

## Why Should My Tribe Consider Developing a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)?

NCA Accreditation Standard this brief addresses:  
1: Multidisciplinary Team

Ensuring that Tribes have the authority and capacity to care for and protect their children is a fundamental value across Indian Country. Assuming ownership of the MDT response allows Tribes to fulfill this value in cases of child abuse. Below, NCARC explains what an MDT is and how Tribal ownership of the MDT response can make a difference.

**What is an MDT?** An MDT brings together the organizations and individuals responsible for investigating and prosecuting cases of child abuse in a community, as well as those who provide treatment and other services so that children and families heal and thrive in the future. An effective MDT response to child abuse allegations includes representation from law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, medical providers, mental health providers, and victim advocates. MDTs may be associated with an established Child Advocacy Center, or they may be standalone teams. The MDT collaborates to ensure that lines of communication remain open from the time of the abuse report throughout the case process, ensuring that the investigation proceeds effectively and that services for the children and families are coordinated and sufficient to help them heal from the trauma of the abuse and to prevent further traumas that may arise during the case process. In smaller communities, one person may fill multiple roles on the MDT. Communities also have the option to include additional roles, either on a routine or a case-by-case basis. For example, in a Tribal community, a spiritual leader or elder may be an appropriate MDT member. Collaboration occurs in the form of a structured meeting schedule where cases are reviewed and decisions about investigation, prosecution, and treatment occur.



**Why does it matter?** In the absence of an MDT, the different organizations and individuals investigating child abuse allegations often struggle to coordinate their actions, and the victim's wellbeing may not be prioritized. A child may be forced to endure repeated questioning, which can further traumatize them, and the child and family are less likely to receive the kinds of multi-faceted treatment and support they need to recover and heal.

**Why should Tribes consider taking ownership of the MDT response?** Investigation and prosecution of child abuse allegations cannot be effective, and children and families cannot receive the full range of services they need, when no MDT response occurs or when the MDT response does not align with a Tribal community's values, institutions, and culture. Tribal MDTs are uniquely positioned to minimize confusion and delays associated with the complexity of jurisdictions and service systems in Indian Country. By ensuring that all appropriate Tribal and non-Tribal agencies collaborate in a purposeful way, Tribal MDTs can enhance these stakeholders' ability to obtain justice and meet the needs of children and families in a holistic, culturally appropriate way.

**We believe that Multidisciplinary Teams and Child Advocacy Centers are a powerful way to care for and protect our children.** Whether you are a Native nation considering starting an MDT or CAC, or you are a non-Tribal CAC interested in better serving Native children and families, we are here to support you.

We provide:

- training and technical assistance on the formation and accreditation of MDTs and CACs which are trauma-informed and culturally grounded,
- guidance on building authentic partnerships with Native nations, and
- connection with a peer network of CACs/MDTs run by Native nations and those who partner with them.

**Connect with us through our website at [nativecac.org](https://nativecac.org) or by reaching out directly to our staff.**

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