

# An Analysis of Missing Native American Children 2012-2021



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This report is an analysis of Native American children reported missing to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) between 2012 and 2021. This presents data related to child demographics and case outcomes, as well as information pertaining to endangered runaway children, children missing from care, and children with tribal affiliations. This also includes data pertaining to abductors.

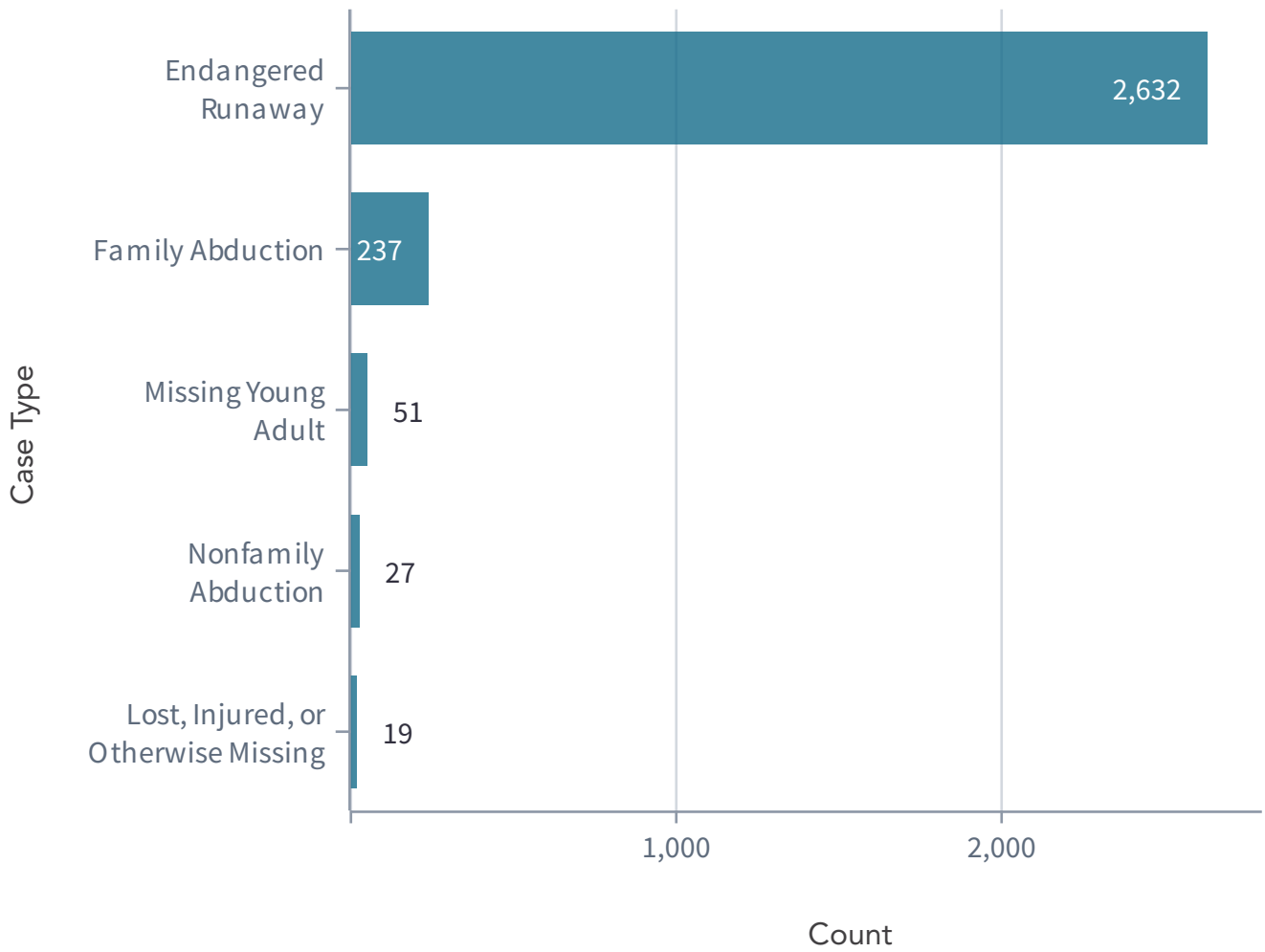
The information provided in this report does not reflect all cases of missing or abducted Native American children, only those reported to NCMEC. Children were determined for inclusion in this analysis based on demographic information provided by an official source, including the child's parent(s), the child's legal guardian, social services or law enforcement.

# Overview of Missing Cases

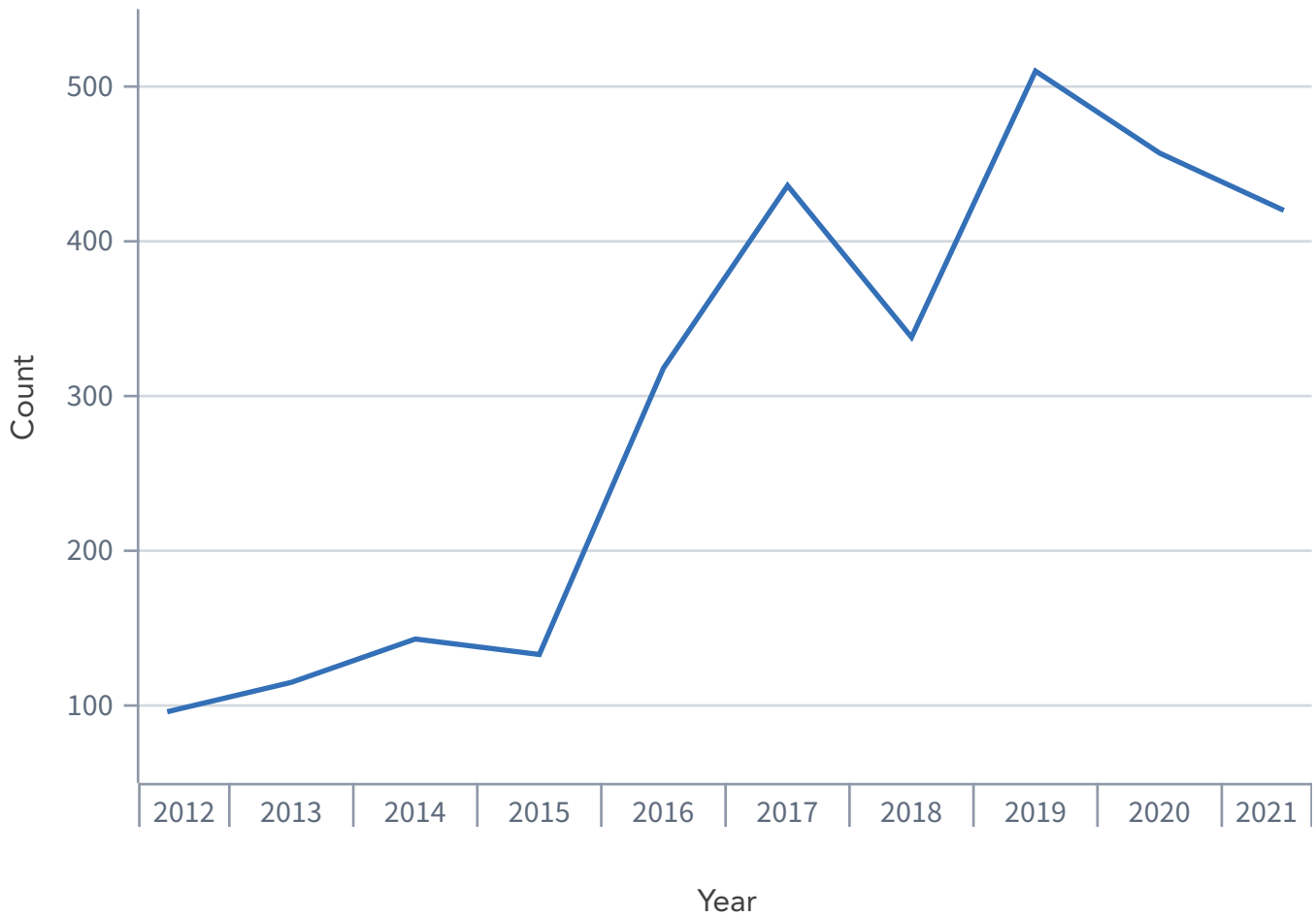
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From January 2012 to December 2021 NCMEC reported nearly 3,000 cases involving Native American children. They comprised 1% of all cases reported to NCMEC during this time period. Ninety-nine percent of these cases have been resolved.

## Case Type



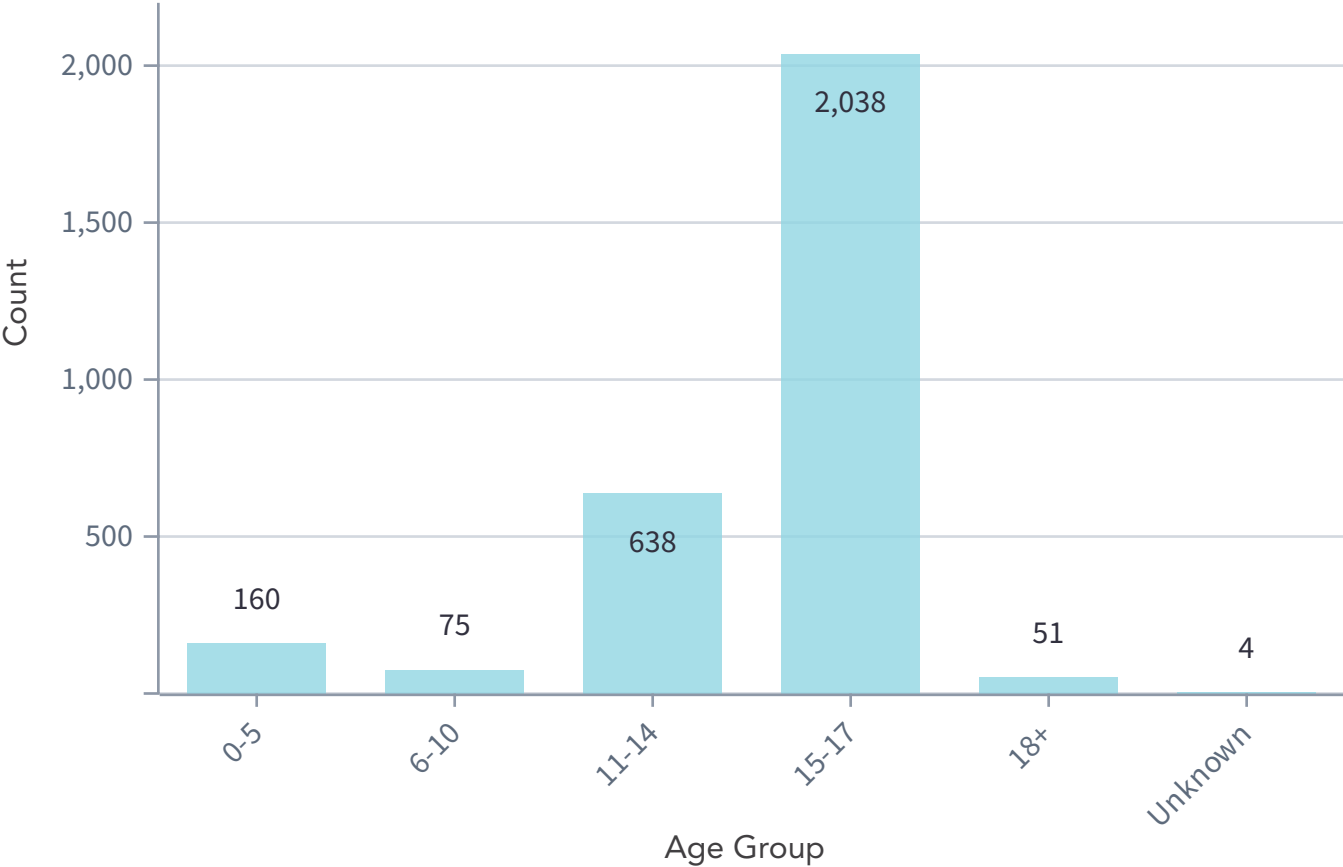
### Children Missing over Time



The "Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act," 42 U.S.C. § 671 (a)(35) was enacted in September 2014. State agencies had two years to comply with the requirement to report all missing children to NCMEC. As a result, intakes rose dramatically between 2015 and 2017. This pattern held true for Native American children.

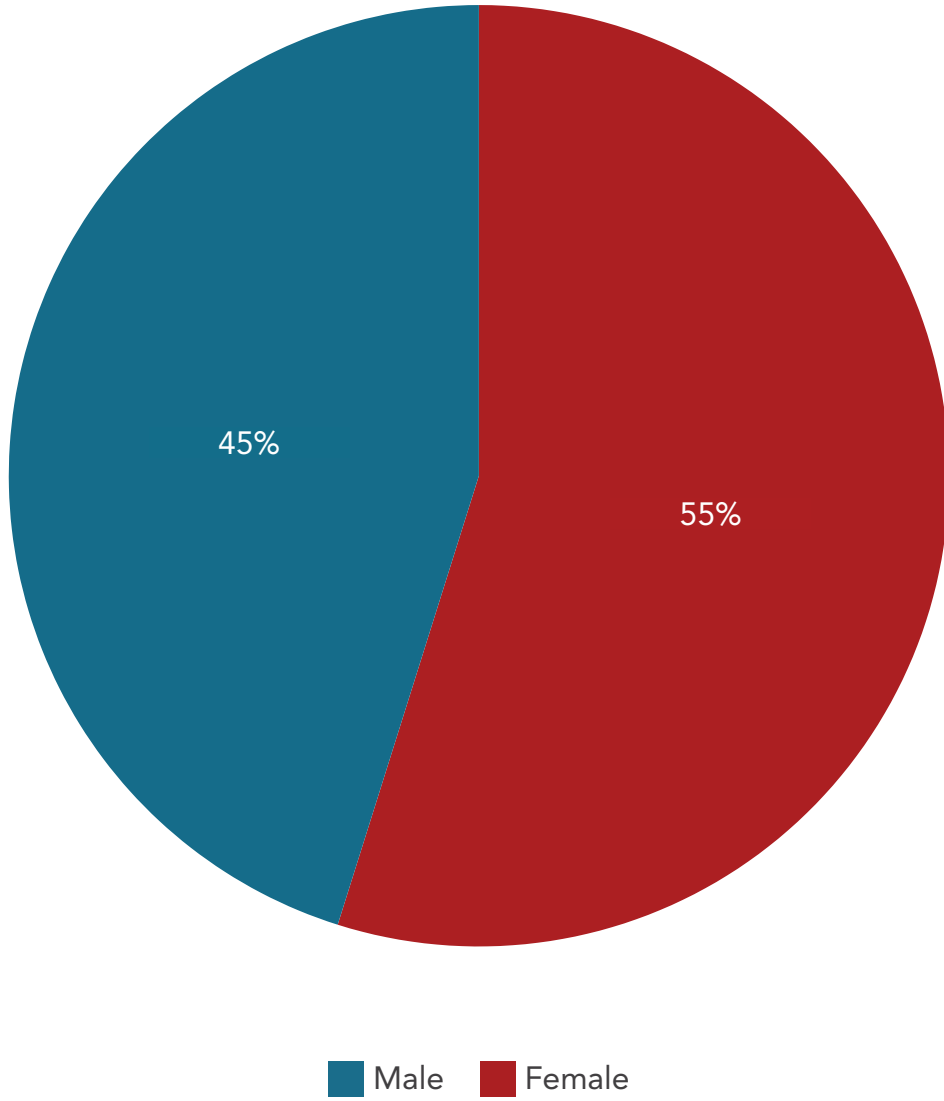
# Demographics

Child's Age Group



Missing Native American children had a mean age of 14-years-old. Children in family abductions were the youngest with a mean age of 5-years-old.

### Child's Gender

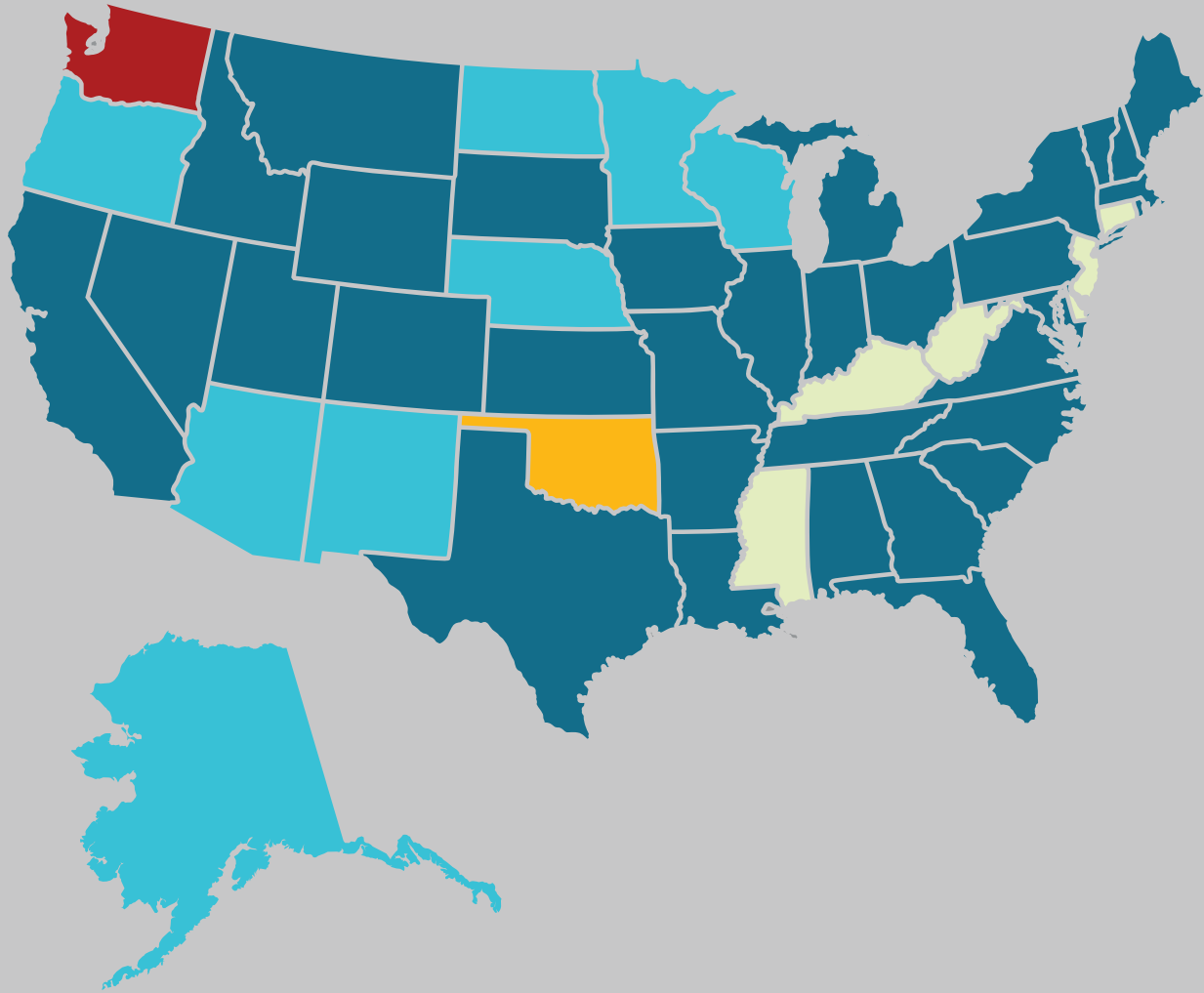




# Missing Locations for Native American Children

In general, states with higher numbers of missing child cases reported to NCMEC typically had a higher population in general. In comparison, that did not hold true for missing Native American children and their missing locations. Some states did have high populations, like Washington, while others, such as North Dakota and Alaska, have some of the lowest populations amongst the states.

## Missing State



### Missing States

● 1+

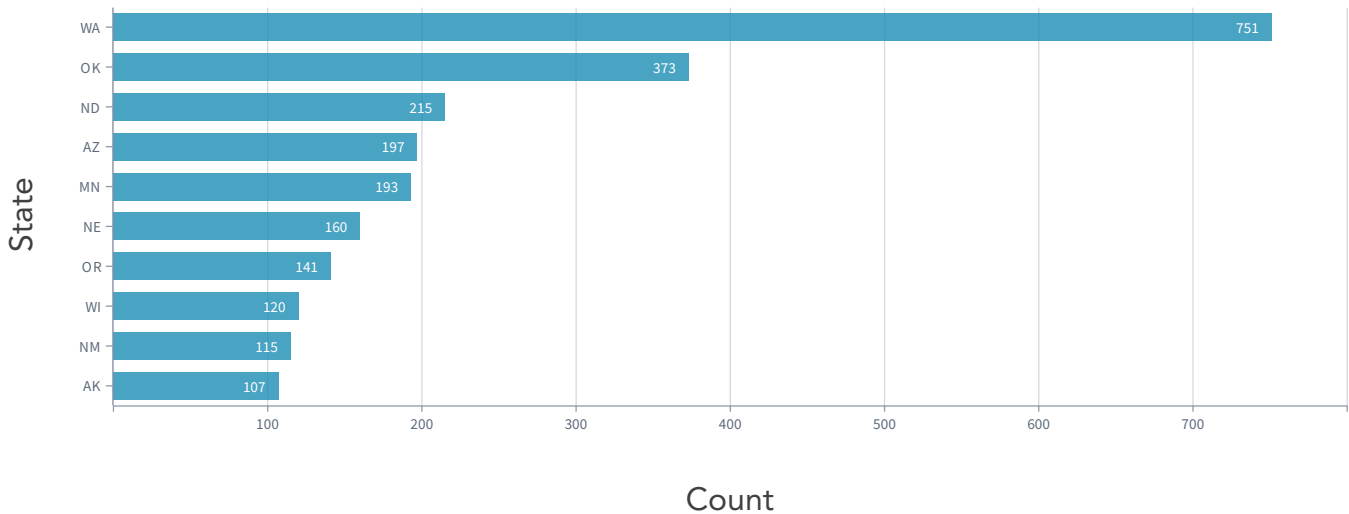
● 100+

● 300+

● 525+

States that are pale green had no instances of missing Native American children reported to NCMEC.

## Top Ten Missing States

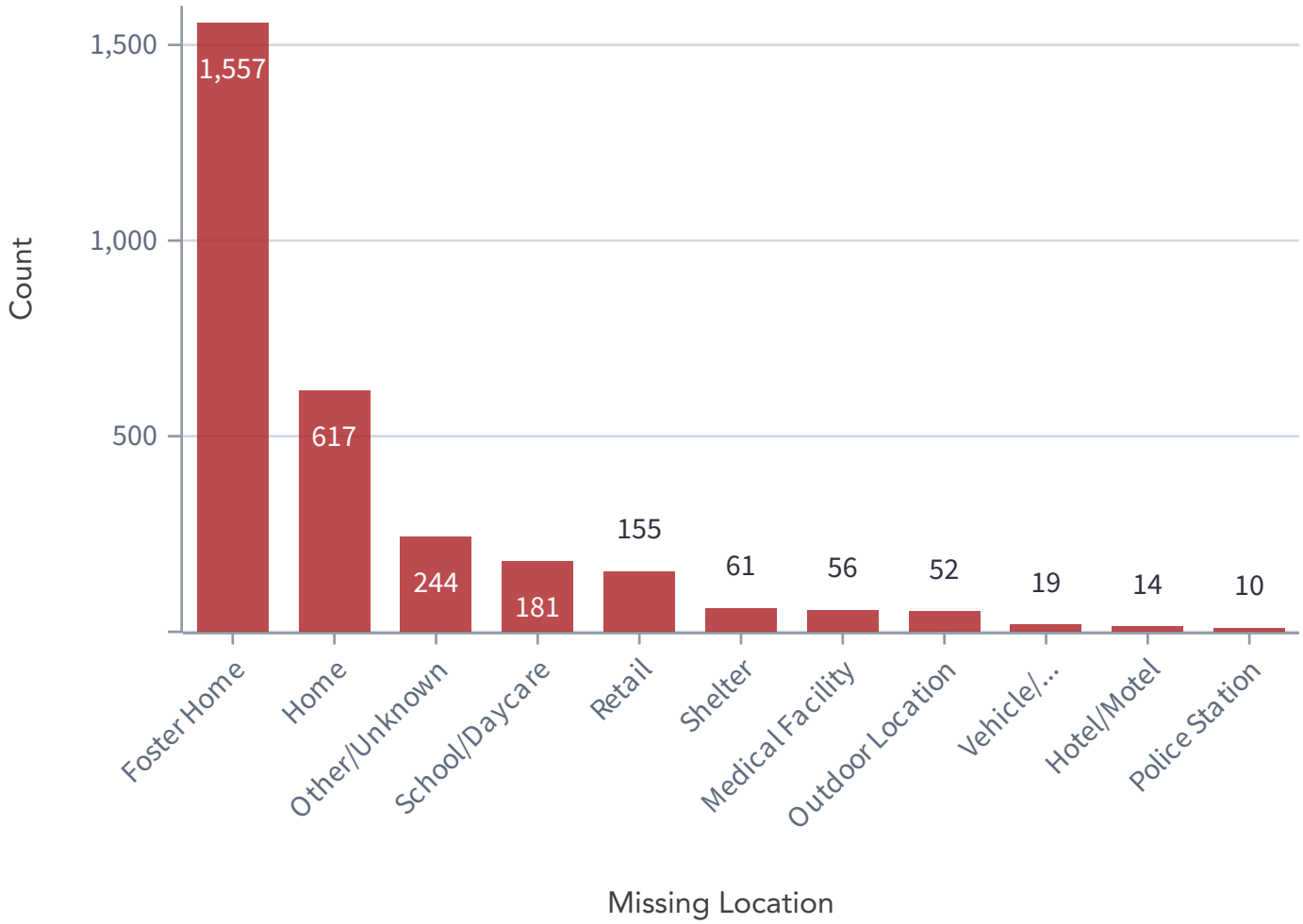


Of the top ten states for missing Native American children, only Washington featured in the top ten states for all children reported missing during the same time period.

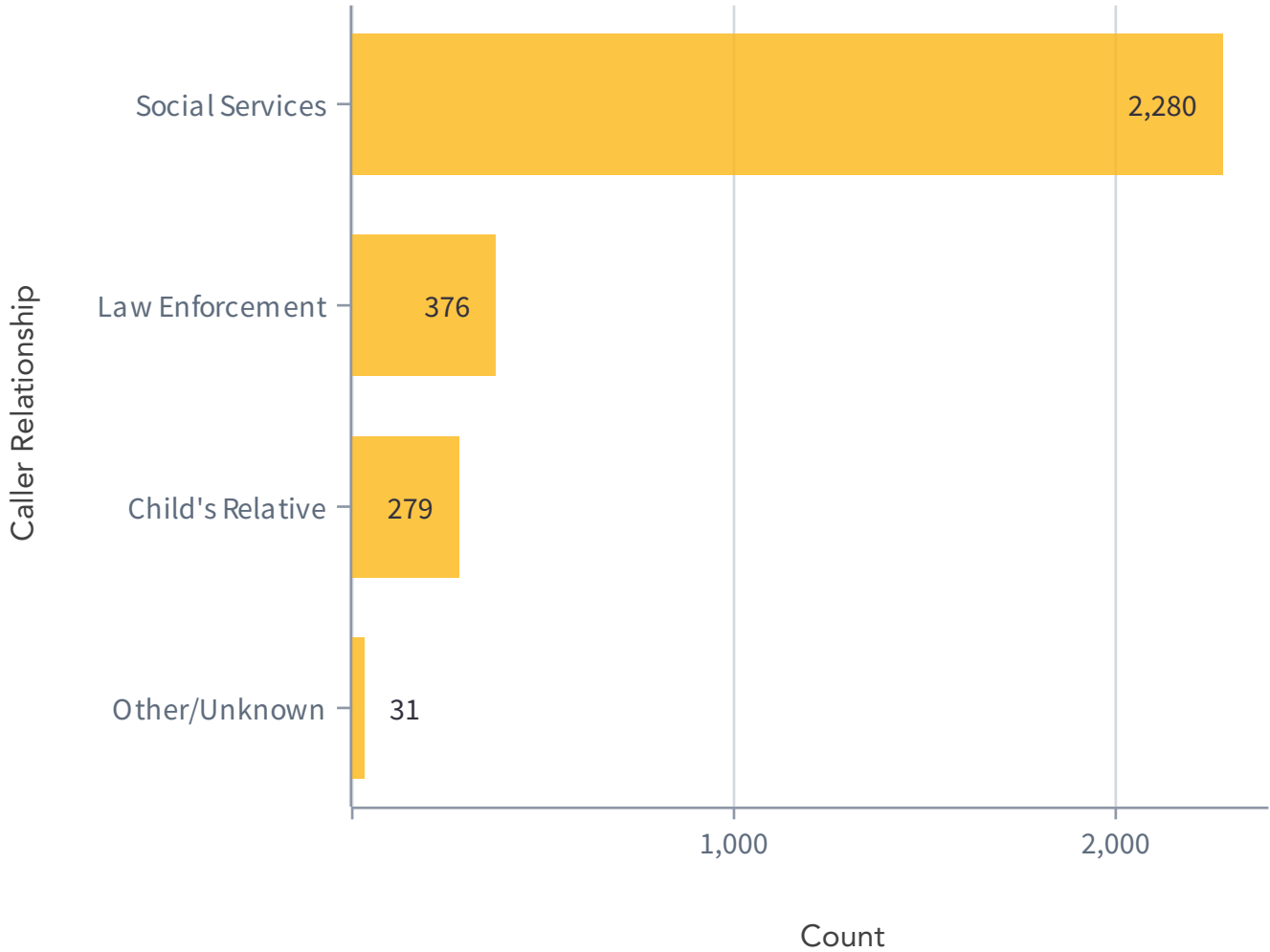
The 2020 U.S. Census found Native American children under 18 comprised 1% of the total U.S. population, but 18.9% of the population in Alaska, 13.4% in South Dakota, 7.9% in North Dakota, and 10.0% in Montana. These states likewise comprised notable proportions of the children reported missing to NCMEC. There were two states in which Native American children comprised over a third of missing child reports from that state: North Dakota (39%) and South Dakota (36%), and two states in which they comprised over a quarter of all children reported missing from that state: Alaska and Montana (both 28%).

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=under%2018&tid=ACSST5Y2020.S0901>

### Missing Location



### Who Reported the Child to NCMEC?

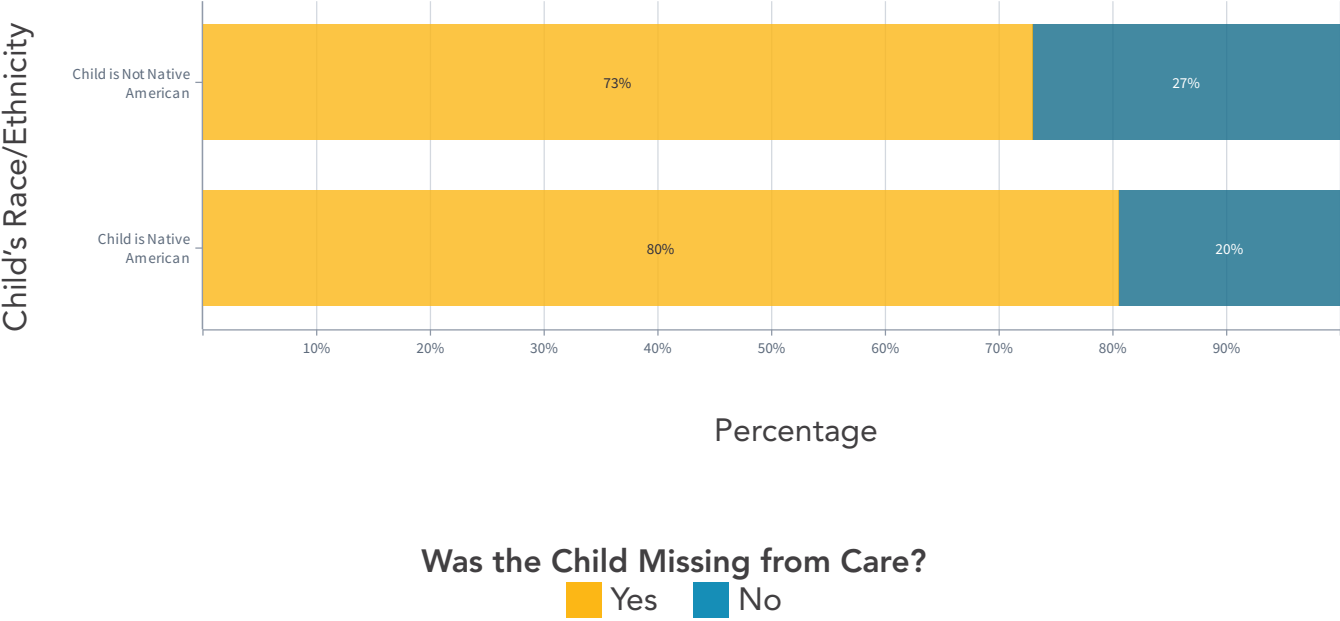


During this time period, Native American children were most likely to go missing from social services so, as a result, they were often reported missing to NCMEC by social services.

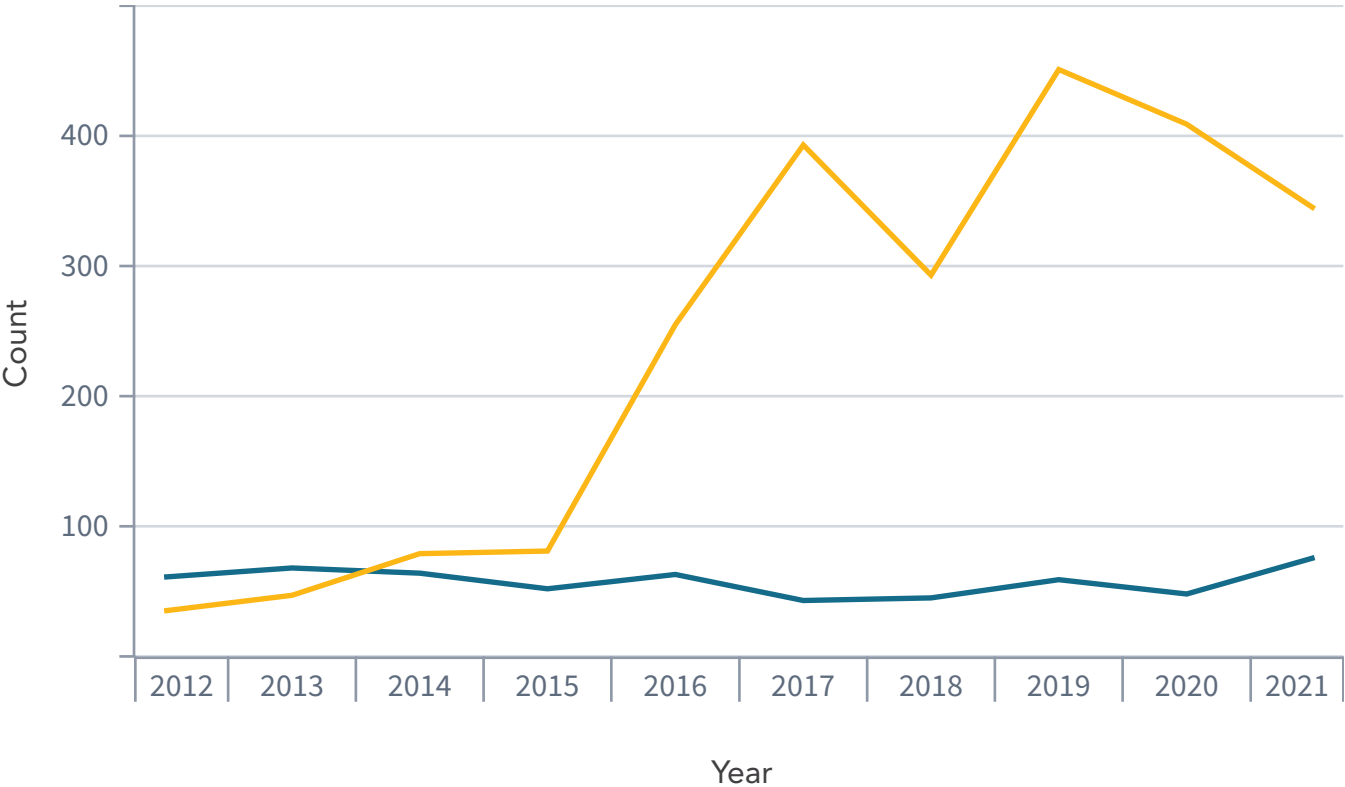
# Children Missing from Care

Native American children were reported missing from care at a higher rate (80%) compared to all other children missing from care during this time period (73%). With the mandatory compliance act, those numbers continued to rise. By the second half of the 2010s, a vast majority of Native American children were reported missing from care.

Comparison: Missing from Care

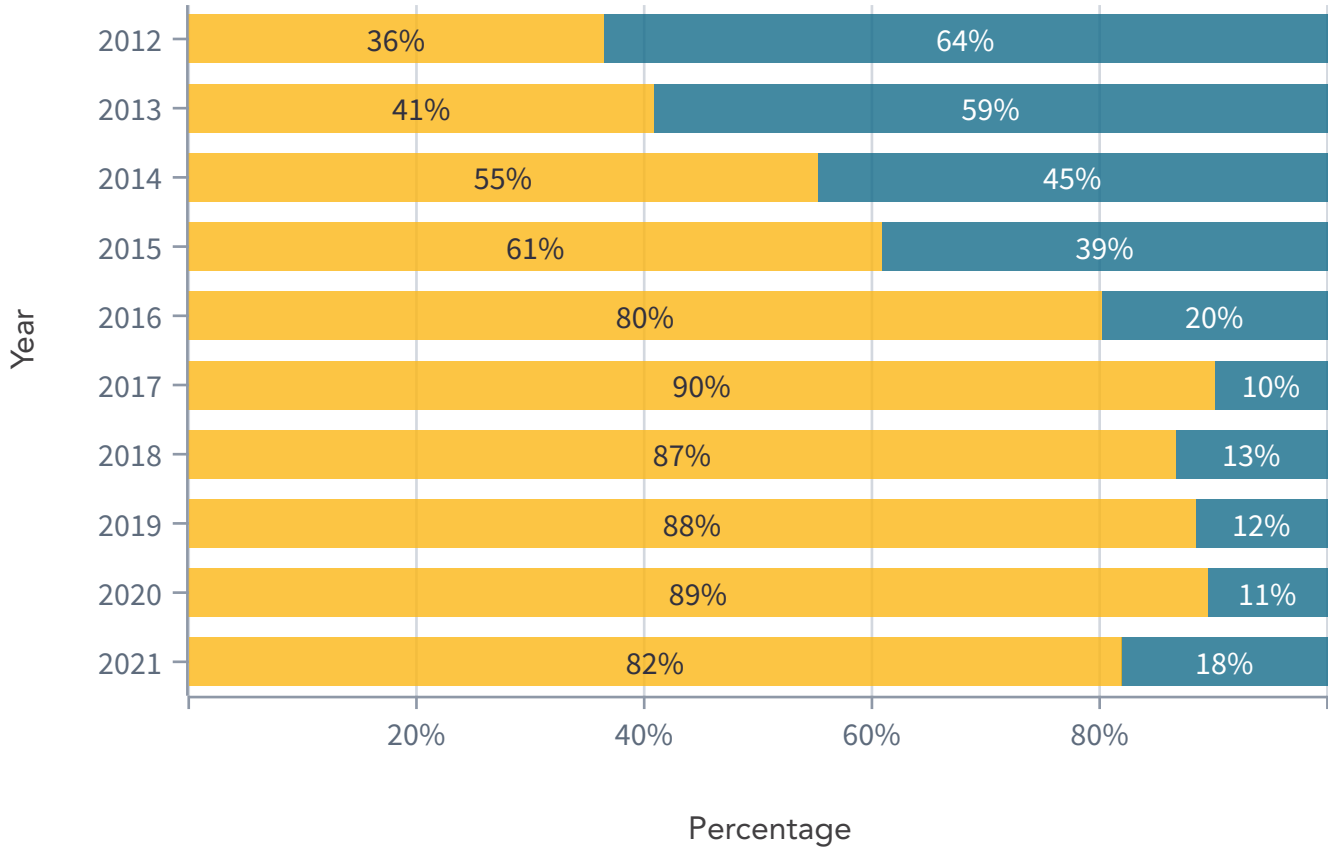


### Native American Children Missing from Care over Time



Was the Child Missing from Care?  
Yes No

## Native American Children Missing from Care over Time



### Was the Child Missing from Care?

Yes No

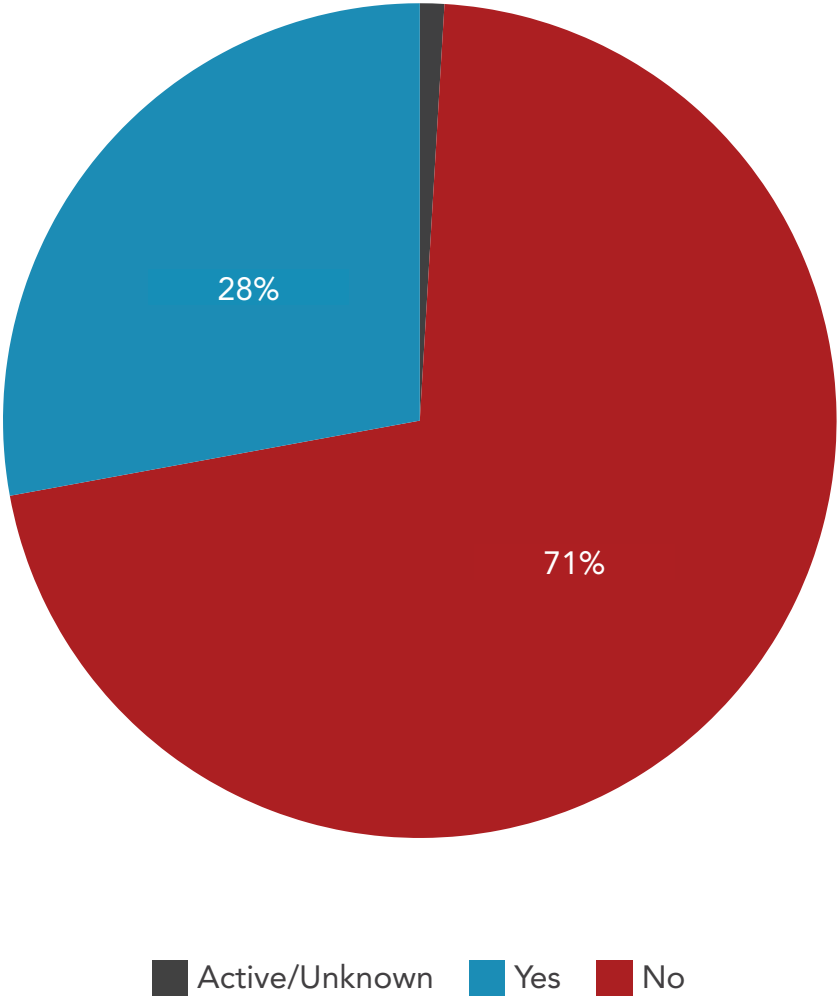
Nearly all (99%) of cases involving Native American children missing from care were resolved. Endangered Runaway was the most common case type and there was an almost equal amount of male children (48%) versus female children (52%). With a mean age of 15-years-old, Native American children were slightly older than all other children.



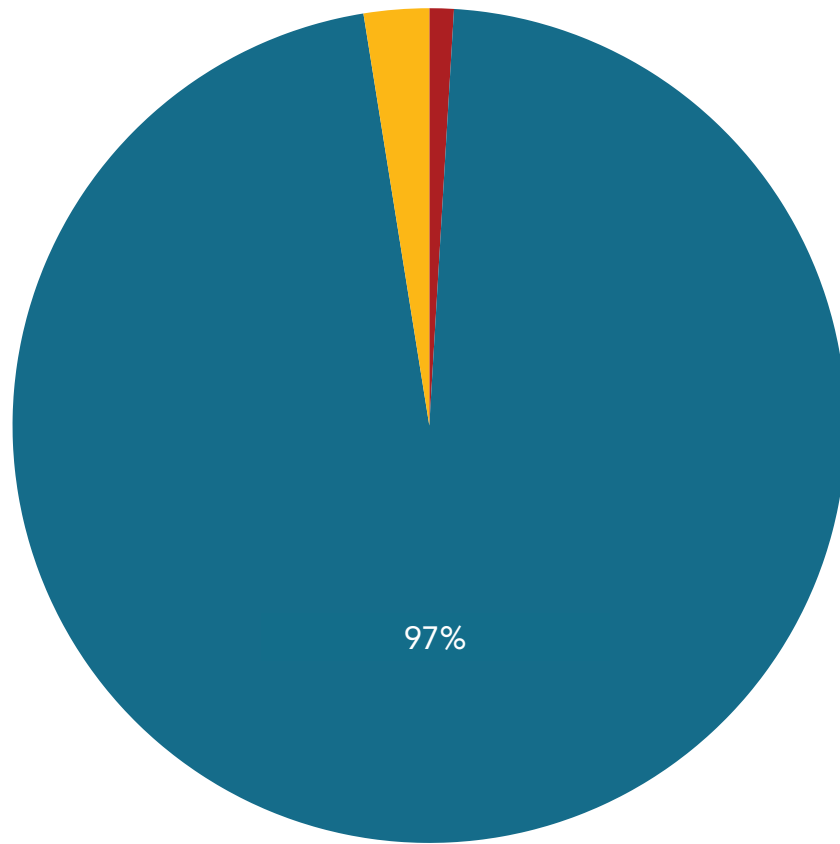
# Case Outcome

Nearly all Native American children (99%) have been recovered. They had a mean missing duration of 56 days and a median missing duration of 10 days. Twelve children (0.4%) were recovered deceased during this time period. None of the deceased children had had a prior missing incident that had been reported to NCMEC.

**Was the Child Recovered in 48 Hours?**

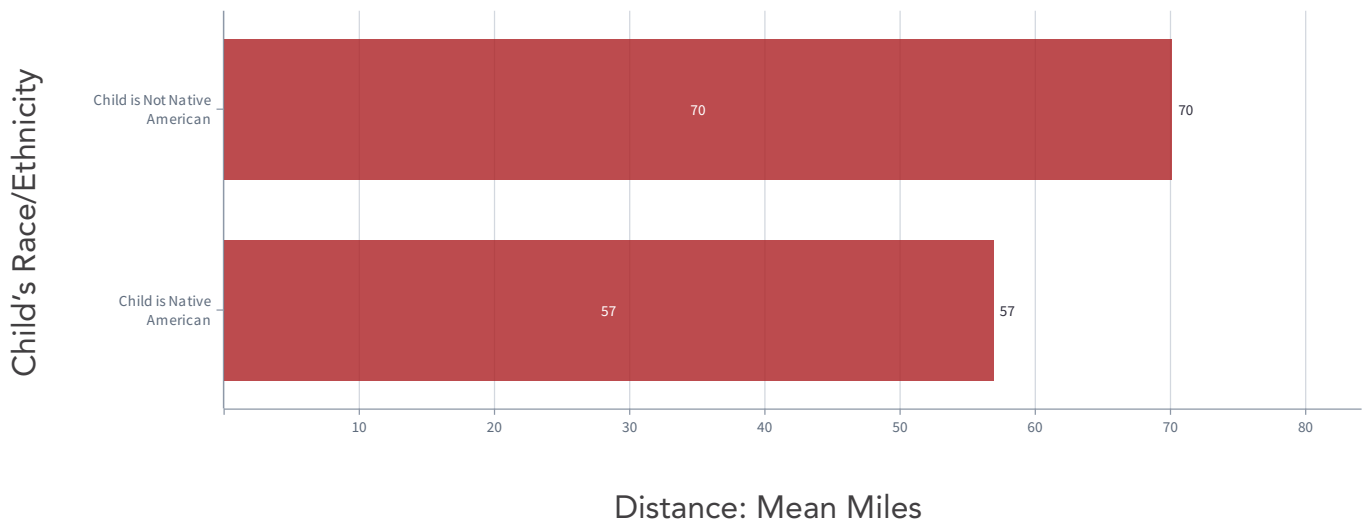


### Was the Child Recovered in 48 Hours?



■ Active/Unknown   ■ Less than a year   ■ More than a year

### Comparison: Travel Distance



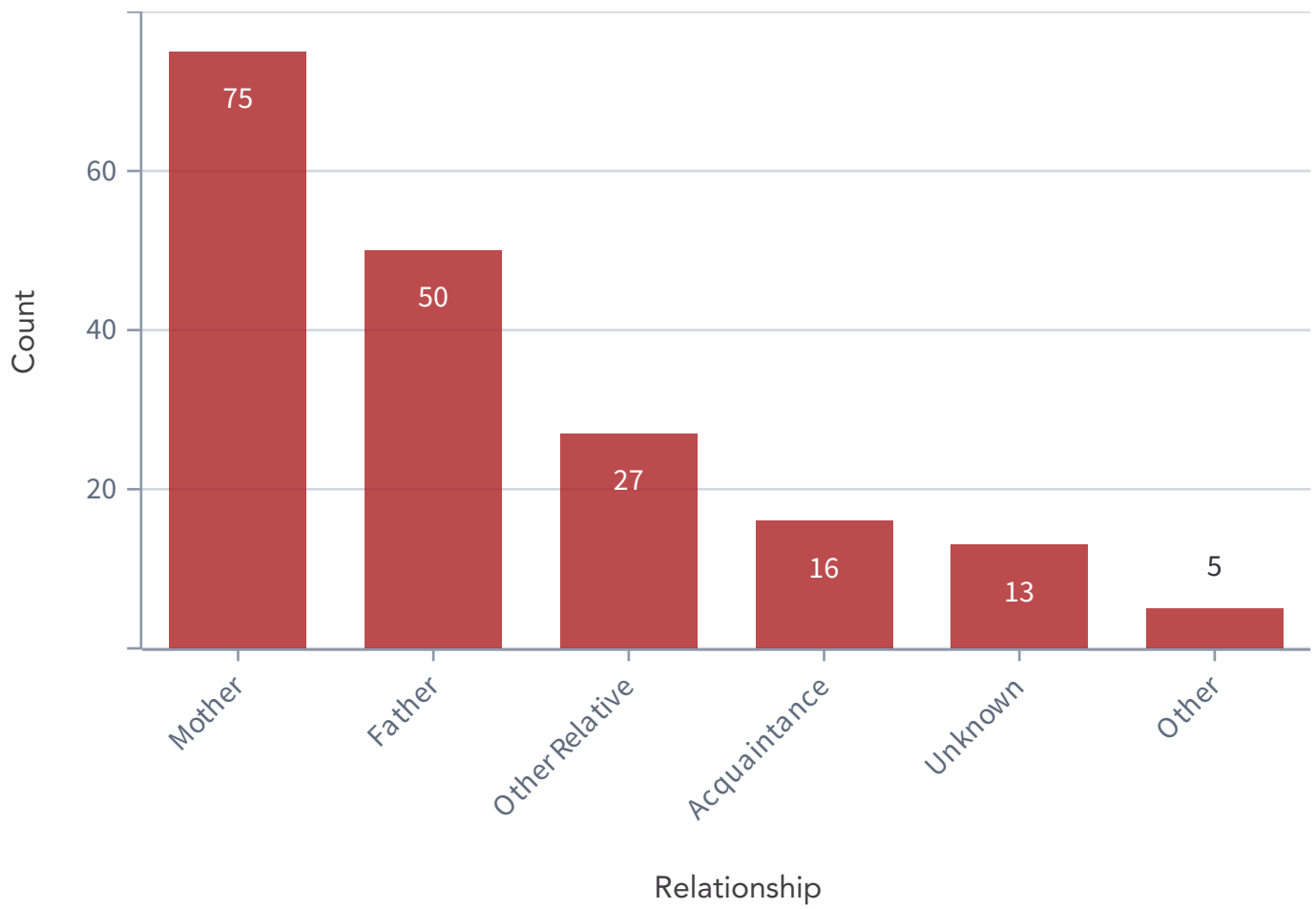
Although Native American children had the same missing duration as their non-Native American peers, they had a shorter mean travel distance (57 miles) compared to non-Native American children (70 miles).

# Abductor Information

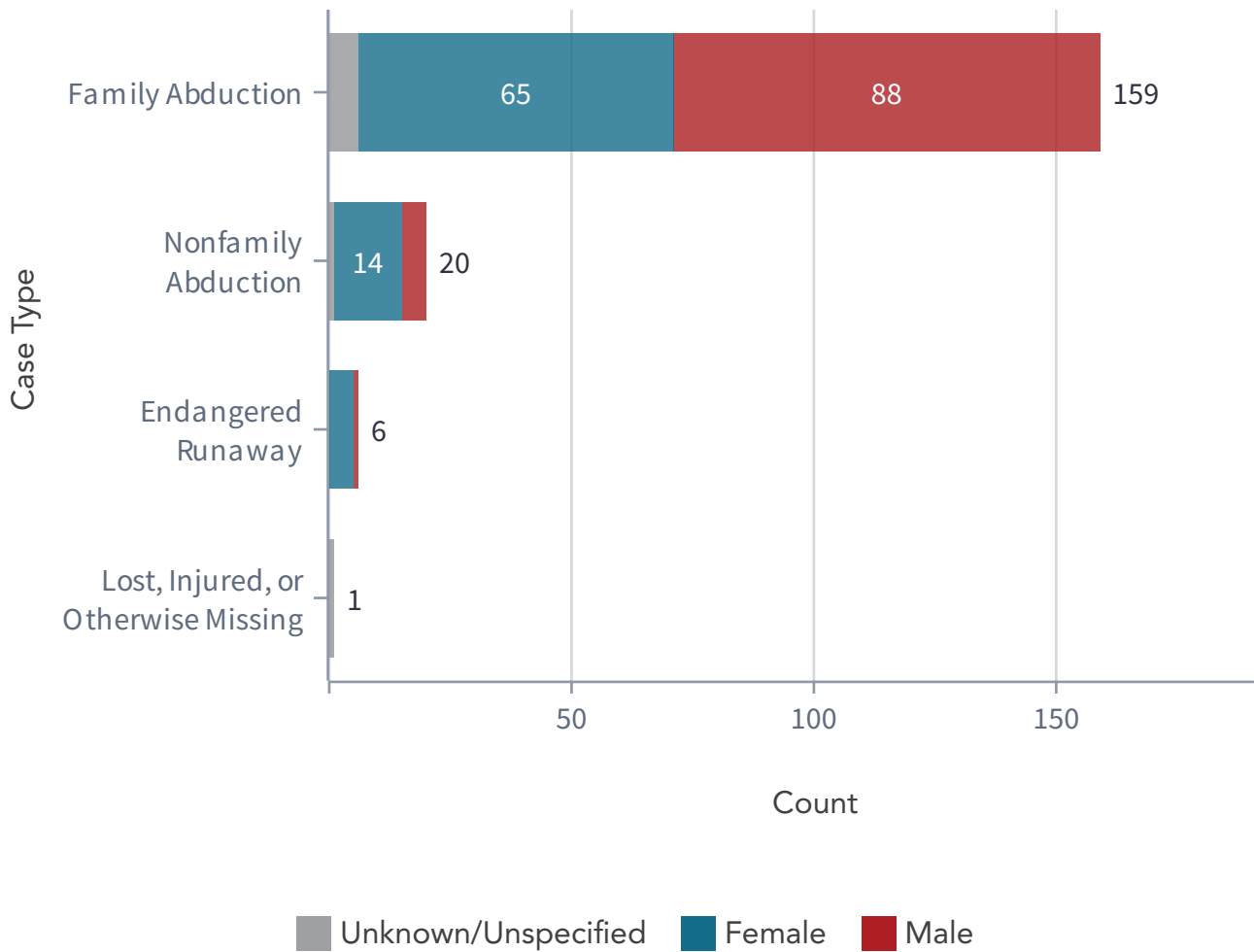
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Eight percent of cases (N=239) had an abductor associated with the missing incident. A majority of these cases were family abductions.

### Abductor Relationship to Child

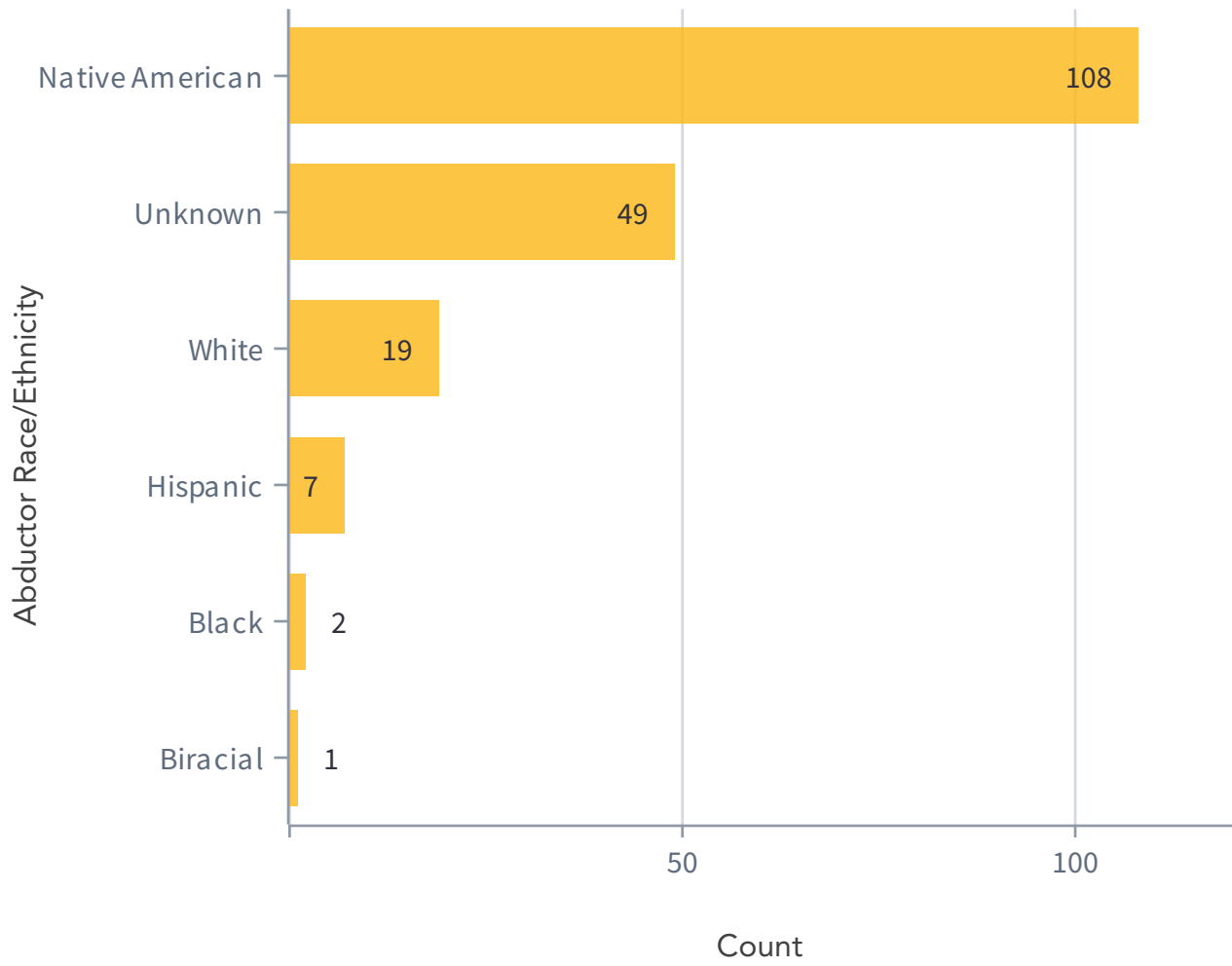


### Case Type and Abductor's Gender

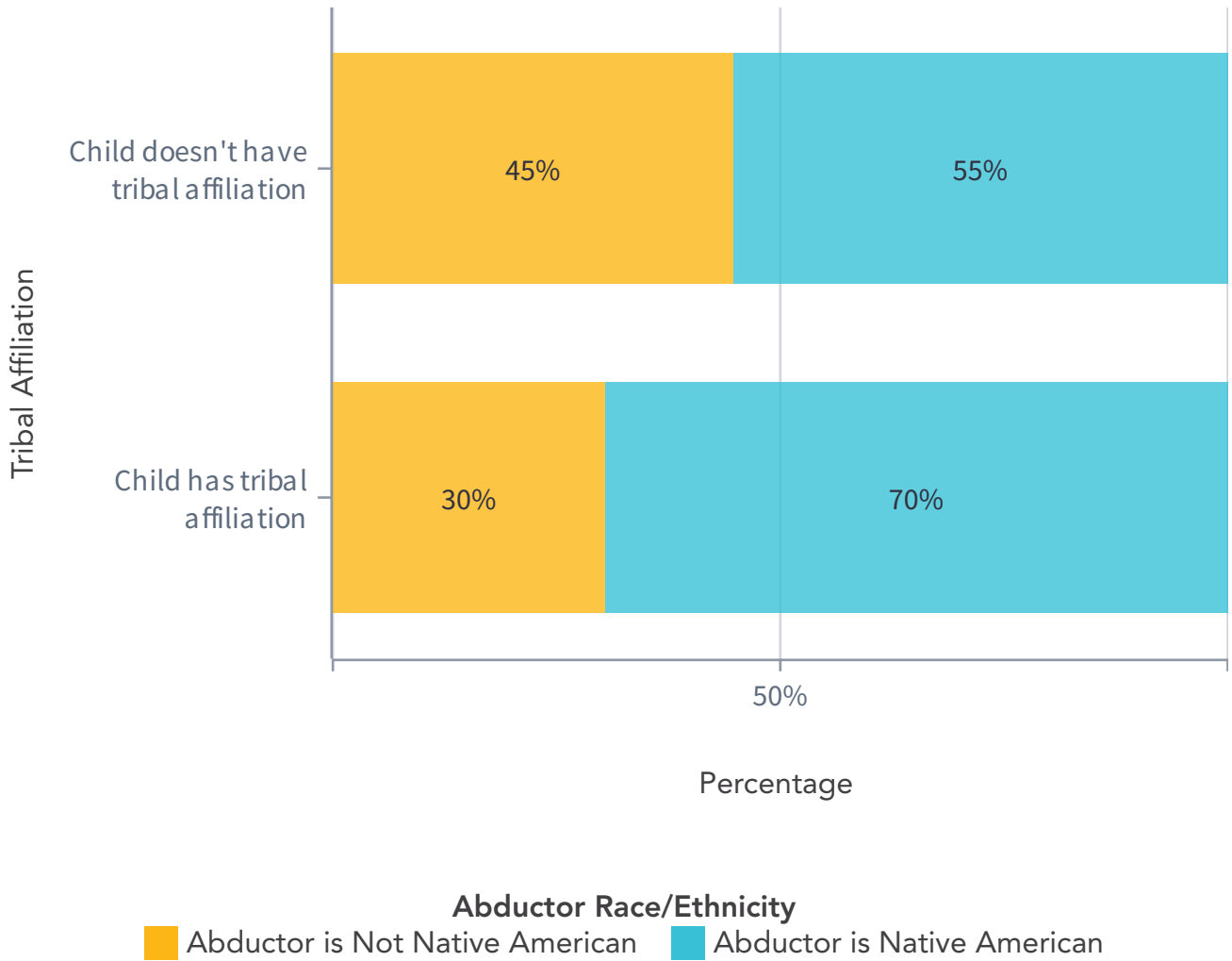


Although female abductors were a slight majority of all cases (51%), they were primarily involved in Family Abductions. Nonfamily Abductions saw a higher proportion of male abductors.

### Abductor's Race/Ethnicity



### Comparison: Tribal Affiliation and Abductor's Race/Ethnicity



Forty percent of Native American children were abducted by someone of their own ethnicity. This was more common amongst children with a tribal affiliation.

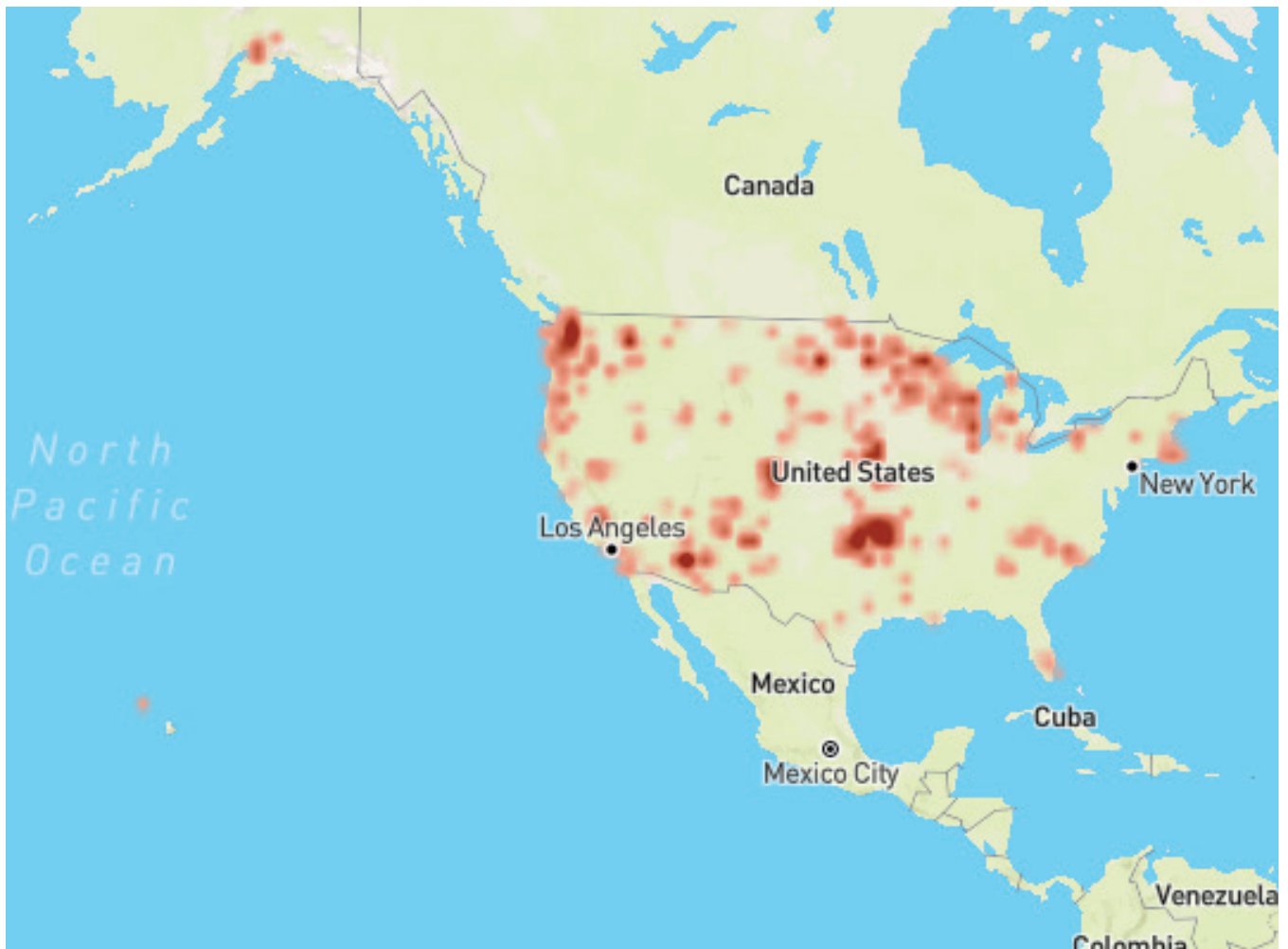


# Children with a Tribal Affiliation

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Of the Native American children reported to NCMEC, 40% reported a tribal affiliation. Ninety-nine percent of these cases have been resolved, meaning they had a similar recovery rate to all Native American children.

## Population Density: Children With a Tribal Affiliation



Missing children with a tribal affiliation were more likely to be reported missing from a location close to tribal land or from a state with a high proportion of Native Americans.

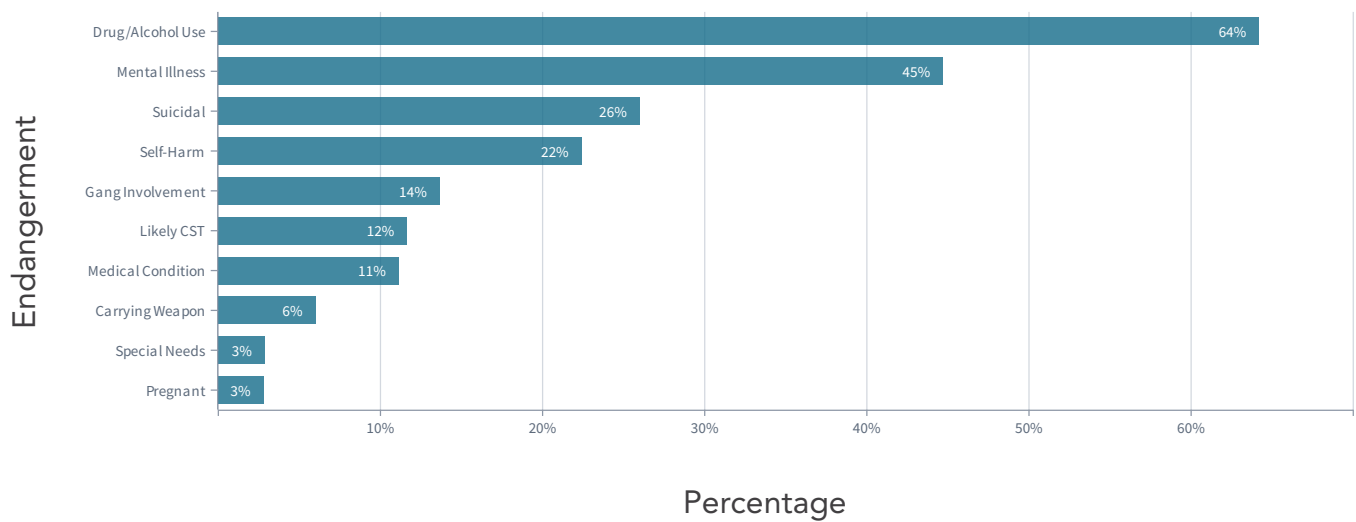
# Endangered Runaway Children

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Endangered Runaway children made up 89% percent of all Native American children reported missing during this time period. While this case type was always in the majority for Native American children, proportions increased after the “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act.” Prior to mandatory compliance, Family Abduction cases made up a greater proportion of Native American children reported to NCMEC than they have in the years following the implementation of this act. **These children face a host of risks and threats to their safety and as such require a multi-disciplinary response that supports and protects them.**

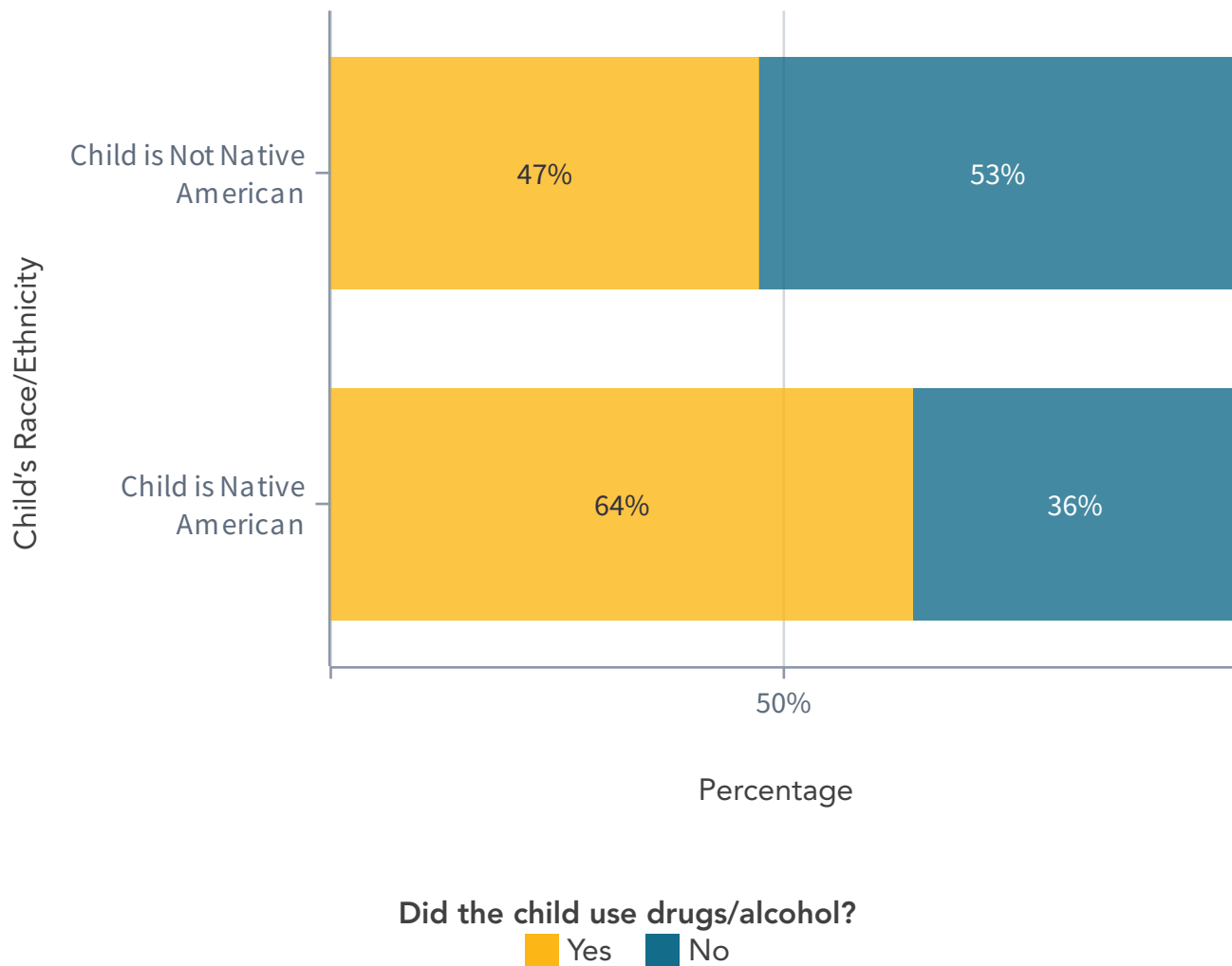
Similar to children in most racial and ethnic categories, it was common for Native American children to have repeat missing incidents. Sixty-five percent had two or more missing incidents, and children with more than one missing incident had a mean number of 4 missing incidents. Sixty-eight was the maximum number of missing incidents for one child.

## Endangered Runaway Children and Endangerments

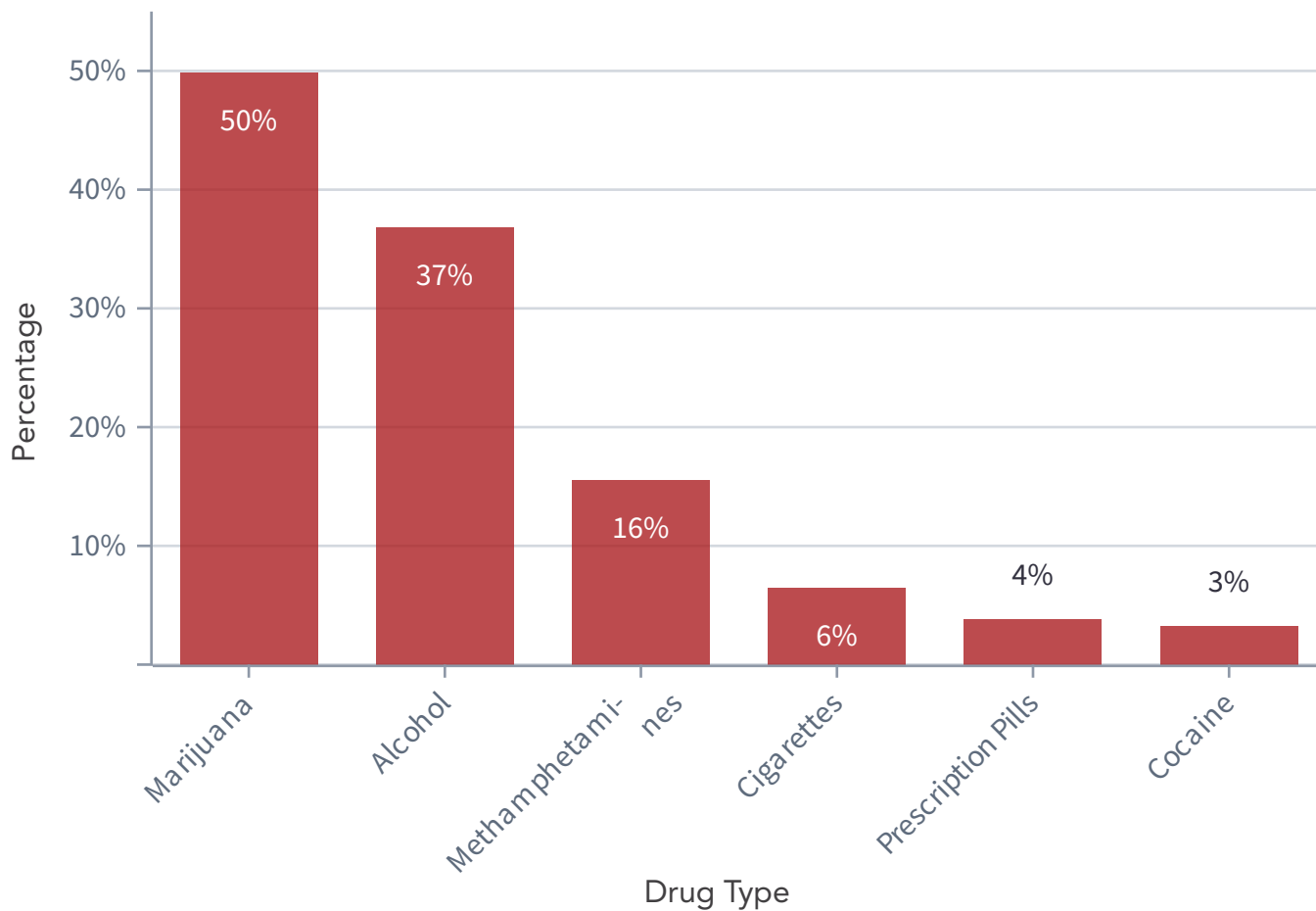


91% of Endangered Runaway Native American children had at least one endangerment. Three was the mean number of endangerments.

### Comparison: Endangered Runaway Children and Drug Use

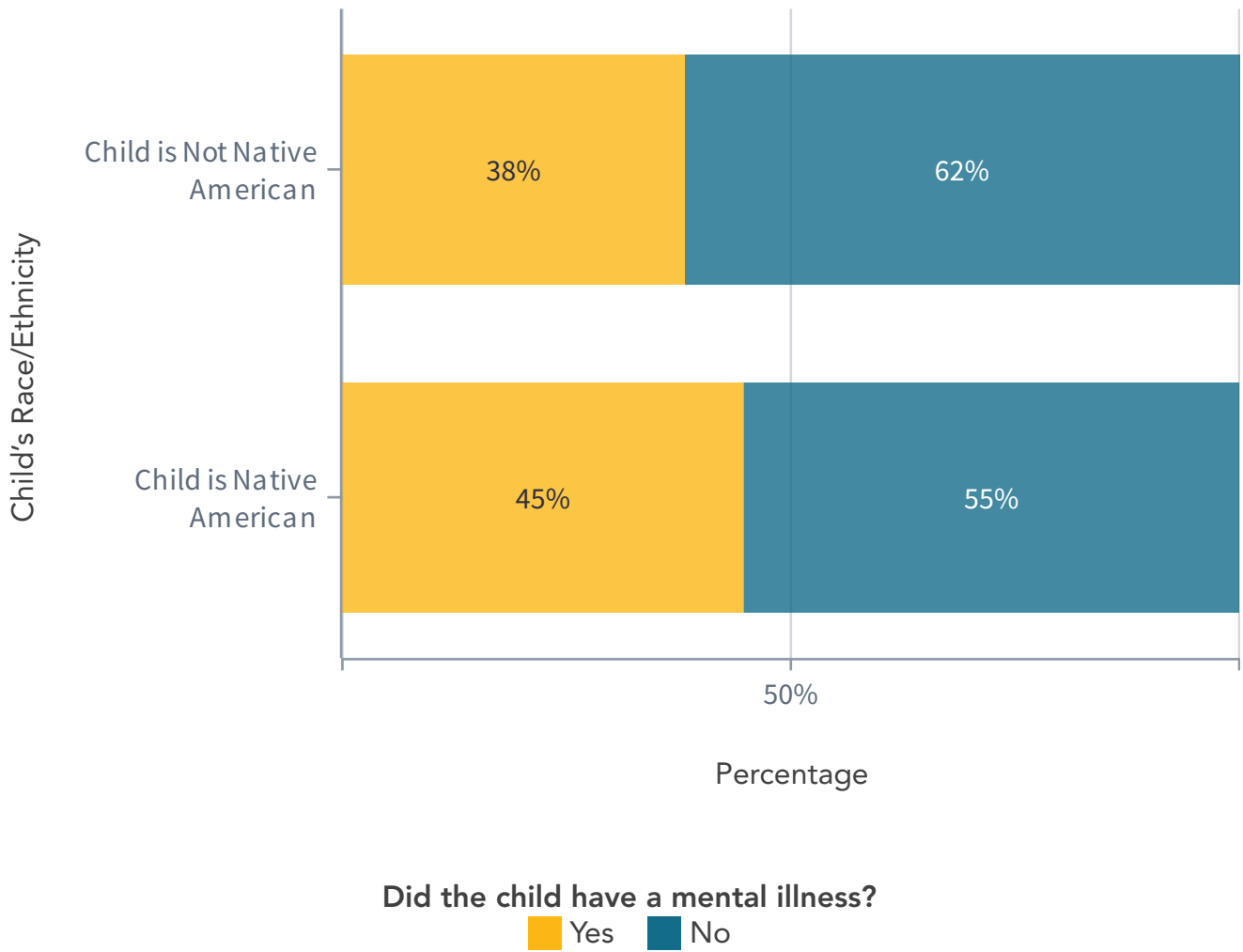


## Native American Endangered Runaway Children and Drug Use

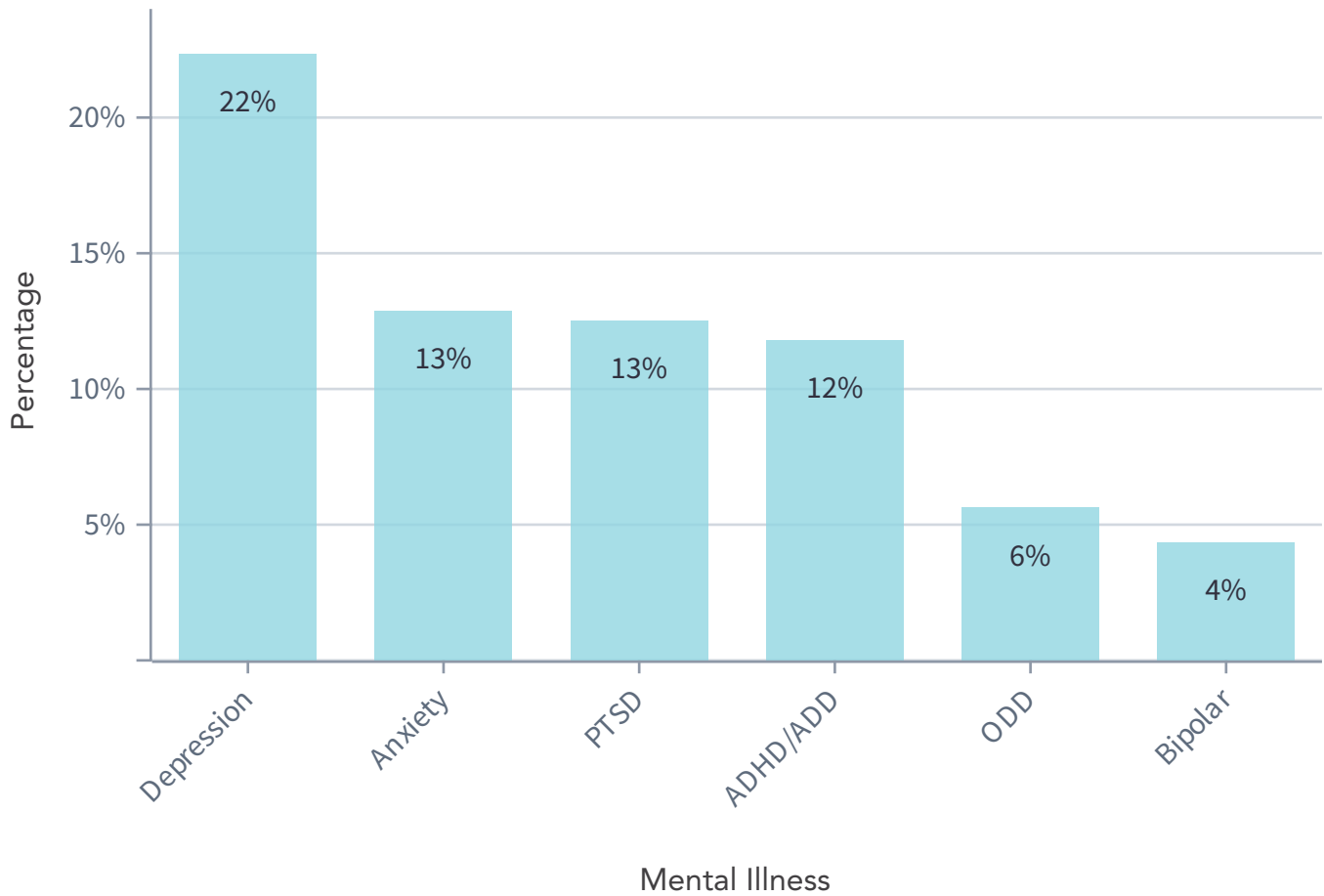


16% of Endangered Runaway Native American children used methamphetamines, compared to 6% of their non-Native American peers.

### Comparison: Endangered Runaway Children and Mental Illness



## Endangered Runaway Children and Mental Illness



22% of Endangered Runaway Native American children had depression compared to 14% of their non-Native American peers. Likewise, 23% of Endangered Runaway Native American children had engaged in self-harm when compared to 15% of their non-Native American peers. Furthermore, over a quarter (26%) of Endangered Runaway Native American children were suicidal, when compared to 19% of their non-Native American peers.



# Conclusion

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This dataset represents Native American children belonging to a variety of regions, age groups, and life experiences. Despite the diversity of circumstances contained within this dataset, certain patterns remained. For example, these children are more likely to be reported missing in states that either have a higher proportion of Native Americans living in the state or a higher proportion of land allocated for tribal territory.

Furthermore, although children of all races and ethnicities who were missing from care were more likely to be reported to NCMEC following the implementation of the “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act,” Native American children had a higher proportion of children missing from care when compared to their non-Native American counterparts. Endangered Runaway Native American children were more likely to be reported engaging in risky behavior. A higher proportion of these children were involved with drug and/or alcohol use and struggled with mental illness. This includes a greater proportion of Native American children using notably dangerous drugs such as methamphetamine, as well as a greater likelihood of engaging in suicidal behaviors.

NCMEC acknowledges the sovereignty of tribal nations and note that because of their sovereignty they do not have the same mandates as states to report missing children to NCMEC. As a result, we believe we do not have a full and accurate picture of missing Native & Indigenous children. NCMEC’s data consistently shows that our children are hurting, and this report underscores that Native & Indigenous children are no exception. In fact, they are suffering at an alarming rate when examining drug and alcohol use, mental illness, and suicide. While many of the endangerments and risk factors that NCMEC collects data on are more appropriately addressed by other child serving organizations when it comes to finding missing and exploited children NCMEC’s work is unparalleled.

NCMEC provides an array of free resources, including case management, poster distribution, law enforcement technical assistance, and analytical support. NCMEC's case management staff coordinate directly with all case workers, social workers and/or law enforcement agencies to provide resources to help safely locate the missing child. Below are some of the resources for which the parent/legal guardian including the child welfare agency that has legal authority over the child can seek assistance through a NCMEC Case Manager.

## Forensic Services

Biometrics (DNA, dentals, and fingerprints) can play a vital role in bringing a child home safely, developing leads, and if needed, forensically confirm identification if the child is recovered deceased, days or years after they went missing. For example, fingerprints can help confirm a child that comes in contact with law enforcement was reported missing from a different state but actively using an alias. DNA can confirm identification if skeletal remains are recovered and suspected to be the missing child. Proactive efforts should be made to secure biometrics shortly after the child goes missing; before dental offices purge records and biological family members cannot be located. NCMEC can help facilitate the collection of dental records, fingerprints, and DNA samples from next-of-kin by providing technical assistance and analytical support to matters involving child welfare agencies and help ensure the records are uploaded into the appropriate national law enforcement databases, where proactive searches for leads and associations help aid in a resolution to the missing child's case. If you have an active missing child case assigned to a NCMEC Case Manager, they will help coordinate these resources. If you would otherwise like assistance from our forensic services team, please send an email to [forensics@ncmec.org](mailto:forensics@ncmec.org).

## Victims & Family Support

NCMEC provides a wide range of support services for victims and their caregivers including crisis intervention, mental health support, referrals to appropriate community agencies and mental health professionals, peer connection, and reunification assistance. The Family Advocacy Outreach Network (FAON) is a membership network connecting victims and families with mental health service providers and other organizations within their communities. FAON seeks the expertise of experienced treatment professionals and service organizations who are willing to provide therapeutic services pro bono or at a low sliding-scale fee to the individuals NCMEC serves. If you provide direct services to people in need, please consider applying to be part of our network. In addition, Team HOPE offers peer-based emotional support services to family members, including foster family members, upon request. If you have an active missing child case assigned to a NCMEC Case Manager, they will help coordinate these resources. If you would otherwise like assistance from our support team or would like to learn more about mental health and peer support services, you can send an email to [gethelp@ncmec.org](mailto:gethelp@ncmec.org).

# Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Planning and Services

The Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Services Team (RST) provides specialized resources to child welfare professionals who have reported a youth missing from care to NCMEC when a concern for child sex trafficking has been identified. Resource Specialists on this team are available to assist child welfare professionals in the development of intentional, trauma-informed, and victim-centered plans for when the youth returns to the placement or is recovered by law enforcement. Case consultation and expert guidance is provided around effective strategies for youth engagement and safety planning, promising practices to address running behavior, and understanding the experiences and needs of youth who have experienced child sex trafficking. Resource Specialists are regionally assigned to provide state-specific guidance and connection to statewide and local specialized child sex trafficking resources. If you have an active missing child case assigned to a NCMEC Case Manager, they will help coordinate these resources. If you are otherwise interested in resources or assistance, please email [RecoveryServices@ncmec.org](mailto:RecoveryServices@ncmec.org).

## Utilizing the Media

NCMEC's media and communications team can support child welfare professionals on how to increase the opportunities for media coverage for missing child cases. This team can help:

- Write statements for caregivers of the missing child
- Help handle incoming media requests
- Assist with strategy and media planning for long term missing cases
- Assist with breaking news for critically missing children by holding press conferences and alerting media to new information

If you have an active missing child case assigned to a NCMEC Case Manager, they will help coordinate these resources. If you are otherwise seeking media assistance, please email our team [media@ncmec.org](mailto:media@ncmec.org).

In 2021, NCMEC established a Tribal Fellowship program dedicated to raising awareness in Native, Indigenous, and tribal communities about the free resources that are available when the Center is contacted about missing & exploited child cases. Other outreach efforts include Congressional Testimony, our CEO's statement on Missing Children's Day, our Data Impact Page, and our Blog on What the Data Shows. To request information about the Fellowship email [tribalfellow@ncmec.org](mailto:tribalfellow@ncmec.org) and to receive a resource presentation for your community submit a request here: [formstack.io/CB73D](https://formstack.io/CB73D).

# Disclaimers and Definitions

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The information provided in this report does not reflect all cases of missing or abducted children, only those reported to NCMEC. As the national clearinghouse for missing and exploited children, NCMEC will assist in any missing child case at the request of law enforcement.

## Case Status:

**Active** – Cases are categorized as active when a child is still missing and law enforcement has an active police report on the child’s disappearance or a Hague application is on file with NCMEC or the U.S. State Department.

**Resolved** – Cases are categorized as resolved when any of the following criteria are met: the child returns home to their parent or legal guardian; the child will remain in the custody of law enforcement; or the child is in contact with their parent or legal guardian but will not be returning home and the parents/legal guardian and law enforcement are satisfied with the situation. A child’s case can only be labeled recovered/deceased if their body has been found and they have been positively identified.

## Case Types:

**Family Abduction (FA)** – The taking, retention, or concealment of a child by a family member in violation of a custody order, a decree, or other legitimate custodial rights.

**Endangered Runaway (ERU)** – Any missing child who is missing on their own accord and whose whereabouts are unknown to their parent or legal guardian.

**Nonfamily Abduction (NFA)** – The unauthorized taking, retention, luring, confinement, or concealment of a child by someone other than a family member.

**Lost/Injured or Otherwise Missing (LIM)** – Any missing child where there are insufficient facts to determine the cause of the child's disappearance, or circumstances puts the child at increased risk.

**Missing Young Adult (MYA)** – Missing persons reported to NCMEC by a law enforcement agency when the individual is at least 18 years old but younger than the age of 21.  
[34 U.S.C. § 41307]

## CMFC Disclaimer:

Social Services agencies in FL, IL, TX, and Los Angeles County (CA) were previously mandated through law or required through a memorandum of understanding to contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) when children went missing from their care. However, the passage of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, P.L. 113-183 (H.R. 4980) in September of 2014 requires all States to report each missing or abducted foster child to law enforcement and to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. States have two years from the date the Act was passed to comply with this directive.



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**MISSING &  
EXPLOITED**  
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