

**Featured
Article**

*Oneida Nation:
Bridging Systems*



**NICWA
NEWS**

Quarterly Newsletter • Summer 2026

National Indian Child Welfare Association

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NICWA is a national, Native-led nonprofit uniting Tribal Nations, individuals, and organizations to protect Native children and families. Together with our partners, board, and staff, we work to keep Native children connected to their families, communities, and cultures.

OUR MISSION

NICWA protects the safety, health, and cultural identity of all Native children and families—today and for future generations—by upholding culturally based services, community strength, and Tribal sovereignty.

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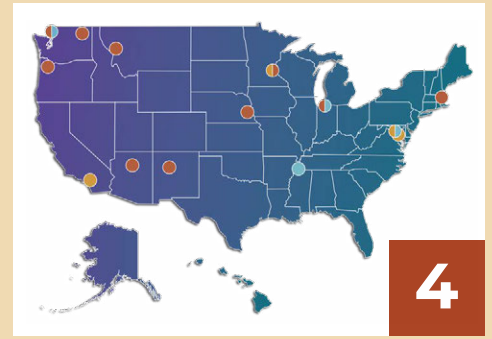
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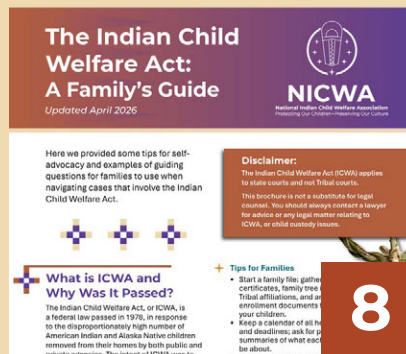
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Scan or click the QR code for a list of all links featured in NICWA News articles.

NICWA News is the quarterly newsletter for members and donors of the National Indian Child Welfare Association. Membership is available in multiple levels starting at \$45. For reprint requests, additional copies, or other information, contact us at info@nicwa.org.

Message from the Executive Director

Dear NICWA Members, Sponsors, Donors, and Friends,

Welcome to the Summer issue of *NICWA News*. The long, warm days give us time for this cycle of our traditional practices that sustain us: fishing, harvesting and gathering foods and medicines, and hunting. Some of us visit important places where our ancestors did these very same tasks, perhaps spending time on the water, and some of us go to culture camps, where we hear our languages and learn more about our ways of life. We may sit around the fire and tell stories, or turn our attention to crafts, games, or sports. Ceremonial and cultural gatherings take place, and we may travel to be with others and express our traditions and cultural pride. Intergenerational relationships are the thread that pulls through all of these activities. Through these gatherings, as well as family visits and vacations, we tend to and nurture our relationships.

At NICWA, we're reflecting on our relationships and the care they need to grow and evolve especially as we wrap up some projects, like our Bridging Systems technical assistance with the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin to better coordinate services for relative caregivers. We're also starting some new projects, like supporting the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi with technical assistance, and planning for the 45th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference, which will be in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in April 2027, by selecting our conference artwork and writing the event theme.

During our summer board meeting, our deeply rooted community leaders from across the country traveled to NICWA's home in Portland, Oregon, to work in-person together for this two-day gathering. Beyond directing our work, board members shared the emerging child and family trends, needs, and successes they are seeing in their own communities, and reviewed our strategic plan. They also helped us bead gifts for communities and leaders we encounter in our work.

As you'll read in this issue of *NICWA News*, throughout the seasonal cycle, our public policy and advocacy work is a constant. The Trump Administration continues to move quickly to advance its priorities, and HHS's Administration for Children and Families is no exception. You can keep track of all of our administrative and legislative work through the Advocacy Center on our website. Our team not only summarizes new developments, but we provide links and templates to make it easier for you to use your voice and position to influence key decision-makers. If you haven't already signed up for these email alerts, we invite you to customize your own tracker on the issues you care most about to stand with us, relentlessly fighting for Native children and families.

Our collective work is not only about responding to today's challenges, but also about strengthening connections and relationships that will carry our children into the future. There's so much good work that you can be a part of, and we thank you for being a part of that journey with us.

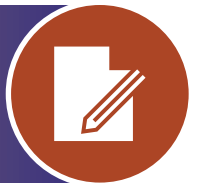
With gratitude for your partnership,

Sarah L. Kastelic

Sarah L. Kastelic, PhD, MSW
(Alutiiq)



"Intergenerational relationships are the thread that pulls through all of these activities."



New Legislation Would Expand Tribal Access to Federal Human Services Funding—Here's What You Can Do

In the spring of 2026, Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) spearheaded the introduction of two bills to expand Tribal access to federal human services funding—investments that would directly strengthen the safety and well-being of Native children, support Tribal sovereignty, and ensure Tribal communities have the resources they need to protect their families. Rooted in the recommendations provided by [The Way Forward Report](#), Senator Murkowski has illustrated her commitment to Native communities by incorporating these recommendations into [draft legislation](#) and now the introduction of the first set of bills focused on the child welfare provisions in Title I of the draft legislation.

On March 24, 2026, Senators Lisa Murkowski and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), alongside Representative Adelita Grijalva (D-AZ), reintroduced the American Indian and Alaska Native Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (AI/AN CAPTA). These bipartisan and bicameral bills ([S. 4179](#) and [H.R. 8048](#)) would amend the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (P.L. 93-247) to increase the amount of funding available for Tribal Nations to support child abuse and neglect prevention activities, and ensure Tribes receive equitable distribution of federal prevention grants. AI/AN CAPTA would create a separate Tribal set-aside for child abuse prevention funding and increase the set-aside to five percent—supporting sustained investment in Tribal prevention programming and culturally relevant prevention strategies, developed by Tribal Nations and Tribal organizations.

On May 21, 2026, Senators Lisa Murkowski and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) introduced the Promoting Strong Native Families and Children Act ([S. 4638](#)). This legislation would (1) **expand Tribal access to federal human services funding by \$94 million**, including direct access to the Social Services Block Grant under Title XX of the Social Security Act

by establishing a five percent Tribal set-aside, (2) ensure grant amounts better reflect the true costs of administration and community needs, (3) strengthen collaboration among states and Tribes when Native children are placed in out-of-home care in state child welfare systems, and (4) support Tribes in effectively meeting program and administrative requirements that align with operational conditions in Tribal communities. S. 4638 would establish greater parity access to federal human services funding for Tribal Nations, ensuring Tribes can continue to provide critical, life-saving services that protect their children, elders, victims of family violence, and individuals with disabilities from harm—services tailored to local community needs and solutions only Tribal Nations can deliver.

NICWA urges Tribal Nations, Tribal organizations, and advocates for Native children and families to contact their senators and representatives—calling on them to sign on to these bills as co-sponsors, and to support their passage by the full Senate and House. **You can take action by**

- [Visiting NICWA's Advocacy Center](#) to learn more about these bills and access sample letters that Tribal Nations, Tribal organizations, and advocates can use to contact their congressional leaders and encourage them to sign on as co-sponsors.
- [Signing up for policy alerts](#) to stay informed and respond quickly to policy issues affecting Native children, families, and Tribal communities. Once subscribed, you'll receive emails about key federal child welfare legislation under consideration in Congress, as well as regulations, appropriations, and other policies that shape the well-being of Native children and families.

Visit our Advocacy Center to receive alerts and take action on key issues!

www.nicwa.org/take-action/

The Administration Is Moving Quickly to Implement Its Deregulatory Agenda—Your Engagement Matters

Federal agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), have begun implementing Executive Order 14192 [Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation](#) and the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) directive on [Streamlining the Review of Deregulatory Actions](#)—together accelerating efforts to roll back existing regulations. The OMB memo asserts that deregulatory actions need not prompt formal government-to-government consultation, a notable departure from long-standing practice in the regulatory process. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within HHS has issued proposed changes across major human services programs—including Family Violence Prevention and Services ([91 FR 17239](#)), Family Assistance Programs ([91 FR 30538](#)), and programs within the Administration for Native Americans ([91 FR 36756](#))—along with new information collection notices for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program ([91 FR 27351](#)) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS; [91 FR 15622](#)). NICWA's comments on the AFCARS request can be found [here](#). At the same time, OMB is advancing a major overhaul of the Uniform Guidance ([91 FR 32198](#)), signaling broad federal shifts in how grants, cooperative agreements, and other awards are administered for Tribal Nations, states, local governments, nonprofits, and other grantees. NICWA's comments on the OMB rule can be found [here](#).

Across these Notices of Proposed Rulemaking, NICWA has observed a few trends in deregulation at HHS: (1) Notices propose to remove regulatory provisions that may be deemed by the agency to be duplicative, outdated, or better incorporated into Notices of Funding Opportunity, (2) Notices assert that Tribal consultation is not required in deregulation, citing the [OMB memo](#) as justification, (3) Notices offer short public comment periods, usually 30-45 days, and don't notify Tribes of proposed changes even after they are published, and (4) Proposed changes seek to replace program purposes to better reflect the Administrations priorities. These shifts raise concern that regulatory safeguards could be pared back, Tribal participation in the rulemaking process minimized, and core elements of federal human services programs reshaped without Tribal consultation. Taken together, these actions signal a broader shift in how HHS and related agencies are redefining program governance. The cumulative effect is a quieter but consequential reorientation of federal policy that could reduce transparency, sideline Tribal Nations, and concentrate decision-making authority within federal agencies.

You can help ensure Native children, families, and Tribal communities are protected by taking these key actions.

- **Submit public comments** on proposed regulatory changes and share them with other Tribes and Native organizations.
- **Raise concerns at federal agency Tribal advisory committee meetings** so that Tribal priorities are heard early in the process.
- **Share your concerns with state human service leaders** to influence decisions at the state level.
- **Become a NICWA member** to receive updates, resources, and opportunities to strengthen your advocacy.
- **Donate today** to support NICWA's policy advocacy activities. Your generosity helps us protect the safety, health, and cultural identity of all Native children, ensuring they thrive within their families and communities for generations to come.



Welcome New Member to the NICWA Team:

Matt Bartolotti

Matt Bartolotti is a seasoned nonprofit and public sector leader with more than 20 years of experience advancing community well-being and equity. He earned his Master of Social Work from Syracuse University in 1997 and has built his career leading systems-level change in behavioral health, afterschool, and human services.

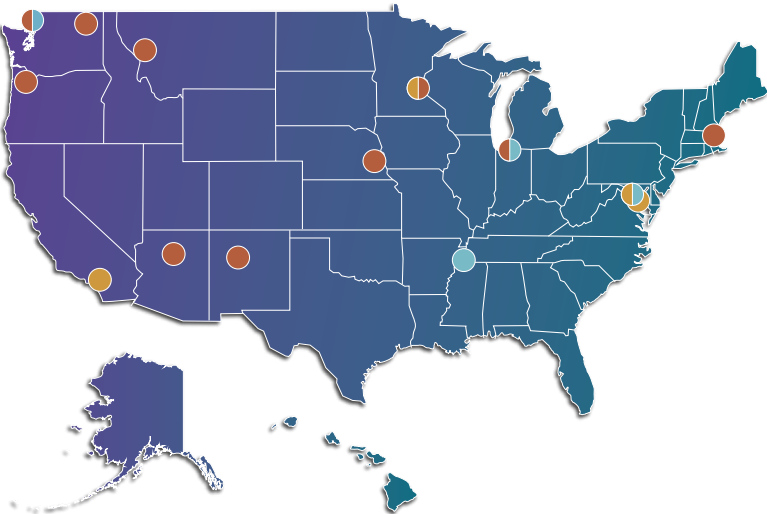
Prior to joining the NICWA on May 1, 2026, Matt served as chief strategy officer and deputy chief executive officer at Metropolitan Family Service in Portland, Oregon. In this role, he partnered with public agencies, community organizations, and philanthropic leaders to design and implement data-informed strategies supporting families and strengthening communities statewide.

Earlier in his career, Matt held leadership roles at Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare, where he managed large program portfolios and launched innovative services, and at the Oregon Health Authority, where he contributed to policy development and system improvements in behavioral health. Known for his collaborative leadership style, he brings a practical, equity-centered approach to complex challenges and long-term systems change.

Outside of work, Matt enjoys strategy and tabletop gaming, biking, and hiking, and can often be found walking with his partner and their two labradoodles to their favorite spots in Portland’s Woodstock neighborhood.



Where We’ve Been



● Policy and Government Affairs ● Programs ● Executive Team

NICWA Has a New Home

We've moved down the road to our new office!

Follow us on social media to see a tour of our current space.



Connecting Systems, Strengthening Kinship Families in Tribal Communities

NICWA's Bridging Systems for Kinship Families initiative highlights the knowledge already in Tribal communities, showing that culturally grounded, community-led approaches can strengthen support for relative caregivers. In partnership with the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, this work has grown into a meaningful example of how collaboration rooted in culture can improve outcomes for Native children and families.

At Oneida Nation, sustained collaboration across programs resulted in stronger coordination, increased cultural integration in services, and expanded opportunities for kinship families to connect with one another. By elevating lived experience and centering Native voices, programs evolved to reflect the needs and strengths of families. New efforts, including a Grandparents as Caregivers Support Circle, a summer kinship youth program, and regular family events, created consistent spaces for relationship building and shared learning.



“The support and assistance we have received from NICWA has been hands-on and engaging while encouraging Oneida Family Services to lead the work with a cultural and sovereign lens,” shared Louise Padron, Oneida Nation family services supervisor. Participants have reported stronger connections with staff, increased knowledge of Tribal teachings, and greater awareness of community resources. Caregivers and youth have also built informal networks of support that continue beyond formal programming.

Oneida Nation has purposefully woven traditional teachings throughout their services, shaping how programs are designed and demonstrating that when culture guides services, families experience a deeper sense of belonging and connection. As Padron shared, keeping children connected to their communities helps foster purpose, identity, and resilience while strengthening the cultural knowledge that carries forward to future generations.

The Bridging Systems for Kinship Families initiative highlights the importance of centering Native heritage, building relationships across systems, and allowing flexibility so services can reflect each family's unique strengths. Oneida Nation's work shows what is possible when communities lead their own solutions, with the support of experts at their side.

As we wind down this two-year partnership, our program team is exploring how these lessons can inform future efforts to strengthen support for kinship families in other Tribal communities. While each community's needs and resources are unique, this experience affirms that the knowledge, strength, and solutions to support Native families already exist within communities.





Training Supports Culturally Grounded Responses to Substance Abuse

Substance abuse continues to be one of the leading reasons children and families become involved with the child welfare system. In Tribal and First Nations communities, these challenges are often shaped by complex histories, intergenerational trauma, and ongoing systemic barriers. Working with Substance Abusing Families (WWSAF) in Tribal/First Nations Child Welfare was first developed by NICWA in the 1980s to support child welfare workers and related professionals in responding to these issues in culturally grounded and trauma-informed ways before being updated in more recent years.

Misty Flowers, NICWA's Senior Child Welfare Fellow, led the summer WWSAF training in Portland, Oregon, from June 9–11, 2026. The 26 participants represented a wide range of roles and communities. Attendees included Navajo Nation Head Start Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance Liaisons, peer support specialists, behavioral health therapists, child welfare professionals, and others whose work brings them into direct contact with families affected by substance abuse.

The WWSAF curriculum centers around culture and emphasizes the importance of Tribal languages, values, and traditions as protective factors that strengthen children, families, and communities. During the training, participants explored their own attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and trauma related to substance abuse. They also discussed the impact of substance abuse in Indian Country, practiced approaches for having difficult conversations with families, and examined how professional roles and responsibilities influence decision-making and service delivery. A central part of the curriculum is the Relational Worldview model, a decolonizing framework for child welfare that centers ancestral knowledge to restore the well-being of Native families. Guided with this teaching in mind, participants understand the interconnected effects of substance abuse on individuals, families, relationships, and community systems.

Throughout the three-day session, participants engaged thoughtfully with the material and with one another, creating space for shared learning across professional roles and community contexts. As shared by one attendee, the in-person format was especially meaningful because it allowed for deeper discussion, reflection, and peer learning.



2026 June Training Institute—Portland, OR

Membership Survey

As a membership-based organization, NICWA is built on the belief that it is our members who drive our work and help us continue our advocacy on behalf of Indian Country. With many of our members serving in the field of social work, we know it is evolving to meet the needs of Native children, families, and communities. To track these changes in the child welfare field, NICWA conducted a survey to identify barriers and training needs among Tribal and state child welfare workers and Native communities, and to determine how NICWA's work could address these needs. The survey indicated the most pressing issues or challenges that Native children and families are facing are substance abuse, housing instability, and youth behavioral health needs. The survey also indicated a gap in training on ICWA within state court systems and best practices on Tribal child welfare.

The survey identified that 61.40% of people needed training on ICWA or ICWA advocacy in state court for Tribal Child Welfare Workers, and 53.22% needed training on Tribal Child Welfare practices. The survey indicated the barriers to meeting these learning needs are due to state/county barriers, with 50.60% limiting their abilities to serve Native children and families. 46.43% feel it is due to limited staffing capacity, and 45.83% say it is due to a lack of culturally specific services. The survey was consistent with the written comment portion; many expressed that, due to funding cuts, there has been a lack of resources, personnel, and training for Tribal and state case workers to meet these needs.

With this information, NICWA is committed to continuing to use the data to develop, create, update, and improve the organization's work. By continuing to improve and expand training opportunities, provide virtual and in-person opportunities for social workers to network with other service providers, and elevate culturally based services and resources. By responding to these identified needs, NICWA can better align its work across strategic lanes and continue supporting the workforce serving Native children and families.



Champion for Native Children

The Champion for Native Children Award is NICWA's highest honor, recognizing individuals and organizations making exceptional contributions to the well-being of Indigenous children, families, and communities in the United States or Canada.

Two awards are presented annually: the Champion for Native Children-Individual, awarded to an outstanding individual, and the Champion for Native Children-Organization, awarded to a Tribal Nation or organization demonstrating impactful work.

Nominations are open soon at <https://www.nicwa.org/conference/champion-native-children/> so you can recognize an incredible organization, leader, social worker, case manager, or foster parent in your community who is doing awesome work serving Native children and families.

Submissions are due January 4, 2027.



2026 Organizational Champion for Children



2026 Individual Champion for Children



UPCOMING TRAINING INSTITUTES

September 29–October 1, 2026
Portland, OR

- ✦ Foundations of Tribal Child Welfare Casework Practice
- ✦ Positive Indian Parenting

October 14, 2026
Virtual

- ✦ ICWA Basics—*New Course!*

November 3–5, 2026
Prior Lake, MN

- ✦ Foundations of Tribal Child Welfare Casework Practice
- ✦ Positive Indian Parenting
- ✦ Cross-Cultural Skills

February 2027
Virtual

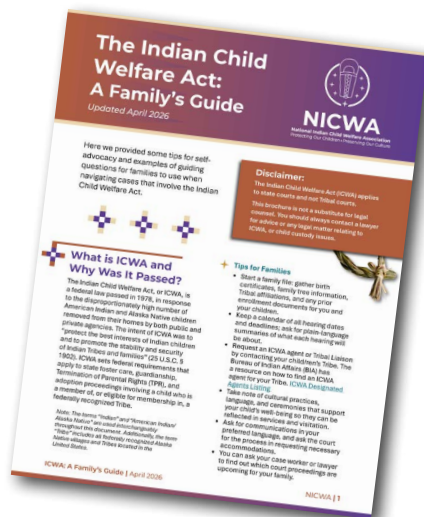
- ✦ Positive Indian Parenting

Resources This Quarter

As a core component of our ongoing work, NICWA creates brief written resources on a variety of topics for families, service providers, and Tribal leaders.

Drawing on our guiding value that our cultures are our strongest tool for helping children and families, NICWA's resources provide practical, culturally based, and timely information to Native families and youth, and those who serve them through our online resource library.

Visit our website to access the Resource Library!



Below, please see a few of the resources we have created over the past few months.

✦ New Resources

- [Tips and Resources for Families Navigating the Child Welfare System](#)
- [Resources for Parents Facing Incarceration, and Their Children, Families, and Caregivers](#)
- [Tips for Engaging and Supporting Native Families Caring for Children](#)
- [ICWA Quick Resource Guide](#)

✦ Updated Resources

- [A Guide to Compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act](#)
- [The Indian Child Welfare Act: A Family's Guide](#)
- [Tracing Native Ancestry: A Guide to Responding to Inquiries](#)
- [When ICWA Doesn't Apply](#)
- [How to Find Free and Low-cost Legal Assistance](#)

www.nicwa.org/resources/



Join Us as a Conference Sponsor

In spring 2027, NICWA will host the 45th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Sponsoring the Protecting Our Children Conference is an opportunity to support building Tribal Nations' capacity to prevent child maltreatment and strengthen Tribal sovereignty—while giving your Tribe or organization the opportunity to reach a unique audience of leaders, advocates, and decision makers from across Indian Country. Sponsorship benefits include complimentary or discounted registrations and exhibitor spots, logo placement, access to NICWA membership, and more. For additional information about sponsorship levels and benefits, please visit www.nicwa.org/conference/#sponsorship or contact April Black, development manager, at april@nicwa.org.





NICWA

National Indian Child Welfare Association
Protecting Our Children • Preserving Our Culture

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NICWA NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter
Summer 2026



CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS NOW OPEN

Presenters are the heart of our conference, recognized as the premiere national gathering dedicated to Tribal child welfare and well-being.



45th Annual

Protecting Our Children Conference

Rooted in Ancestral Wisdom,
Weaving Sacred Connections

Albuquerque, New Mexico
April 4–7, 2027

Apply by
**October 30,
2026**