

# Assessment of Native Housing Needs in Washington State

Findings and Lessons Learned

Big Water Consulting  
Housing WA Conference  
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# Overview

- Background
- Methodology
- Findings
- Recommendations

# Project History and Purpose

## History

- Native organizations sought Native housing needs supplement to 2015 Housing Needs Assessment
- RFP posted by Commerce in October 2019
- Big Water Consulting and partners selected in December 2019
- Project launched in late January 2020

## Purpose

- Evaluate housing needs of 3 unique Native communities
- Identify housing needs and barriers to housing development
- Develop and provide recommendations to reduce or eliminate these barriers

# Why do Native housing needs matter?

- Original Inhabitants of Washington State
- Treaty Obligations
- Intergenerational Trauma (due largely to history of institutionalization, relocation and assimilation practices)
- Land Loss/Displacement
- Earlier Prescriptive Housing Programs Created Poor Housing Stock
- Existing Housing Shortage and Poor Housing Unit Condition
- Continued Discrimination and Disenfranchisement

# Introduction to Native/Tribal Housing

- Treaty Rights and Sovereignty: Government-to-government relationship (vs. Urban Providers)
  - Different for Alaska Natives and none for Native Hawaiians in Washington
- Funding issues
  - Census data
  - Flatlined funding limiting development, renovation, repair
- Land held in trust, creating barriers to housing market
- Limited land to build to housing
- Homelessness (urban) and severe overcrowding/doubling up (tribal)
- Severe economic distress (limiting housing revenue and housing markets on reservation lands)
  - High percentage of people living in managed housing

# History

- Natives lived in what is now WA for **over 12,000 years**
- **Smallpox** wiped out as many as **90%** of the population of some tribes in WA by 1853
- **Series of treaties from 1854-1856** ceded a large portion of Native lands to the U.S. government and established numerous reservations
- City of Seattle passed an ordinance in 1865 expelling and **banning** all Native Americans from the city
- **Boarding school era** from 1860s to 1973
- **Indian Relocation Act** of 1956 encouraged thousands of tribal members to leave their communities and move to large cities, including Seattle, where they did not receive support
- 1950s – **Columbia River dams** flood tribal fishing sites and homes
- 1970 – Occupation of **Ft Lawton** led by Bernie Whitebear
  - Launch of Chief Seattle Club, Seattle Indian Services Commission, Seattle Indian Health Board, and United Indians of All Tribes Foundation
- 1975 **“Boldt Decision”** reaffirms the treaty-based right to harvest fish "in common with all citizens of the Territory"
- 1996 passage of **Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act**, which expanded tribal self-determination in managing tribal housing programs
- Present day: numerous tribes in Washington are still **not federally recognized** including the Duwamish, Chinook, Kikiallus, Marietta Band of Nooksack, Snohomish, Snoqualmoo, and Steilacoom

# Why Now?

- Reflections on 2015 WA Housing Needs Assessment (and 2017 update) and national Native housing needs study completed by HUD and Urban Institute in 2017
- Follows King County American Indian and Alaska Native Housing Needs Assessment conducted by Seattle Indian Services Commission completed in 2019
- Calls for equity at local and state levels

# Why is this important?

- First-of-its-kind study of WA Native housing needs (potential model for other states and local governments)
- Opportunities for partnerships between local, state, federal, tribal and Native nonprofit entities, evaluation of existing policies and programs, and (hopefully) improved services



# Core Structural and Substantive Challenges

- Multiple unique Native communities within study
- Several distinct regions of the state (e.g., coastal, Puget Sound/I-5, eastern Washington)
- Urban Native (nonprofit) vs. Tribal
- Rural vs. urban communities
- Variations in tribal and organizational resources and capacity
- Grouping of Native community members in existing data sets
- Wide range of service providers, agencies, funding sources and allies serving each community

\*COVID-19 disruption of stakeholder and community engagement

# Who are Native/Tribal Communities in WA?

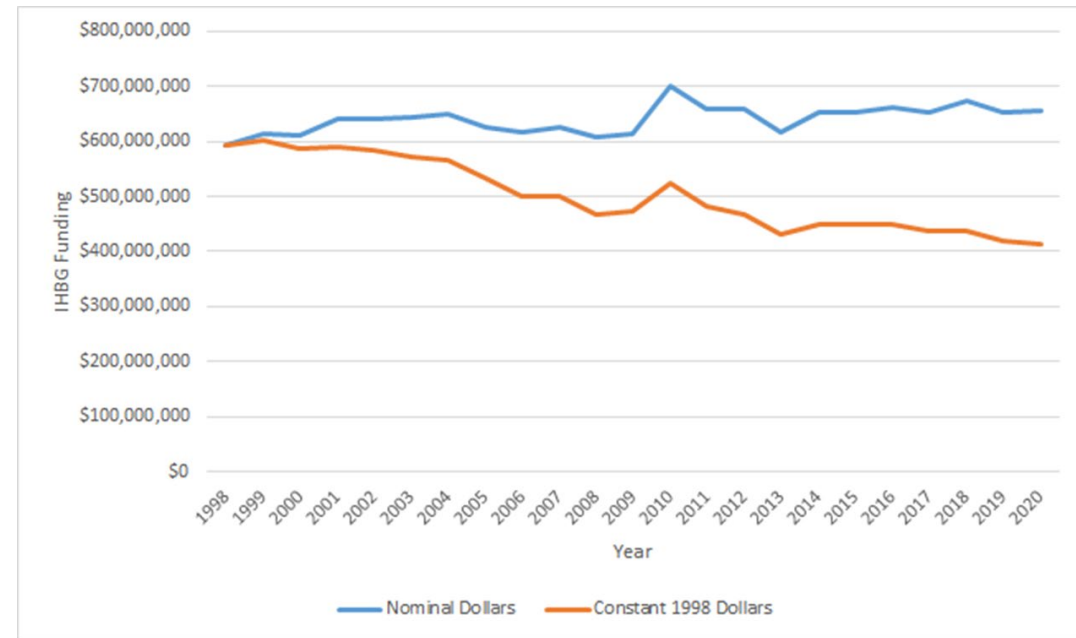
- 29 Federally-Recognized Tribes
- 313,633 Population of AIAN alone or in combination w/ other race(s)
  - 4.1% of WA Population
- Tenth largest AIAN population by state



# Tribal Communities/TDHEs

## Tribally-Designated Housing Entities (TDHEs)

- Maintain housing on reservation land, often have existing subsidized housing
- Operation and maintenance is constrained by underfunding of the Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) and other federal programs
- New development and housing finance is constrained by trust land restrictions, high infrastructure costs, and lack of buildable land



# Urban Native Populations

- Lack of Native-specific or culturally appropriate services (other than those provided by Native nonprofit organizations)
- Contend with high rents and land prices in urban areas, which shifts to fringes of areas away from community spaces and services
- Restrictions on application of “Indian preference” in use of federal funding



# Alaska Natives

- Outside of tribal/village/corporation service area (limited access to services provided through federal or tribal programs and to Native people through nonprofit organizations)
- Difficult to measure and provide services because most data collected aggregates Alaska Native and American Indian populations
- Challenging to organize outside of specific tribe or village

# Native Hawaiians

- No specific right or access to services in WA
- Similar data collection challenge aggregating Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders
- Challenging to organize outside of community-based events and gatherings
- 27,773 persons Native Hawaiian alone or in combination w/ other race(s)
  - 0.4% of WA Population

# Methodology

- Traditional housing data sources are typically unreliable for Native/Tribal populations
  - In 2010, AIANs living on reservations were undercounted by 4.9%
- Data was compiled from WSHFC, HUD, USDA Rural Development, Census ACS/PUMS/AHS, and HMDA
- Original data collection supplemented these sources through surveys, focus groups, and interviews

# Changes due to COVID-19

- NAIHC and regional tribal meetings cancelled
- No direct visits to tribes
- Shorter surveys and no field-based focus groups

BUT,

- Increased participation in Zoom meetings
- Expanded range of interviews
- Regional focus groups



# Findings

When compared to the state of WA, Native communities experience:

- Higher rates of cost burden
- Higher rates of overcrowding
- Higher rates of home loan denial
- Lower rates of homeownership
- Less adequate housing
- Higher rates of homelessness

# Tribally Designated Housing Entities: Opportunities & Successes

- Develop relationships state and local officials to navigate institutional/cultural barriers
- Participation in Continuum of Care programs and Point-in-Time Counts
- Expansion of Tribal HUD-VASH program for veterans
- Leverage LIHTC in combination with other funding programs
  - Successes with WSHFC beginning to reevaluate process for allocating Tribal Points
- **Title VI** can be leveraged with Section 184 or USDA Section 502
- **Section 184** lending limit increase
- Use data to develop **long-term strategic plans** to address transportation, education, health, utilities, environment, etc.
- Expand **homeownership education, loan programs, financial literacy, home maintenance education** for potential homeowners

# Urban Providers: Opportunities & Successes

- CEUIH-led **HMIS update in King County** to include Native identification/affiliation
- Potential for urban providers to **work with tribes** to house tribal members using NAHASDA or other tribal funds, which would allow them to apply Indian preference
- Native-led urban providers have **higher housing retention rates**
- **City funding** allocated for Native housing development (Sacred Medicine House, Fort Lawton Redevelopment)

# Urban Providers: Recommendations

- Reevaluate how certain **data sets** are designed in order to make them more **inclusive** and helpful to Native entities
  - **Expand data collection** beyond simply quantifying AIAN population and demographics to also assess individual and family connection to services and cultural resources
  - Use **changes to HMIS** and coordinated entry program in Seattle/King County to **identify opportunities** for including these changes statewide and examining usage patterns of Native people
- Use the experience of the Chief Seattle Club and its Native and non-Native partners to develop a **roadmap** for other urban Native organizations seeking to develop housing
- Partner with tribes that express interest in developing deeper **partnerships with urban Native housing organizations** so that tribal members living in cities can find housing and supportive services
- Advocate for creation of a **Native and tribal committee at the state level for Continuum of Care** and other Department of Commerce programs based on achievements in Seattle/King County

# Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians: Opportunities & Successes

- Alaska Native Regional Corporations able to provide some support to members (no housing-specific support to date)
- Effort underway to expand services in WA for Tlingit & Haida
- **Urban providers** working to serve Native Hawaiian community (Chief Seattle Club)

# Additional Issues to Consider

- Some grantees discussed how grant processes favor organizations with experienced grant writers and prior history of success in the program
- Agency staff and Tribes are often not aware of various local, state and federal programs, if/how they complement each other and whether Tribes are eligible/competitive
- Washington State agency staff and Senate Housing Stability and Affordability Committee demonstrated interest in improving programs for and relationships with Tribes (considered ahead of most other states)
- Tribal staff noted that the amount of reporting required for some grants is too burdensome in relation to the amount of money awarded
- Urban Native organizations and Tribes can develop partnerships to build capacity and connections in areas of housing operation, maintenance, and development (and groups like the Housing Development Consortium could help facilitate capacity-building through working group/committee)

# Lessons Learned

- Facilitating regional working groups among Tribes and urban Native communities can lead to capacity-building relationships
- Need to adapt survey length and level of detail to reduced staffing levels during onset of COVID-19 pandemic
- Many agencies and TDHEs did not have data readily available or compiled for reporting purposes (requiring greater lead time for compilation)
- Importance of regular communication between stakeholders to learn about and address needs
- Acknowledging unique issues of these different Native communities, explanation of project purposes and potential outcomes, and required steps to properly engage them in the design of the project (including initial budget determination) is critical for success

# Examples of Urban Native and Tribal Housing Success Stories

- Chief Seattle Club
  - [Eagle Village](#)
    - 3% relapse rate compared to county-level relapse of 12%
  - [Sacred Medicine House](#)
    - 120 units of permanent supportive housing
    - Space for supportive and therapeutic activities and outdoor recreation spaces
- Makah Tribe - [Sail River Heights](#)
  - Permanent supportive housing complex
  - 21 affordable housing units for families and individuals experiencing homelessness, a courtyard, and a community center
  - 72 owner-occupied single-family homes and 16 market-rate rental apartments
- Lummi Nation - [Sche'lang'en Village](#)
  - Gated community of 45 units of supportive housing with wrap-around services
  - Community club house, private counseling offices, community garden, playgrounds and picnic areas
- Colville Indian Housing Authority - [Tribal HUD-VASH](#)
  - Housing vouchers for twenty Native veterans at risk of homelessness
- Muckleshoot Housing Authority - [CARES Act Projects](#)
  - Duplex; three single-family homes; upgraded financial and data systems
- [Fort Lawton Redevelopment](#)
  - 85 supportive housing units with on-site staff for seniors and veterans who have experienced homelessness
  - 100 units of 1, 2, and 3 bedroom rental homes for those earning up to 60% for AMI
- [Nesika Illahee](#) (Oregon)
  - Partnership between Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) and Siletz Tribes
  - 59 units of deeply affordable housing



# Key Takeaways

Native communities experience unique housing challenges and barriers:

- Flatlined Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) Funding and Limited Funding for Infrastructure
- Limited Access To State Funding And Restrictions Attached to Federal Funding
- Housing Shortage and Poor Housing Unit Condition
- Funding Barriers for Urban Providers and Native Hawaiians
- High Rates of Homelessness
- Native Communities Struggle to Identify Buildable Land and Reclaim Traditional Lands
- Low Rates of Homeownership

# Key Takeaways

Consider the following steps to reducing challenges or barriers:

- Incorporate Native/Tribal organizations in relevant processes (provide a seat at the table from the outset)
- Evaluate policies, laws, and local planning processes to ensure inclusivity of Native individuals and communities
- Advocate for/provide sufficient levels of funding to address existing need and support self-determination in addressing that need (in recognition of demonstrated capacity to achieve results)
- Advocate for/provide designated funding sources for urban Native organizations and avenues for direct engagement in and contribution to local and state housing and homelessness programs

# Thank You!



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# Key Takeaways

## **Flatlined Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) Funding and Limited Funding for Infrastructure.**

Funding levels for IHBG have not increased (and have declined by 67.1% when adjusted for inflation) since enactment of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA) in 1996, and Indian Health Service (IHS) funding for the development of water/sewer infrastructure is too restrictive to support new unit development. Limited IHBG funding has resulted in a lack of adequate new housing.

**Limited Access To State Funding And Restrictions Attached to Federal Funding.** Washington currently has no set-asides for Native housing projects, and most Tribes are largely forced to rely on federal funds. Minimum rent requirements and other strict compliance issues attached to tax credits and other non-IHBG funding for new housing development prevent many smaller and poorer tribes from pursuing these opportunities.

**Housing Shortage and Poor Housing Unit Condition.** Low household incomes and high local unemployment rates limit housing entity revenue that would support new housing development. A lack of subsidies for the maintenance and operation of units developed following the enactment of NAHASDA, and the overcrowding caused by the shortage of housing units, has left many existing housing units in poor condition.

# Key Takeaways

**Funding Barriers for Urban Providers and Native Hawaiians.** Urban Native housing providers are ineligible for tribal housing programs and funding mechanisms, and can't legally provide access preference to their own community members. Native Hawaiians are not considered tribal members, and therefore are also unable to access tribal funding mechanisms, leaving their Washington communities without necessary social services.

**Significant Homelessness.** While Native individuals experience homelessness at much higher rates than non-Native populations in Washington, tribal and Native programs cannot access HUD Continuum of Care funding. Urban Native housing and service providers in Seattle, for example, feel that they need a more substantial role in the City's Navigation Team and need access to more city, county, state and federal funding mechanisms.

**Native Communities Struggle to Identify Buildable Land and Reclaim Traditional Lands.** Tribal communities are increasingly struggling to identify available, buildable land upon which they can develop new housing. Four tribes are still awaiting development of new housing on the Columbia River to replace home sites flooded by dams built by the federal government in the 1950s. Other tribes are relocating housing units away from expanding flood plains and communities from tsunami zones along the Pacific coast.

**Low Rates of Homeownership.** Traditional mortgage lending is less accessible to tribal populations living on trust land, and mainstream lenders underserve Native communities. Available real estate data sources do not incorporate housing on tribal lands nor do they adequately distinguish Native populations in urban areas.