

A report from the  
Montana Missing  
Indigenous Persons  
Task Force:

# Looping in Native Communities

2021 – 2022  
Report to the State-Tribal  
Relations Interim Committee

Montana Department of Justice  
July 1, 2022



## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Background .....	4
Montana Reservations .....	4
Montana Urban Native Americans.....	5
Missing in Montana.....	6
Graph 1: Location of Reports.....	6
Graph 2: Rate of recovering and locating missing Indigenous People .....	7
Montana Legislation.....	7
Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force .....	8
Table 1: Montana MMIP Task Force Members.....	8
Task Force Activities .....	9
Dates, Locations, and Topics of MMIP Task Force Meetings.....	9
Figure 1: Helena Indian Alliance Youth Dancer - June 2021 .....	9
Improving Interagency and Jurisdictional Cooperation.....	11
Figure 2: MMIP Task Force Presiding Officer Ellie Bundy Keynote at the National Missing and Unidentified Persons Conference - April 2022 .....	11
Looping in Native Communities Grant Program.....	12
Figure 3: MMIPMT.com reporting portal.....	12
Data Analysis for 2021 .....	14
Graph 3: Gender of missing Indigenous people.....	14
Graph 4: Missing Indigenous Persons Analysis by Age .....	14
Graph 5: Length of time missing.....	15
Graph 6: Cases by month reported.....	15
MMIP Task Force Recommendations to the State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee .....	16

**This report is dedicated to the Indigenous people of Montana who have gone missing.  
May we find ways to improve response and bring loved ones home.**



Attorney General Austin Knudsen with members of the Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force  
Helena Strategic Planning session, June 23 & 24, 2021  
Left to Right: Austin Knudsen, Patt Iron Cloud Runs Through,  
Iris Kill Eagle, Jody LaMere, Paula Carter, Mark Pollock,  
Jared Cobell, Ellie Bundy, Valerie Falls Down

*The Montana Attorney General and staff at the Montana Department of Justice are grateful to the Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force members for their dedication.*

*Their work is the hallmark of collaboration and communication needed to improve response to missing Indigenous persons in Montana.*

## Executive Summary

The Montana State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee began studying the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women issue in 2017 and successfully presented bills to the state legislature in the 2019 and 2021 Legislative Sessions. The Montana Missing Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Task Force was initially appointed and began their work in 2019 and reported to State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee (STRC) in September, 2020. Attorney General Knudsen re-appointed the task force members in June, 2021. This report provides an overview of the 2021 and 2022 work of the Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force and the Montana Department of Justice (DOJ) staff that support them.

The passage of House Bill 98 and Senate Bill 4 in 2021 continued the MMIP Task Force and the Looping in Native Communities (LINC) grant program to June 30, 2023 which resulted in the following activities:

- Re-appointment of the MMIP Task Force in June 2021
- MMIP Task Force meetings held between June 2021 and May 2022
- Adoption of the MMIP Task Force mission, vision and goals
- Collaboration with the DOJ Missing Persons Specialist
- Identification of barriers to reporting and responding to missing persons
- In-depth discussion of data about missing youth
- Recommendation of strategies to improve response
- Dissemination of the Looping in Native Communities reporting portal
- Looping in Native Communities grant application and awards
- Analysis of missing persons data from 2017-2020
- Report of findings and recommendations to the Committee by July 1, 2022

## Background

Montana covers 145,552 square miles, with a 2022 estimated population of 1.14 million people.<sup>1</sup> There are eight federally recognized tribes and the reservations include some of the largest in the United States. American Indians are 6.7% of Montana's total population.

### Montana Reservations

- The Crow Reservation is home to the Crow Tribe of Indians in southeastern Montana. The tribe has almost 3.5 million acres, making it the largest in Montana. The reservation is located near Billings.
  - Tribal members living on or near the Crow Reservation 10,000
  - Tribal members living off the Crow Reservation 5,000
  - Total number of enrolled Tribal Members 14,500\*\* (not all members have enrolled)
  - Communities include Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, Pryor, Wyola, St. Xavier
  - The reservation lies within the counties of Big Horn, Yellowstone, and Treasure
- The Fort Peck Indian Reservation has just over 2.0 million acres spreading across four counties. The Sioux and the Assiniboine bands live in the extreme northeast corner of the state on tribal land that is 110 miles long and 40 miles wide.
  - Enrolled Sioux Members living on or near the Fort Peck Reservation 8,814
  - Enrolled Assiniboine Members on or near the Fort Peck Reservation 4,668
  - Total number of enrolled Tribal Members 13,382
  - Another 1,000 members of other tribes live on Fort Peck Reservation
  - Communities include Wolf Point, Poplar, Frazer, Oswego, Brockton, Riverside and Ft. Kipp
  - The reservation lies within the counties of Roosevelt, Daniels, Sheridan, and Valley
- The Blackfeet Indian Reservation, located in northwestern Montana, is home to members of the Blackfeet Nation, one of the 10 largest tribes in the United States. The reservation spans 1.5 million acres.
  - Enrolled Members living on or near the Blackfeet Reservation 9,585
  - Enrolled Members living off the Blackfeet Reservation 7,665
  - Total number of enrolled Tribal Members 17,250
  - Communities include Browning, East Glacier, Babb, St. Mary, Starr School, Heart Butte, and Seville
  - The reservation lies within the counties of Glacier and Pondera
- The Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation is located in southeastern Montana and is 444,000 acres/690 square miles in size.

---

<sup>1</sup> Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.

- Enrolled Members living on or near the Northern Cheyenne Reservation 4,939
- Enrolled Members living off the Northern Cheyenne Reservation 5,901
- Total number of enrolled Tribal Members 10,840
- Communities include Busby, Lame Deer, Ashland, Birney, and Muddy
- The reservation lies within the counties of Big Horn and Rosebud
- The Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation is 171 square miles and is located in north central Montana.
  - Enrolled Tribal Members living on or near the Rocky Boy's Reservation 3,750
  - Total number of residents 5,000
  - The community is Rocky Boy's Agency. The nearest town to the reservation is Box Elder.
  - The reservation lies within the counties of Hill and Choteau
- The Fort Belknap Reservation is located in north central Montana and is home to the Assiniboine (Nakoda) and the Gros Ventre (A'aninin) tribes. The reservation covers just over 1,000 square miles and 697,000 acres.
  - Enrolled Members living on or near the Fort Belknap Reservation 4,546
  - Enrolled Members living off the Fort Belknap Reservation 2,826
  - Total number of enrolled Tribal Members 7,402
  - Communities include Lodge Pole, Hays, Fort Belknap Agency
  - The reservation lies within the counties of Blaine and Phillips
- The Flathead Reservation is home to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT). The reservation in northwest Montana is over 1.3 million acres in size.
  - Enrolled Members living on or near the Flathead Reservation 5,000
  - Enrolled Members living off the Flathead Reservation 2,920
  - Total number of enrolled Tribal Members 7,920
  - Communities include Ronan, Pablo, Arlee, St. Ignatius, Charlo, and Ravalli, Big Arm, Hot Springs, Polson, Elmo, Dixon.
  - The reservation lies within the counties of Lake, Sanders, Missoula, and Flathead
- The Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians is newly recognized by the federal government (2019) and owns 3 acres of land near Great Falls, Montana.
  - Enrolled Members living throughout Montana and Canada 6,400
  - Great Falls is located in Cascade County

### Montana Urban Native Americans

Across the United States, according to the 2010 Census, almost 78% of American Indian and Alaska Natives lived outside of American Indian and Alaska Native areas.<sup>2</sup> In Montana, the majority live on-reservation though many live in Missoula, Billings, Great Falls, Butte, Helena and smaller communities throughout the state. The Montana Office of Public Instruction report also included the following information: In 2015, approximately 47% of American Indians in

---

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, January 25, 2012, [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\\_census/cb12-cn06.html](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-cn06.html)

Montana lived off the reservation. As found in the 2020 Census, Montana’s population is 1,104,271 people and 6.7% are Montana American Indian/Alaskan Natives (AI/AN) population (alone or in combination with other races).

### Missing in Montana

Although Indigenous people make up 6.7% of the overall state population, the DOJ Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse data confirms they are four times more likely to go missing in Montana. In 2021, Montana law enforcement entered 2,114 missing persons cases into the FBI’s National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database of missing persons. Thirty percent, or 650, of the 2021 missing person cases were identified as Indigenous Persons; of those 457 were unique entries and 193 were reports of the same individual missing at least twice during 2021. Over 80% of the reports were youth under the age of 18. The *Location of Reports* graph below, represents the number of cases entered in the missing person database because a missing person’s report was made to a law enforcement agency in 2021. These cases do not represent active cases but includes people that were reported multiple times as missing over the year. The missing Indigenous person clearance rate in 2021 was 95% and by May 30, 2022 eight, or 1%, of the 2021 cases were still open as missing.

Graph 1: Location of Reports



Response programs available through the Montana DOJ include:

1. Criminal Justice Information Network (CJIN) - the state’s link to the FBI’s National Crime Information Center
2. Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse (MMPC) - the database of missing persons in Montana

3. Montana Missing Person System (MMPS) - a searchable website providing information on Montana's missing persons
4. AMBER Alert - a national public alert system that provides notification of the abduction of a child under life-threatening circumstances
5. MEPA – Missing Endangered Persons Advisory: a statewide alert system that provides notification of a missing person in danger
6. DOJ Office of the Child and Family Ombudsman (OCFO) - an entity to which the state Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), Child and Family Services Division (CFSD) is required to report missing children who receive services through CFSD.

Graph 2: Rate of recovering and locating missing Indigenous People



### Montana Legislation

The state of Montana began focusing on missing and murdered Indigenous women during the 2017-2018 legislative interim when the State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee requested information on human trafficking, violence against women, and missing persons. In 2020, the second year of MMIP Task Force work, the members reported to the State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee. Based on those recommendations the committee drafted bills for consideration at the 2021 Legislative Session.

The following committee bills were passed at the end of the 2021 session:

- ❖ House Bill (HB) 98 – Extended the MMIP Task Force to June 30, 2023. Reauthorized the Looping in Native Communities Grant program and required specific information for the 2022 report.
- ❖ House Bill 35 – Established the Missing Indigenous Persons Review Commission in the Montana Department of Justice.
- ❖ Senate Bill 4 - Also extended the MMIP Task Force to June 30, 2023 and required a focus on identifying causes for missing indigenous people.



The passage of these bills by the Montana Legislature is a testament to the work of Montana Department of Justice and lawmakers’ efforts to build on missing and murdered Indigenous persons awareness and the need to address these issues in native communities and statewide.

## Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force

Legislation required a representative from each of the state’s eight federally recognized tribes, a representative from the Attorney General’s Office, a representative from the Montana Department of Justice who has expertise in the subject of missing persons, and the Montana Highway Patrol. In 2019, the Task Force identified the need to include representatives from the United States Attorney General’s Office (Montana District) and Indian Health Services. The Task Force met throughout the following year to discuss the many issues that arise when community members go missing.

**Table 1: Montana MMIP Task Force Members**

Tribe or Agency	MMIP Task Force Member
<b>Blackfeet Nation</b>	<b>Mark Pollock, Councilman</b>
<b>Confederated Salish &amp; Kootenai Tribes</b>	<b>LeEllen “Ellie” Bundy McLeod, Councilwoman MMIP Presiding Officer</b>
<b>Crow Nation</b>	<b>Valerie Falls Down</b>
<b>Fort Belknap Reservation</b>	<b>Tina Bierle</b>
<b>Fort Peck Assiniboine &amp; Sioux Tribes</b>	<b>Patt Iron Cloud Runs Through, Councilwoman Stacie FourStar, Tribal Judge</b>
<b>Little Shell Chippewa Tribe</b>	<b>Iris Kill Eagle, Councilwoman</b>
<b>Northern Cheyenne Tribe</b>	<b>Theresa Small</b>
<b>Rocky Boy</b>	<b>Jody LaMere</b>
<b>Montana Highway Patrol</b>	<b>Derek Werner, Captain MHP Terrence Melton, alternate MHP</b>
<b>U.S. Attorney’s Office, MT District</b>	<b>Jared Cobell, Tribal Liaison Coordinator</b>
<b>Indian Health Services</b>	<b>Dr. Alan Ostby, Psychologist Dr. Paula Carter, alternate member</b>
<b>Montana Department of Justice</b>	<b>Brian Frost, Missing Persons Specialist</b>

## Task Force Activities

### Dates, Locations, and Topics of MMIP Task Force Meetings

Ms. Bundy, MMIP Task Force Presiding Officer, coordinated with the Montana Department of Justice Special Services Bureau Chief and the Missing Persons Specialist to schedule virtual and in-person meetings of the MMIP Task Force in 2021 and 2022. Meetings were frequent throughout the 2021 Legislative Session and each agenda included a report on Missing Indigenous Persons from the Montana Department of Justice Missing Persons Specialist.

- January 19, 2021 - Virtual Task Force Meeting
- February 17, 2021 - Virtual Task Force Meeting
- March 17, 2021 - Virtual Task Force Meeting
- April 14, 2021 - Virtual Task Force Meeting
- May 12, 2021 - Virtual Task Force Meeting
- June 23 & 24, 2021 – Helena in-person - Task Force Meeting
- August 12, 2021 – Billings in-person - Task Force Meeting
- March 2, 2022 – Virtual Task Force Meeting
- May 2, 2022 – Great Falls in-person - Task Force Meeting

The meetings were posted in advance in accordance with the state of Montana public meeting laws and allowed for public comment.

By law, the MMIP Task Force is directed to address the following:

- Administer the LINC grant program;
- Identify jurisdictional barriers between federal, state, local, tribal and community law enforcement entities;
- Work to identify causes that contribute to missing indigenous persons;
- Work to identify strategies to improve interagency cooperation and collaboration

The presiding officer planned meeting agendas specific to the responsibilities of the Task Force. Topics covered from June, 2021 to May, 2022 include:

- LINC Grant applications, awards and LINC mmipmt.com site reporting portal status
- Facilitated sessions to develop MMIP Task Force Vision, Mission and Goals
- Jurisdictional barrier presentation and discussion with expert Maylinn Smith
- Implementation of the Tribal Community Response Plans (TCRP)
- Resources for family members of missing persons such as the *Snowbird Fund*



Figure 1: Helena Indian Alliance Youth Dancer - June 2021

- Exploring causes for the high number of missing youths in discussions with the *Tumbleweed Runaway Program* in Billings, and the *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children*
- Facilitated session to review governing law 44-2-411 MCA and 44-2-412 MCA
- Developing formal recommendations to the STRC

The MMIP Task Force adopted a mission, vision and set 3 goals at facilitated work sessions in June and August, 2021.

### **Mission:**

To significantly reduce the numbers of Montana’s missing Indigenous persons by identifying barriers, strategies, and root causes with the utilization of education, technology, and specific recommendations to the legislature, to help heal and connect families.

### **Vision:**

*What our communities will look like 10 years in the future:* Healthy Families, Breaking the Cycle of Trauma, and Mending the Circle.

### **Goals:**

- 1) To Improve Reporting
- 2) To Improve Tribal Community Emergency Response
- 3) To Empower and Engage Youth

## Improving Interagency and Jurisdictional Cooperation

In 2019, the *Federal Operation Lady Justice* program placed MMIP Coordinators in eleven state United States Attorney's Offices (USAO) including Montana. *Operation Lady Justice* also developed and provided a template for Tribal Community Response Plans, a process coordinated in Montana by Ernie Weyand, a former FBI agent with extensive experience of the complexities of the law enforcement jurisdictions that respond to reports of missing persons on tribal lands.



Mr. Weyand took the lead working with Montana's Tribal Nations to develop the TCRPs and Montana was a national pilot project site. The TCRP template is a four-pronged approach to developing formal coordination between tribal agencies and local tribal programs in cases of missing indigenous persons.

Figure 2: MMIP Task Force Presiding Officer Ellie Bundy Keynote at the National Missing and Unidentified Persons Conference - April 2022

TCRP plans include the following:

- Law Enforcement Guidelines
- Victim Services Guidelines
- Media and Public Relations Guidelines
- Community Outreach Guidelines

The CS&KT worked with Mr. Weyand, the USAO, DOJ, Division of Criminal Investigation, CSKT law enforcement and victims services providers to complete the tribal TCRP in 2020. The Rocky Boy tribal leadership was scheduled to begin TCRP planning when the *Federal Operation Lady Justice Program* was terminated in the Fall of 2021.

The MMIP Task Force reviewed the TCRP template and presiding officer, Ellie Bundy, presented the CSKT planning process and outcomes at the April, 2021 meeting. Subsequent discussions of jurisdictional barriers included a presentation at the August, 2021 meeting by, Maylinn Smith, an expert on the criminal justice jurisdictions related to Montana's tribal communities and Ft. Peck Tribal Judge Stacie FourStar spoke with the members about the cross-jurisdictional agreements adopted by the Assiniboine Sioux Tribes.

The Task Force focus revealed two consistent factors of jurisdictional issues:

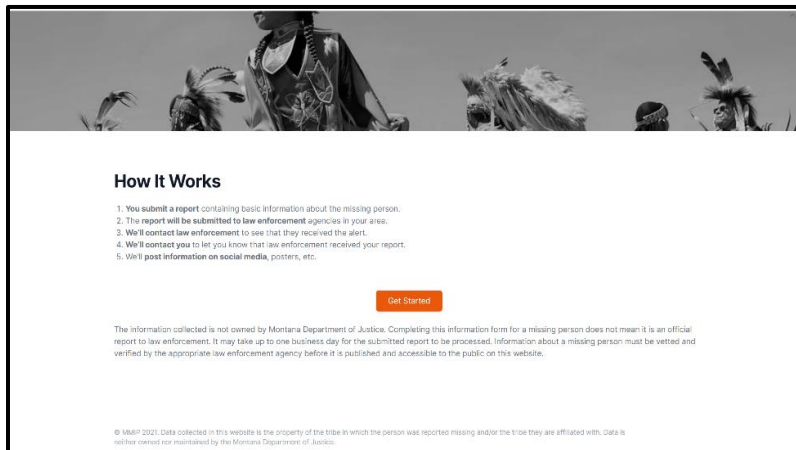
- The complexities of federal, state, county, municipal and tribal law enforcement jurisdictions and each agency’s mandate for missing persons cases are confusing to the public, tribal communities and families of missing persons.
- The TCRP process is a positive solution to improving the jurisdictional barriers in missing persons cases, and cross-jurisdictional agreements on reservations increase response times and resource allocation in missing persons cases.

Although not a formal recommendation, the MMIP Task Force membership agreed that Montana tribal governments would benefit by participating in the TCRP process. The Task Force also suggests that each tribal nation consider developing cross-jurisdictional agreements for agencies designated to missing persons investigations on their lands.

## Looping in Native Communities Grant Program

Legislation in 2021 reauthorized the LINC Grant Program to create a network in support of efforts by Montana tribes to identify, report, and find Native American persons who are missing. The grant program is administered by the MMIP Task Force.

Figure 3: MMIPMT.com reporting portal



The initial LINC grant of \$25,000 was awarded to the Blackfeet Community College in the winter of 2020. The college, working closely with Whitefish company Dillon Software, Inc. who donated their time, completed the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Montana (MIPMT) website by grant closure on June 30, 2021. AT&T donated additional funds to the effort which supported outreach and education about the reporting site to all the tribes located in Montana.

At the writing of this report, the <https://www.mmipmt.com/> site is active for Blackfeet, Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes and Ft. Belknap Indian Community. When a report is entered on the site then the local tribal law enforcement agency receives an electronic alert.

Participating tribes have designated a LINC Coordinator who will confirm with law enforcement and with the reporting party that law enforcement received the report and all required notifications are complete. Although the MMIPMT reporting portal is an important resource for tribal communities to increase reports of missing indigenous persons it is vital to know that these reports are not equivalent to a 911 call to local law enforcement. To date, the MMIPMT portal has received a total of 8 unique individual reports and 6 of those missing individuals reported on the site have been located.

House Bill 98 reauthorized the LINC Grant program and the MMIP Task Force approved small, noncompetitive grants to be awarded to one tribal entity from each Montana reservation. The purpose of the grants awarded to qualifying tribal entities is to provide matching funds for some or all the costs required for the tribal entity to set up and maintain access to the LINC Network. In-kind or hard cash resources from each tribe must be utilized to receive the state match. Each tribal entity may apply for up to \$6,250 in one-time only matching funds from the Montana Department of Justice.

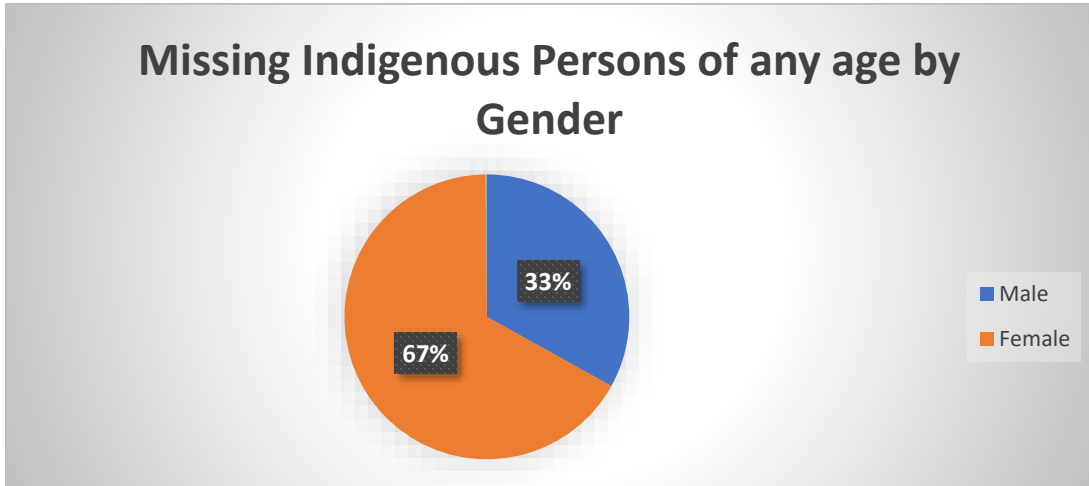
- Total funding to be awarded from the Montana DOJ is \$50,000 in equal grants of \$6,250 to each of the eight Tribal nations.
- Each tribe is eligible for a \$6,250 matching grant from Montana DOJ to match up to \$6,250 from a tribal entity for a total of \$12,500 for a LINC program.
- Awards are not based on reimbursement. Tribal entities will receive the grant funds upon application approval by the Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force.

Applications from Blackfeet, CSKT, and the Ft. Belknap and Ft. Peck were received and approved in round 1 of the solicitation. Round 2, which prioritized funds for Crow, Little Shell, Northern Cheyenne, and Rocky Boy tribes is currently open and closes on July 1, 2022.

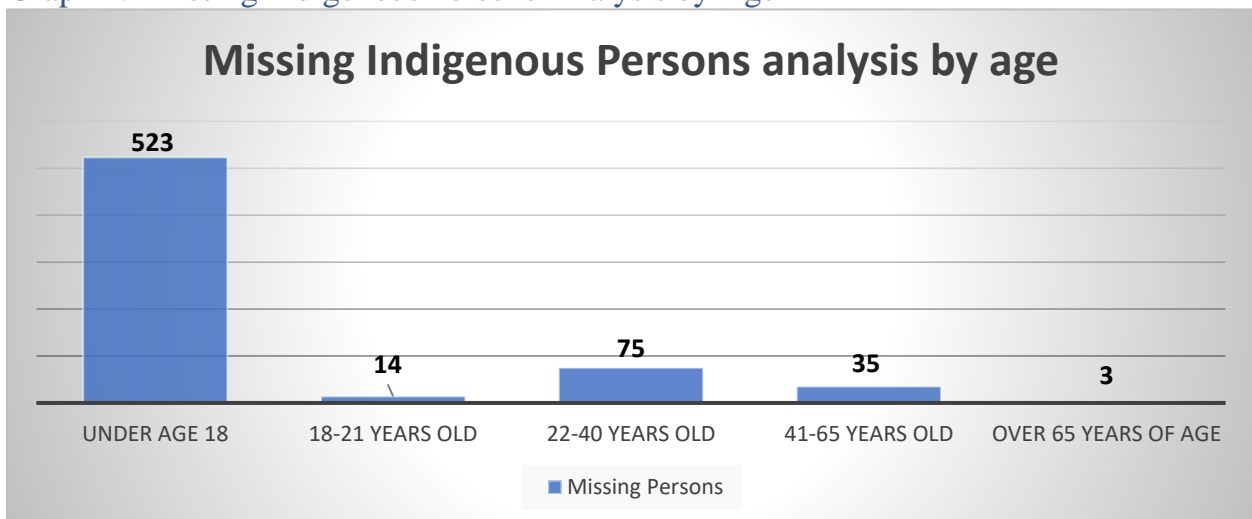
## Data Analysis for 2021

The Montana Department of Justice Missing Persons Specialist is a member of the MMIP Task Force and offers regular reports of data about missing Indigenous Persons. The following graphs provide the 2021 information required for this report. The data is from the Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse.

Graph 3: Gender of missing Indigenous people



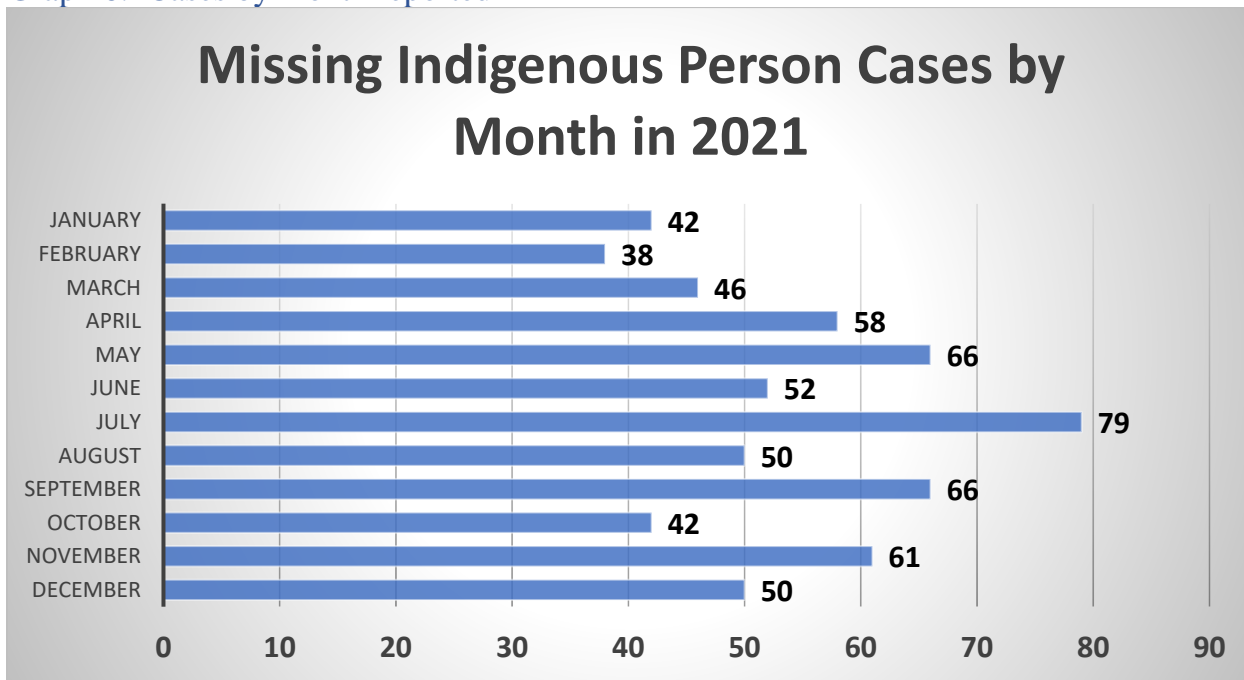
Graph 4: Missing Indigenous Persons Analysis by Age



Graph 5: Length of time missing



Graph 6: Cases by month reported





## MMIP Task Force Recommendations to the State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee

At an in-person meeting in Great Falls, MT on May 2, 2022, the Task Force formally adopted the following 5 recommendations to be submitted to the STRC. In a facilitated discussion, the members reviewed 44-2-411 MCA and 44-2-412 MCA to determine the status of the group's responsibilities.

Recommendation #1: The 2023 Legislature reauthorize both the MMIP Task Force and LINC funds for a minimum of 2 years. Reauthorized LINC funds would continue to be administered by the MMIP Task Force.

Rationale #1: The problem of missing Indigenous persons continues. The Task Force work is valuable and has had an impact on awareness. The pandemic interrupted outreach and education in tribal communities and urban Indian communities. The MMIPMT portal for reporting missing Indigenous person is developed, and currently 3 tribes are active and officially connected to the portal. The Task Force has bridged a gap and needs to continue and assure that the [mmipmt.com](http://mmipmt.com) site is sustainable. The Task Force would like the time to continue their oversight of both the LINC funds and assure that all tribes have the opportunity to access the site.

Recommendation #2: The MMIP Task Force authority be broadened to allow formal recommendations to other state and federal agencies.

Rationale #2: The issue of missing Indigenous persons is complex and the stakeholders are numerous. It is clear from the data that additional state agencies need information and engagement. For example, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) is an important resource for addressing missing youth as are the Montana Judicial Branch Youth Courts.

Recommendation #3: A Legislative Resolution to the Federal Government should be passed to ask that law enforcement on all reservations be funded.

Rationale #3: Article 1 Part 1 of the Montana Constitution provides that the Federal Government retains jurisdiction of all tribal lands which includes adequate provision of funds for law enforcement on those lands. The MMIP Task Force invites each of the 8 tribal councils to draft and send resolutions to the federal government to ask for law enforcement funding on tribal lands.

Recommendation #4: A Legislative Study on the issue of Montana's missing youth with an emphasis on missing Indigenous youth be initiated in the 2024/2025 State Biennium.

Rationale #4: Indigenous men and women in Montana go missing at a rate 4 times higher than non-Indigenous persons; A DOJ data analysis confirms that 80% of all missing people in Montana are youth under age 18 and that figure is consistent in both tribal communities and urban Indian populations.

Recommendation #5: A Missing Persons Response Team training program be established to fund opportunities for training and equipping community based Missing Persons Response Teams.

Rationale #5: The MMIP Task Force learned from community meetings, public testimony, and contact with families of missing Indigenous persons that there is a significant gap in both training and equipment for search teams in tribal communities.

# The Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force and Looping in Native Communities

*Legislative Report to the State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee*  
was approved for release by the Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force  
June 30, 2022

