

INDUSTRY STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A Joint Statement from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center and National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention about New Federal Report on Use of Indian Boarding Schools

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland and Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland recently released [volume 1](#) of the [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative](#) investigative report. Commissioned by Secretary Haaland, the report aims to thoroughly examine the painful history of federal American Indian boarding school policies and establish a foundation for the Interior Department's ongoing work to address the intergenerational trauma caused by these policies. Following the release of this report, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center ([SPRC](#)) and National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention ([Action Alliance](#)) acknowledge and honor the reactions—such as feelings of grief, loss, anger, or horror—that may arise among those in Indian Country in response to the report's findings. Below, we offer resources for coping, as well as culturally resonant approaches to preventing suicide and promoting mental health in impacted communities.

As stated in the report, between 1819 and 1969, the U.S. federal government operated or supported 408 boarding schools across 37 states (or then-territories), including 21 schools in Alaska and 7 schools in Hawaii. The report confirms that the U.S. directly targeted American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children in a policy of cultural assimilation, annihilation, and alienation that coincided with American Indian territorial dispossession and removal. It identifies the boarding schools by name and location and the enacted policies that were used as a means for these ends, along with at least 53 burial sites for children across this system. More site discoveries and data are expected as the investigation continues and future reports are released.

The report also highlights some of the conditions children endured at these schools and asks important questions about the short- and long-term consequences of the federal Indian boarding school system on Indian tribes, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiian communities. Placing the federal Indian boarding school system in its historical context, the report explains that the U.S. established this system as part of a broader objective to dispossess Indian tribes, Alaskan Native villages, and Native Hawaiian communities of their identity, children, land, resources, culture, and spirituality.

Given how recently the boarding schools operated, and that some are still in operation, some graduates and attendees are still alive today. The harmful legacy of these boarding schools continues to reverberate among these American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children and their communities—populations that have struggled disproportionately with suicide and mental health issues. According to [2020 data](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide rates among American Indian and Alaska Native youth ages 15 to 24 and adults 25 to 34 are 34.5 and 38.2 per 100,000 respectively, compared to 12.7 and 16.3 in the general population.

As this report is released across Indian Country, it could trigger understandable feelings of grief or loss among those impacted by what is documented. Tribal families may struggle to comprehend how a government with treaty responsibilities to care, protect, and shelter children, could instead cause harm and death. During this time, we must make space for descendants to [mourn and process](#) their personal and collective history of trauma, exploitation, and genocide. Now is the time to increase our efforts to provide mental health and suicide prevention supports to those impacted. Following are information and resources that may be helpful for you and the individuals and communities you work with:

Crisis Resources

- If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts or emotional distress, contact the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 800-273-8255 or text the [Crisis Text Line](#) (text NATIVE to 741741).
- If you or someone you know is in crisis and identifies as LGBTQ2S, contact [The Trevor Project](#) at 866-488-7386 or text START to 678-678.

National Suicide Prevention Campaigns (focused on being there for others and having caring conversations)

- [#BeThe1To](#) – A campaign of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline highlighting actions we can all take to prevent suicide.
- [#Take5toSaveLives](#) – A campaign of the National Council for Suicide Prevention encouraging everyone to take five minutes out of their day to complete five actions to help prevent suicide.
- [#RealConvo](#) – A campaign of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention equipping people with tools and resources to have open, authentic conversations about mental health.
- [#ReachOut](#) – A campaign of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs highlighting actions you can take now to help prevent a veteran suicide later.
- [#BeThere](#) – A campaign of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and its partners to ensure the public is informed about the actions they can take to help those in their life who may be in crisis, focused on the importance of being there for others.

Messaging for Prevention Practitioners

- As behavioral and public health professionals, we acknowledge and honor the feelings, such as grief or loss, that may arise among those in Indian Country in response to the release of [volume 1](#) of the [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative](#) investigative report.
- We call for increased efforts to provide mental health and suicide prevention supports to impacted communities that draw on their cultural wisdom and strengths.
- As research shows, the way news and entertainment media depict suicide and mental health can have either positive or negative effects on audience members. We encourage members of the media to follow best practices in developing content related to these topics to ensure viewers' safety.

Actions for Prevention Practitioners

- Develop or refine [comprehensive suicide prevention efforts](#) that incorporate multiple strategies working together in a variety of community settings, including enhancing [connectedness](#) and limiting access to [lethal means](#) among youth.
- Incorporate efforts to address [adverse childhood experiences](#) in your suicide prevention efforts.
- Work closely with [tribal community members](#) to ensure prevention efforts are [culturally resonant](#) and draw on the wisdom and strengths of Native communities using the resources below.
- Take steps to establish a [solid foundation](#) for effective, sustainable suicide prevention efforts in your state, territory, tribe, or community.
- Learn about the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#)'s focus on Native populations and recommended strategies for strengthening related programs and policies.
- Foster cross-sector [collaboration](#) across communities, states, and the U.S. to ensure your efforts are comprehensive.

Native Community Resources for Prevention Practitioners

- [Transforming Tribal Communities: Indigenous Perspectives on Suicide Prevention](#) – Brief video clips featuring expert advice on addressing the root causes of suicide in tribal communities.
- [To Live to See the Great Day That Dawns: Preventing Suicide by American Indian and Alaska Native Youth and Young Adults](#) – A guide to develop effective, culturally appropriate suicide prevention plans.
- [Best and Promising Practices for the Implementation of Zero Suicide in Indian Country](#) – A cultural adaptation of the Zero Suicide Toolkit for health systems serving Native American communities.

News Media Resources

- [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#) – Developed by leading experts in suicide prevention—in collaboration with schools of journalism, media organizations and other key journalists—to provide reporters with research-informed best practices in reporting on suicide and suicide prevention.
- [Words Matter: Reporting on Mental Health Conditions](#) – Developed by the American Psychiatric Association to provide guidance to reporters when reporting on mental health conditions.

Entertainment Media Resources

- [National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide](#) – Developed by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention—in collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Entertainment Industries Council—these research-based recommendations were informed by representatives from both the entertainment industry and the suicide prevention field.
- [Mental Health Media Guide](#) – Developed by a coalition of mental health experts and entertainment industry leaders to help content creators more accurately portray mental health challenges.

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SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER:

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center ([SPRC](#)) is the only federally funded resource center devoted to advancing the implementation of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. SPRC is supported through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)). SPRC builds capacity and infrastructure for effective suicide prevention through consultation, training, and resources for state, tribal, health/behavioral health, and community systems; professionals and professional education programs; and national public and private partners and stakeholders. The SPRC project is currently based at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center ([OUHSC](#)). Follow SPRC on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).

NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention ([Action Alliance](#)) is the public-private partnership working to advance the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) and make suicide prevention a national priority. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)), through the Suicide Prevention Resource Center ([SPRC](#)) grant, provides funding to Education Development Center ([EDC](#)) to operate and manage the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which was launched in 2010. Learn more at the Action Alliance [website](#) and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).