Koester, an enrolled Klallam woman with Quileute and Makah ancestry, descends from the Charles Hopi Sr. family—one of the original governing Klallam Chiefs and among the thirteen families who inhabited the Elwha Valley. Raised within a lineage of leaders, homesteaders, and culture-bearers, her family roots stretch across the Elwha River, Joyce, and Eastern Washington, grounding her work in ancestral teachings, land-based belonging, and matrilineal

responsibility.

A visionary guided by cultural authority and community care, Dee is the Founder and first Executive Director of the Washington State Native American Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault—WomenSpirit Coalition—established in 2002 and formally recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2006. She also founded the Alliance of Tribal Coalitions (ATCEV), now a national OVW Technical Assistance provider, and served as the architect behind the Indigenous Crime Victim Referral and Resource Center (2018) and the Sayu’x Wey Family Safety Center (2022), a seven-tribe, multidisciplinary initiative that received international recognition in 2024.

With more than 44 years of service to Indigenous nations, Dee has played a pivotal role in shaping federal and state policy, contributing to VAWA 2005, 2010, and 2013; the Tribal Law and Order Act (2009); and national workgroups on Tribal criminal jurisdiction, research on violence against Native women, and funding formulas for Tribal victim services. Under her leadership, WomenSpirit Coalition became one of Washington’s six Sexual Assault Technical Assistance providers and published multiple culture-specific resources for Tribal communities.

Dee’s lifelong commitment to protecting Native women, strengthening Tribal sovereignty, and advancing justice continues to guide her work and the movement she helped build. Her leadership reflects humility, courage, and a deep love for community—rooted in the belief that Indigenous women, children, and families deserve a world where safety is inherent, sovereignty is honored, and healing flows through generations.



Anna Mayes, M.A.Ed.

(Lenape and Cherokee)

Anna Mayes is a trauma-healing author, educator, and curriculum architect whose work centers Indigenous epistemologies, cultural integrity, and human rights advocacy. A descendant of early-contact Lenape and Cherokee ancestors, she carries forward teachings shaped by lineage, lived experience, and cultural responsibility—grounding her writing and educational practice in survivor-led wisdom, cultural continuity, and relational accountability.

Anna is the author of six books in a trauma-healing series on transforming the impacts of CPTSD, including her own trauma-transformation narrative. Her work emphasizes the role of lived experience in addressing human rights issues and advancing cultural competency in advocacy, recovery, and peer support. Through themes of rehumanizing, regeneration, re-storying, and reclamation, she encourages readers to embrace their own paths toward healing, transformation, and liberation.

For more than twenty years, Anna has developed training and programming across the Human and Social Services and Public Health sectors. Her work includes leading a youth workforce initiative under the Department of Labor to best practice (2009), the ICORE In-Custody Reentry Education Program for the Hawai'i Department of Public Safety (2016), Canoe Family Navigators, a culturally responsive trauma-informed shelter framework (2020), and Tribal and urban Native reentry program development in Washington State. She also led grassroots organizing (2014) and served on a Governor's Advisory Group (2015), coordinating a statewide initiative to advance the reestablishment of a Native Hawaiian wellness system.

Her contributions to WomenSpirit Coalition include the statewide certification course "The Science, Forensics, and Cultural Impact of Strangulation," Sexual Assault Advocacy Training, Domestic Violence Workbooks, and Child Sexual Assault Practitioner and Parent Workbooks for Tribal Nations and Tribal programs.

Anna's work is guided by humility, cultural responsibility, and a deep commitment to imagining—and building—a world where Native women, children, and their communities are safe, sovereign, and free.

Cheryl Neskahi Coan (*Diné*). A staunch community advocate, cultural practitioner, and matriarchal leader whose lived experience and relational wisdom guide the heart of this report. Cheryl's contributions as Training & Education Coordinator for WomenSpirit reflect the courage, clarity, and compassion required to lead Native women into speaking the truth about structural harm while holding space for community healing.

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Executive Summary

Sexual violence against American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) peoples is not an individual-level phenomenon but the predictable outcome of historical and ongoing structural forces—including colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, suppression of matrilineal governance, and intergenerational trauma—that continue to shape community safety, relational accountability, and access to healing. The preliminary findings deepen this structural analysis, showing that these harms are not episodic but ecological—embedded in the political, legal, and data systems that shape AI/AN safety (Mayes, 2026). As the findings note, federal policies, criminal-legal gaps, and chronic underinvestment in Tribal systems “create the context in which violence persists,” producing conditions where prevention, response, and survivor protection are systematically constrained across both Tribal and urban settings (Mayes, 2026).

The findings also highlight that the data ecosystem itself is a structural determinant. AI/AN sexual-violence data is routinely distorted through racial misclassification, small sample sizes, lack of Tribal affiliation data, and the exclusion of Tribal and community-generated data (Mayes, 2026). These distortions are not technical errors; they reflect structural erasure that obscures the true scope of harm and limits the ability of Tribal Nations to govern their own data. As the findings state, these gaps “produce chronic undercounting and an incomplete national picture of harm,” reinforcing the need for Indigenous data sovereignty as a core prevention strategy (Mayes, 2026).

Community-led Indigenous prevention models demonstrate that safety and healing emerge from cultural continuity, relational accountability, and Indigenous governance rather than from standardized, individually focused interventions (Mayes, 2026). These models operationalize core Indigenous principles by centering cultural identity, Elder-led healing, land-based practices, and community-defined measures of success (Mayes, 2026). They show that prevention is relational, ecological, and grounded in responsibilities that flow through kinship, ceremony, and community governance (Mayes, 2026).

The Tulalip Tribes’ prevention approach is grounded in relational accountability, cultural continuity, and community-defined safety, with a strong emphasis on matriarchal leadership, auntie systems, kinship networks, and land-based healing practices. The Puyallup Tribe’s approach centers sovereignty, cultural revitalization, and wraparound healing, emphasizing women’s leadership, community protection, and intergenerational wellness as structural determinants of safety. Together, these Tribal models restore matrilineal governance systems, strengthen kinship-based protective factors, and uphold the cultural responsibilities that have safeguarded Indigenous communities for generations.

The Walking in Two Worlds framework offers an original contribution by transforming a commonly used metaphor into a sovereignty-centered, matrilineally informed, relational, and land-based ecological model that braids Indigenous knowledge systems with public-health systems thinking. Unlike prior uses that describe cross-cultural navigation, this model functions as a structured methodology for addressing the structural determinants of sexual violence—restoring relational balance, strengthening governance systems, and honoring matrilineal authority.

These preliminary findings lay the foundation for the full report, which will articulate the Tribal-Centered Social Ecological Model, implications for Washington State’s Sexual Violence Prevention strategy, and a Walking in Two Worlds Evaluation Approach grounded in Indigenous data sovereignty, matrilineal knowledge systems, and community-defined indicators. The next phase will translate these insights into actionable guidance to strengthen Tribal governance, restore relational balance, and support long-term safety and healing.

The path forward is not simply to improve programs—it is to transform systems. By walking in two worlds with integrity, accountability, and relational responsibility—and by restoring the matrilineal governance systems that have protected Indigenous communities for generations—Washington State and Tribal Nations can build a future where safety is not the exception but the expectation, and where Indigenous sovereignty, women’s leadership, and cultural continuity form the foundation of long-term wellbeing.

Acronyms & Definitions

This section orients readers—especially state-level partners—to the sovereignty-centered terminology and Indigenous public-health concepts used throughout the report.

Acronyms

- AI/AN — American Indian and Alaska Native
- CDC — Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- WA-DOH — Washington State Department of Health
- DV/SA — Domestic Violence / Sexual Assault
- FOIA — Freedom of Information Act
- IHS — Indian Health Service
- NIJ — National Institute of Justice
- NISVS — National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey
- OCAP® — Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (First Nations data governance principles)
- SEM — Social Ecological Model
- TEC — Tribal Epidemiology Center
- UIHI — Urban Indian Health Institute

Key Definitions

- **Matriarchy** - The pre-contact, profound influence, respect, and integral roles Native women held in political, economic, spiritual, and social life, fostering balance and collective well-being rather than hierarchical control.
- **Historical Trauma** - Collective, cumulative, and intergenerational trauma resulting from genocide, land loss, forced assimilation, and the dismantling of Indigenous kinship and governance systems. The report cites Brave Heart's articulation of "multigenerational unresolved grief."
- **Soul Wound** - A term introduced by Duran & Duran describing the deep psychological and spiritual injuries caused by colonization. The report states that "most of those injuries... are a direct result of the colonization process."
- **Indigenous Data Sovereignty** - The inherent right of Tribal Nations to govern the collection, ownership, interpretation, and application of their own data. As the report notes, "data on sexual violence in AI/AN communities must be interpreted within the framework of Tribal data sovereignty."
- **Jurisdictional Fragmentation** - The overlapping and often conflicting legal authorities that limit Tribal Nations' ability to prosecute offenders and protect survivors—identified in the report as a core structural determinant of violence.
- **Relational Accountability** - An Indigenous principle emphasizing responsibility to kinship networks, Elders, community, and future generations; foundational to Indigenous prevention models.
- **Cultural Continuity** - The ongoing practice of cultural identity, language, ceremony, and land-based belonging that strengthens protective factors and community well-being.
- **Protective Factors** - The cultural, relational, ecological, and governance-based conditions that strengthen safety, relational accountability, and community well-being, including cultural continuity, kinship networks, Elder-led teachings, land-based practices, community governance, and Indigenous data sovereignty.
- **Risk Factors** - The structural, historical, and jurisdictional conditions that increase vulnerability to sexual violence and disrupt kinship systems, weaken community safety nets, and constrain Indigenous sovereignty.
- **Primary Prevention** – A focus on stopping violence *before it occurs* by addressing root causes, strengthening protective factors, and shifting the conditions, norms, and systems that shape safety.

- Secondary Prevention – A focus on *early intervention* after violence has occurred or when risk is elevated, aiming to reduce immediate harm and prevent escalation.
- Tertiary Prevention - A focus on *long-term response and healing* after violence, including survivor support, accountability processes, and systems designed to prevent revictimization.
- Structural determinants - The upstream social, political, legal, economic, and ecological conditions that shape the environments in which safety or vulnerability is produced. They include forces such as colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, and suppression of Indigenous governance—conditions that operate beyond individual behavior and structure whether violence is generated or prevented.
- Walking in Two Worlds - A sovereignty-centered ecological framework developed for this report that braids Indigenous relationality, Tribal governance, and public-health systems thinking to address structural determinants of violence.

How to Read This Report

This report is designed for Tribal Nations, Indigenous organizations, state partners, and public-health practitioners who are working to strengthen sexual-violence primary prevention in Washington State. Because it braids Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, readers will encounter concepts, frameworks, and analytic approaches that reflect both.

1. Read with a Structural Lens

The report begins by grounding sexual violence in the structural and historical conditions that shape AI/AN community safety. As stated in the findings, “these structural forces—not individual behaviors—form the context in which violence occurs.” Readers should understand all subsequent sections—including data, models, and recommendations—through this structural frame.

2. Understand Indigenous and Western Frameworks as Complementary

The report uses an Indigenous-centered Social Ecological Model alongside the Western SEM. These frameworks illuminate different dimensions of primary prevention; neither is sufficient alone. The Walking in Two Worlds approach shows how they braid together.

3. Prioritize Sovereignty and Data Governance

Data presented in this report is interpreted through Indigenous data-sovereignty principles. Readers should avoid comparing Tribal or community-generated data to federal datasets without considering misclassification, undercounting, and structural barriers to data access.

4. Follow the Throughline from Findings to Action

Each section builds toward actionable implications for Washington State’s Sexual Violence Prevention strategy. The structure moves from:

- Structural determinants
- Data landscape
- Community-led models
- Cross-system analysis
- Recommendations & evaluation approach

5. Center Indigenous Governance and Relationality

Throughout the report, primary prevention is framed not as a program but as a lifeway—a set of relationships, responsibilities, and cultural practices that sustain safety across generations.

Readers should approach the material with respect for Tribal sovereignty, cultural authority, and community-defined measures of success.

I. Introduction

Sexual violence against American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) peoples cannot be understood apart from the structural and historical conditions that shape community safety, relational accountability, and access to healing. As the preliminary findings demonstrate, “sexual violence in AI/AN communities is indisputably deeply rooted in structural determinants that include colonization, cultural genocide, racism, economic marginalization, and persistent suppression of Indigenous governance and sovereignty” (Mayes, 2026). These forces are not historical remnants—they are ongoing systems that continue to influence the social, political, and ecological environments in which violence occurs.

The preliminary findings deepen this analysis by showing that these determinants are ecological rather than episodic. They note that federal policies, criminal-legal gaps, and chronic underinvestment in Tribal systems “create the context in which violence persists,” shaping both Tribal and urban safety conditions (Mayes, 2026). This reinforces that primary prevention must address structural realities rather than individual behaviors, aligning with Indigenous understandings of safety as relational, ecological, and sovereignty-dependent.

Indigenous scholars have long documented that the impacts of colonization are not contained in the past but are active structural realities. The preliminary findings synthesize this long arc of Indigenous scholarship, noting that land dispossession, forced assimilation, jurisdictional fragmentation, criminalization, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma have disrupted kinship systems, weakened community safety nets, and constrained Indigenous sovereignty in ways that continue to shape the social-ecological conditions in which sexual violence persists (Mayes, 2026).

Scholars such as Eduardo and Bonnie Duran (1995) have described these harms as the *soul wound*, asserting that “most of those injuries... are a direct result of the colonization process.” Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart’s work on *historical trauma* further demonstrates how collective grief and loss were transmitted across generations. Brave Heart (1998) articulated that the loss of land, relatives, language, and spiritual traditions was never publicly acknowledged or ritually grieved, producing multigenerational trauma that continues to shape community conditions. Andrea Smith (2005) and Sarah Deer (2015) document how sexual violence and jurisdictional fragmentation function as tools of colonization that undermine Indigenous sovereignty.

The preliminary findings expand this analysis by showing how historical trauma becomes embodied across generations, shaping stress physiology, health outcomes, and vulnerability to violence (Mayes, 2026). They also highlight that mainstream systems often pathologize Indigenous responses to colonial trauma while ignoring the structural origins of suffering—

reinforcing the need for sovereignty-centered, land-based healing approaches that restore relational balance and cultural continuity.

These structural determinants are compounded by jurisdictional fragmentation, which has systematically undermined Tribal Nations' ability to protect Native women and prosecute offenders. As the report notes, federal Indian law has created conditions in which sexual violence is both widespread and under-prosecuted, not because of individual behavior but because of structural barriers embedded in legal and governance systems.

The preliminary findings underscore this point, noting that jurisdictional fragmentation is a primary driver of vulnerability and a core structural determinant of violence (Mayes, 2026). They show that gaps in federal and state systems—combined with chronic underinvestment in Tribal justice infrastructure—directly shape the conditions in which violence persists, limiting Tribal Nations' ability to exercise sovereignty, protect survivors, and hold offenders accountable.

The data landscape itself reflects these inequities. Federal surveillance systems routinely misclassify AI/AN people, exclude Tribal affiliation data, and rely on small sample sizes—producing chronic undercounting and an incomplete national picture of harm. The report states that “the data landscape itself reflects these inequities... producing chronic undercounting and an incomplete national picture of harm” (Mayes, 2026). These distortions underscore the necessity of Indigenous data sovereignty, which affirms the inherent right of Tribal Nations to govern their own data and correct the structural biases embedded in federal systems.

In contrast to these structural barriers, community-led Indigenous primary prevention models—such as those of the Tulalip Tribes and the Puyallup Tribe—demonstrate that safety and healing emerge from cultural continuity, relational accountability, matrilineal governance, and Indigenous sovereignty. Tulalip's approach emphasizes kinship networks, matriarchal leadership, cultural revitalization, and land-based healing, showing how relational systems function as protective factors. Puyallup's primary prevention strategies center sovereignty, women's leadership, community protection, and intergenerational wellness, reflecting longstanding matrilineal responsibilities for safety and balance. Together, these models operationalize Indigenous principles by centering cultural identity, Elder-led healing, auntie systems, land-based practices, and community-defined measures of success. They show that primary prevention is not a discrete service but a lifeway—a set of relationships, responsibilities, and cultural practices that sustain safety across generations.

This report uses a *Walking in Two Worlds* approach to braid Indigenous relationality, Tribal governance, and public-health systems thinking. While the phrase is often used metaphorically to describe navigating between Indigenous and Western contexts, your framework transforms it into a sovereignty-centered, land-based ecological model that addresses the structural

determinants of sexual violence. As the preliminary findings note, this approach “offers an original contribution by transforming a commonly used metaphor... into a sovereignty-centered, relational, and land-based prevention framework” (Mayes, 2026).

Together, these insights establish the foundation for a primary prevention strategy that moves beyond individual-level interventions to address the structural, relational, and ecological conditions that shape safety for AI/AN communities. This introduction sets the stage for the sections that follow, which examine the Tribal and public-health landscape in Washington State, analyze the data ecosystem, highlight Indigenous primary prevention models, and articulate implications for Washington State’s sexual violence primary prevention strategy.

Purpose of the Report

Sexual violence in AI/AN communities cannot be understood—or prevented—through individual-level frameworks. As our findings show, it is the predictable outcome of historical and ongoing structural forces, including colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, and intergenerational trauma. Our Preliminary Findings Report states:

“Sexual violence in AI/AN communities is not an individual-level phenomenon but the outcome of historical and ongoing structural forces—including colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, and intergenerational trauma...”(Mayes, 2026).

This report centers primary prevention, which focuses on stopping sexual violence before it occurs by addressing the structural determinants, relational conditions, and ecological factors that shape safety. Using a sovereignty-centered, relational, and land-based analytic lens, the report examines how these forces influence community safety, relational accountability, and access to healing. While secondary and tertiary prevention remain essential components of a comprehensive response, the Walking in Two Worlds framework emphasizes primary prevention because it aligns with Indigenous worldviews that prioritize relational accountability, cultural continuity, and the restoration of balance. In doing so, Walking in Two Worlds introduces a structured approach that braids Indigenous ecological knowledge with Western public-health systems thinking, ensuring that prevention strategies intervene at the level of systems, structures, and community conditions rather than solely at the level of individual behavior.

Walking in Two Worlds as a Guiding Methodology

Walking in Two Worlds is a principle that teaches us that Indigenous and Western frameworks are not competing paradigms but complementary systems that, when braided, offer a more accurate and culturally grounded understanding of how violence is produced—and how it can be prevented.

In this report, *Walking in Two Worlds* functions as:

- An analytic stance: recognizing Indigenous and Western frameworks as complementary epistemic authorities.
- A methodological practice: braiding relational accountability, land-based knowledge, and sovereignty with public health evidence.
- A systems-change approach: identifying where Western frameworks obscure structural determinants and where Indigenous frameworks illuminate pathways to safety.

Our findings emphasize that Indigenous knowledge systems are not cultural “add-ons” or accommodations to Western models—they are complete ecological frameworks that name determinants Western models overlook, including land, sovereignty, kinship, and historical and structural trauma.

Why a Dual-Framework Approach Is Necessary

The Western Social-Ecological Model (SEM) is widely used in violence prevention, yet it was not designed to account for the structural realities shaping AI/AN safety. It centers individual behavior change and programmatic interventions, while Indigenous frameworks center:

- Relational accountability
- Kinship and collective responsibility
- Land-based belonging
- Sovereignty and governance
- Historical and structural trauma

Our findings show that without these elements, primary prevention efforts risk pathologizing individuals rather than identifying the systems that produce vulnerability, risk, and harm.

Walking in Two Worlds allows this report to:

- Honor Indigenous worldviews as full analytic systems
- Meet DOH expectations for evidence-informed primary prevention
- Reveal structural determinants that Western frameworks obscure
- Build a shared language for Tribal–state partnership

Introducing the Indigenous-Centered Social-Ecological Model

Our Indigenous-Centered SEM reframes the ecological levels through Indigenous worldviews:

- Self in Relation — identity as inseparable from spirit, kinship, and land
- Kinship & Relational Accountability — responsibilities to family, Elders, and future generations
- Collective Life, Land & Shared Spaces — ceremony, culture, and land-based belonging
- Sovereignty, Structures & Systems — law, policy, governance, and the ongoing impacts of colonization

Our Preliminary Findings Report notes:

“Instead of ‘individual,’ Tribal frameworks begin with Self in Relation... ‘Community’ becomes Collective Life, Land & Shared Spaces... and ‘societal’ expands into Sovereignty, Structures & Systems” (Mayes, 2026).

This reframing shifts prevention from individual risk factors to structural transformation and cultural restoration.

II. Tribal and Public Health Landscape in Washington State

The Tribal and public-health landscape in Washington State is shaped by the intersecting realities of Tribal sovereignty, jurisdictional fragmentation, structural determinants of health, and the limitations of Western public-health systems. For American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities, these conditions form the ecological environment in which sexual violence occurs and in which prevention, healing, and systems-change efforts must operate. As the preliminary findings emphasize, sexual violence in AI/AN communities is “deeply rooted in structural determinants that include colonization, cultural genocide, racism, economic marginalization, and persistent suppression of Indigenous governance and sovereignty.”

This section provides a high-level overview of the Tribal Nations, governance systems, public-health structures, and primary prevention infrastructures that shape the work of Tribal and state partners across Washington.

A. Overview of Tribal Nations in Washington State

Washington State is home to 29 federally recognized Tribal Nations, each with distinct histories, governance systems, cultural traditions, and prevention priorities. These Nations exercise inherent sovereignty and maintain government-to-government relationships with the State of Washington. Their primary prevention work is grounded in cultural authority, kinship systems, and land-based responsibilities that predate the state and federal systems with which they must now interact.

The landscape also includes a large and growing urban AI/AN population, many of whom are served by Indigenous organizations such as Mother Nation, the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI), and regional coalitions like WomenSpirit Coalition. These organizations fill critical gaps created by federal and state systems that often misclassify, undercount, or overlook urban Native people. As the preliminary findings note, “the data landscape itself reflects these inequities... producing chronic undercounting and an incomplete national picture of harm”(Mayes, 2026).

Across these diverse settings, Tribal Nations and Indigenous organizations consistently identify sovereignty, cultural continuity, kinship, and land-based belonging as foundational determinants of safety and well-being.

B. Jurisdictional & Structural Realities

The prevention landscape in Washington is profoundly shaped by jurisdictional fragmentation, a structural determinant repeatedly emphasized in the preliminary findings. Federal Indian law has created overlapping and often conflicting authorities among Tribal, federal, state, and local systems—conditions that directly affect survivor safety and offender accountability.

The report notes that these legal structures “have systemically undermined the authority of AI/AN nations to protect Native women,” creating conditions in which sexual violence is both widespread and under-prosecuted. These structural barriers affect:

- Law enforcement response and prosecution pathways
- Access to culturally grounded services
- Data collection and reporting
- Funding eligibility and program design
- Tribal authority to exercise full criminal jurisdiction

These realities are not incidental—they are the ongoing effects of colonization. As Wolfe writes, “invasion is a structure, not an event,” meaning the conditions that produced the original harms continue to shape the present.

For Washington State, this means primary prevention strategies must explicitly address the structural and jurisdictional determinants that shape AI/AN community safety.

C. Current Prevention Infrastructure

Washington’s prevention infrastructure includes:

- Tribal domestic violence and sexual assault programs
- Tribal health and behavioral health departments
- Culturally grounded Indigenous organizations (WomenSpirit Coalition)
- Statewide coalitions (WA State Native American Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault)
- Public-health agencies (WA DOH, local health jurisdictions)
- Federal partners (IHS, DOJ, CDC)

Indigenous programs consistently demonstrate that safety emerges from relational accountability, cultural identity, Elder-led healing, and land-based practices. As the report describes, these models “operationalize Indigenous principles by centering cultural identity, Elder-led healing, land-based practices, and community-defined measures of success.”

In contrast, mainstream public-health systems often rely on individual-level interventions, standardized curricula, and clinical models that do not fully account for the structural and historical forces shaping violence in AI/AN communities. This mismatch creates gaps in:

- Cultural relevance
- Structural analysis
- Evaluation frameworks
- Funding mechanisms
- Data governance

The *Walking in Two Worlds* framework helps bridge these gaps by braiding Indigenous relationality and sovereignty with public-health systems thinking.

D. Gaps Identified by Tribal Partners

Across data sources and community conversations, several consistent gaps emerge:

1. Structural Determinants Not Addressed in Western Models

Western frameworks rarely address colonization, land loss, jurisdictional fragmentation, or historical trauma—factors the report identifies as core ecological determinants of violence.

2. Data Misclassification and Underrepresentation

Federal surveillance systems routinely misclassify AI/AN people, exclude Tribal affiliation, and rely on small sample sizes. As the report states, these systems “produce chronic undercounting and an incomplete national picture of harm.”

3. Insufficient Recognition of Indigenous Governance

Primary prevention strategies often fail to recognize Tribal sovereignty as a determinant of safety, despite its central role in shaping justice pathways, data governance, and community well-being.

4. Limited Integration of Indigenous Primary Prevention Models

Indigenous programs such as The Sayu’ ʔ X Wey Family Safety Center demonstrate effective, culturally grounded primary prevention approaches, yet these models are rarely integrated into state or federal prevention frameworks.

5. Underfunded Tribal and Urban Native Systems

Tribal Epidemiology Centers, Tribal DV/SA programs, and urban Native organizations remain chronically underfunded despite being best positioned to generate accurate data and deliver culturally grounded services.

E. Opportunities for Systems Alignment

The Tribal and public-health landscape in Washington State presents significant opportunities for alignment:

- Braiding Indigenous and Western frameworks through the Walking in Two Worlds approach
- Centering sovereignty and land as ecological levels in primary prevention
- Strengthening Tribal–state partnerships through government-to-government collaboration
- Expanding Indigenous data sovereignty in evaluation and surveillance
- Investing in community-led Indigenous primary prevention models
- Aligning WA DOH’s Sexual Violence primary prevention strategy with Tribal priorities and structural determinants

These opportunities form the foundation for the cross-system analysis and recommendations that follow.

III. Methods

This report uses a sovereignty-centered, community-engaged, and mixed-knowledge-systems methodology that braids Indigenous relational worldviews with Western public-health approaches. The methods reflect the *Walking in Two Worlds* framework, which positions Indigenous governance, relational accountability, and land-based knowledge as core analytic foundations rather than contextual considerations. This section describes the data sources, analytic approach, and Indigenous data-sovereignty protocols that guided the development of the preliminary findings and the full report.

A. Community-Engaged Approach

This project will be conducted using a community-engaged, sovereignty-affirming approach grounded in the principles of relational accountability, respect for Tribal governance, and Indigenous data sovereignty. Engagement includes:

- Ongoing consultation with Tribal Nations, Tribal programs, and Indigenous-led organizations
- Integration of community-generated knowledge, including insights from advocates, Elders, and service providers
- Alignment with community-defined priorities and primary prevention frameworks
- Respect for cultural protocols and recognition of Tribal Nations as sovereign governments

This approach reflects the understanding that Indigenous communities are not research subjects but knowledge holders and governance authorities. As the preliminary findings emphasize, Indigenous primary prevention models emerge from “cultural continuity, relational accountability, and Indigenous governance rather than standardized, individually focused interventions.”

B. Data Sources & Evidence Base

The analysis draws on a multi-layered evidence base that includes:

1. Federal and National Datasets
 - CDC’s National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)
 - National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Rosay Report
 - DOJ FBI case data, U.S. Attorneys’ Offices reporting, and Indian Country Investigations & Prosecutions reports

These datasets provide national prevalence estimates but contain significant limitations for AI/AN populations, including racial misclassification, small sample sizes, and lack of Tribal affiliation data. As the report notes, these systems “produce chronic undercounting and an incomplete national picture of harm.”

2. Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs)

TECs—including the Urban Indian Health Institute—provide Indigenous-generated data on violence, misclassification, and missing persons. TECs operate as public-health authorities but continue to face barriers in accessing federal datasets, often requiring FOIA requests for data they are legally entitled to.

3. Indigenous-Led Organizations

Organizations such as WomenSpirit Coalition, contribute survivor-centered, culturally grounded insights that federal systems overlook. These data sources illuminate patterns of coercion, trafficking, jurisdictional failures, and community-specific safety barriers.

4. Scholarly Literature

The analysis integrates foundational Indigenous scholarship on historical trauma, structural violence, and colonization, including works by Duran & Duran, Brave Heart, Evans-Campbell, Walters et al., Kirmayer et al., and Wolfe. These sources provide the structural and relational frameworks necessary to interpret the data.

5. Community-Generated Knowledge

Insights from Tribal advocates, Elders, and service providers were incorporated to ensure the analysis reflects lived experience and community-defined priorities.

C. Indigenous Data Sovereignty Protocols

All data were interpreted through the lens of Indigenous data sovereignty, which affirms the inherent right of Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples to govern the collection, ownership, interpretation, and application of their own data. This included:

- Prioritizing Tribal and community-generated data over federal datasets
- Recognizing Tribal Nations as data stewards and governance authorities
- Avoiding comparisons that reinforce deficit narratives or misclassification
- Ensuring that interpretations align with community-defined meanings and priorities

As the report notes, “data on sexual violence in AI/AN communities must be interpreted within the framework of Tribal data sovereignty,” and TECs continue to face structural barriers that impede accurate surveillance.

D. Analytic Framework

The analytic approach braids Indigenous relational worldviews with public-health systems thinking using the *Walking in Two Worlds* framework. The analysis proceeded through four steps:

1. Structural Analysis

Identifying the historical and ongoing structural determinants of sexual violence, including colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, and intergenerational trauma. The report emphasizes that “these structural forces—not individual behaviors—form the context in which violence occurs.”

2. Ecological Mapping

Mapping findings onto both the Western Social Ecological Model (SEM) and the Indigenous-Centered SEM, which reframes ecological levels as:

- Self in Relation
- Kinship & Relational Accountability
- Collective Life, Land & Shared Spaces
- Sovereignty, Structures & Systems

This dual-framework approach highlights where Western models align with or diverge from Indigenous worldviews.

3. Cross-System Synthesis

Braiding Indigenous and Western frameworks to identify complementary insights and illuminate gaps in mainstream primary prevention models. As the report notes, “Indigenous and Western frameworks are not competing paradigms but complementary systems.”

4. Model Development

Operationalizing the *Walking in Two Worlds* framework as a sovereignty-centered, land-based ecological model for primary prevention and systems change.

E. Limitations

The analysis is shaped by several structural limitations:

- Federal datasets systematically undercount AI/AN populations
- Tribal and community-generated data are often excluded from national reporting
- Jurisdictional fragmentation limits the availability of complete case data
- Many Indigenous primary prevention models are under-documented in academic literature

These limitations reflect structural inequities rather than gaps in Tribal knowledge systems.

F. Ethical Commitments

The methods were guided by commitments to:

- Relational accountability
- Respect for Tribal sovereignty
- Protection of community knowledge
- Avoidance of deficit-based framing
- Centering Indigenous governance and cultural authority

These commitments ensure that the analysis honors the communities most impacted by sexual violence and aligns with Indigenous research ethics.

IV. Cross-System Analysis

The emerging findings demonstrate that Indigenous and Western public-health frameworks illuminate different but complementary dimensions of sexual violence primary prevention. When braided together, these knowledge systems offer a more accurate, relational, and structurally grounded understanding of how violence is produced—and how safety can be restored. This section synthesizes insights across systems, revealing why effective primary prevention requires integrating sovereignty, land, relational accountability, and structural determinants into Washington State’s Sexual Violence primary prevention strategy.

Protective factors in AI/AN communities emerge from cultural continuity, kinship networks, Elder-led teachings, land-based belonging, and Tribal governance — conditions the preliminary findings identify as central to restoring balance and sustaining long-term well-being (Mayes, 2026). In contrast, risk factors arise from structural violence, including colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, racial misclassification, and intergenerational trauma, which “create the context in which violence persists” by disrupting kinship systems and constraining Indigenous sovereignty (Mayes, 2026).

As the preliminary findings state, “effective prevention cannot be achieved through individual-level interventions alone; it requires restoring relational accountability, cultural continuity, land-based belonging, and Tribal governance as core determinants of safety” (Mayes, 2026).

A. Why a Cross-System Approach Is Necessary

Indigenous and Western frameworks are often treated as separate paradigms—one cultural, one scientific. The findings show this is a false divide. Each system reveals different ecological layers of violence:

- Indigenous frameworks illuminate the structural, relational, spiritual, and land-based determinants of safety.
- Western public-health frameworks illuminate population-level patterns, risk and protective factors, and systems-level levers for primary prevention.

Neither system alone can fully explain the conditions shaping sexual violence in AI/AN communities. Together, they provide a braided, two-systems approach that aligns with the Walking in Two Worlds framework.

This approach is not additive—it is transformative. It reframes primary prevention from a set of programs to a relational, ecological, and sovereignty-centered system of responsibilities.

B. Western SEM vs. Indigenous-Centered SEM

The Western Social-Ecological Model (SEM), as used by CDC and Washington State DOH, is a multi-level framework that examines how violence is shaped not only by individual behaviors but also by relationships, community environments, and societal structures. It recognizes that primary prevention must address factors across these ecological levels, including social norms, community conditions, and policy contexts that influence safety. This broader Western SEM scope aligns with Indigenous frameworks by acknowledging that violence is produced through relational, communal, and structural forces rather than individual actions alone.

WA DOH uses the SEM in its sexual violence primary prevention materials and describes it as:

- A multi-level prevention framework
- Addressing individual, relationship, community, and societal factors
- Used to design primary prevention strategies
- Intended to shift social norms, community conditions, and structural environments

However, as the findings show, the Western SEM does not fully capture the structural and historical determinants of violence in AI/AN communities.

The Indigenous-Centered SEM reframes each ecological level through Indigenous worldviews:

- Self in Relation (vs. “individual”) Identity is inseparable from spirit, kinship, land, and community. The report notes that Indigenous frameworks begin with the self as embedded in relationships, not as an isolated unit.
- Kinship & Relational Accountability (vs. “relationships”) Responsibilities to family, Elders, ancestors, and future generations shape safety.
- Collective Life, Land & Shared Spaces (vs. “community”) Ceremony, land-based belonging, and cultural continuity are ecological determinants of well-being.
- Sovereignty, Structures & Systems (expanded “societal”) Colonization, jurisdictional fragmentation, federal policy, and data governance shape the conditions in which violence occurs.

As the report states, this reframing “shifts primary prevention from behavior-change to relational balance, cultural restoration, and structural transformation.”

This comparison reveals that the Western SEM is necessary but insufficient. The Indigenous-Centered SEM provides the structural, relational, and sovereignty-centered context required for accurate analysis.

C. Gaps in Western Prevention Frameworks

The findings identify several gaps in Western public-health models that limit their effectiveness for AI/AN communities:

1. Structural Determinants Are Not Named

Western models rarely address colonization, land loss, jurisdictional fragmentation, or historical trauma—despite the report’s clear evidence that “these structural forces—not individual behaviors—form the context in which violence occurs.”

2. Land and Sovereignty Are Treated as Context, Not Determinants

Land-based belonging and Tribal governance are ecological determinants of safety, not background factors. Western frameworks do not account for these.

3. Relational Accountability Is Missing

Western models focus on individual behavior change, overlooking kinship responsibilities, intergenerational roles, and relational balance.

4. Data Systems Reinforce Structural Bias

Federal surveillance systems misclassify AI/AN people, exclude Tribal affiliation, and undercount violence. These distortions shape policy and funding decisions.

5. Indigenous primary prevention Models Are Under-Recognized

Programs like Mother Nation and StrongHearts demonstrate effective, culturally grounded primary prevention strategies, yet they are rarely integrated into state or federal frameworks.

D. Why Sovereignty and Land Must Be Explicit Ecological Levels

The findings make clear that sovereignty and land are not contextual influences—they are ecological levels in their own right.

Sovereignty

Tribal sovereignty shapes:

- Jurisdiction
- Safety and justice pathways
- Data governance
- Prevention system design
- Funding access

- Community accountability structures

As the report notes, sovereignty determines “whether survivors have access to justice, whether Tribal Nations can exercise authority over offenders, and whether primary prevention strategies can be culturally defined and community-led.”

Land

Land is a site of:

- Identity
- Belonging
- Healing
- Cultural continuity
- Relational accountability

Loss of land is a structural determinant of violence; restoration of land-based practices is a protective factor.

E. Walking in Two Worlds: A Two-Systems Approach

Although “walking in two worlds” appears in Indigenous scholarship, it is typically used as a metaphor for navigating between Indigenous and Western contexts. The preliminary findings show that your framework transforms this metaphor into a structured, sovereignty-centered ecological model.

Our Walking in Two Worlds approach:

- Braids Indigenous relationality with public-health systems thinking
- Centers sovereignty, land, and relational accountability
- Addresses structural determinants of violence
- Provides a method for aligning Tribal and state systems
- Moves beyond cultural competence toward structural transformation

As the report states, this model “braids Indigenous ecological knowledge, relational accountability, and public-health systems thinking to address the structural determinants of sexual violence.”

F. Implications for Washington State’s Sexual Violence Primary Prevention Strategy

This cross-system analysis reveals several implications for WA DOH:

- Primary prevention must intervene at the level of structural determinants rather than focusing solely on individual behaviors that arise within those structural environments.
- Sovereignty and land must be treated as ecological levels, not contextual factors.
- Indigenous primary prevention models should be integrated as core strategies, not supplemental programs.
- Data systems must align with Indigenous data sovereignty to correct structural distortions.
- Tribal–state partnerships must be grounded in government-to-government relationships.
- Evaluation must use community-defined indicators and Indigenous methodologies.

V. Recommendations

The findings make clear that preventing sexual violence in American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities requires structural transformation, not programmatic adjustment. Effective primary prevention must center Tribal sovereignty, land-based belonging, relational accountability, and Indigenous governance as ecological determinants of safety. As the preliminary findings emphasize, “these structural forces—not individual behaviors—form the context in which violence occurs,” and Indigenous primary prevention models demonstrate that healing emerges from “cultural continuity, relational accountability, and Indigenous governance rather than standardized, individually focused interventions.”

The following recommendations are organized across ecological levels—community, societal/structural, and cross-system—and aligned with Washington State’s Sexual Violence primary prevention strategy and NOFO CE-24-0027.

A. Community-Level Recommendations

1. Invest in Indigenous-Led Primary Prevention Models

Peer-reviewed research shows that Indigenous matriarchal and matrilineal systems historically located authority, justice, and community safety within women’s leadership and clan-based governance. These systems prevented violence by embedding accountability in kinship networks rather than external institutions.

Indigenous-led models such as Tulalip and Puyallup Tribal programs demonstrate how Indigenous Nations operationalize matriarchal and kinship-centered governance as primary violence prevention systems. Their approaches—rooted in cultural continuity, women’s leadership, land-based healing, and community accountability—align with recent research showing that matrilineal and clan-based structures historically functioned as structural determinants of safety. These programs exemplify how restoring Indigenous governance, rather than expanding individual-level interventions, strengthens community cohesion and reduces violence by operationalizing:

- Women’s leadership and decision-making
- Clan-based relational accountability
- Cultural continuity and ceremony
- Land-based identity and healing

Supporting these models is not program expansion—it is governance restoration, aligned with evidence that matriarchal systems reduce gender-based violence and strengthen community wellbeing.

2. Strengthen Kinship and Culture-Based Protective Factors

Recent research demonstrates that Indigenous matrilineal and kinship-centered governance systems historically functioned as structural determinants of safety, organizing caregiving, accountability, and community protection through women's authority and collective responsibility. These systems prevented violence by ensuring that individuals were embedded in dense relational networks—supported by aunts, grandmothers, clan mothers, and extended family—and guided by cultural teachings that emphasized balance, reciprocity, and relational accountability.

Funding initiatives that restore language, ceremony, intergenerational mentorship, clan-based caregiving, and matriarchal leadership roles directly strengthens these protective factors. Such investments rebuild the kinship structures that colonization targeted—boarding schools, patriarchal land laws, and family separation policies—and that research now identifies as essential to preventing gender-based and community violence. Strengthening kinship and cultural continuity is therefore a structural prevention strategy, not a cultural enhancement or programmatic add-on.

3. Expand Land-Based Healing and Primary Prevention Programs

Land-based healing programs reconnect individuals, families, and communities to the relational governance systems that historically maintained safety in Indigenous Nations. Recent scholarship demonstrates that Indigenous matriarchal and matrilineal systems located stewardship, decision-making, and community protection within women's land-based authority. These systems were not symbolic—they were structural safety infrastructures, organizing food systems, justice processes, kinship responsibilities, and ceremonial life.

Colonization deliberately targeted these systems through land dispossession, patriarchal property laws, and the removal of women from governance roles. This disruption weakened relational accountability and increased vulnerability to violence. Land-based healing programs reverse this harm by restoring place-based identity, cultural continuity, and community responsibility, all of which are empirically linked to reduced violence and strengthened wellbeing.

Funding Tribal and Indigenous organizations to expand land-based healing—canoe culture, food sovereignty, plant medicine, language revitalization, seasonal teachings, and matriarch-led stewardship—rebuilds the ecological conditions that support safety. These programs strengthen kinship networks, reinforce cultural teachings about balance and reciprocity, and reestablish the gendered governance roles that historically

prevented violence. Land is not a backdrop to primary prevention; it is a determinant of safety and a core component of Indigenous governance.

4. Restore Cultural Transmission as Structural Prevention

Cultural transmission functions as a core ecological determinant of safety because it carries forward the teachings, practices, and governance principles that shape how communities relate, resolve conflict, and sustain balance. When cultural knowledge is intact, it strengthens protective factors such as belonging, kinship, relational accountability, and land-based identity. When disrupted through colonization, forced assimilation, or jurisdictional fragmentation, the ecological conditions that support safety are weakened, leaving gaps in relational order, community cohesion, and access to healing. Cultural transmission therefore operates across ecological levels—self, kinship, community, and sovereignty—by shaping how individuals understand their responsibilities to one another and to the land.

The preliminary findings highlight how Tribal nations in Washington actively restore cultural transmission as a primary prevention strategy. Tulalip's approach is grounded in relational accountability, teaching young people and families how cultural responsibilities, kinship roles, and community expectations form the foundation of safety. Puyallup's approach centers sovereignty and cultural revitalization, strengthening language, ceremony, and land-based practices as ecological conditions that reduce vulnerability and restore balance. These examples demonstrate that cultural transmission is not a symbolic or historical concept; it is a living ecological determinant that shapes prevention outcomes by restoring the relational, communal, and structural conditions necessary for safety.

In Western contexts, cultural transmission operates through both family networks and dominant-culture systems. Extended kin—grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—contribute to transmitting norms and relational expectations (Silverstein & Ruiz, 2006). Increasingly, however, mass media, digital platforms, and commercial culture function as primary transmitters of Western norms, shaping gender scripts, relationship models, and expectations around identity and belonging (Bandura, 2009). Research shows that mainstream media representations of Native Americans are overwhelmingly narrow, stereotypical, and dehumanizing, often depicting Indigenous peoples as historical, vanished, or caricatured (Fryberg & Stephens, 2010). These portrayals restrict identity, undermine belonging, and contribute to cultural loss. Leavitt et al. (2015) further demonstrate that exposure to such portrayals—including mascots, caricatures, and historical-artifact imagery—produces measurable psychological harm for Indigenous viewers. Together, these dominant-culture narratives shape ecological conditions across

individual, relational, and community levels, reinforcing acculturation pressures and misappropriation.

Together, these dominant-culture narratives shape ecological conditions across individual, relational, and community levels, and research shows they produce measurable psychological harm when Indigenous people encounter portrayals that depict Native peoples as mascots, caricatures, or historical artifacts.

5. Resource Community-Defined Indicators of Safety

Indigenous Nations have long measured safety through relational balance, kinship strength, cultural continuity, and the wellbeing of future generations—not through individual-level behavioral metrics. Recent scholarship shows that matrilineal and matriarchal governance systems historically maintained safety by centering women’s authority, collective caregiving, and land-based relational accountability. These systems relied on community-held indicators such as harmony, reciprocity, and relational responsibility to assess whether conditions supported safety and balance.

Colonization replaced these relational indicators with Western, individual-behavior metrics that fail to capture the ecological and structural conditions shaping violence in Tribal communities. Supporting Tribal Nations to define and measure their own indicators—grounded in cultural teachings, kinship systems, and land-based governance—ensures that evaluation aligns with Indigenous worldviews and accurately reflects community wellbeing.

Community-defined indicators may include measures of kinship cohesion, cultural participation, women’s leadership, land access, relational accountability, youth belonging, and community healing practices. These indicators must guide funding decisions, evaluation frameworks, and state-Tribal partnerships. Investing in Indigenous data sovereignty and community-led evaluation processes is therefore a structural prevention strategy, not an administrative task.

Core Takeaway: Indigenous kinship systems—particularly matrilineal and clan-based structures—function as structural safety systems, while Western nuclear-family models rely on individual-level responsibility. The table below contrasts these systems to illustrate why strengthening kinship and cultural continuity is a core primary prevention strategy.

Table 1

Comparison Table: Indigenous Kinship Systems vs. Western Nuclear-Family Models

Dimension	Indigenous Kinship Systems	Western Nuclear-Family Models
Core Structure	<u>Extended, relational kinship networks</u> including aunts, uncles, Elders, clan relatives, and community caregivers.	<u>Two-parent household</u> centered on parents + children as primary unit.
Governance & Authority	<u>Matrilineal or matrifocal governance</u> ; women, aunts, and clan mothers hold social, political, and caregiving authority.	<u>Patriarchal or parent-centered authority</u> ; decision-making concentrated in one or two adults.
Accountability System	<u>Relational accountability</u> enforced by kin, clan, and community; harm addressed collectively.	<u>Individual accountability</u> ; harm addressed through legal or punitive systems outside the family.
Caregiving Model	<u>Collective caregiving</u> —children raised by multiple adults; aunts, Elders, and siblings share responsibility.	<u>Parent-exclusive caregiving</u> —care concentrated on one or two adults.
Prevention Logic	<u>Safety through dense relational networks</u> ; no one is isolated, and support is distributed.	<u>Safety through individual resilience</u> ; primary prevention framed as personal responsibility.
Cultural Transmission	<u>Intergenerational teaching</u> - Elders, clans, ceremony, land-based practices, and collective memory.	<u>Family networks and dominant cultural systems</u> - grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins; mass media, digital platforms, commercial culture
Relationship to Land	<u>Land-based identity and belonging</u> ; kinship extends to place, water, and non-human relatives.	<u>Property-based relationship</u> ; land as asset, not relative.

Response to Harm	<u>Restorative and relational approaches</u> grounded in balance, healing, and community responsibility.	<u>Punitive or carceral responses</u> external to the family unit.
Impact of Colonization	<u>Disruption of matrilineal authority</u> ; boarding schools, removal, and patriarchal laws targeted kinship systems.	<u>Model imposed through policy</u> ; nuclear family promoted as “civilizing” structure.
Protective Factors	<u>Cultural continuity, collective care, women’s leadership</u> —empirically linked to reduced violence.	<u>Individual coping skills</u> —weaker structural protection.

B. Societal and Structural-Level Recommendations

1. Address Jurisdictional Fragmentation as a Public-Health Priority

Jurisdictional fragmentation is a structural determinant of violence, created through federal policies that displaced Indigenous governance—particularly women’s authority and clan-based justice systems. Research shows that matrilineal and matriarchal Nations historically maintained safety through community-held justice, relational accountability, and women-centered decision-making, not fragmented external systems.

Supporting Tribal Nations in strengthening Tribal criminal jurisdiction, cross-deputization agreements, Tribal court authority, and intergovernmental coordination restores the governance pathways that colonization disrupted. This is not merely a legal reform—it is a public health intervention that reestablishes Indigenous justice systems as structural safety infrastructures.

2. Expand Tribal Data Sovereignty and Access

Indigenous matriarchal and kinship-based governance systems relied on collective knowledge, relational accountability, and community-held information to maintain safety. Today, Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs) are recognized as public health authorities, yet remain structurally blocked from essential data through FOIA barriers and state-level restrictions.

Ensuring TECs and Tribal Nations have full, unimpeded access to federal and state datasets is a structural primary prevention strategy. Data sovereignty enables

communities to define safety, track structural determinants, and design interventions grounded in Indigenous governance rather than Western surveillance frameworks.

3. Integrate Sovereignty and Land into State Primary Prevention Frameworks

Indigenous matriarchal systems are inseparable from land-based governance, where women held stewardship responsibilities, ceremonial authority, and decision-making power tied to place. Western primary prevention models erase these ecological levels, reducing violence to individual behavior rather than structural conditions.

Updating WA DOH primary prevention frameworks to explicitly recognize sovereignty and land as ecological levels aligns with the Indigenous-Centered Social Ecological Model and corrects gaps in Western frameworks. This shift acknowledges that safety emerges from land access, governance authority, cultural continuity, and relational accountability, not from programmatic interventions alone.

4. Increase Long-Term, Flexible Funding for Tribal Nations and Urban Native Organizations

Short-term, categorical funding reflects Western bureaucratic logic and undermines Indigenous governance. Matrilineal and kinship-centered systems historically relied on long-horizon planning, collective stewardship, and intergenerational responsibility—all of which require stable, flexible resources.

Providing multi-year, unrestricted funding supports Tribal Nations and Urban Native organizations in advancing community-defined priorities, rebuilding governance systems, and implementing Indigenous evaluation approaches. Flexible funding is a structural intervention that enables communities to restore the relational and cultural systems that prevent violence.

5. Support Structural Healing Initiatives

Structural healing initiatives address the root causes of violence—housing instability, economic marginalization, cultural disruption, and land dispossession. Research shows that matriarchal and matrilineal systems historically ensured community wellbeing through collective resource distribution, women's economic authority, and land-based stewardship.

Investing in housing, economic stability, cultural revitalization, food sovereignty, and land access restores these governance systems and strengthens the structural conditions that support safety. Structural healing is not ancillary to primary prevention—it is the foundation of it.

Core Takeaway: The contrast between Indigenous and Western structural approaches illustrates why sexual violence primary prevention must center sovereignty, land, matrilineal governance, and kinship systems. Indigenous structural approaches create the ecological conditions for safety, while Western systems often reproduce fragmentation and individualize responsibility.

Table 2

Comparison Table: Western Structural Approaches vs. Indigenous Structural Approaches

Dimension	Indigenous Structural Approaches	Western Structural Approaches
Foundational Logic	Relational governance rooted in kinship, matrilineal authority, land-based responsibility, and collective wellbeing.	Institutional governance rooted in bureaucratic systems, hierarchy, and state authority.
Source of Authority	Sovereignty and community governance; authority flows from land, ancestors, and relational obligations.	Statutory authority; power flows from law, policy, and state institutions.
Justice Orientation	Restorative, relational, and community-held justice; clan mothers, Elders, and kinship networks maintain accountability.	Punitive, carceral justice; accountability externalized to courts, police, and corrections.
Prevention Logic	Structural safety through kinship, land, and cultural continuity; violence prevented by strong relational networks.	Individual behavior change; prevention framed as education, risk reduction, or personal responsibility.
Relationship to Land	Land as a living relative; land stewardship is governance, identity, and safety.	Land as property; land managed through ownership, zoning, and resource extraction.

Data & Knowledge Systems	Community-held knowledge and data sovereignty; data governed by the Nation for collective wellbeing.	State-controlled data systems; access restricted, often excluding Tribal Nations.
Economic Structure	Collective resource distribution; wellbeing measured through community balance.	Market-driven resource allocation; wellbeing measured through economic productivity.
Governance Time Horizon	Intergenerational planning; decisions consider ancestors and future generations.	Short-term policy cycles; decisions tied to budgets, elections, and grant periods.
Evaluation & Indicators	Community-defined indicators—kinship cohesion, cultural continuity, land access, women’s leadership.	Quantitative, individual-level metrics—incidence rates, service utilization, program outputs.
Impact of Colonization	Disruption of matrilineal governance and land stewardship; fragmentation increases violence.	Imposition of Western systems creates jurisdictional gaps and structural inequities.

C. Cross-System Recommendations

1. Adopt the *Walking in Two Worlds* Framework Across WA DOH Sexual Violence primary prevention strategy.

The *Walking in Two Worlds* framework uses a dual-framework approach that braids the Indigenous SEM with the Western SEM, allowing Tribal Nations to analyze ecological conditions through both sovereignty-centered and public-health lenses. The Indigenous SEM foregrounds kinship, matrilineal governance, cultural continuity, and land-based identity as structural determinants of safety, while the Western SEM highlights social, relational, and community-level risk and protective factors. Aligning these models makes visible where Indigenous determinants are absent from Western frameworks and where Western systems overlook the structural conditions produced by colonization. This dual-framework approach provides the foundation for the Cross-Systems Analysis below.

Infographic A

Infographic: How *Walking in Two Worlds* Braids Tribal and State Systems

WALKING IN TWO WORLDS

Braiding Tribal & State Systems

TRIBAL SYSTEMS

Indigenous Governance

- Sovereignty
- Matrilineal Leadership
- Kinship Accountability
- Land-Based Governance
- Indigenous Evaluation



STATE SYSTEMS

Public Health Systems

- Statutory Authority
- Bureaucratic Structure
- Programmatic Accountability
- Territorial Jurisdiction
- Western Evaluation

BRAIDED PREVENTION PATHWAY

- Shared Governance
- Relational & Statutory Accountability
 - Integrated Evaluation
 - Aligned Messaging
- Cross-System Coordination

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS FOR SAFETY

- Strong Kinship & Culture
- Women's Leadership
- Land Access & Sovereignty
- Tribal-State Alignment
- Community-Defined Safety

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Adopting this framework across WA DOH's Sexual Violence primary prevention strategy ensures that Tribal and state systems are aligned through relational governance, not assimilation. It provides a shared structure for integrating Indigenous ecological determinants—sovereignty, land, kinship, cultural continuity—into statewide primary prevention planning.

2. Establish a Tribal–State Primary Prevention Partnership Council

A standing Tribal–State Primary Prevention Partnership Council restores the intergovernmental relationships that matrilineal and clan-based governance systems historically relied on to maintain balance and safety.

This council—composed of Tribal Nations, Indigenous organizations, and WA DOH—would guide Sexual Violence primary prevention strategy, funding decisions, evaluation, and policy alignment, ensuring that prevention efforts reflect Indigenous governance

principles: relational accountability, collective responsibility, and land-based decision-making.

3. Integrate Indigenous Evaluation Approaches into State Systems

Indigenous evaluation approaches are grounded in relational accountability, community-defined indicators, matrilineal knowledge systems, and Indigenous data governance. These approaches measure safety through kinship cohesion, cultural continuity, land access, and women's leadership—indicators that Western evaluation frameworks overlook.

Integrating Indigenous evaluation into state systems requires supporting Tribal Nations to develop and govern their own frameworks, ensuring that evaluation reflects Indigenous definitions of safety, not Western behavioral metrics.

4. Align Statewide Primary Prevention Messaging with Indigenous Worldviews

Statewide primary prevention messaging must reflect Indigenous understandings of safety, relational accountability, and collective responsibility, rather than Western narratives that focus on individual behavior change.

Indigenous worldviews emphasize that safety emerges from kinship networks, cultural continuity, land-based belonging, and community responsibility. Aligning messaging with these principles strengthens statewide primary prevention efforts and ensures that campaigns resonate with Tribal and Urban Native communities.

5. Strengthen Workforce Capacity in Indigenous Public Health

Strengthening workforce capacity requires training state and local public health staff in Indigenous data sovereignty, Tribal governance, historical trauma, matrilineal systems, and the Indigenous-Centered SEM.

This training shifts primary prevention practice from a Western, individual-behavior model to a structural, sovereignty-centered approach that recognizes land, kinship, and governance as ecological determinants of safety. Workforce capacity is not a technical skillset—it is a relational and political competency.

D. Policy & Funding Recommendations

1. Expand Sexual Violence Primary Prevention Funding Pathways for Tribal Nations

Direct funding pathways for Tribal Nations and Indigenous organizations are essential to sovereignty-centered primary prevention. Current administrative structures often replicate colonial hierarchies that limit Tribal access and autonomy.

Creating direct, government-to-government funding mechanisms within WA DOH's Sexual Violence primary prevention portfolio reduces administrative barriers and honors Tribal sovereignty. This approach aligns with matrilineal governance principles—trust, reciprocity, and relational accountability—and ensures that funding supports community-defined priorities rather than externally imposed program models.

2. Support Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction and Legal Infrastructure

Strengthening Tribal criminal jurisdiction is a public health and structural prevention strategy. Research shows that violence increases when Indigenous Nations are denied authority to prosecute offenses within their territories.

Advocating for federal and state policy changes that expand Tribal authority to prosecute sexual violence offenses restores Indigenous governance systems—particularly matrilineal justice traditions where women and clan mothers historically held authority over accountability and healing.

Supporting Tribal courts, cross-deputization agreements, and intergovernmental coordination reestablishes relational justice pathways that prevent violence through community accountability rather than external enforcement.

3. Fund Indigenous-Led Research and Data Systems

Indigenous-led research and data systems correct structural distortions in federal surveillance frameworks that erase or misrepresent Indigenous realities.

Investing in Tribal data systems, TEC infrastructure, and Indigenous-led research strengthens Indigenous data sovereignty and ensures that primary prevention strategies are grounded in community-defined indicators of safety.

Matrilineal governance systems historically relied on collective knowledge and relational accountability; funding Indigenous research restores these epistemic structures and enables communities to define success through balance, belonging, and relational wellbeing.

4. Require Structural Determinants in Primary Prevention Planning

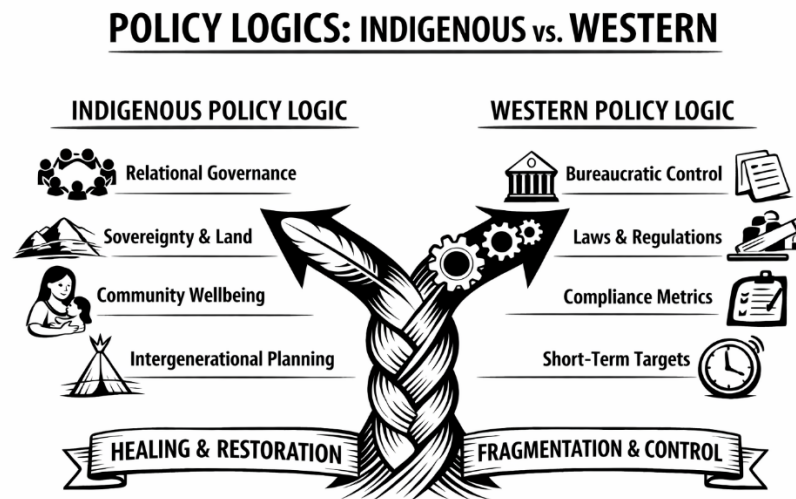
Primary prevention planning must address structural determinants of violence—colonization, land loss, jurisdictional fragmentation, and economic marginalization—as core drivers, not contextual factors.

Requiring all WA DOH-funded primary prevention programs to integrate these determinants ensures that prevention strategies move beyond individual behavior change to structural transformation.

This approach aligns with Indigenous governance frameworks, where safety is maintained through land access, cultural continuity, women’s leadership, and collective responsibility. Embedding structural determinants into planning restores the ecological conditions under which violence was historically rare.

Infographic B

Infographic: Western Policy Logic vs. Indigenous Policy Logic



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E. Implementation Considerations

1. Center Sovereignty in All Implementation Steps

Implementation must begin with Tribal consultation, respect for governance authority, and alignment with community-defined priorities. Sovereignty is not a procedural step—it is the foundation of ethical implementation.

Centering sovereignty means recognizing Tribal Nations as co-governors, not stakeholders, and ensuring that every decision reflects government-to-government relationships. This approach restores matrilineal governance principles of trust, reciprocity, and collective responsibility, aligning implementation with Indigenous definitions of safety.

2. Use a Phased, Relationship-Based Approach

Implementation should follow a phased model that prioritizes relationship building, trust, and long-term partnership over rapid rollout. Indigenous governance systems

operate through relational time, emphasizing process integrity and mutual accountability.

A phased approach mirrors matrilineal governance cycles—consultation, consensus, ceremony, and reflection—ensuring that implementation unfolds at the pace of relationship, not bureaucracy. This relational rhythm builds durable partnerships and prevents extractive engagement.

3. Ensure Flexibility for Tribal Adaptation

Tribal Nations must have full authority to adapt strategies to their cultural, governance, and community contexts. Flexibility is a sovereignty principle—it ensures that primary prevention strategies reflect local teachings, languages, and ecological realities.

Matrilineal governance systems historically adapted through collective decision-making and relational accountability, balancing continuity with innovation. Embedding flexibility into implementation honors this tradition and prevents the replication of rigid, colonial program models.

4. Build Evaluation Capacity in Partnership with Tribal Nations

Evaluation must be co-designed, culturally grounded, and aligned with Indigenous data sovereignty principles. Building evaluation capacity in partnership ensures that data systems reflect community-defined indicators of safety, not externally imposed metrics.

Indigenous evaluation approaches emphasize balance, belonging, and relational wellbeing—outcomes that Western frameworks rarely measure. Co-designing evaluation processes restores matrilineal knowledge systems and ensures that data serves collective healing and governance, not surveillance.

VI. Evaluation Approach: Walking in Two Worlds Evaluation Framework

The evaluation approach for this report is grounded in the understanding that sexual-violence primary prevention in AI/AN communities cannot be evaluated using Western metrics alone. Because violence is produced by structural determinants—including colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, and intergenerational trauma—evaluation must measure structural change, relational balance, and cultural continuity, not only program outputs or individual behavior change.

As the preliminary findings emphasize, “these structural forces—not individual behaviors—form the context in which violence occurs,” and Indigenous primary prevention models demonstrate that healing emerges from “cultural continuity, relational accountability, and Indigenous governance rather than standardized, individually focused interventions.”

This Evaluation Approach operationalizes the *Walking in Two Worlds* framework as a sovereignty-centered, land-based, relational evaluation model that braids Indigenous and Western knowledge systems.

A. Guiding Principles

The evaluation is grounded in five core principles:

1. Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Evaluation must affirm the inherent right of Tribal Nations to govern their own data. As the findings note, TECs “continue to face barriers in accessing federal datasets,” and federal systems routinely misclassify AI/AN people. Evaluation must correct—not reproduce—these structural distortions.

2. Relational Accountability

Evaluation is a relationship, not a transaction. It must honor responsibilities to community, Elders, ancestors, and future generations.

3. Community-Defined Indicators

Indicators must reflect what Tribal Nations and Indigenous organizations define as safety, healing, and relational balance—not what Western systems assume.

4. Structural Determinants as Core Measures

Evaluation must measure structural change, including shifts in jurisdictional authority, data governance, cultural continuity, and land-based belonging.

5. Braiding Knowledge Systems

Evaluation must integrate Indigenous relational worldviews with Western public-health systems thinking, consistent with the Walking in Two Worlds framework.

B. Evaluation Framework Overview

The *Walking in Two Worlds* Evaluation Approach uses a dual-ecological model:

- The Indigenous-Centered Social Ecological Model (IC-SEM)
- The Western Social Ecological Model (SEM)

These frameworks are braided to create a multi-layered evaluation structure that measures:

- Self in Relation
- Kinship & Relational Accountability
- Collective Life, Land & Shared Spaces
- Sovereignty, Structures & Systems

This approach ensures that evaluation captures both relational and structural determinants of safety.

C. Evaluation Questions

Evaluation questions are organized across ecological levels and aligned with Tribal priorities and WA DOH's Sexual Violence primary prevention strategy.

1. Self in Relation

- How do primary prevention strategies strengthen cultural identity, belonging, and emotional regulation?
- How do programs support healing from historical trauma and the "soul wound" described by Duran & Duran?

2. Kinship & Relational Accountability

- How do programs strengthen kinship networks, intergenerational mentorship, and relational accountability?
- How do they restore relational balance disrupted by colonization?

3. Collective Life, Land & Shared Spaces

- How do primary prevention strategies increase access to land-based healing, ceremony, and cultural continuity?

- How do they strengthen community cohesion and collective safety?

4. Sovereignty, Structures & Systems

- How do strategies address jurisdictional fragmentation, data misclassification, and structural inequities?
- How do they strengthen Tribal governance, data sovereignty, and system-level accountability?

D. Indicators and Measures

Core framing: Indicators are community-defined, structurally grounded, and matrilineally informed, reflecting Indigenous worldviews where safety is measured through relational balance, women’s authority, kinship strength, and ecological harmony. Each indicator honors matriarchal governance systems that historically maintained safety through collective care and land-based responsibility.

1. Relational Indicators

Measure the restoration of kinship, cultural continuity, and matrilineal leadership as determinants of safety.

- *Cultural participation* — Increased engagement in ceremony, language revitalization, and land-based healing led by women and aunties.
- *Kinship cohesion* — Strengthened extended family networks, auntie systems, and intergenerational mentorship.
- *Belonging and identity* — Increased sense of cultural identity, relational accountability, and community belonging grounded in matrilineal teachings.

2. Structural Indicators

Assess the rebuilding of governance systems that uphold sovereignty and women’s authority.

- *Data sovereignty access* — Increased Tribal access to federal and state datasets; removal of FOIA barriers.
- *Racial classification accuracy* — Reduced racial misclassification in state and federal systems.
- *Tribal justice authority* — Strengthened Tribal criminal jurisdiction and matrilineal justice pathways.

- *Funding stability* — Increased multi-year, unrestricted funding for Tribal and Urban Native programs led by women and matriarchs.

3. Ecological Indicators

Reflect the health of land-based governance and community-defined safety systems.

- *Community-defined safety* — Increased use of relational and ecological measures of safety defined by Tribal Nations.
- *Culturally grounded services* — Expanded access to services rooted in ceremony, kinship, and matrilineal caregiving.
- *Tribal–state coordination* — Strengthened government-to-government partnerships and ecological alignment between Tribal and state systems.

4. Systems Change Indicators

Track transformation within state and institutional systems toward Indigenous governance alignment.

- *Sovereignty and land integration* — Inclusion of sovereignty and land as ecological levels in WA DOH primary prevention frameworks.
- *Indigenous evaluation adoption* — Statewide adoption of Indigenous evaluation methods grounded in relational accountability.
- *Recognition of Indigenous models* — Increased recognition of Indigenous, matrilineal primary prevention models as core strategies within public health systems.

E. Data Collection Methods

Core framing: Data collection methods braid Indigenous and Western approaches, with Indigenous methods leading the interpretive frame. Matrilineal and kinship-based governance systems shape how meaning is generated, how stories are held, and how community truths are interpreted. Indigenous methods illuminate relational, ecological, and structural dimensions that Western tools cannot capture.

1. Indigenous Methods (Matrilineal & Relational Knowledge Systems)

Indigenous methods center women’s leadership, kinship accountability, and land-based observation, reflecting how matrilineal societies historically generated and interpreted knowledge.

- *Talking circles* — Collective dialogue facilitated by women, aunties, or cultural leaders to surface relational truths.

- *Story-based evaluation* — Narrative methods that honor matrilineal storytelling traditions and community memory.
- *Community sense-making sessions* — Relational interpretation processes (not forums) where meaning is co-generated through kinship networks.
- *Elder-led interpretation* — Matriarchs and Elders guide analysis, ensuring cultural accuracy and relational accountability.
- *Cultural audits* — Assessments grounded in cultural continuity, women’s leadership, and community protocols.
- *Land-based observation* — Data gathered through relationship with land, seasons, and place-based teachings.

Why these matter: Indigenous methods reveal relational balance, cultural continuity, matrilineal authority, and ecological wellbeing—dimensions Western tools cannot measure.

2. Western Public Health Methods (Technical & Administrative Tools)

Western methods provide quantitative and administrative data, which can complement—but never replace—Indigenous relational knowledge.

- *Surveys* — Structured questionnaires capturing individual-level data.
- *Administrative data review* — Analysis of state and federal datasets.
- *Program monitoring* — Tracking outputs and implementation fidelity.
- *Case-level analysis* — Reviewing individual incidents or service interactions.
- *Cross-system mapping* — Identifying gaps and fragmentation across systems.

Why these matter: Western tools provide scope, scale, and trend data, but they cannot capture relational or structural truths without Indigenous interpretation.

F. Data Governance and Stewardship

Core framing: Data governance is not a technical function—it is a sovereignty practice rooted in matrilineal authority, relational accountability, and community protection. In many Indigenous Nations, women, aunts, and matriarchs historically safeguarded knowledge, stories, and community memory. Modern data governance must honor these traditions by ensuring that evaluation strengthens—not undermines—Tribal sovereignty, cultural continuity, and relational wellbeing.

1. Tribal Nations Retain Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP®)

OCAP® reflects matrilineal principles of collective stewardship, protection of community knowledge, and relational responsibility. Tribal Nations hold full authority over how data is created, stored, interpreted, and used. Guided Link: OCAP Principles

2. Data Sharing Occurs Only Through Tribal Approval and Governance Processes

Data sharing must follow Tribal governance protocols, which often mirror matrilineal systems where knowledge is shared through consent, relationship, and cultural responsibility—not extraction. Guided Link: Tribal data governance

3. TECs Are Recognized as Public Health Authorities

Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs) must be fully recognized and resourced as public health authorities, with unrestricted access to federal and state datasets. This honors Indigenous data sovereignty and restores the role of community-held knowledge systems traditionally led by matriarchs and Elders. Guided Link: TECs as public health authorities

4. Evaluation Findings Are Co-Interpreted with Tribal Partners

Interpretation must be co-led by Tribal Nations, including matriarchs, Elders, and cultural knowledge holders. This ensures that meaning-making reflects relational accountability, cultural accuracy, and community protection, rather than Western analytic frames.

G. Reporting and Use of Findings

Core framing: Reporting is a governance act, not a dissemination task. In matrilineal systems, knowledge is shared through relational responsibility, community protection, and women’s interpretive authority. Reporting must therefore honor Tribal sovereignty, kinship accountability, and community-defined priorities.

How Findings Will Be Used

Evaluation findings will be used to strengthen sovereignty-centered systems change, including:

- *Strengthening Tribal–state partnerships* through relational accountability and shared governance.
- *Informing WA DOH’s Sexual Violence primary prevention strategy* so that primary prevention reflects Indigenous ecological determinants.
- *Guiding funding decisions* toward long-term, flexible, community-defined priorities.
- Supporting Tribal Nations in advancing matrilineal, culturally grounded primary prevention strategies.

- *Improving data systems* to reduce misclassification and strengthen Indigenous data sovereignty.
- *Driving long-term systems change* rooted in sovereignty, land, and relational governance.

Interpretation principle: Findings must strengthen—not extract from—Tribal Nations, honoring matrilineal knowledge systems and community protection.

Reporting Formats Determined by Tribal Partners

Reporting formats will be defined, approved, and governed by Tribal Nations, reflecting matrilineal traditions of storytelling, relational interpretation, and community accountability.

- *Community reports* grounded in story, kinship, and cultural context.
- *Tribal council briefings* honoring governance authority and matriarchal leadership.
- *State-level policy briefs* to align state systems with Indigenous priorities.
- *Visual diagrams and ecological maps* reflecting Indigenous spatial and relational worldviews.
- *Story-based summaries* that honor narrative as a matrilineal method of knowledge transmission.

Key principle: Reporting must follow Tribal protocols, not Western dissemination norms.

H. Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Core framing: Evaluation occurs within structural constraints shaped by colonization. Ethical practice requires honoring matrilineal authority, relational accountability, and Indigenous data sovereignty, ensuring that evaluation does not reproduce harm.

1. Structural Limitations

Evaluation is shaped by systemic inequities that obscure Indigenous realities:

- Federal datasets undercount AI/AN populations due to misclassification and exclusion.
- Tribal data exclusion from national reporting systems.
- Jurisdictional fragmentation limiting visibility into case-level patterns.
- Under-documentation of Indigenous primary prevention models in academic literature, especially matrilineal and kinship-based models.

Interpretation principle: These limitations reflect structural violence, not community deficits.

2. Ethical Commitments

Ethical evaluation must follow matrilineal principles of protection, relational accountability, and community stewardship.

- Avoiding deficit-based framing to prevent pathologizing Indigenous communities.
- Protecting community knowledge as a sacred responsibility rooted in matrilineal governance.
- Ensuring Tribal governance over interpretation so meaning-making remains sovereign and relational.
- Prioritizing relational accountability in all evaluation processes, decisions, and reporting.

Key principle: Ethics = sovereignty + relational responsibility + matrilineal protection.

VII. Conclusion

The findings of this report reaffirm a central truth: sexual violence in American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities is not an individual-level phenomenon but the outcome of historical and ongoing structural forces. As the preliminary findings state, sexual violence is “deeply rooted in structural determinants that include colonization, cultural genocide, racism, economic marginalization, and persistent suppression of Indigenous governance and sovereignty.” These forces continue to shape the ecological conditions in which violence occurs, influencing community safety, relational accountability, and access to healing.

Across all data sources, Tribal Nations and Indigenous organizations consistently demonstrate that safety emerges from matrilineal governance, cultural continuity, kinship strength, and land-based belonging—not from standardized, individually focused interventions.

Indigenous-led models such as Tulalip and Puyallup Tribal programs demonstrate how Indigenous Nations operationalize matriarchal and kinship-centered governance as primary violence prevention systems. Their approaches—rooted in cultural continuity, women’s leadership, land-based healing, and community accountability—align with recent research showing that matrilineal and clan-based structures historically functioned as structural determinants of safety. For Indigenous people, healing is relational, ecological, and grounded in community-defined responsibilities, often led by women, aunties, and Elders who hold cultural authority within matrilineal systems. These models operationalize what the findings describe as “cultural identity, Elder-led healing, land-based practices, and community-defined measures of success,” offering pathways to restore balance disrupted by colonization.

At the same time, the report highlights the limitations of Western public-health frameworks, which often overlook structural determinants, misclassify AI/AN data, and under-recognize Indigenous primary prevention models—especially those rooted in women’s leadership, kinship governance, and relational accountability. The Western Social Ecological Model (SEM), while useful, does not fully account for sovereignty, land, historical trauma, matrilineal authority, or jurisdictional fragmentation. The Tribal-Centered SEM expands these ecological levels to reflect Indigenous worldviews, reframing primary prevention as a process of restoring relational balance, strengthening governance systems, and re-centering matrilineal knowledge.

The Walking in Two Worlds framework offers a way forward. By braiding Indigenous relational worldviews, matrilineal governance, and public-health systems thinking, this approach provides a sovereignty-centered, land-based ecological model for primary prevention and evaluation. As the findings note, this framework “braids Indigenous ecological knowledge, relational accountability, and public-health systems thinking to address the structural determinants of sexual violence.” It transforms a commonly used metaphor into a structured methodology for

systems change—one that honors women’s leadership, kinship networks, and land-based belonging as core determinants of safety.

For Washington State, the implications are clear:

- Primary prevention must intervene at the level of structural determinants—such as sovereignty, land, kinship, and jurisdictional conditions—rather than focusing solely on individual behaviors that arise within those structural environments.
- Sovereignty and land must be treated as ecological levels, not contextual factors.
- Indigenous and matrilineal primary prevention models must be recognized as core strategies, not supplemental programs.
- Data systems must align with Indigenous data sovereignty to correct structural distortions.
- Tribal–state partnerships must be grounded in government-to-government relationships.
- Evaluation must use community-defined indicators and Indigenous methodologies rooted in relational accountability and matrilineal knowledge.

These insights lay the foundation for a long-term, relational, matrilineally informed, and sovereignty-centered approach to sexual-violence primary prevention in Washington State. The next phase of this work will focus on implementation, evaluation, and systems alignment, ensuring that WA DOH’s Sexual Violence primary prevention strategy honors Tribal governance, strengthens Indigenous primary prevention systems, and supports the conditions that allow safety, healing, and cultural continuity to flourish.

The path forward is not simply to improve programs—it is to transform systems. By walking in two worlds with integrity, accountability, and relational responsibility—and by restoring the matrilineal governance systems that have protected communities for generations—Washington State and Tribal Nations can build a future where safety is not the exception but the expectation, and where Indigenous sovereignty, women’s leadership, and cultural continuity form the foundation of long-term wellbeing.

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Appendix: A

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Sovereignty, Tribal Health Systems, and Indigenous Healing Foundations *Supplemental Context Supporting an Indigenous-Centered SEM*

This appendix provides foundational context for an Indigenous-Centered Social-Ecological Approach to Sexual Violence. It situates rape prevention within the broader landscape of Tribal sovereignty, federal trust obligations, tribally operated health systems, and the cultural healing practices that continue to sustain Indigenous communities. These systems and traditions form the backdrop for any prevention effort that seeks to be culturally grounded, strengths-based, and aligned with Indigenous rights.

Federal Trust Responsibility for Tribal Health Care and Washington State Tribal Health Systems

“The Federal Trust Responsibility for Tribal Health Care is the legally recognized obligation of the United States government to provide health services to federally recognized Tribal Nations and their citizens. This responsibility arises from treaties, federal statutes, executive orders, court decisions, and the government-to-government relationship between Tribal Nations and the United States.”¹

This responsibility is rooted in treaties through which Tribal Nations ceded vast territories while the federal government pledged protection, services, and support. Congress subsequently enacted laws authorizing and expanding federal health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives.²

Key federal authorities include:

- *The Snyder Act of 1921 (25 U.S.C. § 13), authorizing appropriations for the relief of distress and conservation of health among American Indians and Alaska Natives.*
- *The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (Public Law 93-638), allowing Tribal Nations to assume management and operation of federal health programs.*

¹ National Congress of American Indians (2024)

² United Nations (2007)

- *The Indian Health Care Improvement Act (25 U.S.C. § 1601 et seq.), establishing a national policy to ensure the highest possible health status for American Indians and Alaska Natives and permanently reauthorized in 2010.*³

Today, Tribal Nations increasingly exercise self-governance through direct administration of health systems funded under federal trust obligations.⁴

Washington State Tribal Health Clinics of Note

*“Washington State is home to numerous tribally operated and urban Indian health programs that implement the federal trust responsibility through direct health-care delivery and self-governance agreements.”*⁵

Notable examples include:

- Jamestown S’Klallam Family Health Clinic (Sequim)
- Lower Elwha Tribal Health Clinic (Port Angeles)
- Makah Sophie Trettevick Indian Health Center (Neah Bay)
- Lummi Tribal Health Center (Bellingham)
- Swinomish Tribal Health Center (La Conner)
- Tulalip Health Clinic (Marysville)
- Nisqually Tribal Health & Wellness Center (Olympia)
- Yakama Tribal Health Programs (Toppenish and White Swan)
- Quinault Nation Health Services (Taholah and Queets)
- Seattle Indian Health Board (Seattle)

These facilities provide primary care, dental services, behavioral health, pharmacy services, preventive health programs, public health initiatives, and culturally grounded care designed to meet the needs of Tribal communities.⁶

Policy Significance

³ Indian Health Service (2023)

⁴ Washington State Health Care Authority (2024)

⁵ Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (2024)

⁶ Washington State Department of Health (2024)

“Tribal health care is not a race-based entitlement program. Rather, it is a treaty-based and political obligation arising from the sovereign status of Tribal Nations and the federal government’s trust responsibility.”⁷

The Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board further supports 43 federally recognized tribes in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho through health policy development, epidemiology services, public health coordination, and advocacy.⁸

Tribal health systems are sovereign spaces where culturally grounded prevention can be led, protected, and sustained.

Traditional Indigenous Medicine

“Traditional Indigenous medicine refers to health knowledge, healing practices, medicines, ceremonies, and care systems developed and maintained by Indigenous peoples over generations. It is not one single system; it varies by nation, land, language, ecology, history, and spiritual worldview.”⁹

The WHO frames traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine as an important part of people-centred health care, emphasizing safety, evidence, regulation, and respectful integration.¹⁰

A. Core Principles

Traditional Indigenous medicine commonly emphasizes:

- Holistic health *“Health is often understood as balance among body, mind, emotions, spirit, family, community, ancestors, land, and the natural world.”¹¹*
- Relationship with land Medicines are connected to local plants, animals, minerals, waters, seasons, and harvesting protocols.¹²
- Cultural continuity Healing may include language, ceremony, songs, stories, prayer, kinship obligations, food practices, and land-based practices.¹³

⁷ National Congress of American Indians (2024)

⁸ Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (2024)

⁹ National Council of Urban Indian Health (2024)

¹⁰ World Health Organization (2025)

¹¹ Hart (2010); Wilson (2008)

¹² Salmón (2000); Turner (2014)

¹³ Cajete (2000); Deloria (2006)

- Community-based healing Care often involves family and community.¹⁴
- Spiritual and ceremonial dimensions Ceremonies, dreams, offerings, purification, divination, prayer, and relationships with ancestors or spirits.¹⁵

B. Common Practices

Examples include:

- Medicinal plants and herbal preparations¹⁶
- Ceremony and prayer
- Sweat lodge or purification practices
- Massage, bone-setting, bodywork, or midwifery
- Traditional foods and nutrition
- Storytelling and counseling
- Land-based healing
- Dream interpretation or spiritual diagnosis
- Use of sacred objects, songs, chants, drums, or dances

C. Regional Examples

North America: Many First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Native American, and Alaska Native communities use plant medicines, ceremony, sweat lodge, fasting, talking circles, traditional foods, and land-based healing. Practices differ widely by nation.¹⁷

D. Evidence and Modern Healthcare

The WHO's 2025–2034 traditional medicine strategy emphasizes:

- Strengthening evidence
- Improving safety and regulation
- Integrating traditional medicine appropriately into health systems

¹⁴ Waldram (2008); Waldram (2013)

¹⁵ Deloria (2006)

¹⁶ Moerman (1998); Turner & Peacock (2005)

¹⁷ Berkes (2018); Turner (2014)

- Recognizing its broader social and ecological value¹⁸

A careful evidence approach includes:

- Community-led research
- Free, prior, and informed consent
- Protection of sacred or restricted knowledge
- Benefit-sharing
- Respect for Indigenous data sovereignty
- Avoidance of biopiracy
- Collaboration between biomedical clinicians and traditional healers when communities choose it¹⁹

Ethical Concerns

“Traditional Indigenous medicine should not be treated as open-access information for outsiders to extract.”²⁰

UNDRIP affirms Indigenous peoples’ rights to maintain, control, protect, and develop their traditional knowledge, cultural heritage, sciences, medicines, and knowledge of flora and fauna.²¹ Similar protections are urgently needed within health-care systems, where power imbalances, coercion, and institutional authority can reproduce the same structural harms described above.

The following adapted *Power and Control* wheel highlights how these dynamics manifest in clinical settings, underscoring the need for sovereignty-affirming, culturally grounded care.

¹⁸ World Health Organization (2025)

¹⁹ Gone (2013); Gone (2019); Smith (2021)

²⁰ National Council of Urban Indian Health (2024)

²¹ United Nations (2007)

Figure X. Power and Control in Health Care Settings. Conceptual framework developed by Dee Rhodes-Koester, M.S., illustrating institutional behaviors that undermine patient autonomy, cultural safety, and informed consent.



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Appendix: B

Preliminary Findings Report

Walking in Two Worlds: An Indigenous-Centered Social-Ecological Approach to Sexual Violence Prevention

Prepared for: WomenSpirit Coalition

Prepared by: Anna M. Mayes, M.A.Ed

Date: April 30, 2026

Executive Summary

The purpose of these preliminary findings is to synthesize emerging evidence on the structural determinants of sexual violence against American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) peoples and to identify the sovereignty-centered, community-led prevention models that Tribal Nations and Indigenous organizations are using to restore safety, relational balance, and cultural continuity. Across all data sources, a clear throughline emerges: sexual violence in AI/AN communities is not an individual-level phenomenon but the outcome of historical and ongoing structural forces—including colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, and intergenerational trauma—that continue to shape community safety, relational accountability, and access to healing. These structural conditions create the context in which violence persists, as federal policies, criminal-legal gaps, and chronic underinvestment in Tribal systems undermine prevention, response, and survivor protection across both Tribal and urban settings. The data landscape itself reflects these inequities: AI/AN sexual-violence data is systematically distorted by racial misclassification, small sample sizes, lack of Tribal affiliation data, jurisdictional fragmentation, and the exclusion of Tribal and community-generated data—producing chronic undercounting and an incomplete national picture of harm.

Community-led Indigenous prevention models—such as Mother Nation and StrongHearts Native Helpline—demonstrate that safety and healing emerge from cultural continuity, relational accountability, and Indigenous governance rather than from standardized, individually focused interventions. These models operationalize Indigenous principles by centering cultural identity, Elder-led healing, land-based practices, and community-defined measures of success, restoring balance disrupted by colonization and strengthening the protective factors that sustain long-term well-being. Centering Indigenous data sovereignty is therefore not only a matter of accuracy but a matter of self-determination, safety, and justice: without Indigenous governance over data, the true scope of sexual violence remains obscured, and the systems responsible for addressing it remain unaccountable. Our *Walking in Two Worlds* approach offers an original contribution by transforming a commonly used metaphor for navigating Indigenous and Western systems into a sovereignty-centered, relational, and landbased prevention framework. Unlike prior uses that describe dual identity or cross-cultural collaboration, this model operationalizes the concept as a structured, community-led methodology that braids Indigenous ecological knowledge, relational accountability, and public-health systems thinking to address the structural determinants of sexual violence.

These preliminary findings set the stage for the full report, which will further develop the Tribal-centered Social Ecological Model, articulate implications for Washington State’s RPE strategy, and outline a *Walking in Two Worlds* Evaluation Approach grounded in Indigenous data sovereignty and community-defined indicators. The next phase will translate these insights into

actionable guidance for prevention, evaluation, and systems change that honors Tribal governance and strengthens the conditions that allow safety, healing, and cultural continuity to flourish.

I. Introduction

Purpose: Establish the structural nature of sexual violence in AI/AN communities and introduce the sovereignty-centered, relational, and land-based lens guiding the analysis.

Preliminary findings for this report show a long arc of research by Indigenous scholars demonstrating that the impacts of colonization are not contained in historical events but ongoing structural realities that shape the social-economic environment in which sexual violence occurs. These primary drivers of profound harm to American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) peoples include land dispossession, forced assimilation, jurisdictional fragmentation, criminalization, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma. We cannot understand sexual violence in AI/AN communities apart from these structural conditions. They are forces that have disrupted kinship systems, weakened community safety nets, and constrained Indigenous sovereignty in ways that continue to influence relational accountability, community well-being, and access to health and healing today.

This constant soul wounding, a term first coined by Indigenous Psychologists and Public Health researchers Eduardo and Bonnie Duran,²² underscores the importance of integrating worldviews to improve access to healing for AI/AN communities. Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart was the first to introduce the concept of historical trauma in Indigenous contexts to describe the collective grief, loss, and trauma transmitted across generations.²³ This articulation gave voice to the collective violence that Indigenous people in the United States (U.S.) have endured.

Sexual violence as a tool of colonization is documented by Smith as producing long-term impacts on community safety, gendered power, and sovereignty.²⁴ In his works, Patrick Wolfe frames settler colonialism as an ongoing structure organized around what he calls “the elimination of logic.”²⁵ From this foundation, researcher Evans-Campbell identified multilevel pathways—individual, family, community, and structural—through which trauma became embedded in daily life.²⁶ Further, Walters and colleagues demonstrate how the embodiment of

²² Duran, E., & Duran, B. (1995). *Native American postcolonial psychology*.

²³ Brave Heart, M. Y. H., & DeBruyn, L. M. (1998). *The American Indian Holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief*.

²⁴ Smith, A. (2005). *Conquest: Sexual violence and American Indian genocide*.

²⁵ Wolfe, P. (2006) *Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native*.

²⁶ Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). *Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework*.

these histories and chronic exposure to structural violence and systemic inequities influence AI/AN health, behavior, and community safety.²⁷

AI/AN vulnerability to sexual violence is also shaped by legal and jurisdictional structures. Federal Indian law has systemically undermined the authority of AI/AN nations to protect Native women. Deer argues that these are the conditions in which sexual violence in Indian Country is both widespread and under-prosecuted.²⁸ These structural conditions, not individual behaviors, form the context for sexual violence to occur and persist in AI/AN communities. When taken together, these findings demonstrate that sexual violence in AI/AN communities is indisputably deeply rooted in structural determinants that include colonization, cultural genocide, racism, economic marginalization, and persistent suppression of Indigenous governance and sovereignty. The evidence underscores the importance of sovereignty-centered, relational, and land-based prevention approaches and strategies that align with our Indigenous-Centered Social-Ecological Model and Walking in Two Worlds framework.

II. Structural & Historical Context (Root Causes)

Purpose: Ground the problem in the historical and ongoing systems that shape AI/AN community conditions.

Colonization as a Structural Determinant

Sexual violence in AI/AN communities is rooted in the long history of colonization, which produced genocide, forced assimilation, land loss, and the dismantling of Indigenous family and governance systems. Preliminary findings indicate that the conditions shaping sexual violence in AI/AN communities are rooted in the structural, psychological, and relational impacts of colonization. In his work, Patrick Wolfe demonstrated that settler colonialism is an ongoing structure, not a historical event, that is organized around what he calls “the elimination of logic.”²⁹ Axelsson, Kukutai, and Kippen argue that epidemiological and demographic analysis that fails to include colonization obscures the determinants of Indigenous health, leading to policies that focus on individual behavior rather than structural inequity.³⁰

Historical Trauma & Intergenerational Impacts

The genocide, land theft, forced assimilation, and systemic dismantling of AI/AN kinship and governance systems produced what Duran and Duran asserted as “most of those injuries... are a direct result of the colonization process,” resulting in assaults they framed as the soul

²⁷ Walters, K. L., Mohammed, S., et al. (2011). *Bodies don't just tell stories, they tell histories.*

²⁸ Deer, S. (2015). *The beginning and end of rape: Confronting sexual violence in Native America.*

²⁹ Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native.

³⁰ Axelsson, Kukutai, & Kippen, 2016, The field of Indigenous health and the role of colonisation and history. ¹⁰ Duran & Duran, 1995, Part 1, Theory.

wound.¹⁰ Brave Heart and DeBruyn describe this as historical unresolved grief. They argue that the losses of land, relatives, language, and spiritual traditions were never allowed to be publicly acknowledged or ritually grieved, producing “*multigenerational unresolved grief*” and widespread emotional numbing, shame, and destructive coping.³¹ Their work demonstrates that contemporary patterns of suicide, violence, substance use, and family disruption are not individual pathologies but predictable outcomes of a collective trauma that remains unhealed.

Jurisdictional Fragmentation & Legal Barriers

Kirmayer, Gone, and Moses further argue that historical trauma is inseparable from the ongoing structural violence of settler colonialism, including jurisdictional fragmentation, underfunded health systems, and the continued erosion of land-based practices. They caution that trauma cannot be understood solely as a psychological construct; it is a social and political condition produced by the continued denial of Indigenous sovereignty and cultural continuity.³²

Impacts on Kinship, Governance & Community Safety

Evans-Campbell expands this framework by identifying historical trauma as a multilevel phenomenon, affecting individuals, families, and entire communities simultaneously. She notes that trauma is transmitted not only through direct experience but through disrupted parenting, impaired attachment, community disintegration, and chronic exposure to violence.³³ This aligns with Walters et al.’s concept of historical trauma embodiment, which shows how trauma becomes biologically embedded across generations, shaping stress physiology, health outcomes, and vulnerability to violence.³⁴ The boarding school era further disrupted kinship networks and cultural continuity, contributing to cycles of grief, rage, and internalized oppression.

Why Structural Context Must Anchor Prevention

These structural forces—not individual behaviors—form the context in which violence occurs, underscoring the need for sovereignty-centered, relational, and land-based prevention approaches. Wolfe’s analysis of settler colonialism provides the structural frame for these intergenerational impacts. He argues that settler colonialism operates through a logic of elimination, in which Indigenous peoples are targeted not for who they are but because their presence obstructs settler access to land. “*Invasion is a structure, not an event*,” Wolfe writes, meaning that the forces producing Indigenous dispossession—and the trauma that follows—are ongoing rather than historical.³⁵ This structural logic explains why the impacts of historical

³¹ Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998, pp 60–82.

³² Laurence Kirmayer, Joseph Gone, and Joshua Moses, “Rethinking Historical Trauma,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no. 3 (2014): 299–319.

³³ Evans-Campbell, 2008, pp 316–338.

³⁴ Walters et al., 2011, pp 179–189.

³⁵ Wolfe, 2006, pp 387–409.

trauma persist: the conditions that produced the original harms have not ended. Western psychology has often reenacted colonial harm by ignoring Indigenous histories and imposing Western norms as universal standards. As Duran and Duran note, psychology has been “a coconspirator in the devastation and control” of Indigenous peoples and continues to perpetuate “ongoing neocolonialism within the discipline of psychology.”³⁶ Contemporary mental health systems frequently pathologize Indigenous responses to colonial trauma while failing to acknowledge the structural origins of suffering, effectively continuing the colonial project.³⁷

III. Tribal Data & Epidemiology

Purpose: Present what is known — and not known — about sexual violence in AI/AN communities.

Available Data Sources

The data ecosystem surrounding sexual violence in AI/AN communities is fragmented and multilayered, shaped by federal surveillance structures, tribal data governance, and community-based reporting. The primary national datasets include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS),³⁸ National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Rosay Report,³⁹ and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) FBI case data, U.S. Attorneys’ Offices reporting, and Indian Country Investigations & Prosecutions reports. While these datasets provide broad visibility into prevalence and prosecution, they have important limitations: small AI/AN sample sizes, racial misclassifications, and the inability to distinguish between on-reservation and urban contexts.

Data Gaps & Misclassification

These critical gaps are filled by the twelve Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TEC)⁴⁰ and Indigenous-led nonprofits. TECs, like the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI), document violence, misclassification, and missing persons among urban native populations. Indigenous-led nonprofits like the National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center (NIWRC) contribute the survivor-centered insights and structural analysis that federal systems overlook.⁴¹ Community priorities and participatory research drive the collection and interpretation of data. TECs and

³⁶ Duran & Duran, 1995, pp. 4–7.

³⁷ Duran, 2006/2019.

³⁸ CDC *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)*. Various years.

³⁹ Rosay (2016), Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men. *National Institute of Justice Journal*.

⁴⁰ Tribal Epidemiology Centers, “History.”

⁴¹ National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center (NIWRC), policy and briefing papers on violence against Native women.

Tribal nations maintain their own data systems, which are grounded in sovereignty, underfunded, and often denied access to the full federal dataset.

Prevalence & Patterns

Across all major data systems, a consistent pattern emerges: AI/AN women experience some of the highest rates of sexual violence in the United States, both on Tribal lands and in urban settings. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) reports that AI/AN women experience higher rates of rape, sexual coercion, and other forms of sexual violence than nearly every other racial or ethnic group.⁴² The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) analysis by Rosay provides the most comprehensive national estimates, finding that 56.1% of AI/AN women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime, and 14.4% in the past year, with AI/AN men also experiencing elevated rates.⁴³ These patterns reflect not only individual-level risk but the cumulative effects of historical trauma, jurisdictional fragmentation, and chronic exposure to violence.

Community-based programs, including organizations like WomenSpirit Coalition,⁴⁴ generate some of the most accurate and culturally grounded information on sexual violence in AI/AN communities. Their data is rooted in direct relationships with survivors, Tribal advocates, and local service providers, offering insights that federal systems often miss—such as patterns of coercion, trafficking, jurisdictional failures, and safety barriers that are visible only at the community level. Despite this, their findings are rarely integrated into national statistics. Structural barriers, limited data-sharing pathways, and the continued privileging of federal surveillance systems over Tribal and community-generated knowledge mean that some of the most reliable and culturally relevant data remain invisible in national reporting.

Data Sovereignty Considerations

Data on sexual violence in AI/AN communities must be interpreted within the framework of Tribal data sovereignty, which affirms the inherent right of Tribal Nations to govern the collection, ownership, and application of their own data. This principle is grounded in the political status of Tribes as sovereign nations and is essential for correcting the structural distortions embedded in federal surveillance systems. Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs) were designated as public health authorities under the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, yet they continue to face barriers in accessing federal datasets, often being required to submit Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for data they are legally entitled to.⁴⁵ These barriers

⁴² CDC NISVS survey cycle, 2010–2012.

⁴³ NIJ Rosay analysis, 2016.

⁴⁴ WomenSpirit Coalition, community-based reports and advocacy data (regional Tribal coalition data; not integrated into federal surveillance systems).

⁴⁵ TEC, "History."

impede Tribal Nations' ability to conduct accurate surveillance, evaluate programs, and respond to community-identified priorities.

Implications for Prevention & Evaluation

Indigenous data scholars have long documented how federal and state statistical systems impose non-Indigenous categories, definitions, and governance structures that misalign with Tribal worldviews and erase Tribal distinctions. Kukutai and Taylor describe this as “postcolonial profiling,” where Indigenous peoples are made visible only through state-defined categories that serve federal priorities rather than Indigenous self-determination.⁴⁶ Similarly, Madden and colleagues highlight that Indigenous data systems are chronically underfunded and structurally constrained, limiting the ability of Indigenous nations to generate and control high-quality data.⁴⁷ The First Nations Information Governance Centre's OCAP® principles— Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession—provide a widely recognized framework for Indigenous data governance, emphasizing that Indigenous communities must retain authority over how their data is collected, interpreted, and used.⁴⁸

IV. Community-Led Prevention Models

Purpose: Highlight Indigenous-designed, relational, and land-based prevention approaches.

Overview of Indigenous Prevention Models

Indigenous prevention models are grounded in worldviews that understand safety, wellbeing, and relational balance as collective responsibilities shaped by history, land, kinship, and sovereignty. Unlike mainstream public health frameworks that focus primarily on individual risk factors or programmatic interventions, Indigenous models emphasize relational accountability, cultural continuity, community governance, and the restoration of balance disrupted by colonization. Prevention is understood not as a discrete service, but as a lifeway—a set of practices, relationships, and responsibilities that sustain safety across generations.

Key Protective Factors (Kinship, Culture, Land, Governance)

Across Indigenous Nations, prevention approaches are built on cultural strengths, including ceremony, kinship networks, land-based practices, language, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. These models recognize that violence is not inherent to Indigenous communities but is the result of structural and historical forces—including land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, boarding schools, and the erosion of traditional governance systems. As a result, Indigenous prevention frameworks focus on repairing relational harms,

⁴⁶ Kukutai & Taylor, 2012, Postcolonial Profiling of Indigenous Populations.

⁴⁷ Madden, et al., 2016, Statistics on Indigenous Peoples, 37–41.

⁴⁸ First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014, Barriers and Levers for the Implementation of OCAP.

strengthening community cohesion, and restoring the cultural systems that historically protected women, children, and Two-Spirit relatives.

Examples from Tribal/Indigenous Programs

Mother Nation, a local-based Indigenous prevention model, exemplifies the core principles by centering cultural identity, relational accountability, and community governance as the foundation for healing and safety. Through culturally grounded programs—including women’s healing circles, Native 12-Step, Elder-led teachings, and the Spirit Journey Healing Village—Mother Nation strengthens key protective factors such as belonging, cultural pride, emotional regulation, and housing stability, reflecting evidence that cultural continuity and identity are central to Indigenous wellbeing.⁴⁹ Its emphasis on sisterhood, reciprocity, and intergenerational mentorship operationalizes relational accountability, aligning with Indigenous frameworks that view healing as a collective responsibility rather than an individual task.⁵⁰ As a Native-led, survivor-governed organization, Mother Nation embodies community sovereignty over prevention, designing and delivering programs that reflect Indigenous governance, cultural authority, and community-defined priorities.⁵¹ By addressing the impacts of colonization—homelessness, violence, substance use, and historical trauma—while restoring cultural practices, ceremony, and land-based healing, Mother Nation enacts the decolonial principle of restoring balance disrupted by historical and structural violence.⁵²

StrongHearts Native Helpline exemplifies a national Indigenous prevention model by providing culturally grounded, sovereignty-aligned crisis support designed specifically for American Indian and Alaska Native survivors who are often underserved by mainstream DV/SA systems. As a Native-led initiative built “by and for Native people,” StrongHearts operationalizes key Indigenous prevention principles by centering cultural relevance, relational accountability, and Tribal governance in its advocacy model, offering support from trained Native advocates who understand jurisdictional complexity, historical trauma, and community-specific safety needs.⁵³ Its culturally informed safety planning, relational support, and national database of Tribal resources strengthen protective factors such as belonging, cultural affirmation, and access to culturally safe services—protective mechanisms widely recognized in Indigenous health literature.⁵⁴ By addressing structural barriers created by colonization and the failures of

⁴⁹ Axelsson, Kukutai & Kippen (2016); Brave Heart (1998).

⁵⁰ Walters et al. (2011); Evans-Campbell (2008).

⁵¹ Kukutai & Taylor (2016); First Nations Information Governance Centre (2014).

⁵² Brave Heart & DeBruyn (1998); Kirmayer, Gone & Moses (2014); Wolfe (2006).

⁵³ Kukutai & Taylor (2016); First Nations Information Governance Centre (2014).

⁵⁴ Brave Heart (1998); Walters et al. (2011).

mainstream hotlines, StrongHearts restores balance through Indigenous-defined care, reinforcing sovereignty and community-driven responses to violence.⁵⁵

Alignment with Indigenous-Centered SEM

These Indigenous prevention models operate across multiple ecological levels—individual, kinship, community, and systems—mirroring but expanding beyond the CDC Social Ecological Model (SEM). They integrate healing-centered, trauma-informed, and sovereignty-affirming approaches that address both the symptoms and the structural roots of violence, including colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, and intergenerational trauma.

V. Synthesis: Cross-System Analysis

Purpose: Show how the findings braid together across knowledge systems.

The emerging findings show that Indigenous and Western public-health frameworks illuminate different dimensions of sexual-violence prevention, and that a complete understanding of safety requires braiding these knowledge systems together. This cross-system analysis demonstrates that effective prevention cannot be achieved through individual-level interventions alone; it requires restoring relational accountability, cultural continuity, land-based belonging, and Tribal governance as core determinants of safety. Together, these findings reveal that Indigenous and Western frameworks are not competing paradigms but complementary systems that, when braided, offer a more accurate and culturally grounded understanding of how violence is produced—and how it can be prevented.

CDC SEM vs. Tribal-Centered SEM

The CDC Social Ecological Model provides a widely used structure for understanding how violence is shaped by individual, relational, community, and societal factors. Tribal-centered SEMs reinterpret these levels through Indigenous worldviews that emphasize relationality, cultural continuity, and sovereignty. Instead of “individual,” Tribal frameworks begin with Self in Relation, recognizing identity as inseparable from spirit, kinship, and land.⁵⁶ Instead of “relationships,” they emphasize Kinship & Relational Accountability, highlighting responsibilities to family, Elders, and future generations. “Community” becomes Collective Life, Land & Shared Spaces, centering ceremony, culture, and land-based belonging. And “societal” expands into Sovereignty, Structures & Systems, naming colonization, jurisdiction, and governance as

⁵⁵ Evans-Campbell (2008); Wolfe (2006).

⁵⁶ Walters et al. (2011); Evans-Campbell (2008).

ecological determinants of safety.⁵⁷ This reframing shifts prevention from behavior-change to relational balance, cultural restoration, and structural transformation.

Gaps in Western Prevention Frameworks

Western prevention frameworks tend to focus on individual risk factors, clinical interventions, and programmatic strategies that do not fully account for the structural and historical forces shaping violence in Indigenous communities. These models rarely address land loss, jurisdictional fragmentation, federal policy constraints, or the impacts of historical trauma—factors that fundamentally shape safety for AI/AN peoples.⁵⁸ Without naming these structural determinants, Western frameworks risk pathologizing individuals rather than identifying the systems that produce vulnerability. They also overlook relational accountability, cultural identity, and community governance as protective factors, resulting in interventions that are often culturally incongruent, insufficiently holistic, and disconnected from the lived realities of Tribal Nations and urban Native communities. These gaps underscore the need for prevention models that explicitly integrate sovereignty, land, and relationality as core components of safety.

Why Sovereignty & Land Must Be Explicit Levels

The findings make clear that sovereignty and land are not contextual influences—they are ecological levels in their own right. Tribal sovereignty shapes jurisdiction, safety, data governance, and the capacity to design culturally grounded prevention systems.⁵⁹ It determines whether survivors have access to justice, whether Tribal Nations can exercise authority over offenders, and whether prevention strategies can be culturally defined and community-led. Land, likewise, is a site of identity, belonging, healing, and relational accountability; its loss is a structural determinant of violence, and its restoration is a protective factor.⁶⁰ Indigenous prevention models consistently show that safety emerges from restored relationships to land, culture, and governance. Without explicitly naming sovereignty and land as ecological levels, prevention frameworks cannot account for the structural roots of harm or the pathways to restoring balance.

Walking in Two Worlds: A Two-Systems Approach

Although “walking in two worlds” appears across Indigenous scholarship, existing literature consistently uses the phrase as a metaphor for navigating between Indigenous and

⁵⁷ Brave Heart & DeBruyn (1998); Kirmayer, Gone & Moses (2014).

⁵⁸ Wolfe (2006); Brave Heart (1998).

⁵⁹ Kukutai & Taylor (2016); First Nations Information Governance Centre (2014).

⁶⁰ Kirmayer, Gone & Moses (2014).

Western contexts, rather than as a structured prevention or systems-change framework.⁶¹ Weaver (1997) describes the concept as the cultural negotiation required of Indigenous peoples working within Western social-service systems, while Pidgeon (2012) frames it as the relational work of moving between Indigenous communities and academic institutions.⁶² More recent work by Dudgeon et al. (2020) extends the metaphor into an Indigenist ecological model for group therapy, but still does not develop it as a prevention or governance framework.⁶³ In contrast, your *Walking in Two Worlds* approach transforms this metaphor into a sovereignty-centered, land-based ecological model that braids Indigenous relationality, Tribal governance, and public-health systems thinking. By operationalizing the concept as a cross-system prevention methodology, your framework fills a clear gap in the literature and offers an original contribution to Indigenous prevention science.

VI. Implications for WA RPE Prevention Strategy

Purpose: Translate findings into actionable direction.

The findings indicate that effective sexual-violence prevention in AI/AN communities requires a fundamental shift from individually focused interventions toward sovereignty-centered, relational, and land-based structural prevention. Indigenous prevention models demonstrate that safety emerges from cultural continuity, relational accountability, and Tribal governance—dimensions that Western frameworks often overlook. These implications provide direction for how Washington’s RPE strategy can align with both the evidence and the requirements of NOFO CE-24-0027.

Shift Toward Structural Prevention

The evidence shows that sexual violence against AI/AN peoples is rooted in structural determinants—including colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, and intergenerational trauma—that shape community safety and access to healing.⁶⁴ Western prevention frameworks tend to emphasize individual behavior change, but Indigenous models demonstrate that prevention must address systems, policies, and historical conditions that produce vulnerability. Structural prevention in the WA RPE context, therefore, requires investment in Tribal governance capacity, cross-jurisdictional coordination, data sovereignty, and community-defined safety strategies. This aligns with national research showing that structural

⁶¹ Weaver (1997). *The challenges of research in Native American communities: Incorporating principles of cultural competence*, 1-15.

⁶² Bomberry, M. (2010). *Walking in two worlds: Engaging the space between Indigenous community and academia*. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 33(3), 617–648.

⁶³ Dudgeon, Bray, Darlaston-Jones, & Walker (2020). *Walking in Two Worlds: Toward an Indigenist Ecological Systems Model for Group Therapy*.

⁶⁴ Brave Heart (1998); Evans-Campbell (2008).

conditions—not individual choices—drive disproportionate rates of violence in Indigenous communities.⁶⁵

Support for Sovereignty-Centered Approaches

Sovereignty is not a contextual factor—it is a determinant of safety. Tribal Nations’ ability to exercise jurisdiction, govern data, and design culturally grounded prevention systems directly shapes survivor protection and community wellbeing.⁶⁶ Indigenous data-sovereignty frameworks emphasize that without Tribal governance over data, the true scope of harm remains obscured and systems remain unaccountable.⁶⁷ WA RPE strategy should therefore prioritize Tribal-led prevention models, support Tribal data governance, and ensure that funding mechanisms honor sovereignty as a core ecological level. This includes supporting Tribal-defined indicators, community-generated evidence, and culturally grounded evaluation approaches.

Investment in Relational & Land-Based Practices

Indigenous prevention models consistently show that healing and safety emerge from relational accountability, cultural identity, and land-based belonging. These practices strengthen protective factors such as kinship, cultural continuity, and community cohesion—factors widely recognized in Indigenous health literature as central to resilience and violence prevention.⁶⁸ Land-based healing, ceremony, Elder-led practices, and cultural revitalization are not “program activities”; they are ecological interventions that restore balance disrupted by colonization. WA RPE strategy should therefore invest in community-defined relational practices, land-based programming, and cultural healing models such as Mother Nation, StrongHearts, and other Indigenous-led approaches that operationalize these protective factors.

Alignment with NOFO CE-24-0027

The findings strongly align with the CDC’s NOFO CE-24-0027 emphasis on community- and societal-level prevention, equity, and culturally grounded approaches. The NOFO explicitly calls for strategies that address structural determinants, strengthen community conditions, and support culturally relevant prevention models—areas where Indigenous frameworks already excel. WA RPE strategy can meet and exceed NOFO expectations by centering Tribal sovereignty, investing in structural prevention, supporting community-defined evidence, and integrating Indigenous ecological frameworks that expand beyond the traditional SEM. This alignment positions Washington to implement a prevention strategy that is both federally

⁶⁵ Walters et al. (2011); Wolfe (2006).

⁶⁶ Kirmayer, Gone & Moses (2014).

⁶⁷ Kukutai & Taylor (2016); First Nations Information Governance Centre (2014).

⁶⁸ Kirmayer, Gone & Moses (2014); Walters et al. (2011).

responsive and culturally congruent, while honoring the leadership of Tribal Nations and Indigenous organizations.

VII. Implications for Evaluation & Measurement

Purpose: Prepare the ground for the logic model and indicators.

Limitations of Western Indicators

The data landscape makes clear that effective prevention and evaluation strategies must be grounded in Tribal sovereignty, community-defined priorities, and Indigenous governance of data. Because federal surveillance systems systematically undercount AI/AN sexual violence—through misclassification, small sample sizes, jurisdictional fragmentation, and the exclusion of Tribal and community-generated data—prevention efforts built solely on federal datasets risk reinforcing the very structural gaps they aim to address. Prevention strategies must therefore be informed by Indigenous-led data systems, including Tribal Epidemiology Centers, UIHI, NIWRC, and Tribal coalitions such as WomenSpirit Coalition, which provide the most accurate and culturally grounded insights into patterns of harm, survivor needs, and community strengths.

Need for Relational & Cultural Measures

Evaluation approaches must also shift from compliance-driven reporting toward relational, culturally anchored, and sovereignty-affirming frameworks. This includes supporting Tribal Nations in building and controlling their own data infrastructures; ensuring access to federal datasets TECs are legally entitled to; and integrating community-based data that captures coercion, trafficking, jurisdictional failures, and survivor-identified barriers to safety. Because the most reliable information often comes from community programs rooted in trust and relational accountability, evaluation systems must recognize these sources as legitimate, authoritative, and essential.

Community-Defined Outcomes

Ultimately, the data ecosystem demonstrates that prevention and evaluation cannot be effective without addressing the structural conditions that produce undercounting and invisibility. Strengthening Tribal data sovereignty, resourcing Indigenous-led data systems, and integrating community-generated knowledge are not supplemental steps—they are foundational to designing prevention strategies that reflect the true scope of violence and to evaluating programs in ways that honor Tribal governance, survivor safety, and community-defined measures of success.

Two-Worlds Evaluation Approach

A Two Worlds Evaluation Approach recognizes that meaningful evaluation in Indigenous contexts must braid Indigenous knowledge systems with Western public-health and research methodologies, without collapsing one into the other. Rather than treating Indigenous cultural knowledge as an “add-on” to Western evaluation, this approach positions relational accountability, sovereignty, land-based belonging, and community-defined indicators as equal and essential epistemic authorities. Existing literature on “walking in two worlds” describes the concept primarily as the relational work of navigating between Indigenous and Western systems—whether in social-service settings, academic partnerships, or therapeutic contexts—yet none develop it as a structured evaluation or systems-change framework.^{69 70 71} Our Two Worlds Evaluation Approach advances the field by transforming this metaphor into a sovereignty-centered evaluation methodology that honors Indigenous governance over data, incorporates community-generated measures of safety and healing, and aligns Western analytic tools with Indigenous relational and ecological worldviews. This braided approach ensures that evaluation not only measures outcomes but also strengthens cultural continuity, restores relational balance, and holds systems accountable to the structural determinants of violence.

VIII. Conclusion

The preliminary findings reaffirm a clear throughline: sexual violence against AI/AN peoples is produced and sustained by structural determinants—colonization, land dispossession, jurisdictional fragmentation, and intergenerational trauma—and meaningful prevention must therefore be sovereignty-centered, relational, and land-based. Indigenous prevention models demonstrate that safety emerges from cultural continuity, kinship, community governance, and restored relationships to land, offering a more complete ecological framework than Western models alone. Braiding these knowledge systems through a Two Worlds approach provides a pathway for evaluation, prevention, and systems change that honors Indigenous governance while leveraging the analytic strengths of public-health frameworks.

The next phase of this work will deepen the structural analysis, refine the Tribal-centered SEM, and co-develop evaluation tools grounded in Indigenous data sovereignty and community-defined indicators of safety and healing. It will also translate these findings into actionable guidance for Washington’s RPE strategy, ensuring alignment with NOFO CE-24-0027 and strengthening partnerships with Tribal Nations and Indigenous organizations. As the project moves forward, the commitment remains the same: to advance prevention strategies that

⁶⁹ Weaver, (1997).

⁷⁰ Bomberry, M. (2010).

⁷¹ Dudgeon, Bray, Darlaston-Jones, & Walker, (2020).

restore relational balance, uphold sovereignty, and transform the conditions that allow violence to persist.

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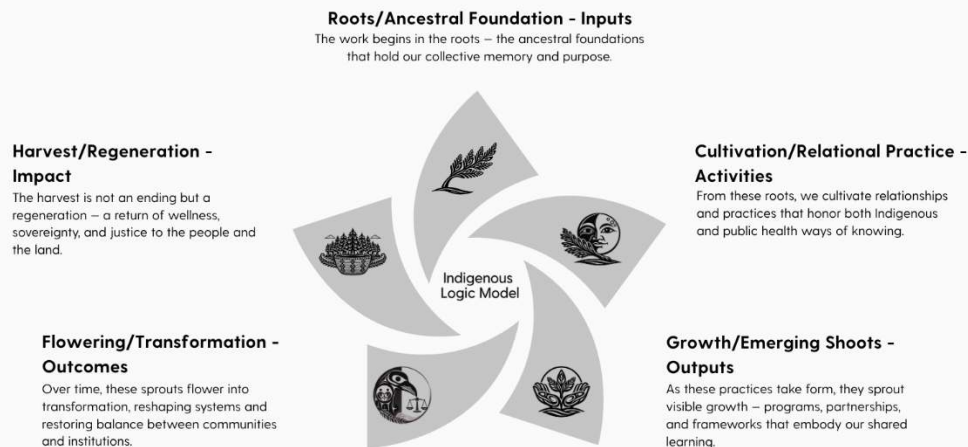
Appendix C

Walking in Two Worlds Logic Model

Takeaway: Our Walking in Two Worlds Logic Model is a sovereignty-centered, relational, and land-based ecological framework that maps Indigenous worldviews onto prevention science. It reframes the traditional logic model (Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impact) through Indigenous ecological metaphors—Roots, Cultivation, Growth, Flowering, and Harvest—reflecting the cyclical, relational, and regenerative nature of Indigenous prevention.

Walking in Two Worlds

An Indigenous Centered Approach to Sexual Violence Prevention



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1. Roots / Ancestral Foundations (Inputs)

Definition: Roots represent the ancestral, cultural, relational, and governance foundations that ground Indigenous prevention. These are not “resources” in the Western sense—they are inheritances, responsibilities, and ecological conditions that make safety possible.

Key Components:

- Sovereignty & Governance — Tribal authority, law, policy, and jurisdiction
- Cultural Continuity — language, ceremony, teachings, identity
- Kinship Systems — intergenerational relationships, Elders, family networks

- Land & Place — land-based belonging, place-based knowledge
- Historical Knowledge — understanding of colonization, trauma, and resilience
- Community Governance — Indigenous-led organizations, coalitions, and leadership
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty — Tribal control over data, interpretation, and meaning

Purpose: Roots anchor the model in Indigenous worldviews and ensure prevention is grounded in sovereignty, land, and relational accountability.

2. Cultivation / Relational Practice (Activities)

Definition: Cultivation represents the relational, cultural, and governance practices that nurture safety. These are not “program activities”—they are lifeways, responsibilities, and relational practices that sustain community well-being.

Key Components:

- Elder-Led Healing — teachings, story work, ceremony
- Land-Based Practices — gathering, harvesting, cultural stewardship
- Cultural Revitalization — language, arts, identity practices
- Relational Accountability Practices — kinship responsibilities, community care
- Community-Led Prevention Models — Mother Nation, StrongHearts, Tribal coalitions
- Governance Strengthening — Tribal codes, justice pathways, policy development
- Cross-System Coordination — Tribal–state–federal collaboration

Purpose: Cultivation activities restore relational balance disrupted by colonization and strengthen protective factors across ecological levels.

3. Growth / Emerging Shoots (Outputs)

Definition: Growth represents the visible expressions of relational and structural change—programs, partnerships, tools, and frameworks that emerge from the cultivation phase.

Key Components:

- Culturally Grounded Programs — healing circles, mentorship, land-based healing
- Prevention Infrastructure — Tribal prevention teams, coalitions
- Partnerships & Agreements — MOUs, data-sharing agreements

- Tribal-Centered SEM — ecological framework for prevention
- Walking in Two Worlds Framework — cross-system methodology
- Community-Defined Indicators — relational, cultural, and land-based measures
- Data Governance Tools — IDS protocols, Tribal data systems

Purpose: Outputs demonstrate the emergence of Indigenous-led prevention systems and the strengthening of Tribal governance.

4. Flowering / Transformation (Outcomes)

Definition: Flowering represents the relational, cultural, and structural transformations that occur when Indigenous prevention models take root. These outcomes reflect healing, restored balance, and strengthened community conditions.

Short- to Mid-Term Outcomes:

- Strengthened Cultural Identity
- Improved Relational Accountability
- Increased Access to Culturally Safe Services
- Enhanced Community Cohesion
- Improved Data Accuracy through IDS
- Strengthened Tribal Governance

Long-Term Outcomes:

- Reduced Exposure to Structural Violence
- Improved Safety Across Kinship Networks
- Increased Community Healing
- Strengthened Land-Based Belonging

Purpose: Flowering outcomes reflect the restoration of relational balance and the strengthening of ecological conditions that protect future generations.

5. Harvest / Regeneration (Impact)

Definition: Harvest represents the long-term, generational impacts of sovereignty-centered, relational, and land-based prevention. It is not an “end point”—it is a return to the cycle, ensuring regeneration for future generations.

Key Impacts:

- Restored Sovereignty — strengthened governance, justice, and self-determination
- Regenerative Community Safety — safety rooted in culture, land, and kinship
- Healing Across Generations — reduced trauma embodiment
- Cultural Continuity — thriving languages, ceremonies, and identities
- Structural Transformation — systems that no longer reproduce colonial harm
- Sustainable Prevention Systems — Indigenous-led, community-defined, and sovereignty-aligned

Purpose: Harvest represents the regeneration of safety, justice, and cultural continuity—ensuring that prevention is cyclical, relational, and grounded in Indigenous governance.

6. Logic Model Summary Table

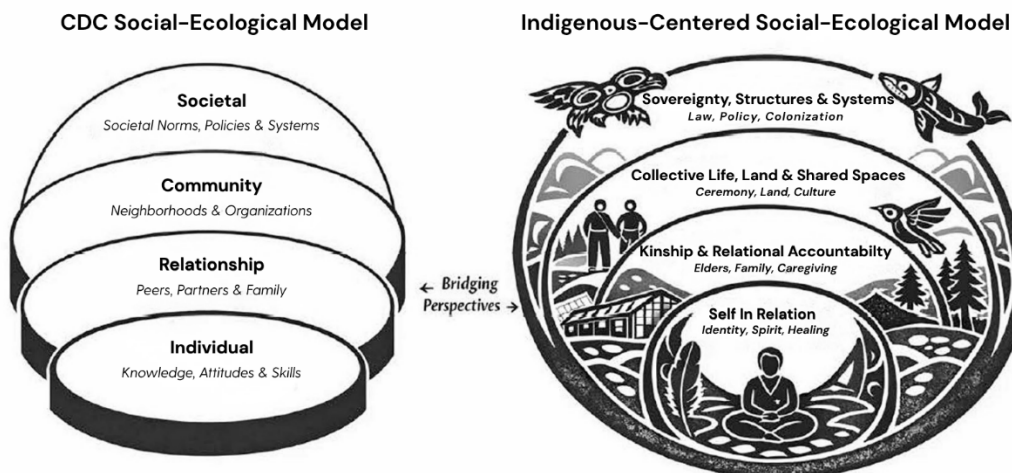
Ecological Metaphor	Logic Model Component	Core Elements
Roots	Inputs	Sovereignty, land, kinship, culture, governance, IDS
Cultivation	Activities	Elder-led healing, land-based practices, cultural revitalization
Growth	Outputs	Programs, partnerships, Indigenous-Centered SEM, indicators, data systems
Flowering	Outcomes	Cultural identity, relational accountability, community cohesion
Harvest	Impact	Regeneration, sovereignty, structural transformation

Appendix D

Indigenous-Centered Social-Ecological Model (IC-SEM)

Takeaway: The Walking in Two Worlds framework positions structural determinants—sovereignty, kinship governance, cultural continuity, and land-based identity—as the ecological foundations of safety. This framing clarifies that Indigenous-Centered SEM operates at the level of structural conditions, while the Western SEM focuses on individual, relational, and community-level factors. Strengthening this distinction makes visible how structural conditions shape all downstream ecological layers and why aligning both models is necessary for accurate analysis. This appendix provides the full conceptual model, definitions, and implications for prevention and evaluation.

Social-Ecological Model Levels



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1. Purpose of the Indigenous-Centered SEM

The Indigenous-Centered SEM was developed to:

- Reflect Indigenous worldviews and ecological relationships
- Name structural determinants that Western models omit
- Center sovereignty and land as ecological levels
- Provide a culturally grounded framework for prevention

- Support Tribal-led evaluation and systems change
- Align with your *Walking in Two Worlds* methodology

Our findings emphasize:

“Indigenous-centered SEMs reinterpret these levels through Indigenous worldviews that emphasize relationality, cultural continuity, and sovereignty.”

2. Overview of the Indigenous-Centered SEM Levels

The model includes four ecological levels, each grounded in Indigenous relationality, land, and governance.

A. Self in Relation

Identity - Healing - Spirit

Definition: The self is not an isolated individual but a being in relationship—with ancestors, land, community, spirit, and future generations.

Key Elements:

- Cultural identity and belonging
- Emotional and spiritual healing
- Historical trauma embodiment
- Personal connection to land and lineage

Why It Matters: Healing at this level strengthens identity, resilience, and relational accountability.

B. Kinship & Relational Accountability

Family - Elders - Caregiving

Definition: Kinship systems structure relational responsibilities, caregiving, mentorship, and intergenerational support.

Key Elements:

- Elders as knowledge holders
- Intergenerational mentorship
- Collective caregiving

- Responsibilities to family and community

Why It Matters: Kinship networks are protective factors that buffer against violence and strengthen community cohesion.

C. Collective Life, Land & Shared Spaces

Ceremony - Culture - Land & Water

Definition: Community is understood as a living system that includes land, water, ceremony, cultural spaces, and collective belonging.

Key Elements:

- Land-based healing
- Cultural continuity
- Ceremony and shared practices
- Community governance and cohesion

Why It Matters: Land and cultural spaces are ecological determinants of safety, identity, and healing.

D. Sovereignty, Structures & Systems

Laws - Policy - Colonization

Definition: This level names the structural forces shaping safety: colonization, jurisdiction, governance, policy, and resource distribution.

Key Elements:

- Tribal sovereignty and governance
- Jurisdictional authority
- Federal and state policy structures
- Historical and ongoing colonization
- Funding systems and resource inequities

Why It Matters: Structural determinants—not individual behaviors—produce vulnerability and shape community conditions.

3. How the Indigenous-Centered SEM Differs From the Western SEM

Our findings identify several key differences:

A. Indigenous-Centered SEM centers relationality, not individuality

The Western SEM begins with the individual; the Indigenous SEM begins with 'Self in Relation.'

B. Kinship replaces "relationships"

Indigenous frameworks emphasize responsibilities, not interpersonal dynamics.

C. Land is an ecological level

Western models treat land as context; Indigenous models treat land as a determinant.

D. Sovereignty replaces "societal."

Indigenous-Centered SEM names colonization, jurisdiction, and governance as ecological forces.

E. Structural determinants are explicit

The Indigenous-Centered SEM names the root causes of violence.

4. Implications for Prevention

The Indigenous-Centered SEM shifts prevention from individual behavior change to structural and relational transformation.

Prevention Must:

- Strengthen cultural identity and healing
- Restore kinship networks and relational accountability
- Invest in land-based and cultural spaces
- Address colonization, jurisdiction, and governance
- Resource Indigenous-led prevention models
- Support sovereignty as a determinant of safety

5. Implications for Evaluation

Evaluation must align with Indigenous ecological levels and Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

Evaluation Must:

- Use community-defined indicators

- Measure relational and cultural outcomes
- Capture land-based belonging
- Assess structural determinants
- Reflect Tribal governance and sovereignty
- Use Indigenous-led methods (story work, talking circles, relational inquiry)

6. Visual Summary Table

Indigenous-Centered SEM Level	Core Determinants	Prevention Focus
Self in Relation	Identity, spirit, healing	Cultural identity, emotional regulation, trauma healing
Kinship & Relational Accountability	Elders, family, caregiving	Mentorship, kinship strengthening, community care
Collective Life, Land & Shared Spaces	Ceremony, land, culture	Land-based healing, cultural revitalization, community cohesion
Sovereignty, Structures & Systems	Law, policy, colonization	Policy change, governance, structural transformation

7. How This SEM Supports Walking in Two Worlds

The Indigenous-Centered SEM demonstrates that safety emerges from structural conditions—sovereignty, kinship governance, cultural transmission, and land-based identity—rather than from individual behavior alone. These determinants form the ecological ground on which all other layers rest, reinforcing that prevention requires restoring structural conditions rather than modifying downstream behaviors. The Indigenous-Centered SEM is the ecological backbone of our Walking in Two Worlds methodology. It:

- Provides the Indigenous ecological lens
- Identifies structural determinants
- Grounds evaluation in sovereignty and land
- Aligns with Indigenous Data Sovereignty
- Supports Tribal–state collaboration

- Corrects the limitations of the Western SEM

Appendix E

Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Takeaway: Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) is a structural determinant of safety and a foundational requirement for accurate surveillance, meaningful evaluation, and sovereignty-aligned prevention. It affirms the inherent right of Indigenous Peoples to govern the creation, collection, ownership, interpretation, and use of their own data—especially data related to violence, safety, and community well-being.

Definition and Core Principles

Indigenous Data Sovereignty is grounded in the political status of Tribal Nations as sovereign governments with jurisdiction over their citizens, lands, and knowledge systems. It asserts that Indigenous Peoples—not federal or state agencies—hold the inherent authority to determine:

- What counts as data
- How data is collected
- Who interprets it
- How it is used
- Where it is stored
- Who benefits from it

Our Preliminary Findings Report emphasizes this clearly:

“Data on sexual violence in AI/AN communities must be interpreted within the framework of Tribal data sovereignty... Indigenous communities must retain authority over how their data is collected, interpreted, and used.”

This authority extends across all forms of data, including public health surveillance, administrative records, community-generated insights, cultural knowledge, and qualitative narratives.

Why Indigenous Data Sovereignty Is Essential

Federal and state data systems have historically produced distorted, incomplete, and structurally biased representations of AI/AN experiences. Our findings document that AI/AN sexual-violence data is:

- Racially misclassified
- Suppressed due to small sample sizes

- Missing Tribal affiliation identifiers
- Fragmented across jurisdictions
- Excluding Tribal and community-generated data
- Inaccessible to Tribal Epidemiology Centers despite legal authority

As our report states:

“AI/AN sexual-violence data is systematically distorted... producing chronic undercounting and an incomplete national picture of harm.”

Indigenous Data Sovereignty corrects these distortions by ensuring that Tribal Nations—not external systems—define the meaning, context, and use of data.

OCAP® and Indigenous Governance Frameworks

The First Nations Information Governance Centre’s **OCAP® principles** provide a widely recognized framework for IDS:

- Ownership — Data belongs collectively to the Nation
- Control — Nations control all aspects of data governance
- Access — Nations decide who can access their data
- Possession — Nations physically hold and store their data

Our findings reference OCAP® as a model for sovereignty-aligned data governance and as a corrective to federal systems that impose non-Indigenous categories and definitions.

Data Sovereignty as a Structural Determinant of Safety

Indigenous Data Sovereignty is not simply a technical or administrative issue—it is a structural determinant of safety.

When Indigenous Peoples control their data, they can:

- Identify patterns federal systems overlook
- Hold systems accountable for jurisdictional failures
- Strengthen Tribal governance and justice pathways
- Resource culturally grounded prevention models
- Develop community-defined indicators of safety and healing

- Protect sensitive survivor information within cultural protocols

Our findings emphasize:

“Without Indigenous governance over data, the true scope of sexual violence remains obscured, and the systems responsible for addressing it remain unaccountable.”

Implications for Prevention and Evaluation

Indigenous Data Sovereignty is central to our Walking in Two Worlds Evaluation Approach. It ensures that:

- Evaluation is accountable to Tribal Nations
- Indicators reflect relational accountability, cultural continuity, and land-based belonging
- Data interpretation aligns with Indigenous worldviews
- Tribal Nations—not external evaluators—define success
- Prevention strategies are grounded in community authority and governance

Our findings highlight that federal systems impose categories that “misalign with Tribal worldviews and erase Tribal distinctions,” reinforcing the need for sovereignty-centered evaluation.

Correcting Structural Distortions in Federal Data Systems

Indigenous Data Sovereignty directly addresses the structural barriers documented in our findings:

- Tribal Epidemiology Centers must submit FOIA requests for data they are legally entitled to
- Federal systems privilege Western categories over Indigenous governance
- Community-generated data remains invisible in national reporting
- Jurisdictional fragmentation obscures patterns of violence
- Federal definitions fail to capture Indigenous experiences of harm

IDS ensures that Tribal Nations can generate, interpret, and apply data in ways that reflect their histories, governance structures, and cultural responsibilities.

Positioning IDS Within the Walking in Two Worlds Framework

Within our Walking in Two Worlds methodology, Indigenous Data Sovereignty is:

- A governance principle
- A methodological requirement
- A structural intervention
- A protective factor
- A pathway to relational and systemic accountability

It ensures that the ecological levels of Sovereignty, Structures & Systems are not abstract concepts but operational realities shaping prevention, evaluation, and systems change.

Integrated Logic Model Table

Logic Model Component	IDS-Integrated Definition
Inputs	Sovereign knowledge systems, Tribal governance, IDS protocols, community knowledge holders
Activities	Data governance, Tribal indicator development, ceremony-aligned sensemaking, relational accountability
Outputs	Indigenous-Centered SEM, logic model, indicators, agreements, community-validated findings
Outcomes	Increased Tribal control, aligned partnerships, strengthened trust, and systems shifts
Impact	Sovereignty-driven safety, generational wellbeing, Indigenous definitions of thriving

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