

Arizona ranks near top in missing Indigenous person cases

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Indigenous advocates speak out as awareness day shines a spotlight

Indigenous peoples across North America are gathering this month to raise awareness about the disproportionate violence in their communities.

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PHOENIX (AZFamily) — It's a crisis that has impacted tribal communities and members for decades. The number of Native people who've been murdered, or those who make up missing person cases, is disproportionately higher than any other group.

To highlight this problem, Tuesday is National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

According to the latest biannual report by the National Institute of Justice's NamUS (National Missing and Unidentified Persons System), Arizona ranks second in the nation with the number of missing person cases for Indigenous people.

That number as of last year was 90. When it comes to unidentified deceased people with tribal affiliation, Arizona ranked number one with 42 cases.

Arizona's Family has highlighted many MMIW cases in just the last year and the effort to address this crisis. That included the creation of the state's [Turquoise Alert](#), which was signed into law in honor of [Emily Pike](#). She was 14 years old when she was reported missing and later found dismembered in a wooded area February 2025. There have been no updates on her case.

One of the more recent cases was 28-year-old [Passion Schurz](#). She was from the Salt River-Pima Maricopa Indian Community. Her body was found in a Scottsdale canal in March of this year. Her death is still under investigation.

Last November, [Challistia Colelay](#)'s body was discovered in Whiteriver. A Turquoise Alert didn't go out for the 16-year-old from the White Mountain Apache tribe when she went missing in October. DPS said they weren't asked to launch one by the investigating agency. Investigators do believe foul play was involved.

A Turquoise Alert did go out for [Maleeka "Mollie" Boone](#) in January. The 8-year-old was found dead in the Coalmine area of the Navajo Nation after a hit and run. No arrests have been made.

"There's always this misunderstanding of, you know, who do we report to? Where do we put this report out to?" said [Phoenix Indian Center](#) CEO Jolyana Begay-Kroupa. "And I think a lot of that, the way the system is set up right now, it is creating an extra barrier. Then there's just not enough services, there's not enough resources that go out to our native communities when it comes to things like domestic violence."

She says they offer support services for families impacted by this crisis and hold many events and walks to promote awareness of this year-round. One of the criticisms surrounding this problem has been lack of media coverage or action by government officials. But the tide has been shifting with more cases getting covered and also the creation of MMIW task forces and Turquoise Alert, is this crisis getting better?

"We need changes to happen. I know that there are task forces that are created, there's small steps being taken, like the alert that came out last year in 2025. So these different steps are occurring in a good way. We do need more though ... It shouldn't still be happening in 2026," Begay-Kroupa said. "I honestly think that it's the same."

She remains hopeful that being outspoken and advocating for Indigenous people will help this crisis come to an end.

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