



National Alliance to
End Sexual Violence

Responding to COVID-19: Sexual Assault Programs & Survivor Needs May 2020

Request:

- **Provide \$100 million in emergency Sexual Assault Services Funding (SASP) in the Office on Violence Against Women, Department of Justice.**
- **Waive the match requirement on Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds at the Department of Justice and enact policies to increase deposits to the fund.**

What are sexual assault survivors experiencing during the pandemic?

- *Sexual violence thrives in secrecy: Most sexual violence occurs between people who know each other, and perpetrators are taking advantage of those disconnected from their regular activities and support networks (work, school, places of worship, community groups).*
- *Many survivors are experiencing severe trauma reactions due to the increased stress of the pandemic, and their needs are more complex.*
- *Responding to survivors' emergency needs, including medical & legal services, has become very difficult. Advocates are struggling but committed to finding innovative solutions.*
- *Even though many stay-at-home orders are still in place, many individuals cannot stay home while others are not following restrictions. Sometimes, the perpetrators are landlords or employers who threaten eviction or termination, leveraging desperation to sexually extort vulnerable people.*

The National Alliance to End Sexual Violence conducted a survey about the impact of COVID-19 on the efforts of rape crisis centers to meet the needs of survivors. Results from over 600 programs across the country reflect a grave need for emergency funding to ensure survivors are not left alone.

89% of programs need emergency stimulus funding to respond to current requests from survivors for support and emergency assistance.

40% of programs have experienced an increased demand for services since the onset of COVID-19 both in terms of new requests and more dire and complicated requests from current clients.

April was Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and many programs had to cancel their signature fundraisers in addition to experiencing overall decreases in private donations.

Priority needs of programs:

- Funds to purchase tablets, cell phones, telehealth, internet, and other equipment and platforms to allow staff working remotely to provide virtual services to survivors.
- Funds to meet the emergency needs of survivors such as food, rent, and pre-paid cell phones for survivors to receive emergency support.
- Funds to meet the needs of vulnerable populations including immigrant and homeless survivors and communities of color.

Quotes from advocates:

From a program director in Ohio: "We are one of the largest independent rape crisis centers in the nation. Our funding is diverse and balanced between government sources and philanthropy. We entered the month of March in the strongest financial position in the history of our organization. Now, with the anticipated VOCA cuts at the end of this year, combined with the cancellation of our signature fundraising event, and our philanthropic partners diverting donations to COVID-19 emergency response, our financial well-being is in jeopardy. Without significant intervention, we will be dramatically reducing rape crisis services to our community (urban, suburban, rural)."

From a Massachusetts advocate: "When the response is remote and people are experiencing a pandemic, it makes the work so much more difficult because we are responding to so many additional needs in a way we are all learning about. We are building the plane as we're flying it. Seclusion does not mean survivors are safe or healthy."

From an Oregon advocate: "Trauma of sexual assault survivors is heightened and becomes complex trauma with the increased economic insecurity and with having kids home 24/7. Many survivors feel more isolated so reach out to us for connection and emotional support to replace that of their usual social connections."

From an Illinois advocate: "Outreach services to vulnerable populations are extremely limited at this time; with children not being seen on a regular basis by trusted/safe adults during the school day, we anticipate a significant increase in the demand of services due to the number of disclosures that will be made when the state returns to as usual."

From a Kansas advocate: "Most services are being provided remotely making it difficult to assist survivors. Not all staff have laptops available to work with survivors remotely. Survivors need victim services now, more than ever, in this scary time."

From a Tennessee advocate: "There is a significant cost to operating remotely, and it takes a different kind of emotional toll on staff. Sexual assault survivors are often triggered during times of crisis, such as this pandemic, so being able to maintain connection and support is essential to their wellbeing. The biggest challenge our organization has faced is making the transition to remote work with all of the necessary equipment and privacy protections."

For more information, contact Terri Poore, Policy Director, at terri@endsexualviolence.org