

Answering the Call

Thirty Years of the

Violence Against Women Act

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United States Department of Justice
Office on Violence Against Women

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Congress passed the first Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994 with bipartisan support, answering the call from those who testified and wrote letters urging lawmakers to improve legal protections and increase access to services for domestic violence and sexual assault victims to survive the harm perpetrated against them and hold offenders accountable. In the three decades that followed, investments in VAWA grant programs have meant that—in communities in every state and territory, and in Tribal nations across the country—there is someone to respond when a survivor calls for help.

This report chronicles the impact of VAWA grant funding in the United States. It uses research findings, numbers, archival material, and grantees' and survivors' own words to present snapshots of the ways VAWA transforms communities' efforts to support survivors, hold offenders accountable, and work collaboratively to end domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

"I don't even know if my kids and I would be alive today, had it not been for this program."

- A survivor served by the New Hope Regional Foundation's Transitional Housing Program grant, Nebraska, 2012

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Letter from the OVW Director

I am pleased to present this report as a glimpse into what has been achieved through thirty years of implementing the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and investing in its grant programs. It includes examples from every state and territory of how these grants have helped survivors rebuild their lives and pursue justice for the harm they suffered.

The report offers snapshots of the grant programs' impact, showing how that impact grew with each subsequent reauthorization of VAWA. It tracks how each reauthorization of VAWA answered the calls for expanded protections and increased resources for survivors. It describes how VAWA grant funds have been used to answer survivors' calls for safety, services, and justice in communities across the country.

In recounting the ways VAWA grants have extended a lifeline to millions of people over three decades, OVW in no way means to diminish the experiences of survivors who have *not* found support in the aftermath of violence—the ones whose calls went unanswered. Much has been accomplished and much remains to be done to ensure all survivors have a chance to find safety, healing, and justice, and to improve prevention efforts so that everyone can thrive free from violence.

With hope and gratitude,

Rosemarie Hidalgo
Director
Office on Violence Against Women
U.S. Department of Justice

Hope at the Outset

"This is the one assignment I have found that, as a judge, you feel that **you really can make a difference in people's lives.**"

- Circuit Court Judge in Cook County, Illinois from *Snapshots of Success* video series (Leadership, Commitment, and Change)

OR • 2006 Grantee Perspective

"I received a call from the hospital to go visit a victim who had just come into the emergency room. I went to the hospital, met the victim, offered services including shelter, and provided her with information. When I was done, the first responding officer arrested her for domestic violence assault and took her to jail, where her boyfriend was already lodged for domestic assault (dual arrest). I contacted the follow-up investigator and the advocate who met the victim when she arrived at the jail, the investigator interviewed both combatants, determined who the victim was, and had her released. The advocate transported the victim to the shelter and is helping her through the court system. When the abuser is convicted, he will be added to the caseload of our team probation officer. The follow-up investigator was able to educate the first responding officer about predominate aggressor, defensive wounds, and dual arrest. With Rural Program funds, we were able to minimize the effect of revictimization by the system."

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES, OREGON
(RURAL PROGRAM)**

In the early 1990s, the United States Senate held hearings on the proposed Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the bill that ultimately became law as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault testified at the hearings, as did scholars, legal experts, and advocates. They called for better protections and expanded resources for survivors, stronger laws and better enforcement of existing laws, greater availability of victim advocates, and training for people who are part of criminal and civil justice system responses to domestic violence and sexual assault.

"Victims of domestic violence cannot be further traumatized by the very system that should be helping them."

- Survivor testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee,
December 11, 1990

VAWA was first designed to equip the justice system with resources, training, and policies to deal with crimes that historically were treated as a private matter.ⁱ Recognizing that domestic violence and sexual violence require a coordinated response that extends beyond the justice system, Congress subsequently reauthorized and enhanced VAWA, with revisions to its policies and expansions of the grant funding streams, in 2000, 2005, 2013, and, most recently, in 2022. Over the four subsequent iterations of VAWA, the focus progressed toward enhancing comprehensive services for victims; recognizing sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking as serious crimes that communities are under-resourced to address; and strengthening legal protections and civil remedies for all victims, particularly those who may face compounding barriers to accessing safety, services, and justice because of their race, ethnicity, immigration status, age, disability, primary language, economic status, sexual orientation, or gender identity, as well as those living in rural areas, among other factors.

ⁱ While the title of the Violence Against Women Act reflects the fact that the women face higher rates of the crimes the Act addresses, VAWA's legal protections and grant programs provide protections for survivors regardless of sex.

The first authorized VAWA grant programs reflected the primary emphasis in the 1994 Act on the criminal justice system's role in addressing violence against women. The **Services*Training*Officers*Prosecutors (STOP) Formula Grant Program**, which distributes funds annually to states and territories according to a population-based formula, was created to develop and strengthen justice responses to domestic violence and sexual assault and enhance services for victims. The STOP funds are then distributed as subawards within each state and territory, following the development of state plans, to support: victim services (30%), law enforcement (25%), prosecutors (25%), courts (5%), and discretionary funding (15%). Congress provided \$26 million for the STOP Formula Grant Program in Fiscal Year 1995, marking the first-ever appropriation for a VAWA program. In Fiscal Year 2024, STOP Formula Grant Program funds totaled \$255 million.

VAWA also created two discretionary programs when first enacted in 1994. Unlike with formula grants, which ensure every state and territory has funding to address gaps in victim services and justice solutions, applicants to discretionary grant programs seek funding through a competitive process. They are provided with specialized training and technical assistance and are encouraged to use innovative approaches that may prove instructive to other communities struggling with similar challenges, in order to continue developing promising practices.

The **Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies Program (later renamed Improving Criminal Justice Responses (ICJR) Program)** encouraged state, Tribal, and local governments to treat domestic violence as a serious crime. To be eligible for these grants, applicants had to certify that the laws or policies in their jurisdiction encouraged or mandated the arrest of someone for whom there is probable cause that they committed domestic violence or violated a protection order. Recognizing that these laws could have unintended impacts on survivors, later reauthorizations of the program removed mandatory arrest policies as an eligibility criterion. Grantees must also certify that their laws, policies, or practices discourage dual arrests of offenders and victims and prohibit issuance of mutual protection orders—except in limited, specified circumstances—and do not require victims to pay fees related to the filing of criminal charges against their abusers or the service of protection orders, warrants, and subpoenas. By conditioning eligibility for funding on a jurisdiction having such laws or policies in place, VAWA has promoted through its grant programs significant, nationwide changes in how law enforcement responds to domestic violence calls for service.

The **Rural Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Program (Rural Program)** was also authorized to provide rural communities with resources to respond to domestic violence and child abuse, supporting "cooperative efforts and projects between law enforcement officers, prosecutors, [and] victim advocacy groups[.]"

MN • 2010 Grantee Perspective

"Immediately following the first training on strangulation, reports were received that law enforcement officers were using the information gained at the training and making arrests for strangulation where previously they had not. Individual law enforcement officers and prosecutors have reported to the various committee and task force members that they are now making arrests due directly to information received at the training."

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY (ARREST PROGRAM)

NV • 2012 Grantee Perspective

"Funding has allowed us to dedicate investigative staff to cases of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, thus decreasing incident response time, increasing victim trust and cooperation, and improving investigative effectiveness. . . Prior to receiving this funding, [our county] lacked the resources necessary to effectively address domestic violence incidents, the scope of the problem was intangible, agencies acted in isolation, and victims fell through the cracks."

DOUGLAS COUNTY, NEVADA (RURAL PROGRAM)

UT • 2004 Grantee Perspective

"Our Arrest Program-funded efforts kept many victims from having to testify, thus taking the responsibility off the victim and placing it on the criminal justice system."

WEST VALLEY CITY, UTAH (ARREST PROGRAM)

MP • 2021 Subgrantee Perspective

"This grant funds the Victim Assistance Coordinator position, which was created to help address the gap between victims and the criminal justice system. They work alongside the detectives on the cases as well as refer victims to services they may need, such as filing for restraining orders, counseling, and accompanying them to medical examinations."

FAMILY VIOLENCE TASK FORCE - DPS SAIPAN, NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS (STOP)

AZ • 2004 Grantee Perspective

"Our total number of domestic violence probationers increased 756%, from 110 in 2000, the first year of funding, to 942 in 2003. Seventy-four percent of domestic violence probationers now graduate from probation, compared with only 6% in 2000. Prior to receiving funds, there was no supervised probation of domestic violence perpetrators in the county."

**COCHISE COUNTY ADULT PROBATION,
ARIZONA (RURAL PROGRAM)**

Tribal • 2022 Grantee Perspective

"The on-going re-victimization and victim blaming that takes place through the civil and criminal legal process continues to be a huge barrier in survivors seeking help and a life free from abuse."

**MUSCOGEE NATION FAMILY VIOLENCE
PREVENTION PROGRAM (TRIBAL
GOVERNMENTS PROGRAM)**

NH • 2002 Grantee Perspective

"In New Hampshire, the Strafford County District Attorney's Office successfully secured increased penalties for offenders convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors."

**STRAFFORD COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S
OFFICE, NEW HAMPSHIRE (ARREST PROGRAM)**

This notion of a **coordinated community response**—meaning justice professionals and victim advocates working together and involving people from other systems and different parts of the community—became the cornerstone of VAWA grant programs. Later reauthorizations created new grant programs to address specific underserved populations and challenges, but the thread that has run through the grant programs since the beginning is the idea that agencies, service providers, non-profit organizations, and community leaders should collaborate to make their communities safer and increase support for all survivors to navigate the aftermath of violence and access safety, services, and justice.

Congress also authorized that four percent of STOP Formula Program funds be used for grants to Indian Tribal governments. Through subsequent reauthorizations, this allocation grew into a portfolio of comprehensive grant programs designed to support Tribal efforts to prevent and address domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and sex trafficking in their communities.

Beyond the grant programs, VAWA 1994 established new provisions and tools meant to ensure that victims could get help during a crisis and improve access to justice. At the federal level, it added a new rule of evidence commonly referred to as a "rape shield law," which limits a defendant's ability to introduce as evidence a sexual assault complainant's prior sexual history. It also addressed jurisdictional issues, revising the federal code to criminalize an offender's crossing state lines to commit domestic violence or violate a protection order. It established "full faith and credit" for protection orders, meaning that states and Tribes had to enforce another state or Tribe's protection order as if it were their own, when a survivor crossed jurisdictional boundaries. Furthermore, VAWA 1994 created specialized legal remedies through the VAWA self-petition to support immigrant victims and made it more difficult for abusive spouses to use immigration laws to prevent victims from seeking safety and leaving an abusive relationship.

In 2000, the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), which has administered VAWA grant programs since 1995, partnered with the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine to produce a series of videos showing grant funding in action. The series, *Snapshots of Success*, featured people recounting how VAWA had transformed the response to violence against women in their communities.

"[I was at] kind of just a dead-end street. That was before I found out that there was help available to me. [Things are] a lot more bright now that I got the help that I needed. They started me off with all the essential things that I needed to live. And they put me in training for better job skills. And I truly believe that I would probably be in the same situation had it not been for this help."

- A survivor in Detroit, Michigan on how a VAWA-funded agency assisted her,
Snapshots of Success interview, 2000

Throughout the *Snapshots of Success* series, interviewees conveyed that VAWA brought resources to their communities that mitigated long-standing barriers to safety and justice for survivors. The founder of a legal assistance program in rural Vermont remarked that she noticed how many women would obtain temporary protection orders but then not return to court for a final order: "I said, why is this happening? What I saw was that there was this gap that women had of not being able to get to the courthouse." That observation led to her establishing the organization Have Justice Will Travel, so that survivors "could get to the courthouse to get the legal representation they needed. I could go to their homes and sit with them where they're comfortable and look at why they need legal assistance."

Interviewees explained how VAWA transformed the response to violence against women in their communities. A prosecutor in San Diego, California, said of the coordinated community response funded by grants: "Individually, I don't think we would be as successful, but together in collaboration we make things work better." Her colleague added: "We've gone from waiting until we have broken bones and dead bodies, to intervening at the earliest possible stage to stop the violence before it escalates, and that shift has been dramatic. And it hasn't just been the criminal justice system, it's been the criminal justice system in partnership with the entire community."

NM • 2004 Subgrantee Perspective 

"Resources, Inc. created the Stalking Assessment Team within the Albuquerque Police Department in response to a case in which a woman was killed by her stalker. The team provides specialized training to police officers and advocates on investigating and prosecuting stalking cases and assisting stalking victims."

RESOURCES, INC., NEW MEXICO (STOP)

IN • 2022 Subgrantee Perspective 

"This funding allows us to keep our crisis shelter open 24 hours a day. Having night staff allows us to take calls from victims of domestic violence all night and gives them somewhere to escape their situation. This is vital to the safety and survival of those victims."

YWCA NORTHEAST INDIANA (STOP)

What VAWA Grant Programs Have Achieved

"We are very **grateful that we have been entrusted with these resources** and are able to make a critical difference."

- Coalition to End Gender-based Violence, Washington, 2018 (Disability Program)

ND • 2021 Subgrantee Perspective

"STOP funding allows us to continue to keep our doors open. Without this funding, we would not be able to make ends meet."

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND RAPE CRISIS CENTER, NORTH DAKOTA (STOP)

WA • 2002 Grantee Perspective

"In Washington State, VAWA funding enabled Columbia Legal Services 'Las Amigas Unidas' to educate Latina farm workers and teens about domestic violence, provide direct services to victims, and train more than 100 leaders from the farm worker community as lay volunteer advocates to make informal contact with victims about options and resources. Prior to VAWA funding, outreach was not provided to the Latino community."

COLUMBIA LEGAL SERVICES, WASHINGTON (RURAL PROGRAM)

NH • 2002 Grantee Perspective

"Over nine months, we provided free legal services to 199 refugees and immigrant women who were victims or survivors of domestic violence."

BATTERED IMMIGRANT WOMEN PROJECT, NEW HAMPSHIRE (LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR VICTIMS PROGRAM)

Congress reauthorized VAWA in 2000, with new programs and provisions that reflected a broadened understanding of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking (which are referred to collectively under the term "gender-based violence" throughout the remainder of this report). It also reflected a deeper understanding of the ways survivors' vulnerabilities can be exploited by abusers and can also result in additional barriers to safety in systems that are supposed to protect them. VAWA 2000 accounted for the fact that where survivors live, where they choose to go for help, and where they are on their individual paths to safety, healing, and justice have implications for the supports and safeguards they need. VAWA 2000 also recognized stalking and dating violence as separate crimes that require solutions beyond those used to address domestic violence and sexual assault.

Congress created the U visa as a form of relief for undocumented survivors who are willing to help police and prosecutors hold their abusers accountable but fear being deported if they report their victimization. It also created the T visa to support victims of trafficking when it enacted the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in conjunction with the reauthorization of VAWA in 2000.

VAWA 2000 also established funding streams to help fill two of the deepest gaps in services for survivors. The **Legal Assistance for Victims (LAV) Grant Program** supports comprehensive legal services for survivors in matters stemming from their victimization, helping them obtain protection orders and navigate divorce, custody, child support, evictions, and other matters. Research funded by the National Institute of Justice has shown that legal assistance provided by LAV-funded attorneys improves the quality, quantity, and efficiency of legal services for domestic violence survivors, and legal aid attorneys trained on domestic violence attain the most favorable outcomes for their clients on custody matters when compared to victims who represent themselves or have privately retained lawyers who may not have specific training on domestic violence.

LAV grantees often recount in reports on their grant-funded work how they have assisted people whose ability not only to survive violence but to thrive hinges on what happens in court. Caring Unlimited, a grantee in Maine, shared this note its attorneys received from a former client in 2021: "I just wanted to reach out and thank you both so much for advocating for my son and me. You really went out of your way to stand up for us and I will be forever grateful for your support. I cannot thank you enough for everything. You both are in the right line of work, and you are changing the world."

By creating the **Transitional Housing Assistance Grants for Victims of Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Program (Transitional Housing Program)**, VAWA 2000ⁱⁱ helped open doors to survivors who need longer term housing assistance, as a result of violence, beyond emergency shelter services or other crisis intervention services. By filling survivors' most urgent need first through offering a safe place to live, grantees can then work with survivors to recover and plan for long-term safety, healing, and economic stability. Domestic Violence Project, Inc., a Transitional Housing grantee in Ohio, reported in 2020: "It may take six months or more of residency in our program for survivors to begin to engage in any type of change-oriented conversation or actions to increase their chances of long-term stability and permanent housing. It is the trauma-informed setup of the program, and the adequate housing timeframe, that allow residents the opportunity to progress out of the crisis stage, begin to rebuild their lives, and be empowered to make their own choices for their future." Despite increased investments in transitional housing services through VAWA grant programs, a lack of access to safe and affordable housing has always been and remains one of the greatest challenges cited by grantees. The National Network to End Domestic Violence, in its annual survey of domestic violence programs, found that on a single day in 2023 survivors made 13,335 requests for services that programs could not provide because they did not have the resources, and most of those unfilled requests were for emergency shelter, lodging, and transitional housing.ⁱⁱⁱ

Recognizing that people with disabilities and older adults have distinct needs and encounter unique barriers to safety and justice when they are victimized, VAWA 2000 created programs to prevent and respond to violence against these populations. The **Enhanced Training and Services to End Abuse in Later Life Program (Abuse in Later Life Program)** started as a training program for law enforcement but now funds a comprehensive approach to addressing elder abuse. Similarly, the **Grants for Training and Services to End Violence Against Individuals with Disabilities and Deaf People Program (Disability Program)** initially only focused on education and training, but now fosters change within and between organizations to improve responses to survivors with disabilities and Deaf survivors. Both of these programs strengthen coordinated community responses by including a focus on organizations and people connected with populations who may be "invisible in the justice system," as one grantee described it, and whose needs may be unaccounted for in services, policies, and protocols.

ⁱⁱ VAWA 2000 authorized Transitional Housing as a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grant program. The PROTECT Act of 2003 reauthorized it as U.S. Department of Justice grant program.

ⁱⁱⁱ See: National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2024). 18th Annual Domestic Violence Counts Report - National Summary. Available at: <https://nnedv.org/content/domestic-violence-counts-18th-annual-report/>.

MT • 2022 Grantee Perspective

"This grant has allowed us to offer stability in rent, security deposits, utilities, and support services like therapy, financial counseling, and employment advocacy. These tools give clients a real chance to change their lives for the long term."

DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE SERVICES OF CARBON COUNTY, MONTANA (TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM)

DE • 2012 Grantee Perspective

"This funding has allowed us to hire dedicated staff to create the connections necessary to implement lasting systems change. We are able to train a core group in the intersections of domestic violence, disabilities, and mental health who can then identify opportunities to disseminate this knowledge and understand and overcome the barriers to change."

DELAWARE COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (DISABILITY PROGRAM)

OH • 2004 Grantee Perspective

"Most important for the long-term elimination of violence against women with disabilities has been the vigorous collaborative community response Educate to Eliminate has led. Prior to its creation, no programs or coordinated community response to violence against people with disabilities existed, although anecdotal evidence from service providers showed the problem was very real."

INDEPENDENT LIVING OPTIONS, OHIO (DISABILITY PROGRAM)

TN • 2012 Grantee Perspective

"The coordinated community response activities have increased the coordination between governmental and nongovernmental advocates in order to better serve elderly victims, leading to an increase in case referrals to victim service organizations by law enforcement and Adult Protective Services. Cross-training increased participants' knowledge of elderly victim service agencies regarding community resources and provided concise information pertaining to individual organizations."

YWCA OF NASHVILLE AND MIDDLE TENNESSEE (ABUSE IN LATER LIFE PROGRAM)

AL • 2022 Grantee Perspective

"This funding helps us ensure better services to rape victims across the state of Alabama."

ALABAMA COALITION AGAINST RAPE (STATE COALITIONS PROGRAM)**RI • 2006 Subgrantee Perspective**

"We have provided advocacy services to numerous victims of these crimes as well as support and referrals to their friends, family members, and professional staff. We have worked with victims who were either dropping out or failing out of college following a sexual assault. We were able to support them and to work with other staff on campus on their behalf. All of these women have stayed on and are in the process of completing school."

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND (CAMPUS PROGRAM)

In 2002, legislation established the Office on Violence Against Women as a "separate and distinct" component of the U.S. Department of Justice headed by a director who is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. As a stand-alone office, OVW provides federal leadership to advance programs, policies, and practices to end gender-based violence.

An example of OVW's leadership in developing critical policy guidance is the Justice Department's 2024 *Framework for Prosecutors to Strengthen Our National Response to Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence Involving Adult Victims*. It provides a blueprint for building provable cases in a trauma-informed manner while addressing myths and misconceptions that can lead to the declination of potentially meritorious allegations.

In Denver, Colorado, the city and county government said in 2014 that, if not for an Abuse in Later Life Program grant and the training it provides, they "would not be addressing elder abuse on anything other than a case-by-case basis from siloed perspectives." Disability Program grantees often remark on how the grant funding has afforded them the time and space needed to support survivors with disabilities. The South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault noted in 2021 that its grant provided "funding and bandwidth to work with people who need more of [staff's] time and attention in working through some horrific experiences."

To foster statewide efforts around the coordinated community response at the core of VAWA, the 2000 reauthorization also created the **State and Territorial Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Coalitions Program (State Coalitions Program)**. Coalitions advocate for improved policies at the state and local level and provide critical training for advocates, justice system professionals, health-care providers, educational institutions, and others throughout their state or territory. The **Grants to Tribal Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalitions Program (Tribal Coalitions Program)** was also created to support the development and operation of Tribal domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions.

VAWA 2000 also strengthened the **Grants to Reduce Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking on Campus Program (Campus Program)**, originally authorized by the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 to address gender-based violence, including dating violence, on campuses. Additionally, the **Safe Havens Pilot Program** was authorized to keep survivors and their children safe during court-ordered supervised visits and custody exchanges, which often coincide with what can be the most dangerous time in a survivor's life: the period immediately following their separation from the abuser, when the violence can significantly escalate.^{iv} VAWA 2000 also mandated the Department of Justice's issuance of a national protocol for sexual assault medical forensic examinations and accompanying training standards for health-care providers, which helps ensure sexual assault survivors can get urgently needed treatment and evidence collection.

The 2005 reauthorization of VAWA deepened the original Act's commitment to fostering partnerships that make a community's response to gender-based violence better than merely the sum of its parts. It recognized that, to truly serve the entire community, organizations that offer resources beyond what the criminal and civil justice systems and mainstream victim services agencies can provide need to be part of shaping and implementing responses to violence. VAWA 2005 authorized new programs to ensure that safety, healing, and justice are within reach for survivors who endure unique impacts of gender-based violence and face significant barriers when they seek support, particularly survivors in culturally specific and Tribal communities. Furthermore, it created a Tribal Deputy Director position to lead OVW's efforts in Tribal communities. OVW's Tribal Affairs Division has grown significantly over the years to support expanded grant programs, training, and technical assistance for Tribal governments and other Tribal organizations.

^{iv} See, for example: Rezey, M. L. (2020). Separated Women's Risk for Intimate Partner Violence: A Multiyear Analysis Using the National Crime Victimization Survey. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 35(5-6), 1055-1080. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517692334>.

AR • 2022 Subgrantee Perspective 

"SASP funding has allowed us to hire a full time Sexual Assault Victim Advocate. Prior to this funding, we were only able to provide limited services through volunteers. Though volunteers are wonderful, it is too big of a task to cover our rural four-county area with volunteers who are typically only available to assist in the evening. Our survivors were slipping through the cracks and self-medicating with alcohol and drugs. Knowing that there is a trained advocate allows survivors to feel safe and lets them focus on healing and restoration."

SOUTHWEST ARKANSAS CRISIS AND RESOURCE CENTER (SASP)

Tribal • 2021 Grantee Perspective 

"Our staff members are familiar with the people in communities and can offer insight into customs and traditions that otherwise would not be known/understood by non-tribal members."

MISSISSIPPI BAND OF CHOCTAW INDIANS (TRIBAL SASP)

CA • 2020 Grantee Perspective 

"We cannot stress enough the importance of culturally responsive services for survivors, especially language access. We have received calls from survivors who stayed at other shelters and expressed that they have not fully received or understood the available services due to language/cultural barriers. Language access is a civil right as well as a trauma-informed practice for survivors of domestic violence, which we hope mainstream shelters can improve upon."

ASIAN WOMEN'S SHELTER, CALIFORNIA (CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES PROGRAM)

WY • 2021 Grantee Perspective 

"We have three focus areas: primary prevention programming, outreach and awareness, and the ongoing support of the SAFE Men project. With grant funds, we are developing a primary prevention program for 8th and 9th grade boys to learn about healthy relationships. Local adults and university students will serve as mentors and guides to this group throughout the year."

WYOMING COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT (CONSOLIDATED YOUTH PROGRAM)

VAWA 2005 also established the first permanent federal funding stream exclusively for services for sexual assault survivors. The **Sexual Assault Services Formula Grant Program (SASP Formula)** provides annual funding to states and territories according to a formula, which they then distribute as subawards to rape crisis centers and similar organizations. Furthermore, two grant programs were created as set-asides from the SASP funding—meaning Congress designates specific allocations within SASP—to support, respectively, culturally specific services for sexual assault survivors and services for survivors in Tribal communities. The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma explained in 2021 that with "these culturally specific services, victims are more likely to put their trust in our program because they feel more comfortable sharing their stories to someone who is like them." Similarly, Nisaa African Family Services, a SASP-Culturally Specific Services-funded organization in Iowa, noted in 2020 that "to build a strong working relationship with survivors and their support system, [advocates] need to understand the survivor's history, and have thorough knowledge of the norms, values, and boundaries."

VAWA 2005 created the **Grants to Indian Tribal Governments Program** to bolster Tribes' capacity to respond to violence against Native women. These grants consolidate various funding sources to support law enforcement, prosecution, victim services, legal assistance, supervised visitation, and prevention programming—all consistent with Tribal laws and customs. The Tribal Government of St. Paul Island in Alaska reported in 2012 that "when a victim feels that services and the response were sensitive and respectful, the information is soon spread throughout the community. This is a significant step because where there was no trust, now there's hope and more options."

Over time it became evident that there is no "one-size-fits-all solution" and that it is important to provide a range of options for survivors to seek safety and services, particularly for survivors from historically marginalized and underserved populations. To address the needs of these survivors, who often encounter barriers to service, Congress authorized the **Culturally Specific Services Program (CSSP)**, which funds organizations that primarily focus on serving survivors from culturally specific communities. Our Sisters' House, in Tacoma, Washington, described in 2022 how its CSSP grant provides critical services "for Black and African American survivors in an area that is predominantly white and caters to the mainstream. We have been providing services since 1995 but had to scrape and scrap for funding for years."

VAWA 2005 also established several youth- and prevention-focused grant programs designed to serve young people directly victimized by or exposed to violence, as well as to encourage youth and men to get involved in efforts to prevent gender-based violence. Beginning in 2012, when Congress first appropriated funds for a consolidated **Children and Youth and Engaging Men (CYEM) Program**, OVW has administered grants through funding opportunities that combine elements of VAWA 2005 programs that focused on services for young people as well as prevention.

WV • 2012 Grantee Perspective

"We had an advocate call last week with a delicate situation, asking for technical assistance. We serve as a safety net for those providing services to sexual assault and stalking victims. Many professionals just do not have the training, resources or background to handle the many nuances that often are part of complicated cases. Through our resources and assistance, we help them provide the quality of services victims deserve."

WEST VIRGINIA FOUNDATION FOR RAPE INFORMATION AND SERVICES (STATE COALITIONS PROGRAM)**SC • 2020 Subgrantee Perspective**

"There have been several occasions lately where the hospital billed the victim for the sexual assault kit. Sometimes this is a clerical error, but recently a victim was told by the hospital that she was responsible for her bill since she chose the anonymous reporting option. Our advocate was able to intervene to inform the hospital that it is against the law to bill victims when they have exercised their right to have the kit collected, but want to decide later about reporting to law enforcement."

HOPEFUL HORIZONS, SOUTH CAROLINA (SASP)**Tribal • 2018 Grantee Perspective**

"Claiming jurisdiction over non-Native men who commit crimes of domestic/dating violence, or who violate a protection order against a victim who lives on tribal land, is instrumental in keeping Native women safe."

PORT GAMBLE S'KLLAM TRIBE (TRIBAL JURISDICTION PROGRAM)

"We have always known that non-Indians can come onto our lands and they can beat, rape and murder us and there is nothing we can do about it [...]. Now, our tribal officers have jurisdiction for the first time to do something about certain crimes. But it is just the first sliver of the full moon that we need to protect us."

INTERGENERATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR

(quoted in the National Congress of American Indians' 2018 OWW-funded report "VAWA 2013's Special Domestic Violence Criminal Jurisdiction (SDVCJ) Five-Year Report," available at: https://archive.ncai.org/resources/ncai-publications/SDVCJ_5_Year_Report.pdf).

The **Courts Training and Improvement Program** was authorized to support judicial education and specialized court processes. The Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts noted in 2014 that their grant "allowed judges to attend an intensive domestic violence program that was not an option prior to funding. Judges continue to praise the training and have started using the info they garnered at the training in their home courts."

In addition to creating new grant programs, the 2005 reauthorization further conditioned grant funding on compliance with requirements meant to protect survivors. For instance, it added rules to the STOP Formula Program concerning sexual assault survivors' access to medical forensic examinations, making funding contingent on states certifying that survivors cannot be required to make a police report before getting an exam. VAWA 2005 also imposed confidentiality requirements addressing how victim services providers must treat survivors' personal information. Additionally, the 2005 Act provided that Tribes could enter and obtain protection order information in federal databases, extended federal firearms prohibitions to people convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence in Tribal courts, and enacted new housing protections for survivors.

The next reauthorization, which followed in 2013, enhanced tools and programs to help communities serve *all* survivors effectively. It bolstered support for sexual assault survivors and clarified that grant funds could be used to help survivors who have also been trafficked for sex. Several grant programs were amended to include the funding of legal services for survivors, thereby expanding those programs' ability to fill a chronic deficit that grantees regularly cite as keeping survivors vulnerable to further abuse. The Oregon Law Center reported in 2018 that their Rural Program grant "effectively resurrected legal services for survivors, resulting in more safety and protection in our area."

VAWA 2013 built on earlier reauthorizations' efforts to curb high rates of violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women by providing Tribal-specific resources and recognizing Tribes' inherent sovereignty to administer justice. The 2013 reauthorization restored Tribal jurisdiction to prosecute and convict non-Native domestic violence offenders and protection order violators in Tribal courts. Before this landmark provision in VAWA, a 1978 Supreme Court decision held that a Tribe could not prosecute a non-Native offender, including one who assaulted their Native spouse or intimate partner. Furthermore, VAWA 2013 established a grant program to support Tribes in preparing to implement, and ultimately to exercise, this jurisdiction, funding not only investigation and prosecution but also other necessary elements, including counsel for defendants, reconstitution of Tribal courts' jury pools to include non-Natives, and revisions to Tribal laws. Later, the 2022 reauthorization of VAWA expanded recognition of special Tribal criminal jurisdiction to cover more crimes committed by non-Indians, including those involving sexual violence, sex trafficking, stalking, and violence against children.

KY • 2022 Grantee Perspective

"This funding has allowed us to offer a much needed service to survivors of domestic violence in this small rural area. Before this funding there was no secure place for supervised visitations and exchanges [of children] to take place. They often took place in parking lots or at a family members home. Victims of domestic violence no longer have to be afraid for their and their children's safety or have to face their abuser and inevitably be re-victimized with every encounter. They feel safe in our facility and feel that their children are safe."

**JOHNSON COUNTY FISCAL COURT, KENTUCKY
(JUSTICE FOR FAMILIES PROGRAM)**

The cornerstone of VAWA is the coordinated community response, which fosters an approach that is survivor-centered and trauma-informed, bringing together victim service providers, criminal and civil justice systems, community-based organizations, health-care providers, and other partners at the local level to meet the diverse needs of survivors on their path to safety, justice, healing, and well-being. *The U.S. National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence: Strategies for Action* was launched in May 2023 to further advance this concept by establishing a "federal coordinated community response." This plan serves as a comprehensive blueprint for a whole-of-government approach that builds on the lessons learned and achievements made through the efforts of survivors, advocates, and others, aiming to enhance strategies to prevent and address gender-based violence effectively and more comprehensively.

Another grant program established by the 2013 reauthorization is the **Grants for Outreach and Services to Underserved Populations Program**,^v which funds outreach and services to survivors in underserved populations.^{vi} Furthermore, VAWA 2013 added a nondiscrimination provision prohibiting grantees from discriminating on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.

VAWA 2013 also created a **Justice for Families Program** that consolidated activities previously supported by the Safe Havens Pilot Program and Courts Training and Improvement Program and includes legal assistance for survivors, court watch programs, and other strategies for improving how civil and criminal justice systems respond to gender-based violence.

VAWA was reauthorized for a fourth time in 2022. This reauthorization modified existing programs to better meet the needs of survivors who endure multiple forms of victimization and need holistic support to recover. For example, it added a new statutory definition of "forced marriage," which recognizes that forced marriage can be both a cause and a consequence of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Similarly, it updated statutory definitions that direct how grant funds can be used to include technological abuse—a growing challenge in the effort to stop gender-based violence—and economic abuse, which traps survivors in unsafe situations and requires strategies beyond what the justice system and victim services typically can offer.

To further address economic needs that stand in the way of survivors' safety and recovery, Congress first authorized a **Financial Assistance Program** in Fiscal Year 2023 to provide flexible financial assistance to help survivors mitigate costs they endure as a result of violence.

VAWA 2022 also opened pathways for survivors to seek services and support focused on restorative practices. Specifically, it authorized a **Pilot Program on Restorative Practices** with an evaluation component that will support, strengthen, and expand existing restorative practices programs that prevent or address gender-based violence and will focus on building evidence for victim-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally restorative practices addressing these harms.

The 2022 reauthorization also created the new **Demonstration Program on Trauma-Informed, Victim-Centered Training for Law Enforcement on Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking** (also known as the Abby Honold Act program) to improve how law enforcement

^v A Grants for Outreach to Underserved Populations Program was first authorized in VAWA 2005 but never received appropriations. VAWA 2013 added services as a focus of this program and designated that a percentage of funds appropriated for two other grant programs be set aside to support the Underserved Program. In Fiscal Year 2023 Congress provided for the first time a direct appropriation for the program to supplement the set-aside amount.

^{vi} The term "underserved populations" means populations who face barriers in accessing and using victim services, and includes populations underserved because of geographic location, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity; underserved racial and ethnic populations; and populations underserved because of special needs (such as language barriers, disabilities, alienage status, or age).

responds to gender-based violence, an **LGBT Specific Services Program** to maintain and replicate LGBT-specific victim services, and a **Supporting Access to Nurse Exams (SANE) Act Program** to ensure that survivors can access high-quality medical forensic care after an assault.

Two newly authorized programs are designed to equip communities to respond to the rapidly changing ways technology is used to perpetrate abuse: **Local Law Enforcement Grants for Enforcement of Cybercrimes** will increase resources for the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of cybercrimes, and the **National Cybercrime Resource Center** will serve as a resource and training hub for advancing strategies used to combat cybercrimes.

VAWA 2022 included policies and programs that strengthen support for Tribal communities' efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. In addition to expanding recognition of special Tribal criminal jurisdiction, it authorized a **Reimbursement to Tribal Governments Program** that covers expenses Tribes incur in exercising special Tribal criminal jurisdiction, and the **Tribal Access Program**, which expands on Department of Justice efforts that began in 2015 to provide Tribes access to criminal information databases that are powerful tools for keeping communities safe.

"Every time VAWA has been up for reauthorization, it has provided an opportunity to identify what is working well that can be enhanced further and where there are gaps and barriers that need to be addressed to make sure all survivors have a pathway to safety, services, and justice," said OVV Director Rosemarie Hidalgo earlier this year.

"I see a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel."

- A California survivor served by the Jenesse Center's
Legal Assistance for Victims grant, 2022

NY • 2018 Grantee Perspective



"An 18-year-old student, born and raised in Korea, was raped and went to the local police station alone to report the rape, without any interpretation or support services. She was brought to the hospital for a medical forensic exam but after that she never heard back for the follow-up. A week after the incident, the client came to us after getting connected through her roommate. Confused and overwhelmed, the client displayed clear signs of severe trauma. Our counselor, experienced in such cases of sexual assault trauma, calmly explained the next steps and offered emotional support. She contacted the police and followed up with the detective and the hospital. In the meantime, the client received weekly trauma-focused counseling. The client is already showing progress in her recovery and is looking forward to starting college this fall."

KOREAN AMERICAN FAMILY SERVICES, NEW YORK (SASP-CULTURALLY SPECIFIC)

TX • 2012 Grantee Perspective



"A survivor thanked us recently for continuing to build a relationship with her and being transparent in our decision-making as we provided services. She stated, 'I wasn't sure I could trust that someone could keep my family safe, but I saw how you kept an ongoing relationship with me and my son's father and that made all the difference.'"

DALLAS COUNTY, TEXAS (SAFE HAVENS PROGRAM)

Places Where Survivors' Calls are Answered

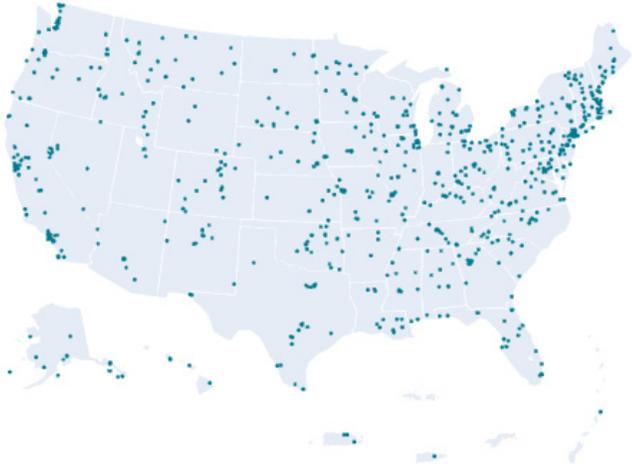
"[Our agencies] are **a spot of hope** for the state of Louisiana because of the change we are making and the fact that we are saving lives."

- Parish of Ouachita, Louisiana, 2020 (Improving Criminal Justice Response Program)

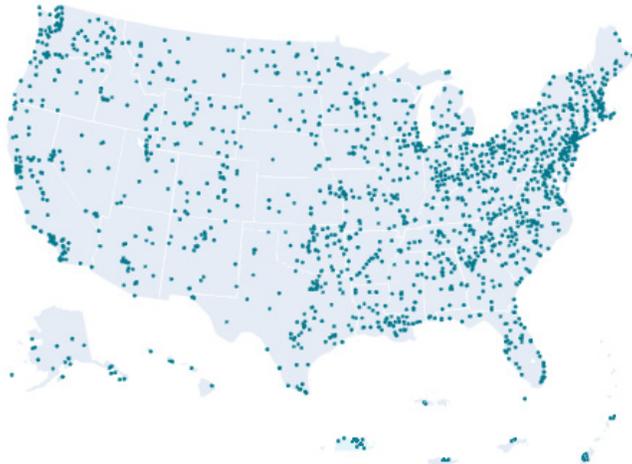
The Violence Against Women Act has transformed the way gender-based violence is handled and talked about in the United States. At the national level, it sustains funding streams and authorizes programs and policies to improve responses to these crimes. At the state level, it fills resource gaps and supports coordinated solutions, from task forces and initiatives to standard policies and protocols. In local communities throughout the country, VAWA has charted paths away from harm and toward a better future for millions of people who have suffered violence and needed somewhere safe to go for help. In every state and territory in the nation, because of VAWA and other funding streams, there is a shelter where a domestic violence survivor can take her children in the middle of the night when she knows it might be her only chance of seeing another day. Because of VAWA, many law enforcement agencies, prosecutors' offices, and courts are better equipped to hold offenders to account while making the justice system more navigable for survivors. Because of VAWA, sexual assault survivors can go to the hospital to get medical care and evidence collection after an assault, even if they have not decided yet about involving law enforcement. Because of VAWA, a survivor who is afraid to report a crime of domestic violence or sexual assault for fear of being deported can seek protection through a U visa. Because of VAWA, survivors doing the deeply personal work of healing from abuse can find a trusted advocate at a culturally specific organization.

Because of VAWA and the training and awareness-building efforts it has supported over three decades, there are more people in the justice system and in schools, hospitals, places of worship, legal aid offices, and other community spaces—and in families and friendship circles—who can respond with compassion and competence when someone discloses that they have been victimized.

Grantees Reporting in 2003



Grantees Reporting in 2022



Victim Services Providers

"Survivors report this funding has given them hope for a brighter future. One client we are working with has struggled with substance abuse resulting from prescription pain medications prescribed for her foot, a severe physical disability, living in a home where domestic violence has taken place, and losing her children to foster care. She reports, after working with us for over one year beginning in the transition house, she has left the abusive home, has had surgery to repair her disfigured foot and is able to walk, has maintained her apartment, gained employment, is working on her sobriety, and gained back full custody of her children who are very happy to be back with their mom and are thriving."

**RAPPAHANNOCK GOODWILL INDUSTRIES, VIRGINIA, 2018
(TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM)**

Legal Services Providers

"Prior to the formation of the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), many sexual assault survivors, particularly those who had experienced a non-domestic sexual assault, had no access to legal assistance and were not provided with information about their legal options outside of the criminal justice system. Thanks to LAV funding, SALI attorneys now provide comprehensive and holistic legal advice and representation to survivors."

MARYLAND COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT, 2020 (LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR VICTIMS PROGRAM)

Hospitals

"Hospital social work staff can now link victims to services outside of the hospital, support victims, and provide education to hospital staff."

AMERICAN SAMOA STATE ADMINISTRATOR, 2008 (STOP)

"Simply put, we would not have a sexual assault program without this funding. It allows us to provide contracted Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners to ensure 24/7 care for victims so they do not need to wait hours. This greatly impacts the victims' physical, emotional, and mental health and enhances the opportunity to collect potential DNA evidence to aid law enforcement in their handling of the case."

THE REFUGE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER INC., GEORGIA, 2022 (STOP)

Law Enforcement Agencies

"The OIW-funded domestic violence investigator states: 'My number one priority is to contact victims after incidents to make sure they're safe. I also gather enough evidence so the case can be prosecuted without the victims having to face the offender. Victims have told me they don't feel like the system has failed them! This funding has helped us make offenders more accountable for their actions and gives victims the opportunity to tap into resources to keep them safe and help end domestic violence in their lives.'"

TULALIP TRIBE, 2012 (TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS PROGRAM)

Prosecutors' offices

"The grant enabled the VAWA-funded Assistant Attorney General to take the lead on the largest sexual assault case likely ever prosecuted in Michigan and one of the largest ever prosecuted in the country. The victims reported they were sexually assaulted during the course of their treatment by a doctor, while the doctor claimed he used legitimate medical techniques. The abuse spanned over twenty years. It's difficult to imagine local county prosecutors having the time, resources, and expertise to take on such a large scale and complex investigation. The funding also allowed us to take a second look at a number of cases which were closed, or which required additional time and resources to reopen and prosecute. One pending case involves charges brought against an interstate truck driver defendant who was identified by DNA and through CODIS hits as the perpetrator of a sexual assault. That defendant has now been linked to 10 other sexual assaults, spanning three other states over the course of 25 years. We are the only state to bring charges against this serial offender. At the heart of our work is providing support, resources and information to victims. At each step, we attempt to support victims in a way that is compassionate, non-judgmental, honest, and empowering."

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, 2016-18 (ICJR PROGRAM)

Courts

"In our trainings, professionals from all fields were able to discuss improvements, dig deeper into one another's roles, and openly and honestly discuss how we can improve services so they are safer for victims and children. One judge who attended reported: 'I will look for flags of possible intimate partner violence and if I do not have a guardian ad litem report, or if it is inadequate, I will make sure I get the information I need to make informed decisions.'"

THE PARENTING PLACE, WISCONSIN, 2021 (JUSTICE FOR FAMILIES PROGRAM)

Supervised Visitation Centers

"Having a Visitation Monitor in the room with them at all times gives the children and the survivor comfort, knowing that the children will not be used to gain information about the survivor or that any negative comments will be tolerated about the survivor or their family."

ERICA'S HOUSE, GUAM, 2019 (STOP)

Family Justice Centers

"This funding has supported the creation of the Buncombe County Family Justice Center (FJC), one safe and welcoming place for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking to begin their journey to strength, safety, and hope."

BUNCOMBE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, 2020 (ICJR PROGRAM)

Culturally Specific Programs

"Grant funding geared toward culturally and linguistically specific services is crucial in responding to the needs of immigrant survivors. Women tend to feel comfortable with organizations working in the South Asian community that are familiar with their cultural practices and linguistic differences. Even when South Asian women do seek help from mainstream agencies, they are not always served adequately. South Asian survivors state that they face considerable difficulties in seeking services from these agencies due to differences in language and religious and cultural practices. It is clear that interventions with South Asian victims of abuse can be effective only when the workers better understand the factors that affect the individual."

MANAVI, INC., NEW JERSEY, 2012 (CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES PROGRAM)

Transitional Housing Programs

"The rental assistance funding has saved victims from becoming homeless when they have no other options available for them and their children. With this funding we are able to assist survivors so they do not have to return to their abusers. We are able to give our clients a chance and the hope that they can start a new life free from violence."

PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER, HAWAII, 2014 (TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM)

Places of Worship

"Outreach and educational material, requested by faith leaders themselves, continues to be an effective strategy to engage more faith leaders and their communities in expanding the outreach of the Tu Paz Cuenta (Your Peace Counts) program, increasing referrals, and increasing attendance at training, prevention, and education activities."

TALLER SALUD INC., PUERTO RICO, 2021 (CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES PROGRAM)

Tribal Programs

"This program has been effective in bringing awareness within the tribal community that domestic violence is not okay. There is help and hope available for survivors that had never been available before within the reservation. While leaving their abuser is still a huge step that will take time for many survivors to be ready to take, the community is aware of services and supports available to help them remain safe when they make that decision."

SAC AND FOX NATION OF MISSOURI IN KANSAS AND NEBRASKA, 2014 (TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS PROGRAM)

Schools

"As a result of participating in events at [a university], our staff were invited to open a new outreach space to provide on-campus services to students. One student said, 'I'm so glad I came down this hallway and saw you were here. I feel more aware that what he has been doing to me is stalking and abuse.'"

HOPE AND JUSTICE PROJECT, MAINE, 2012 (RURAL PROGRAM)

What More is Needed

"Beyond working on individual victim situations, staff also work on identifying and **fixing systemic problems** that put barriers in front of victims seeking safety and justice."

- Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2018 (STOP)

OVW asks grantees to report not only about what they have accomplished with their funding, but also what they see as areas of remaining need in their communities. Grantees consistently identify resource shortfalls, training deficits, and other gaps that are barriers to safety and justice for the survivors they serve. While VAWA funding has made responses to gender-based violence better in communities across the country—and countless victims have survived violence in part because of help from people whose work VAWA grants funded—the following areas of unmet need remain the most frequently cited by grantees and subgrantees:

Scarcity of safe and affordable housing.

"Affordable housing continues to be the greatest unaddressed need. Without the funds to move to a new living situation, victims are often forced to stay with their abusive partner. This is especially true for parents of small children who cannot afford the childcare needed for them to work a full-time job. Without safe, affordable housing, victims are often forced to choose between their family's mental, physical, and emotional safety and homelessness."

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF CRIME CONTROL AND PREVENTION, MARYLAND, 2020 (ICJR PROGRAM)

"The most significant area of remaining need regarding increasing victim and survivor safety is access to safe and affordable housing. Safety concerns and financial dependence are among the leading reasons victims and survivors return to their abusers and unsafe situations. Locating and securing safe, affordable housing for victims and survivors and their children is the highest priority for victims and survivors fleeing their previous residence as a result of domestic abuse. The lack of safe, affordable housing is the greatest barrier for victims and survivors to overcome."

UNITY HOUSE OF TROY, NEW YORK, 2022 (TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM)

Survivors not having enough money to meet their and their children's basic needs, with poverty or near-poverty conditions preventing them from escaping abuse, healing from harm, and succeeding on their own.

"Many of the families we work with are unable to establish independence and safety because of financial issues. Establishing an income or transitioning from two incomes to one, affording childcare, overcoming potential damage to credit, finding employment, and accessing education are all significant barriers to obtaining a safe situation in the region."

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH, 2018 (RURAL PROGRAM)

"We see a continued need for financial support for survivors. Poverty doesn't cause domestic or sexual violence, but it does exacerbate already terrible situations. Someone living in poverty doesn't have the same choices as a person with money. Physical and mental safety are often put on the back burner in favor of a place to stay or food to eat."

THE DOVES PROGRAM, NEBRASKA, 2022 (RURAL PROGRAM)

"We have found that economic dependency is the strongest predictor of a survivor's decision to remain, leave, or return to an abusive relationship—stronger than physical safety issues."

CONNECTICUT COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, 2012 (STATE COALITIONS PROGRAM)

Dearth of legal services that leaves survivors and their children vulnerable to ongoing abuse.

"A large remaining need is access to affordable legal representation. This is especially true in rural communities when their options are few and far between."

YWCA OF TOPEKA, KANSAS, 2021 (RURAL PROGRAM)

"We've seen some families remain separated or left in unsafe situations due to their inability to obtain legal representation."

ASSAULT CARE CENTER EXTENDING SHELTER AND SUPPORT, IOWA, 2018 (TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM)

"Legal support for victims engaged in protective order, divorce, and custody matters prove challenging, particularly with legal fees being out of reach for many survivors."

DESCHUTES COUNTY, OREGON, 2021 (ICJR PROGRAM)

"A significant area of remaining need is affordable and accessible legal representation, especially for non-English speaking survivors and survivors of sexual assault and stalking."

YWCA SILICON VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 2021 (ICJR PROGRAM)

Lack of offender accountability precipitated by a range of factors, including but not limited to: failure to use a trauma-informed approach for investigation and prosecution, gender bias and other biases, under-resourced and under-staffed divisions within criminal justice agencies, and inadequate training.

"Prosecutors and judges often will not pursue or may dismiss cases where a survivor is unwilling to testify. Law enforcement should receive additional training on obtaining evidence to secure convictions without survivor testimony."

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, 2022 (STOP)

Survivors struggling to maintain long-term economic security and independence, due to limited or unsustainable employment options, difficulty obtaining public benefits, credit problems, and lack of childcare.

"Our clients do not have the credit history, current employment or ability to pay rent in any traditional rentals. Most of them have children and so the needs and costs are even greater. This often leads to hopelessness that puts them in further danger of returning to violent relationships."

SUQUAMISH TRIBE, 2014 (TRIBAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAM)

Meager or nonexistent measures to ensure people with disabilities, people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and people who speak a language other than English can obtain services, safety, and justice solutions that are available to others.

"Responding to and supporting victims with disabilities is not an added service. Having comprehensive services to all victims of abuse means being prepared to provide appropriate supports to victims with disabilities."

CITY OF LOS ANGELES MAYOR'S OFFICE OF PUBLIC SAFETY, CALIFORNIA, 2018 (DISABILITY PROGRAM)

Lack of access to health care, including general health care, post-assault forensic health care, and mental health and substance abuse treatment.

"Sexual assault victims often receive forensic exams from emergency room nurses and doctors who are uncomfortable or lack experience with these exams and are often unsure how to collect or store the evidence properly. When skilled SANEs provide exams, victims are more likely to feel supported and believe that the invasive exam will prove helpful in obtaining evidence to prosecute an offender."

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, 2021 (SASP)

Insufficient resources for culturally specific and community-based organizations.

"Native American victims face unique cultural barriers, based upon historical and current events, and may be hesitant to seek help from non-Indian service providers."

NATIVE ALLIANCE AGAINST VIOLENCE, 2016 (TRIBAL COALITIONS PROGRAM)

"St. Croix is unique, as a part of the U.S. Virgin Islands, in addressing its domestic violence issues. There are cultural and language barriers particular to the region and a need for education about domestic violence and its prevention."

LEGAL SERVICES OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS, INC., 2022 (STOP)

Inadequate training and difficulty keeping new staff trained in VAWA-funded jobs that have high turnover.

"The training of first responders is an ongoing challenge. Particularly in rural areas, new staff are seemingly 'jumping on moving trains' as they begin providing services with limited training. With the pandemic, where before training may have focused more on emerging issues, we increasingly find the need for providing foundational information."

WEST VIRGINIA FOUNDATION FOR RAPE INFORMATION AND SERVICES, 2022 (RURAL PROGRAM)

Lack of transportation , especially in rural, Tribal, and isolated communities.

"With program funding, we can reach a population that is underserved and, for lack of words, forgotten. Some of the barriers that they are facing when seeking counseling are, lack of childcare, not being able to afford missing work, not being able to afford counseling sessions, and not being able to travel to where services are available for fear of being stopped (many are undocumented), among an endless list of other circumstances."

MHP SALUD, TEXAS, 2018 (UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS PROGRAM)

Need to strengthen, modernize, and expand prevention and community education to stop violence before it starts.

"There is such a stigma surrounding sexual assault that victims may suffer in silence, rather than report and have the perpetrator prosecuted. Hopefully, increased community education and awareness, along with the knowledge about criminal prosecution, will increase safety and reduce these crimes."

YUROK TRIBE, 2011 (TRIBAL SASP)

Studying VAWA's Impact

"Collaboration not only aids us in providing holistic legal services to victims but also provides us with a team of colleagues who are **committed to learning from each other.**"

- Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center, 2014
(Legal Assistance for Victims Program)

PA • 2022 Grantee Perspective

"Before receiving this grant, Mazzoni Center did not have the capacity or staffing to provide education or training to professionals specific to sexual violence in LGBTQ+ communities. This funding created opportunities for partnership-building and the exchange of expertise between service providing agencies with overlapping target populations."

**MAZZONI CENTER, PENNSYLVANIA
(UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS
PROGRAM)**

DC • 2018 Grantee Perspective

"AEquitas (which provides TTA to prosecutors) has committed to working with jurisdictions to review and end practices that may be harmful to victim safety. Requests for technical assistance are addressed 24/7 by an AEquitas attorney who communicates directly with the requester. AEquitas is able to provide a response that is data-driven, nuanced, and tailored to the needs of the particular jurisdiction and issue."

**AEQUITAS: THE PROSECUTOR'S
RESOURCE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN, WASHINGTON, D.C.
(TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM)**

Beyond resourcing communities' responses to gender-based violence, VAWA programs create opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of those responses. Most of the grant programs support training, including cross-training so that everyone involved in the community's response understands each other's roles.

OVW also provides grantees with training and technical assistance (TTA) so they can align their work with practices that are proven to help survivors and hold offenders accountable. Moreover, the 2022 reauthorization of VAWA required that OVW make TTA available as broadly as possible so that advocates, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and others can access tools to do their work better.

Just as grantees strive to use research-backed strategies, OVW is committed to rigorously examining the impact of VAWA-funded efforts. Through research and data analysis, OVW learns about what works to curb gender-based violence and ensure that survivors can heal and thrive. Therefore, OVW established its Research and Evaluation (R&E) Initiative in 2016 to support researcher-practitioner partnerships to study VAWA-funded interventions. The Principal Investigator of an R&E project at the University of Georgia, studying a program that teaches Korean American faith leaders how to support congregants who are enduring domestic violence, shared that she and her colleagues "learned that with a strong researcher-practitioner partnership, we can conduct a randomized controlled trial, advancing scientific rigor without sacrificing the community's voice," and noted that a project partner said the "project truly embodies community-engaged research that involves community stakeholders in solving community problems."

Since its inception, R&E has supported 52 awards totaling \$21 million to study efforts to enhance the response to gender-based violence in the fields of victim services, law enforcement, prosecution, and courts. Information on these projects and their findings are available at <https://www.vawamei.org/report/studying-vawas-impact>.

The *VAWA Funding Supports Evidence-based Practices* chapter of this report shows how the grants finance evidence-based approaches like advocacy, specialized law enforcement and prosecution units, legal assistance from Legal Aid attorneys, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs, and culturally specific services.

Looking Forward

"We are facing some serious challenges in my community, and this funding is essential. For some of us, it is a matter of life and death. These funds are **an essential investment**, and they create public value."

- A listening session participant, May 2024

In the spring of 2024, OVW convened listening sessions in English and Spanish with frontline workers in VAWA-funded jobs. The purpose was to learn what VAWA means for their work, ask what they see as survivors' most pressing needs, and find out about their hopes for the future of VAWA. Frontline workers have the most direct interaction with survivors, so their perspectives offer unique insight into what VAWA grants have accomplished and what needs remain.

Listening session participants cited housing, short-term financial needs, and long-term economic stability as the most acute challenges survivors face. A participant stated that "housing and finances are a recurring theme with most of the clients I see. With nowhere to go and no money to access basic resources, it tends to keep them stuck in the abusive relationship. Especially if there are children involved." Another participant further described how poverty creates conditions that escalate risk for violence:

"Violencia de género, pero también tenemos un elemento de raza, de clase, de nivel socioeconómico. Aquí en Puerto Rico hay un problema severo de lo que es vivir bajo el nivel de pobreza. La mayoría de mis participantes están bajo el nivel de pobreza, así que todas tienen ingresos de \$20,000 o menos. Pues imaginar verlas cubrir todos los gastos, especialmente cuando se tienen menores dependientes."

"Gender-based violence also has the element of race, class, and socioeconomic status. Here in Puerto Rico we have a severe problem with folks living under the poverty line. Most of my participants live below the poverty line, they all make less than \$20,000. Imagine them covering all their costs with that, especially if they have dependent children."

Moreover, participants talked about how, for survivors who are immigrants, these challenges are aggravated by unequal access to justice, discrimination, and legal vulnerabilities. "Cómo no tienen los documentos, no tienen acceso. / If they don't have [immigration] documentation, they don't have access," is how an advocate summed it up. Additionally, several participants described common occurrences of non-English-speaking survivors not getting referrals for services, not being able to access justice and services, and being forced into situations where their children are used as interpreters.

Among other worries these frontline workers expressed for the people they serve were that violence that has increased in brutality (i.e., it involves guns, strangulation, and/or severe violence) and puts survivors at heightened risk for being killed, and that there is more widespread use of technology to stalk and abuse survivors. An advocate explained that "years ago we went to a training and could address problems" related to technology-facilitated abuse, "but now the tech advances so fast that what you learned a year ago may have changed."

Participants also described how they struggle to make it through busy workdays with limited resources:

"I am constantly struggling to keep the doors open and keep people here. To get pens to get five different signatures. I am still very committed to this work. For me, I see hope and opportunity. We have seen so much progress, and we can do so much more. With these resources we can tackle the challenges survivors face and effectuate change in a more systemic way. You get one success, and it is enough to keep you going."

In thanking OVW for convening the listening sessions, an advocate said: "I hope you get good sense of what is going on the field, and we hope that it guides your work at the federal level."

"VAWA funding played a big role in me being alive today."

- A survivor and VAWA-funded frontline victim services worker, 2024

OK • 2008 Grantee Perspective



"Without this grant we would be back to business as usual: don't ask, don't tell. I know this first-hand as I was a student 25 years ago on this campus and one of my closest friends was victimized. In our area all she could do was take a shower and go on with her life, she tried hard but never got over it and attempted suicide on numerous occasions because she could not get past the shame and pain. That was years ago, she is now an advocate and outspoken leader. If this grant allows us to keep one person from going through that, it will be the best money ever awarded."

**EASTERN OKLAHOMA STATE COLLEGE
(CAMPUS PROGRAM)**

Tribal • 2020 Grantee Perspective



"This funding has been what has kept the program functioning. It has been the source of safety, healing, and comfort for clients and their children. It provides counseling to many, including children who witness the violence in their homes, so the impact on their lives will be great. Without this funding, there would not be a program. The funding provides so much for victims."

**COEUR D'ALENE TRIBE, IDAHO (TRIBAL
GOVERNMENT PROGRAM)**

VAWA Funding Supports Evidence-based Practices

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA) GRANTS SUPPORT EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, DATING VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT, AND STALKING NATIONWIDE.

VAWA funding is administered by the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women and is distributed nationwide through discretionary grant programs, as well as the Services*Training*Officers*Prosecutors (STOP) Formula Grant Program and the Sexual Assault Services Formula Grant Program (SASP Formula). VAWA grantees/subgrantees use this funding to serve victims and to improve the criminal justice response to gender-based violence using evidence-based interventions.

This section presents aggregate data reflecting recently reported VAWA-funded activities and accomplishments.

VICTIM ADVOCACY HELPS TO IMPROVE VICTIMS' WELL-BEING AND REDUCE THEIR FEAR.

Victims supported by **advocates** may suffer less fear, less psychological distress, and fewer physical health problems, and endure less self-blame, guilt, and depression.¹

In the period of time covered by this report:



Most victims that requested grant-funded services **received some or all of those services.**

Overall, in a 12-month period, grantees/subgrantees:



VICTIMS WHO USE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING ARE BETTER PREPARED FOR THE FUTURE.

Victims who use **transitional housing** receive a wider range of services over a longer period of time than do victims who never use shelter services, and they report having a greater ability to plan for their safety, are aware of more resources in their community, have more hope for the future, and feel better able to achieve their goals.²

In a 12-month period, grantees/subgrantees:



Of the victims receiving transitional housing through the **TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM**:



SANE/SAFE PROGRAMS IMPROVE MEDICAL CARE FOR VICTIMS AND FORENSIC EVIDENCE COLLECTION.

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners or Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SANEs/SAFEs) are health care providers trained to provide medical care to victims after an assault, and to competently and compassionately collect forensic evidence from a victim's body. SANE/SAFE programs lead to higher rates of victims reporting the assault to law enforcement and improved prosecution outcomes.³

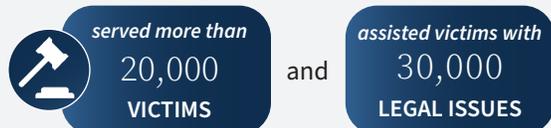
In a 12-month period, grantees/subgrantees:



WORKING WITH A SPECIALIZED ATTORNEY CAN LEAD TO BETTER LEGAL OUTCOMES FOR VICTIMS.

Civil legal assistance provided by attorneys funded through VAWA's Legal Assistance for Victims (LAV) Program increases the quality, quantity, and efficiency of legal services for domestic violence victims. Legal aid attorneys who are trained on domestic violence may attain more favorable outcomes for their clients on custody matters when compared with victims who represent themselves and victims with privately retained attorneys. Victims who obtain civil legal services may suffer less subsequent physical violence and stalking and achieve more economic self-sufficiency. Victims who get help from attorneys and community-based advocates may be more likely than victims without that assistance to perceive themselves as having a voice in the justice process.⁴

Every 6 months, attorneys/paralegals funded through the **LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR VICTIMS PROGRAM** alone:



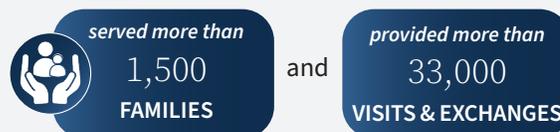
Additionally, in a 12 month period, grantees/subgrantees:



SUPERVISED VISITATION/SAFE EXCHANGE CENTERS IMPROVE SAFETY FOR VICTIMS AND THEIR CHILDREN.

Many victims continue to share custody with the person who abused them, even after leaving an abusive relationship. Abusers often use children and custody arrangements to control, harm, or monitor the victim. **Supervised visitation and safe exchange programs** offer a safe place for the exchange of a child and a secure and nurturing environment for children to interact with non-custodial parents.⁵

Every 6 months, discretionary program grantees:



A COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC/SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS KEY.

Efforts to address domestic and sexual violence are most effective when they are implemented as a **coordinated community response (CCR)** across disciplines, involving advocates, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, forensic health care providers, and others.⁶

All VAWA grantees/subgrantees are required to engage in CCR activities and work in meaningful ways with community partners.

VAWA FUNDING EMBEDS BEST PRACTICES INTO LAW ENFORCEMENT'S RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC/SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

Law enforcement officers who are trained in and use best practices—like following up with victims, helping victims make safety plans, assessing the needs of children exposed to domestic violence, and describing protection orders and court procedures—may be more likely to arrest domestic abusers. Taking an offender into custody and documenting evidence of injury increases the odds that a domestic violence case will be prosecuted. A swift police response to sexual assault and a thorough investigation may make it more likely that a case will be referred to a prosecutor, accepted for prosecution, and result in a conviction.⁷

Specialized domestic violence law enforcement units have been found to decrease the frequency and severity of future domestic violence and produce higher case clearance rates, compared to a standard patrol response.⁸

In a 12-month period, grantees/subgrantees:



VAWA funding supports specialized law enforcement units and, at any given time during the period covered by this report:



In a 12-month period, these officers' agencies:



VICTIM-CENTERED PROSECUTION IMPROVES VICTIMS' SATISFACTION WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Victim-centered prosecution—which engages victims in the justice process, prioritizes their safety, and seeks their input—is associated with a lower incidence of re-abuse. Victims who feel empowered in the justice process suffer less depression and report better quality of life, and they are more satisfied with the system and more likely to seek its help, if needed, in the future. Jurisdictions with **specialized domestic violence prosecution units** generally prosecute these crimes at a higher rate.⁹

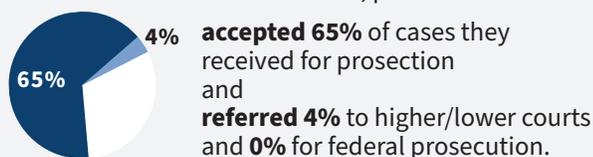
In the period of time covered by this report, VAWA grants supported specialized prosecution units and:



In a 12-month time period, these prosecutors' agencies:



Within **ICJR-FUNDED AGENCIES**, prosecutors:



PROTECTION ORDERS CAN HELP VICTIMS FEEL SAFER AND PREVENT FUTURE ABUSE.

Protection orders—which grant various types of protection and relief for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking—can deter further abuse and increase victims' perceptions of their own safety, reduce victims' post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, and have shown a cost-benefit of tens of millions of dollars in one state.¹⁰

In a 12-month period, VAWA-funded advocates, legal professionals, law enforcement officers, and prosecutors assisted victims with:



VAWA FUNDING SUPPORTS BEST PRACTICES AT EVERY STEP OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSE.

In addition to law enforcement and prosecution, best practices must be implemented across the entire criminal justice system to achieve offender accountability and justice for victims.

For example, **specialized domestic violence courts**, which exist to enhance victim safety and offender accountability, may reduce re-offending, increase conviction rates, increase offender compliance, and result in victim satisfaction.¹¹

In the period of time covered by this report, VAWA funds were used to support criminal justice activities carried out through local courts, probation and parole offices, and domestic violence intervention programs. Additionally, funds were used to train judges, court personnel, probation officers, and other justice system personnel.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION CAN IMPROVE PROFESSIONALS' RESPONSES AND REDUCE VIOLENCE OVER TIME.

It is not easy to talk about violence, and it may be difficult for victims to ask for help. When they do, it matters how people respond.¹²

Training plays a crucial role in ensuring that professionals are equipped to respond competently and compassionately when a victim requests their assistance.¹³

In a 12-month period, grantees/subgrantees:



Community education can reduce domestic/sexual violence in the long-term by changing people's attitudes and beliefs that legitimize it. For example, **bystander intervention programming** can change behavior and reduce dating violence and sexual assault among high school and college students.¹⁴

In a 12-month period, **CAMPUS PROGRAM** grantees:



OVW PROVIDES FUNDING FOR SERVICES THAT MEET THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS.

Victims' experiences and a growing body of research confirm that certain populations are victimized by domestic/sexual violence at particularly high rates. Additionally, victims from certain underserved populations are more likely to encounter barriers to accessing criminal justice and victim services, which may impact the rate at which they report abuse and receive services. These barriers can be due to race or ethnicity, geographic location, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or a victim's unique needs (such as language barriers, disabilities, age, or immigration status).¹⁵

Victim services that appropriately meet the particular needs of victims from underserved populations, as well as training for professionals to ensure a proper response to underserved victims, are lacking in many communities around the country. In recognition of these barriers to justice, safety, and healing, OVW is committed to funding organizations operated by and for communities of color and other historically marginalized and underserved populations.

SERVICES THAT ARE TAILORED TO VICTIMS' CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS ARE ESSENTIAL.

Designing or adapting services to address victims' cultural backgrounds so that they affirm their culture and effectively address barriers like language and communication challenges may make those services more effective. Examples of **culturally specific services**, such as the *promotora* model, which involves peer leadership and information sharing among Latinx immigrant victims, have shown that they can have transformative effects on individuals and their communities. Offender treatment may also be more effective when it is culturally relevant.¹⁶

In the period of time covered by this report, grantees/subgrantees provided support services, outreach, and informational materials in at least **65 languages**.

Every 6 months, **CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES PROGRAM** grantees:



The majority of these victims were:



**immigrants, refugees,
or asylum seekers**

and/or



**people with limited
English proficiency**

ACCESSIBLE SERVICES FOR VICTIMS WITH DISABILITIES ARE NEEDED TO ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO SUPPORT.

People with disabilities are at a much greater risk for abuse—and face greater barriers to accessing help and justice—than people without disabilities. In fact, people with intellectual disabilities are sexually assaulted at a rate seven times higher than people without disabilities, according to an analysis of Justice Department data.

Accessible services for victims with disabilities can help address these victims' unique safety needs.¹⁷

In a 12-month period, **DISABILITY PROGRAM** grantees:



to increase their capacity to provide more effective services to victims with disabilities.

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH CAN IMPROVE THE RESPONSE TO ABUSE AGAINST OLDER ADULTS.

For older victims of domestic/sexual violence, age may increase isolation or dependence on caretakers, which may heighten their risk of victimization and limit their ability to report abuse and seek assistance. A multidisciplinary approach—involving collaboration across Adult Protective Service agencies, as well as the victim advocacy, health care, and justice sectors and with faith communities—can enhance the **response to abuse against older adults**.¹⁸

In a 12-month period, **ABUSE IN LATER LIFE PROGRAM** grantees:



to increase their capacity to recognize and respond to abuse against older adults.

Endnotes

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30 Answering the Call

Thirty Years of the Violence Against Women Act