



WISCONSIN COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT
ANTI-RACISM POSITION STATEMENT

Anti-racism and sexual violence (SV) work are one in the same. The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) is committed to anti-racism work as it is foundational and intrinsic to our mission *to create social change to end sexual violence*. Violence against any group, in any form, stems from an abuse of power. In the United States, our dominant culture is profoundly shaped by the influence of white supremacy, resulting in abuses of power against whole communities – especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and LGBTQ+ peoples. The eradication of SV therefore demands that we uproot white supremacy and emphatically pursue racial justice and liberation for all.

In 2021, WCASA staff jointly authored the following anti-racism statement to express our organization’s commitment to anti-racism:

WCASA believes that to achieve our mission of ending sexual violence, we must end all forms of racism and other forms of oppression; anti-racism work is sexual violence prevention work. WCASA recognizes that we have caused harm to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

As we strive to become an anti-racist organization, WCASA commits to purposefully identify, discuss, and challenge racism and the impact it has in our state, systems, and people. It is an expectation that WCASA staff and board of directors take action against racism; in doing so, they will be supported by the organization. It is no longer acceptable to sit in silence. We stand in solidarity with individuals and organizations working towards racial justice led by BIPOC.

The following statement serves as both an update and expansion to WCASA’s 2021 commitment. Anti-racism work requires ongoing and meaningful action, and as we asserted in 2021, WCASA remains dedicated to purposefully identifying, discussing, and challenging racism and the impact it has in our state, systems, and people. With this position statement we also wish to provide greater clarity around specific priorities and factors within our anti-racism work, including: the SV movement’s history and intersection with anti-racism, resources supporting anti-racism efforts, and WCASA’s own history of harm and action steps in centering anti-racism. WCASA stands with BIPOC survivors, advocates, organizations and communities, and commits fully to upholding and pursuing anti-racism in all we do.

WCASA COMMITS TO:

Devote attention and investment to BIPOC

Value culturally specific organizations and their work

Listen to and amplify the voices of BIPOC and then act, based on their guidance

Actively support BIPOC in the anti-violence movement

Understand historical trauma and its ongoing impact today

Incorporate an anti-racist lens into every area of our work

Continue to educate ourselves and others about racism and all forms of oppression

Acknowledge our power and privilege and use it to dismantle racism

Recognize that being an ally is no longer enough – we must move beyond that

Stand up and take action as co-conspirators

Practice humility, intentionality, and accountability

HISTORY and IMPORTANT CONTEXT

To understand the intersection of anti-racism and SV work, we must first confront our nation's history of oppression against those who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). European colonizers based the foundational documents that became the United States' systems of government on a number of [racist, harmful ideologies](#). Be it [historical](#) or [recent](#), our systems, institutions, and government regularly inflict violence on BIPOC communities to ensure their continued oppression and [to uphold white supremacy](#).

SV is endemic to systems of oppression: it is both a tool for, and an outcome of oppression. If we hope to prevent and eradicate SV from our communities, we must

confront white supremacy and center our work—be it intervention or prevention—on anti-racism.

I. **Movement Origins: Centering Indigenous and Black Women**

Prior to colonization, [Indigenous communities](#) in North America were largely egalitarian, with women playing important roles in economic and political decision-making. SV was [almost entirely unheard of](#); and when such harm did occur, Tribal Nations responded strongly. Indigenous communities [believed and empowered survivors](#) to determine their own process for justice and healing.

Colonizers were extremely [threatened](#) by the status and power Indigenous women held. They used [SV as a tool of genocide](#) and [destroyed](#) traditional Indigenous practices and customs. Women were forced out of their roles as decision-makers within their communities, as colonizers refused to respect their personhood or conduct political and economic processes with them.

SV against Indigenous women has continued for centuries and into the present day. The ongoing [Epidemic](#) of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women exemplifies this. A staggering [86-96%](#) of the sexual abuse against Indigenous women is carried out by non-Indigenous men who are rarely brought to justice. Indigenous women are [leading](#) the movement against the violence yet again, demanding action and rightfully condemning the continued disregard of their women and children.

The institution of slavery in the United States normalized the physical and sexual abuse of enslaved African people as a tool of humiliation and control. This violence continued into the Reconstruction Era (1863-1877) following the Civil War. White racists terrorized Black communities with [murder](#), [lynchings](#), and [rape](#)—all of which were made more prolific with the rise of the [Ku Klux Klan](#). [Propaganda](#) purported that Black men were sexually predatory and spurred white law makers to deem rape a capital offense, but only when a Black man was found guilty of sexually assaulting a white woman. As a result, thousands of Black men were [wrongfully accused and murdered](#) by white mobs in the decades between the Reconstruction Era to World War II. The sexual assault of Black women, however, was [not recognized](#) in the same manner and was often dismissed.

Black women were among the first leaders in the movement to fight back against SV. During the Reconstruction Era, [Black women laid the groundwork](#) for modern-day rape crisis centers by creating safe spaces for survivors. In 1866 following the [Memphis Massacre](#), five women boldly [testified before Congress](#) and described their experiences of being gang-raped by a white mob during the three-day massacre. It was the first-time survivors of SV provided congressional testimony, and their stories played a crucial part in spurring political motivation to pass [the 14th Amendment](#). A decade before refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus, [Rosa Parks](#) was a leading anti-rape activist. In 1944, she formed the [Committee for Equal Justice](#) to fight SV against women. And in 2006, [Tarana Burke](#), a sexual assault survivor and activist, founded the #MeToo movement to raise awareness specifically for historically marginalized survivors.

From its inception, BIPOC women have been at the center of the movement to end SV, but too often their contributions are minimized or erased. White women have ignored and pushed out the BIPOC leaders and survivors in the movement – [an issue that persists to this day](#).

II. White Supremacy in the Movement: Then and Now

The first rape crisis centers opened in the early 1970s, but in many ways centered only the experiences of white women. In response, Black women created their own groups and spaces for their communities. [The Combahee River Collective](#) was one such organization. Founded in 1974 by Black feminists, the Collective was openly critical of the way white feminism perpetuated discrimination and bigotry against BIPOC women, impoverished women, and LGBTQIA+ women. While BIPOC operated organizations continued to grow, the mainstream anti-violence movement (predominantly white-led programs) took most state and federal funding opportunities and purposefully excluded BIPOC organizations and survivors in their work.

In 1977, feminists with the Santa Cruz Women Against Rape penned [an open letter](#) to the anti-rape movement, citing their concerns with the way the mainstream movement was [narrowly defining SV work](#) only around the experiences and needs of white women. Moreover, mainstream rape crisis centers were increasingly aligning with oppressive and violent systems—such as law enforcement and the criminal

legal system—which are rooted in white supremacy. BIPOC community members were justifiably opposed to partnering with these systems, let alone trusting them to provide genuine support to BIPOC survivors.

Unfortunately, the letter did little to change the trajectory of the mainstream movement. Over time SV work became both [hyper-professionalized and intertwined](#) with the criminal legal system in such a way that alienated BIPOC communities and survivors, especially those seeking accountability and resolution to violence outside of the carceral system. The lasting impact of white supremacy within the movement is still felt today. While BIPOC-led organizations are more numerous, BIPOC advocates and survivors are still impacted by the [violence of white supremacy](#) within the mainstream movement.

Following the murder of George Floyd in June 2020, leaders within the anti-SV movement issued a statement addressing the racism and violence BIPOC communities—specifically, Black men—regularly experience by law enforcement. 46 state coalitions cosigned the [‘Moment of Truth Letter’](#), a public-facing document detailing how our field has failed survivors of color by placing so much value in the criminal legal system as part of the movement. The letter further affirmed the coalitions’ shared commitment to center BIPOC survivors going forward. While it was significant for coalition leaders to acknowledge the failures of the movement, it is just one step in interrupting the white supremacy within the field.

III. Anti-Racism and Sexual Violence Work: One in the Same

The connection between SV and white supremacy runs deep. As Darian J. Dorsey of Rooting Movements [says](#), SV is both a tool and outcome; that is, it is used to maintain control and domination of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ peoples, while also being an outcome and reflection of white supremacy. As part of our social fabric, the impact of white supremacy is widespread, from our own individual biases, to communities, to organizations and systems. A [health equity approach](#) to the prevention of SV means we must look at the societal conditions that allow for some communities to be impacted by violence more than others. We need to understand how the violence of [racism, white supremacy, and oppression](#) impact people’s ability to reach their best health outcomes. The disproportionate burden of SV among historically marginalized communities illustrates that impact.

Sexual violence is often used specifically to intimidate, target, and exploit historically marginalized communities, namely LGBTQ+ and BIPOC peoples. For instance, [over 50% of Black transgender people](#) are sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetime; Indigenous and Alaskan Native women are [twice as likely](#) to experience SV than any other racial or ethnic community; and [more than 1 in 4](#) Black women experience SV in their lifetime. Statistics alone cannot tell the complex story of the 'how' and 'why' certain communities are subjected to a greater risk for experiencing violence. If we wish to prevent SV from occurring, it is essential for us to look beyond the numbers and examine the source of the violence.

WCASA and ANTI-RACISM

I. WCASA's History

WCASA has its own history of causing harm to BIPOC individuals, programs, and communities. Our actions have violated the trust of BIPOC staff and partners, including not using our voice to stand with Black leaders and advocates; failure to listen to the concerns of BIPOC providers; pushout of staff of color; prioritizing system relationships over community partnerships. The subsequent trauma of these actions cannot be simply ignored or written off; accountability for the damage WCASA has inflicted is essential if we wish to be part of this movement. Most importantly, we recognize that naming our past transgressions is by itself insufficient and does not translate to true accountability. WCASA must act with genuine effort to repair the harm we've caused and commit to the ongoing work of eradicating white supremacy within ourselves and the movement.

Beginning with the intensive support of the [Women of Color Network](#) in 2016, WCASA implemented multiple organizational changes to foster accountability and promote healing with staff, board, and partners. The measures implemented throughout our organization from the development of [our strategic framework](#) to policies and procedures that have led to systemic changes in function and practice for staff and board. As WCASA engaged more intentionally in anti-racism work, it was met with pushback from stakeholders, including those in our membership. As our commitment has been challenged, we reflect on our history and rely on our frameworks to strive for antiracism in our agency and our movement.

II. Actions & Commitments

Organization Practice & Culture

Ongoing conversations about race and racism are essential to WCASA's work. One workgroup is called White Folks Work (WFW). WFW is a standing, bi-weekly space dedicated to challenging white supremacy within ourselves, our agency, and our field. The activities of the group can take many forms and includes education and training but also processing and strategizing about the challenges we encounter within our anti-racism efforts. Regardless of the activity, staff of color are welcome but never required to attend. Keeping the space open allows for accountability and transparency throughout our team.

Unlike WFW, WCASA's internal space for staff of color (SOC) is not open to white staff, nor is there any expectation of transparency or report out to the entire team. This space is expected to be a safe and confidential environment where SOC focus on how issues affect BIPOC staff differently, both personally and professionally. This space fosters solidarity and support, allowing SOC to strategize when issues arise, connect and gather input, and work collectively to navigate challenges. Efforts can include reviewing documents to assess their impact on communities of color and ensuring that BIPOC voices are centered and valued in all organizational actions. This is a space where SOC can safely express themselves, support one another, and ensure that what is important to them is recognized and acted upon.

Because anti-racism work is central to what we do, we've dedicated time and space internally, while centering BIPOC staff and partner experiences. While important, spaces for learning and support are only a piece of our internal work. Changes to policies, procedures, and practices have led to significant improvements to the agency culture, changes that would not have occurred without the leadership and dedication of staff of color. It is this commitment from board to staff that also provides protection from reprimand for staff as they engage in antiracism work across the state.

Services & Efforts

WCASA staff strive to integrate anti-racism into all areas of our work, including policy and systems change advocacy, as well as training and technical assistance (TTA) to members and other partners.

In our TTA, WCASA centers the needs of survivors and service providers from historically marginalized communities. We are committed to elevating the voices and strategies of culturally specific providers, center the needs of those most marginalized, and challenge harmful responses. To reinforce the connection between SV and racism, all WCASA trainings include content focusing on the intersections between the training topic and racism or the needs of marginalized communities. We also provide support to BIPOC staff who are experiencing racism in their work, while challenging mainstream providers to provide more inclusive services and a safe work environment for BIPOC staff.

WCASA's anti-racism framework is also integrated into our policy and systems work. In addition to centering the needs of marginalized communities when identifying policy priorities, we also examine proposed policy changes with a racial justice lens; including things like examining if law changes will expand the criminal-legal system and contribute to mass incarceration or cause other harm to BIPOC communities. Within all systems, we challenge white supremacy, as we work to eliminate barriers and mitigate harm. For far too long, culturally specific programs have been left out of funding opportunities; beyond providing support to these programs, we also challenge funding structures to eliminate these barriers.

Coalition Partnership & Long Range Plan

Beginning in August 2019, representatives from End Abuse, WCASA, American Indians Against Abuse (AIAA), Black and Brown Womyn Power Coalition (BBWPC), and several state provider and funders met jointly to collaborate on a shared vision for services for survivors of both sexual and domestic violence. Over the course of several months, the WI Coalitions, led by End Abuse and WCASA, gathered feedback via input sessions with directors and advocates from member programs throughout the state. From this process the [2023-2029 Long Range Plan – Addressing Sexual and Domestic Violence in Wisconsin](#) (LRP) was crafted. The plan's impact ranges from funding and public policy, to how leaders and stakeholders within the movement understand the anti-violence landscape. Six [Priorities and Recommendations](#) are outlined in the plan:

- 1) Demand Intersectionality in Our Work: Intersectionality will not only enhance services for survivors, but also requires an understanding that solutions to

gender-based violence must be multifaceted and address a variety of social problems that intersect with violence

- 2) **Confront Racism and Oppression:** The impact of white supremacy and white feminism are evident in our movement today. The marginalization of BIPOC leaders has led the field to almost exclusively empower cisgender, white women in leadership roles at national, state, and local levels.
- 3) **Center Black, Indigenous, and People of Color:** The DV and SA movements are not exempt from the legacy and presence of racism, and it must meaningfully address its impact in all we do. Many BIPOC-focused programs have been left out of funding opportunities, meaning much of their work has been under or unfunded.
- 4) **Embed Transformative Justice Principles into Systems Work:** Our historic reliance on criminal legal responses and solutions has had dire consequences for survivors. Therefore, decriminalizing survival must be central to our work. Survivors of SA and DV, particularly Black women and girls, have been the target of criminal legal responses when defending themselves.
- 5) **Prioritize Sexual Assault Services:** Distinct services for SA are essential due to the complexity of the violence. Many dual programs struggle to reach survivors of SA outside the intimate partner context. Although SA may be used by a partner to exert coercive control, those who perpetrate SA transcend intimate partner relationships.
- 6) **Redefine the Role of Advocate:** A limited definition of the role of advocacy fails to recognize survivors as experts in their own healing and impedes addressing the complex nature of trauma. Many survivors experience multiple forms of trauma throughout their lives; BIPOC survivors also experience historical trauma.

The LRP serves as a guidepost for the anti-violence movement within the state and firmly asserts anti-racism as foundational to the work. WCASA, in partnership with our fellow Coalitions, are committed to the LRP and more importantly to the core themes within, especially upholding anti-racism in all our efforts.

Below is a list of talking-points—both with and without statistics—that can be utilized in discussions and resources for supporting anti-racism efforts.

TALKING POINTS:

- Sexual Violence and racism are inextricably linked, as both are rooted in oppression. As a result, sexual violence prevention must address the root causes of violence, including racism.
- Racism is also a risk factor for experiencing sexual violence. Many other risk factors for sexual violence, including poverty, lack of employment, and racism within the criminal legal system, are also linked to oppression.
- The US was built on foundations of white supremacy, which maintain power for white people at the expense of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). As a result, white supremacy continues to permeate cultural and societal institutions in the US. This includes the criminal legal system, which has disproportionately harmed BIPOC.
- Anti-blackness is a targeted form of racism directed against Black people. While rooted in slavery, the impacts continue today. These include:
 - Mass incarceration
 - Adverse health outcomes
 - Segregation in schools and housing
- Anti-blackness continues to impact the anti-sexual violence movement. This has led not only to the push out of Black advocates, but also programs led by Black women have been left out of funding opportunities.
- The anti-sexual violence movement began and was led by Black and Indigenous women, who rejected the idea that the criminal legal system could provide justice for survivors.
- The mainstream, white-led anti-sexual violence movement has aligned with the criminal legal system for funding and as a solution to end sexual violence. This has directly contributed to the problem of mass incarceration of BIPOC, but also pushed BIPOC advocates out of the movement.
- Mainstream programs have also used BIPOC led programs to access funding, and then subsequently failed to meet their needs.

- BIPOC are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence, including experiencing barriers to reporting and accessing services after violence.
- We must center BIPOC in our work to end sexual violence. By centering those most marginalized, we will improve responses for all survivors.
- We must embed transformative justice in our work to end sexual violence. This includes restorative justice approaches that center survivor-defined justice and safety outside the criminal legal system, which has dehumanized and caused harm through punishment.

DATA POINTS:

- The federal government has created a complex interrelation between federal, state, and tribal jurisdictions that undermines tribal authority and often allows perpetrators to evade justice. Indigenous survivors who come forward to report sexual violence are caught in a jurisdictional maze that law enforcement cannot easily sort out. The resulting confusion may mean no one intervenes, therefore survivors are denied access to justice. [Amnesty International - Maze of Injustice](#)
- 86% of rapes reported by Native and Indigenous women were committed by non-Indigenous perpetrators. [Amnesty International](#)
- For every 15 Black women who are raped, only one reports her assault. [National Organization for Women](#)
- Black women report experiencing sexual harassment at work at three times the rate of white women. - [Know The Facts - We, As Ourselves](#)
- Of 2,400 of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women surveyed, 74% reported personally experiencing racism and/or discrimination, 38% experienced sexual harassment, and 12% experienced gender and/or race-based physical violence. [National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum](#)
- Of 117 AAPI survivors surveyed, 82% received no resources or services related to their sexual assault. [CDC, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#)

- Latinx women are more likely to encounter barriers to seeking services and are less likely to report rape victimization. [NSVRC - Preventing Sexual Violence in Latin@ Communities](#)
- Hundreds of Latinx women and girls are subjected to sexual violence at US Immigration and Custom Enforcements (ICE) Detention Centers every year. The abuse is often perpetrated by ICE employees. [Futuro Investigates, Futuro Media](#)
- Young girls of color who are incarcerated are disproportionately survivors of sexual abuse. For instance, 76% of young women in the Oregon carceral system were survivors of sexual abuse by age 13, and over 81% of incarcerated girls reported a history of sexual violence in South Carolina. [Rights 4 Girls, The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline](#)

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Begin with yourself. White folks and those with privileged identities must understand how white supremacy shows up in their lives, as well as how implicit bias may influence their behaviors. Some tangible action steps include staying informed by prioritizing information and expertise from BIPOC creators, getting friends and family involved by sharing resources, having intentional discussions and holding each other accountable to anti-racism.

Engage with your elected officials (including school boards) about anti-racism. This includes opposing curriculum censorship and book ban efforts that limit learning about racism and oppression.

Ensure you are incorporating anti-racism discussions into your prevention education programming. This includes all prevention materials including curriculum, articles, books, podcasts, etc.

Examine agency policies and practices to ensure that anti-racism is present in the foundation of the agency's day to day functions, as well as to remove biased policies that may be currently present.

Unlearning racism and white supremacy are an ongoing process; there is no end point. All staff and the board should seek out trainings on a frequent basis. One two-hour webinar is not enough.

Be a conscious consumer; support business and organizations that uplift anti-racism and liberation.

Identify and collaborate with others—organizations, advocacy groups, etc.—engaged in anti-racism and liberation in your community

LEADERS IN ANTI-RACISM:

There are many leaders we can follow and support in our professional and personal networks. Here are a few:

- [Ujima: National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community](#)
- [Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence](#)
- [National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center \(NIWRC\)](#)
- [Caminar Latino: Latinos United for Peace and Equity](#)
- [Color Of Change](#)
- [Black Lives Matter](#)
- [Incite!](#)
- [Transform Harm](#)
- [Black Youth Project](#)
- [Sins Invalid](#)
- [Police Free Schools](#)
- [In Our Own Voices](#)