

The Violence Against Women Act

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), enacted in 1994, recognizes the insidious and pervasive nature of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking and supports *comprehensive, effective, and cost-saving* responses. VAWA programs, administered by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) at the Department of Justice, give law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, and community organizations the tools they need to support victims, hold offenders accountable, and keep communities safe.

VAWA includes many essential grant programs designed to provide both a systemic and community-based-services response, including the following:

- The Services, Training, Officers, Prosecutors (STOP) formula grant program funds each state and territory to improve the services and criminal justice response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. In its most recent report to Congress on the STOP Program, OVW noted that STOP grant-funded programs helped 362,172 victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking; funded 2,226 staff members, including victim advocates, law enforcement officers, counselors, and attorneys; and trained 252,795 individuals from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016.¹
- Victim services, law enforcement, prosecution staff, and court personnel funded through STOP Grants helped victims of domestic/dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking obtain a combined total of 151,870 protection orders.¹
- The Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) funds each state and territory to provide services to sexual assault survivors. In its most recent report to Congress on services provided, OVW noted that 49,068 survivors of sexual assault had been served, and 113,697 hotline calls answered, by SASP-funded advocates from January 1, 2016 – December 31, 2016.²
- Over the 2013-2015 grant period, VAWA grantees provided over 1.9 million bed nights in emergency or transitional housing to victims and their children.³
- In addition to formula grants, VAWA is also comprised of various discretionary grant programs. The Legal Assistance for Victims Program (LAV Program) is the primary VAWA-funded vehicle for delivering legal assistance to victims of domestic/sexual violence. From 2014 – 2016, during each six-month reporting period, LAV Program grantees provided services to an average of 28,553 victims.⁴
- VAWA grants helped ensure that victims from historically underserved populations were able to access life-saving services. During each six-month grant period, VAWA-funded organizations served an average of 29,581 victims living in rural areas; 10,185 victims identifying as American Indian or Alaska Natives; 8,436 victims with disabilities; and 17,812 victims who were immigrants, asylum-seekers, or refugees.³
- More than 1.3 million individuals participated in VAWA-funded education, awareness, or prevention activities.³
- From 2014 – 2016, during each six-month reporting period, VAWA-funded grantees provided services to an average of 124,916 victims, children, youth, and other dependents.³
- VAWA grants can be used for training professionals who work directly with survivors to improve survivor services. Overall, VAWA-funded grantees trained 11,519 sexual assault nurse

examiners/sexual assault forensic examiners (SANEs/SAFEs); 89,937 law enforcement officers; 15,680 prosecutors; 18,404 court personnel; and used funds to support an average of 38 specialized courts.³

- Law enforcement officers in agencies funded through discretionary grants focused on improving the criminal justice system responded to 229,619 calls for assistance, made more than 66,095 arrests, investigated 169,546 cases, and referred 76,146 cases to prosecutors.³
- Across the two-year reporting period, VAWA-funded grantees responded to 591,788 hotline calls.³
- In total, VAWA discretionary program grantees provided over 1 million services to victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or child or elder abuse during the two-year grant period.³
- National training and technical assistance projects funded through VAWA help to support service providers, develop training resources, identify promising practices, and conduct research that is beneficial to improving efforts at the local, state, and national level to ending domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

VAWA saves lives and saves money

VAWA funded programs have unquestionably improved the national response to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. It's estimated that as many as 45 million adults experience physical violence, rape, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.³ Thanks to VAWA, more victims are coming forward and receiving life-saving services to help them move from crisis to stability, and the criminal justice system has improved victim safety and efforts to hold perpetrators accountable. Since VAWA was first passed in 1994, it has made the following impacts:

- Between VAWA's implementation in 1994 and 2011, serious victimization by an intimate partner declined by 72% for women and 64% for men.⁵
- A 2010 study demonstrated that an increase in the availability of legal services is associated with a decrease in intimate partner homicide.⁶
- A 2009 Department of Justice-funded study found that Kentucky saved \$85 million in one year alone through the issuance of protection orders and the reduction in violence that resulted.⁷
- Nationally, VAWA saved as much as \$14.8 billion in its first six years alone.⁸
- Referring a victim to an advocate has been linked to an increased willingness to file a police report – survivors with an advocate filed a report with law enforcement 59% of the time, versus 41% for individuals not referred to a victim advocate.⁹
- Sexual assault victims who have the support of an advocate in the aftermath of an assault also receive more helpful information, referrals and services, experience less secondary trauma or re-victimization by medical and legal systems, and fare better in both long- and short-term outcomes than those without such support.⁹
- A 2016 study conducted in 26 Kentucky high schools over five years found that a bystander intervention program, funded through the Rape Prevention Education (RPE) grants, decreased not only sexual violence perpetration but also other forms of interpersonal violence and victimization.¹⁰

References

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