

# THE NAVAJO NATION



## **The Navajo Nation Victim Assistance Program Navajo Department of Criminal Investigations Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah**

**Founded:** 1989  
**Service area:** 16.2 million acres in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah  
**Population:** 157,716  
**Source of funding:** federal, state, tribal

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## **Program Description**

Established under the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety in 1989, the Navajo Nation Victim Assistance Program (NNVAP) is designed to provide information, support, and assistance to victims of crime on the Navajo Nation. NNVAP responds to major crimes including assault, homicide, and child sexual abuse.

Advocates from NNVAP are available to respond directly to crime scenes. While law enforcement officers are processing the scene, an advocate will comfort the victims, explain what the officers are doing, and prepare the victims for questioning. In the days and weeks following the crime, advocates help the victims cope with issues related to the crime, following up with letters, telephone calls, and/or even a home visit. After a crime, the victim advocates can provide victims with available services, including crisis intervention, emotional support, explanation of court proceedings,

and referrals to other social service agencies. In addition, the program has English-Navajo interpretation services available for victims and their families.

## **Geographic Isolation**

Geographically, the Navajo Nation is the largest Indian reservation in the United States, stretching into portions of three states—Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Due to the large size of the reservation, the five program advocates must travel long distances to provide services to the many victims in need of support. Transportation is one of the biggest challenges for the program. At certain times of the year, many roads on the reservation are impassable. The advocates hope to acquire four-wheel drive vehicles in the future so they can reach more victims.

NNVAP services include visiting victims in the hospital, transporting them to federal and tribal

court on and off the reservation, and assisting victims in applying for temporary restraining orders. The long distances that must be traveled to provide these services are a challenge for the small staff. Recruiting volunteers is critical to avoid staff burnout and increase the number of victims who can access services. NNVAP provides training to all its volunteers. Training includes crisis intervention, court-related services, administrative duties, and community education.

NNVAP staff give presentations to the community, service providers, schools, and even local businesses. These presentations explain the criminal justice system, victimology, victimization, and victim compensation. They have helped NNVAP to open people's eyes and to let them know what the program does. Awareness is critical.

## Financial Assistance

The victim compensation component is extremely important to victims; NNVAP helps victims understand the process they must go through to receive this compensation. NNVAP advocates also work closely with state compensation offices to make the process easier for Navajo Nation citizens. Each state system has different policies and procedures that govern the particular victim compensation program. NNVAP provides information to victims about the state's victim compensation program and assists victims of violent crime in completing applications. The types of reparations victims can seek include health-related expenses (for medical, dental, and mental health care) and costs of funerals, lost wages, eye-wear, and, particularly important for NNVAP, Native healing ceremonies.

Not all states provide compensation for traditional healing ceremonies for victims, but Arizona and New Mexico do include medicine people as allowable recipients of victim assistance. Apache County in Arizona was the first in the United States to submit a compensation application that identified these healing costs specifically.

## Keys to Success

- ◆ Identify transportation needs for rural communities and recruit volunteers from different regions of the reservation to assist with program objectives.
- ◆ Provide ongoing training to different agencies to recruit volunteers.
- ◆ Identify financial resources that can be used to support traditional healing practices for victims of crime.

## Quotes

*Our staff and volunteers are here to provide information, support, and assistance to victims of violent crime.*

—Christine J. Butler  
Victim Advocate

*The Navajo Nation Victim Assistance Program*