



Wyoming Homicides and Missing Persons

*An Update for the Wyoming Legislature
Select Committee on Tribal Relations*

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This publication was produced for the Wyoming Attorney General's Office, Division of Victim Services to support the Governor's Task Force on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons.

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Introduction

Since 2019, the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC) has worked closely with the Wyoming Division of Victim Services (DVS), the Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI), and the Governor’s task force on missing and murdered Indigenous people (MMIP) to better understand the MMIP issue in Wyoming. WYSAC provides data and analysis to help victim service providers, law enforcement, the Attorney General, and the Legislature improve policy and practice related to missing and exploited persons in Wyoming.

WYSAC created this update for the Wyoming Legislature Select Committee on Tribal Relations. This update aims to provide information on the homicides and missing person cases that occurred during 2021 and January – June 2022. In the future, WYSAC will update numbers on a calendar year schedule (January – December). This update comprises four sections, 1) homicide victims, 2) missing person cases, 3) law enforcement protocol survey, and 4) future support.

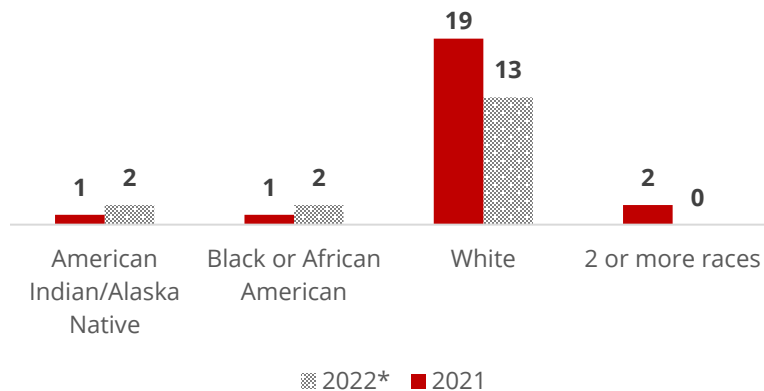
Homicide Victims

Homicide Victims by Race

Twenty-three homicides occurred in Wyoming in 2021. Of these, 19 victims were White, one was Black, one was American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), and two were identified as two or more races (both were Black and White). The Black victim, two of the White victims, and one of the victims with two or more races were of Hispanic origin.

Between 1/1/2022 and 9/29/2022, there were 17 homicides in the state – 13 victims were White, two were Black, and two were AI/AN. Two of the White victims were of Hispanic origin.

Figure 1: Homicide Victims by Race (2021 & 2022*)



*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 9/29/2022

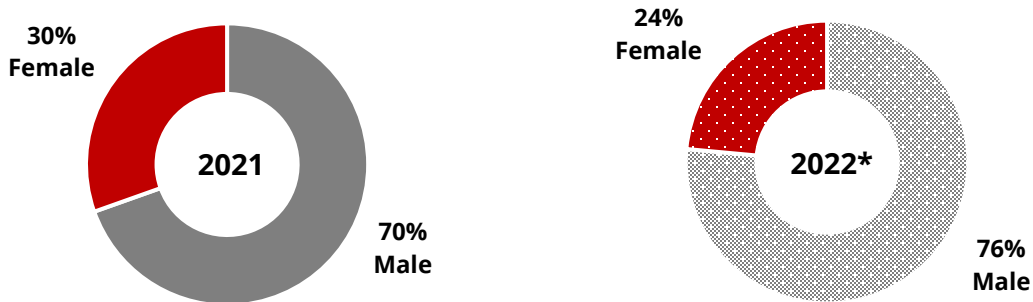
Source: Wyoming Department of Health, Vital Statistics Services Death Data.

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Homicide Victims by Gender

In 2021, the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH), Vital Statistics Services identified 23 homicide victims. Of these, 70% (16) were male, and 30% (7) were female. In 2022, as of September 29th, there were 13 male and four (4) female victims of homicide in the State.

Figure 2: Homicide Victims by Gender (2021 & 2022*)



*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 9/29/2022

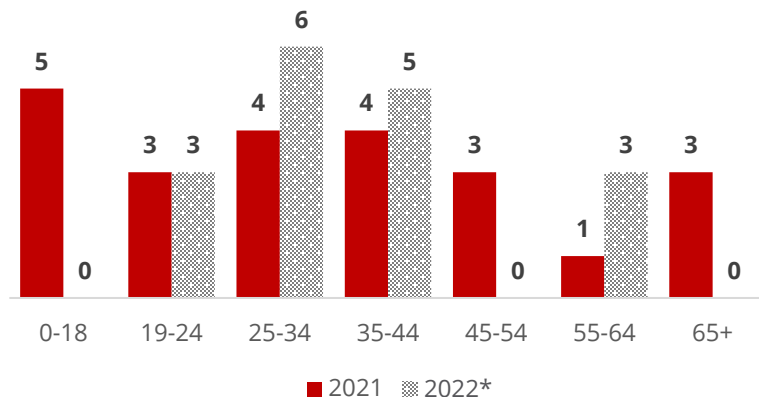
Source: Wyoming Department of Health, Vital Statistics Services Death Data.

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Homicide Victims by Age

In 2021, homicide victims ranged in age from less than one year old to 70 years old, with a median age of 33. In 2022, victims ranged in age from 19 to 62, with a median age of 33.

Figure 3: Homicide Victims by Age (2021 & 2022*)



*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 9/29/2022

Source: Wyoming Department of Health, Vital Statistics Services Death Data.

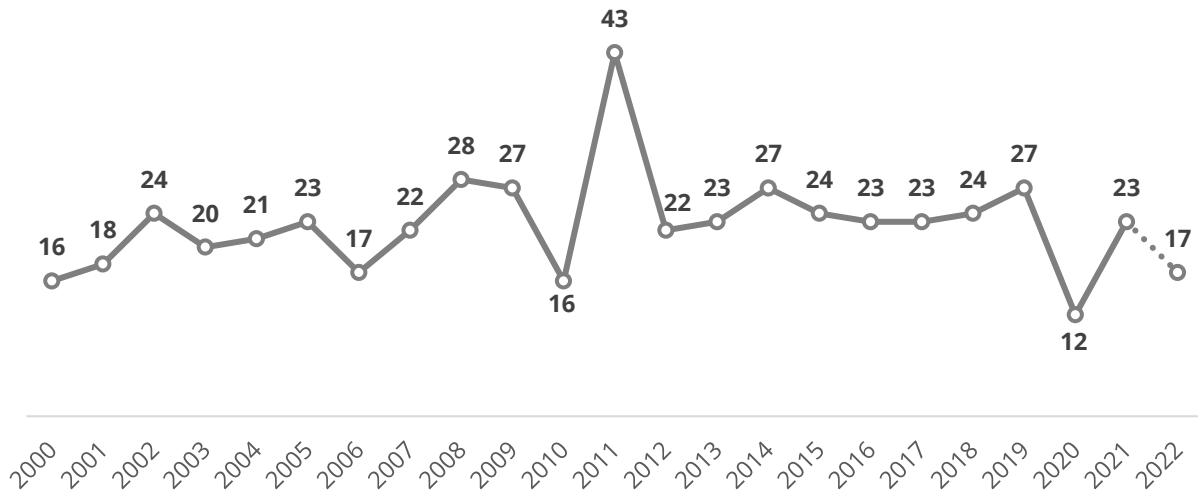
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Homicides 2000 – 2022*

WDH recorded 520 victims of homicide between January 1, 2000, and September 29th, 2022 (Figure 4). During that period, WDH recorded the greatest number of homicides in 2011 (n=43, and the fewest in 2020 (n=12). Of the 520 homicide victims, 113 were AI/AN (Figure 5). In 2011, 14 AI/AN people were victims of homicide. There was one AI/AN homicide victim in 2003 and one AI/AN victim of homicide in 2021. Two AI/AN people were victims of homicide in the first nine months of 2022.

In 18 of the last 23 years, more AI/AN males have been victims of homicide than AI/AN females (Figure 6). In 2010, 57% (4) of AI/AN victims of homicide were female. In 2001, 2005, 2008, and 2017, an equal number of male and female AI/AN victims died from homicide. There were no female AI/AN victims of homicide in the first nine months of 2022.

Figure 4: Homicides: (2000-2022*)

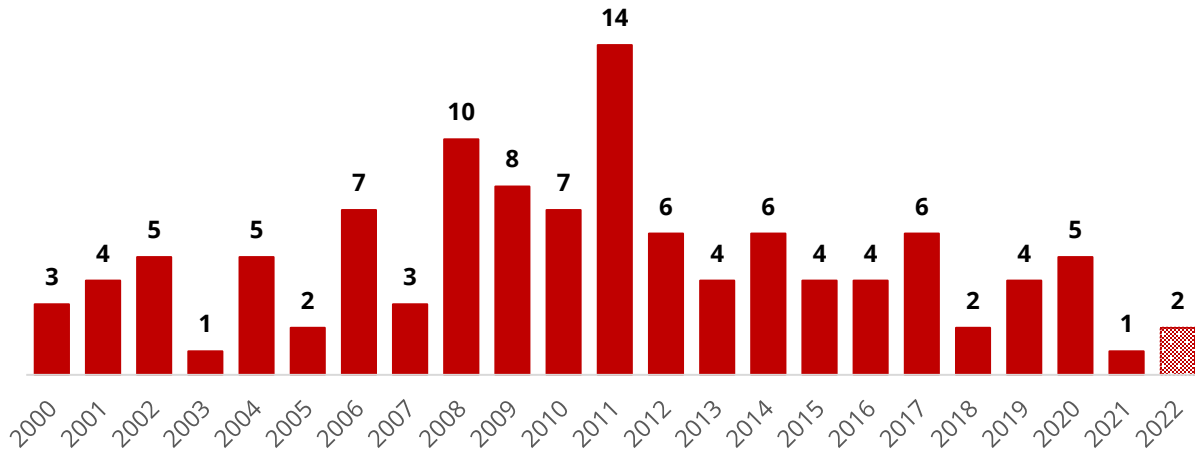


*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 9/29/2022

Source: Wyoming Department of Health, Vital Statistics Services Death Data.

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Figure 5: American Indian/Alaska Native Homicide Victims (2000-2022*)

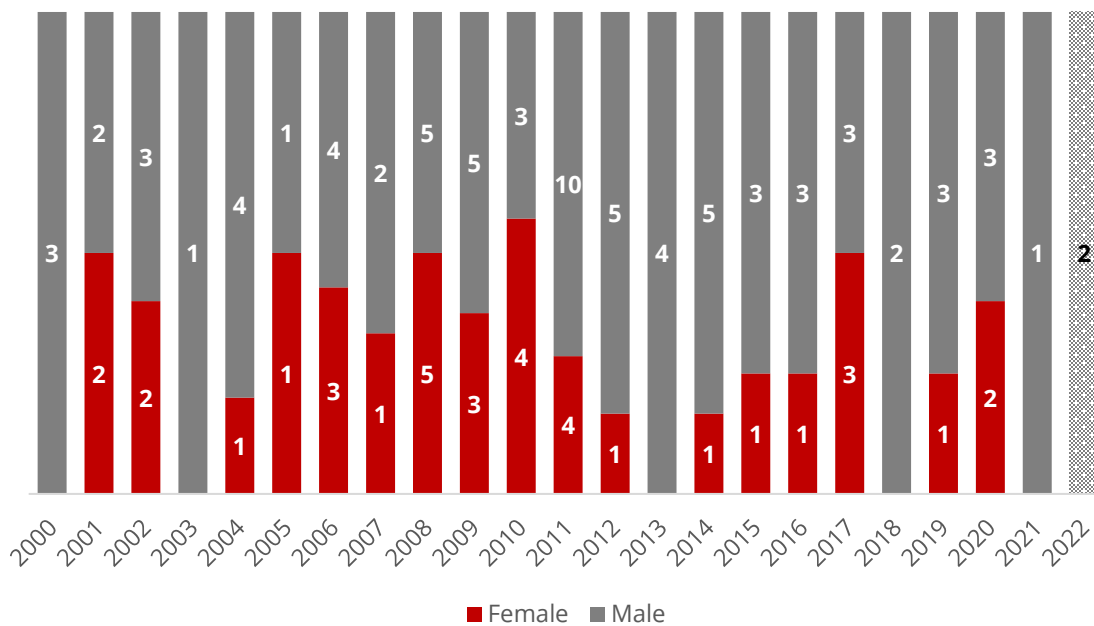


*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 9/29/2022

Source: Wyoming Department of Health, Vital Statistics Services Death Data.

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Figure 6: American Indian/Alaska Native Homicides by Sex (2000-2022*)



*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 9/29/2022

Source: Wyoming Department of Health, Vital Statistics Services Death Data.

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Missing Persons

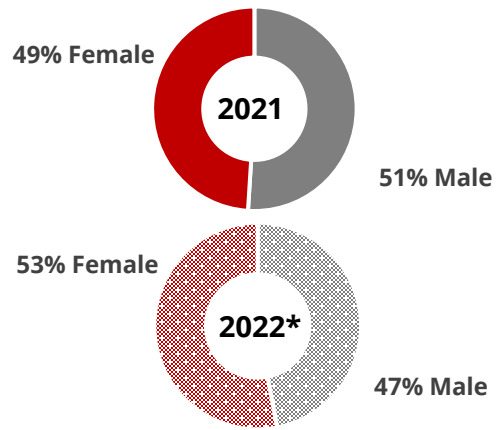
In 2021, 533 missing person cases were reported by law enforcement to NCIC. In the first seven months of 2022, there were 486 missing person cases. AI/AN people represented 17% of the cases in 2021 and 16% in 2022. Some people were reported missing more than once in a year, so the next section focuses on the characteristics of the unique individuals reported missing.

Unique Missing Persons

In 2021, Wyoming law enforcement entered missing person records for 388 unique individuals. More than half (51%; n=196) were male. Of unique individuals, 15% (n=57) were AI/AN and 77% (n=297) were White.

In 2022, as of 7/30/22, law enforcement agencies entered missing person records in NCIC for 381 unique individuals. Of these, 53% (n=202) were female and 47% (n=179) were male. Of unique individuals, 18% (n=68) were AI/AN and 77% (n=293) were White.

Figure 7: Unique Missing Persons by Sex (2021 & 2022*)

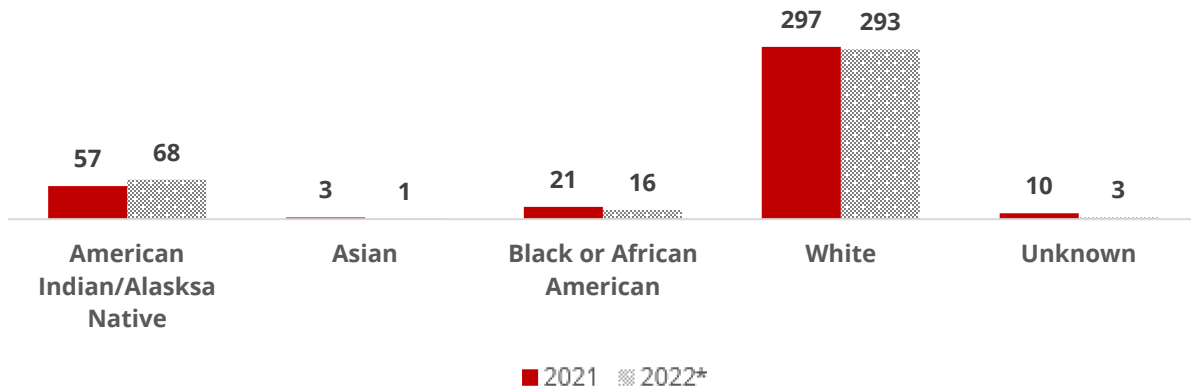


*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 - 7/30/2022

Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data.

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Figure 8: Unique Missing Persons by Race (2021 & 2022*)



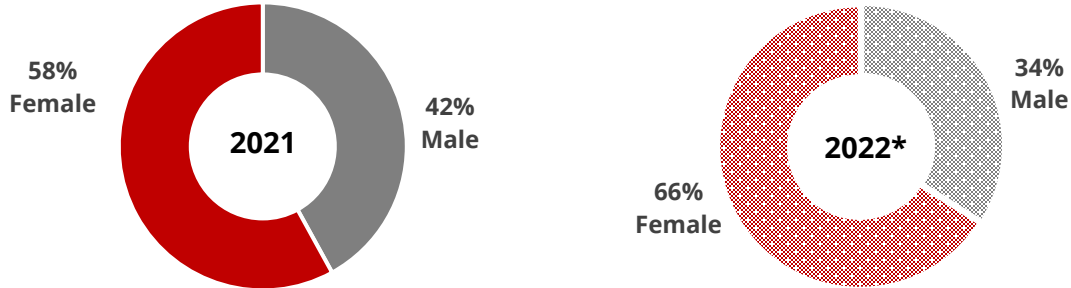
*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 - 7/30/2022

Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data.

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Indigenous Missing Persons

Figure 9: Indigenous Missing Persons by Sex (2021 & 2022*)

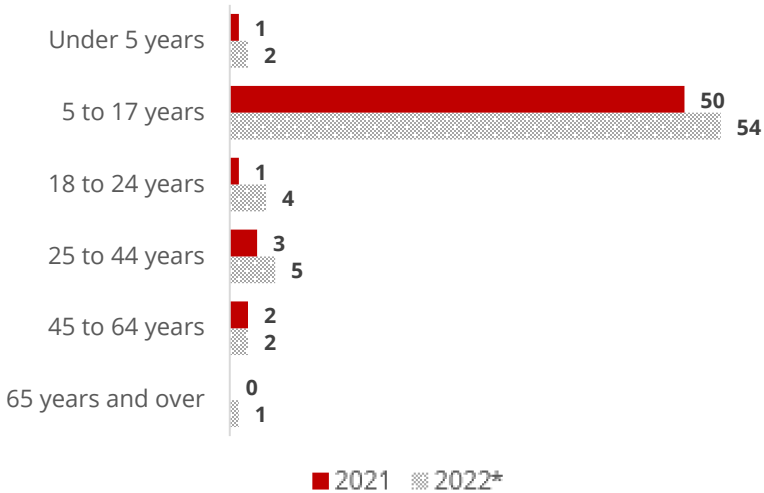


*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 7/30/2022

Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data.

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Figure 10: Indigenous Missing Persons by Age (NCIC)



*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 7/30/2022

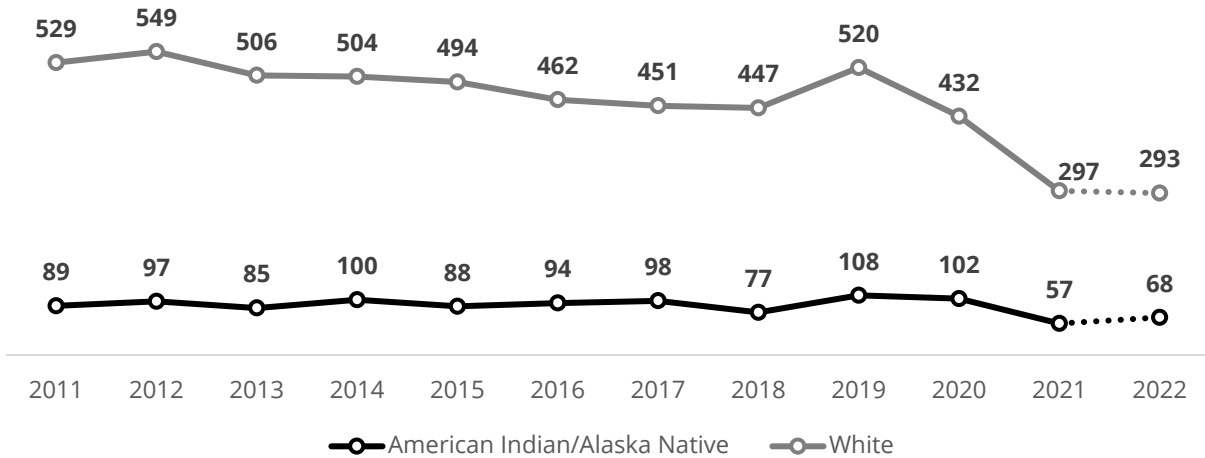
Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data.

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Missing Persons 2011-2022*

WYSAC monitors trend data for the number of missing person cases each year. While it appears that there was a decrease in 2021, it is too early to tell if that represents an actual decrease in missing people in Wyoming. We will continue to monitor the trend.

Figure 11: NCIC Missing Person Records (2011 - 2022*)



*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 - 7/30/2022

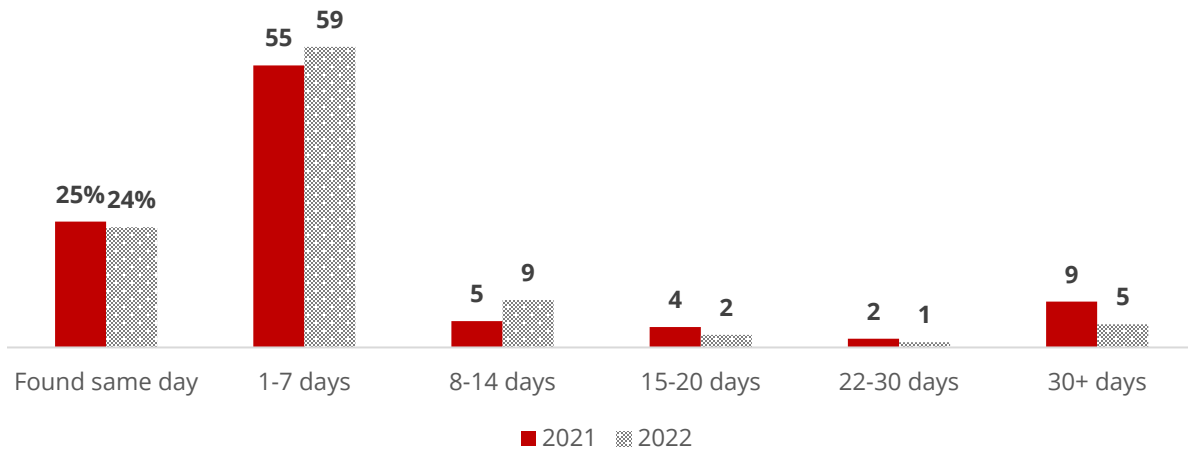
Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data.

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Missing Person Clearance Rates

Once a person is no longer missing, law enforcement clears their record from NCIC. In 2021, 25% (n=129) of cleared missing person records were closed the same day law enforcement entered the NCIC record. Law enforcement cleared 55% (n=289) of NCIC records within one week. In 2021, law enforcement cleared 14% (n=12) of NCIC records for missing AI/AN people the same day. During the same period, law enforcement cleared 27% (n=106) of missing person records for White people the same day.

Figure 12: Case Clearance (2021 & 2022*)

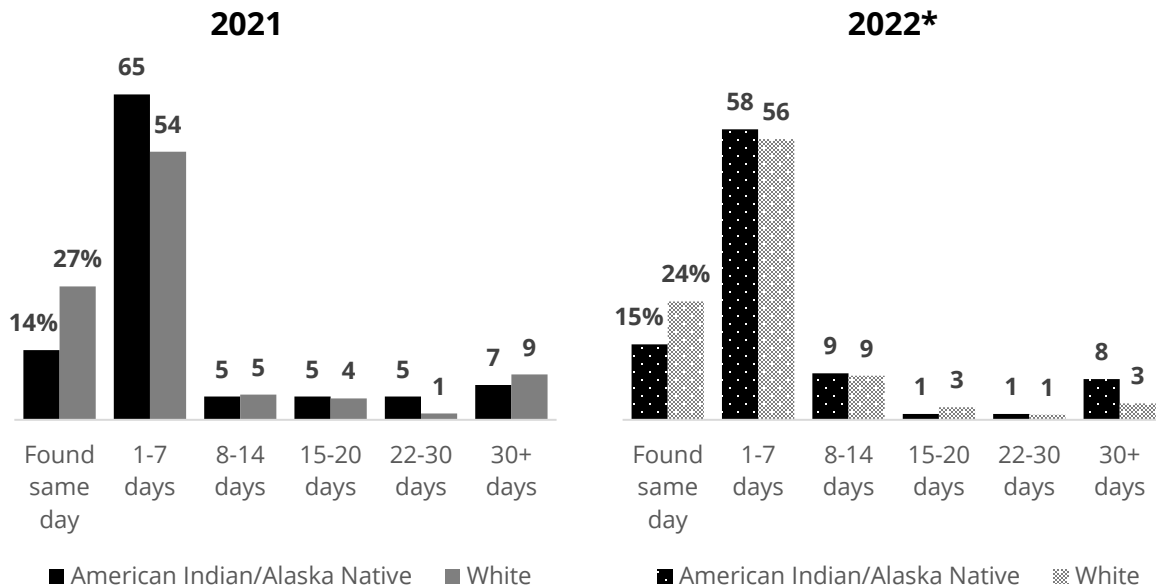


*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 7/30/2022

Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data.

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Figure 13: Case Clearance by Race (2021 & 2022*)



*2022 Data reflects 1/1/2022 – 7/30/2022

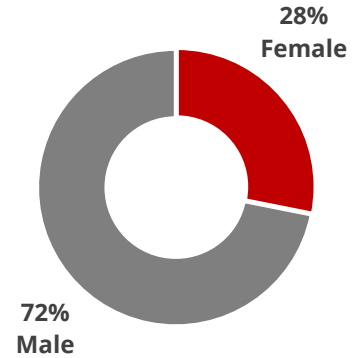
Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data.

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Active Missing Persons

As of 9/27/22, there are 32 people currently reported as missing in NCIC data. Of these, 17% (n=5) are AI/AN. They are two females and three males, all juveniles. There are 50 people currently listed as missing in the National Missing and Unidentified Person System (NamUs). Two of the missing people identified in NamUS are AI/AN, both adult men.

Figure 14: Active Missing Persons by Sex (NCIC)

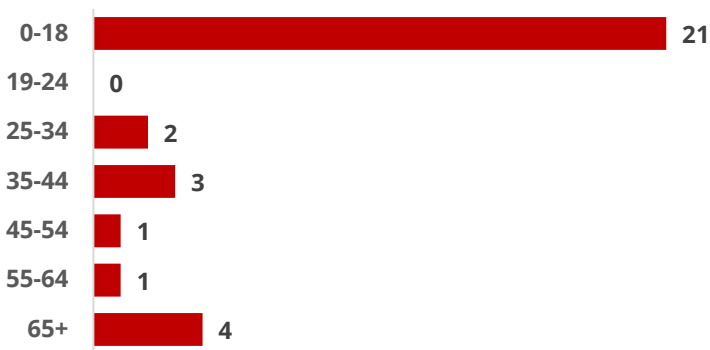


Note: As of 9/27/22.

Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data

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Figure 15: Active Missing Persons by Age (NCIC)

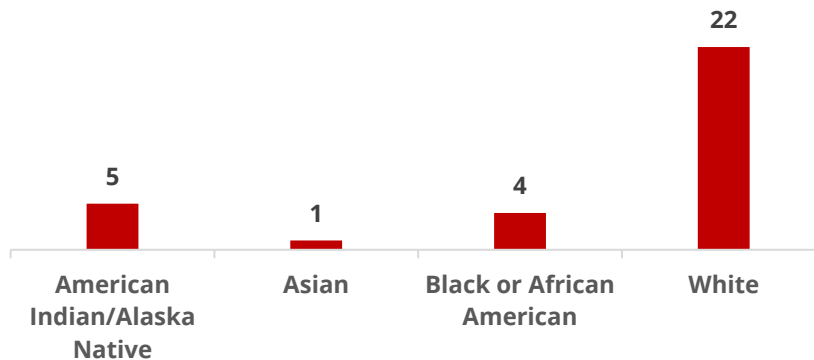


Note: As of 9/27/22.

Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data.

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Figure 16: Active Missing Persons by Race (NCIC)



Note: As of 9/27/22

Source: Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, NCIC data

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Law Enforcement Missing Person Protocol Survey

WYSAC conducted a survey of Wyoming law enforcement agencies to gather information about each agency's policies, practices, and procedures when a person is reported missing and during the investigation. WYSAC reviewed existing investigation protocols, model policies, and the available literature about best practices in missing person investigations to design the survey. WYSAC created the survey in collaboration with DVS, DCI, and the Wyoming Association of Sheriffs and Chiefs of Police (WASCOP).

Standardized policies, practices, and procedures can aid law enforcement in accurately and effectively responding to missing persons cases. However, Wyoming is a large, rural and frontier state where each county, community, and law enforcement agency has unique needs and faces unique challenges. There is seldom a suitable “one-size-fits-all” solution to any problem. Information provided by survey participants indicated that many jurisdictions rarely, if ever, receive missing person reports. Other agencies may receive reports that are usually resolved within days, if not hours. This research aims to improve policies, practices, and procedures that result in timely resolution of all missing persons cases, including Indigenous missing persons. Those responsible for providing educational opportunities to Wyoming law enforcement can use this information to identify areas for additional training and technical assistance as well as opportunities for knowledge sharing among agencies across the state.

To collect this information, WYSAC created a 29-question online survey based on best practices. WASCOP provided WYSAC with email addresses for each Wyoming law enforcement agency representative and sent an email informing them of the study's purpose and encouraging participation. WYSAC emailed each agency a unique link to the online survey on May 17th, 2022. WYSAC sent three reminders to agencies who had not yet completed the survey and ended data collection on June 1st, 2022. WYSAC used Microsoft Excel to analyze the data.

Twenty-two of Wyoming's 90 law enforcement agencies responded to the survey. Caution should be used in interpreting the results of the survey because 74% of the law enforcement agencies in Wyoming did not respond.

Table 1: Responding Agencies

Albany County Sheriff's Office	Newcastle Police Department
Cheyenne Police Department	Powell Police Department
Fremont County Sheriff's Office	Rawlins Police Department
Gillette Police Department	Sheridan County Sheriff's Office
Green River Police Department	Sheridan Police Department
Hanna Marshal's Office	Sublette County Sheriff's Office
Johnson County Sheriff's Office	Sweetwater County Sheriff's Office
Kemmerer Police Department	University of Wyoming Police Department
Lincoln County Sheriff's Office	Weston County Sheriff's Office
Moorcroft Police Department	Wheatland Police Department
Natrona County Sheriff's Office	Wyoming State Parks

Source: Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming

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Formal Processes & Procedures

The majority of responding agencies reported using formal processes and procedures for taking missing person reports and handling cases, but not for investigation, classification, or management of long-term cases. The majority of responding agencies also had access to a victim/witness coordinator.

Table 2: Formal Processes & Procedures

"Does your agency..."	Yes	No	Unsure
Use a standardized form or model checklist when taking a report of a missing person?	68% (15)	32% (7)	0
Have a formal written protocol outlining how law enforcement officers should handle missing persons cases (initial report and/or investigation)?	55% (12)	41% (9)	5% (1)
Use a specialized investigative checklist (i.e., a list of recommended actions, activities, and considerations) to guide the missing persons investigation?	36% (8)	59% (13)	5% (1)
Use a standardized process to classify missing persons cases as high- or low-risk?	27% (6)	68% (15)	5 (1)
Use a specialized investigative checklist to guide how law enforcement officers manage long-term missing persons cases (persons who are still missing 30 days after law enforcement received the initial report)?	5% (1)	77% (17)	18% (4)
Have a victim/witness coordinator	23% (5)	45% (10)	32% (7)

Note: Local agencies provided included: Advocacy and Resource Center, County Attorney's Office (4), county coordinator, independent party, and a separate office within the county.

Source: Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming

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Processes & Procedures – Missing Persons Reports

The majority of responding agencies reported “Always” using the best practices and procedures when taking missing person reports. Many of the other agencies responded that they did these practices “Sometimes.” Few agencies reported using the best practices and procedures for missing person reports rarely or never.

Table 3: Processes & Procedures for Reports

“When your agency investigates mission persons cases, does the investigating officer...”	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Identify and contact the last person(s) to have seen the missing person as well as friends, relatives, coworkers, or associates who were or may have been in contact with the missing person prior to their disappearance?	77% (17)	23% (5)	0	0
Request information about physical or emotional problems, involvement in domestic incidents, recent emotional trauma, or life crises, uncharacteristic or bizarre behavior, drug or alcohol dependence, and history of mental illness?	64% (14)	36% (8)	0	0
Identify the missing person’s plans, habits, routines, and personal interests including places frequented or locations of personal significance?	50% (11)	50% (11)	0	0
Collect indications of missing personal belongings, particularly money and other valuables?	36% (8)	45% (10)	14% (3)	5% (1)
Enter information about the missing person into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)?	23% (5)	18% (4)	14% (9)	18% (4)
Enter information about the missing person into the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) Law Enforcement Services Portal?	23% (5)	27% (6)	32% (7)	18% (4)
Enter information about the missing person into the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP)?	9% (2)	23% (5)	50% (11)	18% (4)
Obtain a sample of the missing person’s fingerprints.	9% (2)	27% (6)	45% (10)	18% (4)
Obtain the missing person’s dental records?	5% (1)	23% (5)	55% (12)	18% (4)
Enter DNA samples into the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS)?	5% (1)	23% (5)	50% (11)	23% (5)
Enter DNA samples into the State DNA Index System (SDIS)?	5% (1)	19% (4)	52% (11)	24% (5)
Enter DNA into the National DNA Index System (NDIS)?	5% (1)	19% (4)	52% (11)	24% (5)
Obtain samples of the missing person’s DNA?	0	27% (6)	55% (12)	18 (4)

Source: Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming

Processes & Procedures – Missing Persons Investigations

More than half of the agencies surveyed reported that officers “Always” identify and contact the last person(s) to have seen the missing person and request information about physical or emotional problems (e.g., recent trauma, substance abuse). Half of the agencies reported that officers “Always” identify the missing person’s plans, habits, routines, and personal interests, and half of the agencies reported that officers do that “Sometimes.”

Most agencies reported that officers “Sometimes” collect indications of missing personal belongings. More than half of the agencies reported that officers “Rarely” obtain samples of the missing person’s fingerprints, dental records, or DNA during their investigations. Most also “Rarely” enter DNA samples into CODIS, SDIS, or NDIS, or enter information about the missing person into ViCAP, NAMUS, OR NCMEC.

Table 4: Processes & Procedures for Investigations

“Does your agency...”	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Circulate the description of the missing person to police patrols?	91% (20)	9% (2)	0	0
Circulate the description of the missing person to other local law enforcement agencies?	68% (15)	32% (7)	0	0
Search the missing person’s normal place of residence and other relevant locations?	68% (15)	32% (7)	0	0
Check to see if the missing person is in police custody?	64% (14)	27% (6)	5% (1)	5% (1)
Obtain a list of the missing person’s associates, friends, and frequented places.	59% (13)	41% (9)	0	0
Check the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) to see if the missing person may be an offender, a vulnerable witness, or a victim of crime?	59% (13)	18% (4)	14% (3)	9% (2)
Check to see if the missing person has been admitted to a local hospital?	55% (12)	41% (9)	0	5% (1)
Obtain a recent photograph of the missing person?	41% (9)	59% (13)	0	0

Source: Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming

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Future Support

After completing the initial inquiry into MMIP in Wyoming, questions remain. DVS contracted with WYSAC for ongoing data and research support for the MMIP task force throughout 2022 - WYSAC will collect, compile, and analyze data as the task force identifies data needs. Findings will be reported back to DVS and products will be developed to disseminate the findings, as specified by DVS and the task force. WYSAC will attend all task force and other relevant meetings to participate in conversations about the ongoing research. WYSAC plans to develop an official publication as an update to the 2021 Statewide MMIP report in January 2023. This report will include updated numbers, information on task force activities, and progress on the recommendations outlined in the original report.