

## Crime Victim Support Services – Background

**What are *victim service providers? victim services?*** *Victim service providers* work with law enforcement, county attorneys, defense attorneys, and other community human service providers to offer crisis response to crime victims and they specialize in providing post-crisis support services to help victims recover physically, mentally, and financially. Local victim service provider organizations that are members of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) serve victims of domestic and sexual violence, rape, human trafficking, child abuse, stalking, and families of homicide victims. They offer a range of [victim services](#) that vary by organization and available funding: crisis support, counseling and safety planning, finding stable housing, replacing identity documents, navigating the legal system (protection orders, victim witnesses), finding jobs, supporting children, and regaining financial security. These organizations served most of the 49,795 victims seeking assistance last year from organizations receiving state and federal funds administered by the Iowa Attorney General's Victim Assistance Section. (SFY24 annual report)

**Why Invest in Victim Services?** Victim services help crime victims recover, care for families, and enhance their capacity to become contributing members of communities and valued employees. In doing so, investing in victim services enhances public safety and helps prevent violence. The amount of funding for victim services directly impacts the number of victims agencies can support, the type and quality of services available, and where victims can find support. ***Insufficient funding means fewer victims can access the most effective and most requested services and leaves many without access to any support, especially in rural areas. Leaving so many victims without access to support misses an incredible opportunity to prevent violence.***

Violent crime victims experience significant physical, financial, and mental challenges to recovery because surviving violence means losing autonomy and financial security as well as the means to regain it. Post-crisis services are essential to recovery and the most frequently requested because these victims need support beyond what family and friends can provide. Serving rural areas, rape and trafficking victims, and helping victims find safe housing, or navigate legal proceedings are resource intensive - and access to these services are most threatened by lack of funding. ***Failing to prioritize funding victim services undervalues the comprehensive needs of victims and the workforce dedicated to supporting them. Victims experience this as 'victim-blaming.'***

**Crime victims seeking support are being turned away now.** Failing to fully support victims means people *and* communities lose the capacity to thrive. It keeps violence alive in every community and keeps preventable costs high for every business, workplace, and 'system' (school, legal, human services, corrections). It also increases the workload of other service providers and is ultimately more expensive because victims lacking stability continue to need services. When victim service providers help victims avoid homelessness, find employment, or keep children safe it eases caseloads of other providers. Helping victims navigate legal proceedings or criminal investigations enables police, attorneys, and courts to better support victims. Lack of access to support contributes to staggering human and economic costs. Lost productivity due to victimization increases employer costs and violence in the workplace and impacts the safety of employees and customers. When a parent leaves a violent home or goes to prison, households lose 1-2 wage earners, parents lose homes and jobs, children lose one or both parents – leaving more children struggling in school, more struggling families, and the cycle continues.

**How are victim services funded?** Organizations rely on a variety of public (federal, state, local) and private funding but federal funding is currently the largest source of funding for publicly funded victim service providers. The Iowa Attorney General (AG) Victim Assistance Section (VAS) administers state and federal victim services funds and allocates funding through a competitive grant process ([2 different RFPs](#) – Criminal Justice and Victim Services). In SFY 24, they administered \$5 million in state funds and \$17.4 million in federal grants for victim support services. (AG SFY24 Victim Assistance section Annual Report, p. 5); list of [current grantees](#))

Organizations also apply directly for federal grants to support victims. After the massive cuts in federal funding for victim services in the last few years and the continued uncertainty of federal funds, it is clear states cannot count on consistent federal funding in the future. However, federal funds were never intended to replace state responsibility to support crime victims. Fully supporting victims means Iowa must make victim services funding a state budget priority. Adequate and dedicated state funding is needed to ensure statewide access to victim services and a vital service provider network. Summary of public [funding sources](#).

- **State funding:** For the last decade, Iowa provided just \$5 million each year for victim services despite increased demand for services and significant losses in federal funds. *At least \$10 million in victim services funding in the Justice System budget is needed to maintain access to victim support services and a vital service provider workforce.* It is too late for an incremental state funding increase to prevent service providers from having to triage cases and priorities – crime victims are being turned away now.
- **Federal funding:** Federal funding for victim services awarded to the state of Iowa comes from formula grants established by the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), the Family Violence and Prevention Services Act (FVPSA), and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Victim service provider agencies also rely on federal discretionary grant funding that is awarded directly to organizations through a federal competitive grant process. VOCA is the largest source of federal funding for victim services by far, e.g., in FY23 Iowa received \$13.1 million in VOCA victim assistance funds compared to [\\$1.6 million](#) in regular FVPSA grants and \$2.8 million from VAWA ([STOP](#) + [SASP](#)).

Iowa's [FY24 VOCA](#) Victim Assistance grant was \$7.6 million, a 42% cut or *\$5.4 million loss* in funds compared to FY23, i.e., the *cut* in FY24 was larger than what Iowa invests in victim services. Thankfully, Governor Reynolds allocated one-time federal ARPA funding to mitigate the loss in FY24 but states are unlikely to see increases in FY25 VOCA victim assistance grants. These are paid for from VOCA's Crime Victim Fund (CVF) which collects fines/penalties from violations of federal law (not taxpayer money) so funding fluctuates. Congress did not want to reduce grants to states but the CVF balance was too low to allocate more and is not replenishing quickly enough to provide grants at robust levels anytime soon. This impacts a broad range of organizations who rely on federal VOCA funding, in addition to domestic and sexual violence service providers, this includes child abuse advocacy centers, law enforcement agencies, victim witness coordinators and county attorneys, coordinated response teams, courts, and other non-profit organizations like violence prevention projects, homicide and human trafficking service providers, universities/colleges, human services providers, etc. (Note- Iowa receives a separate VOCA victim compensation grant each year that is deposited in Iowa's victim compensation fund- this grant has not been impacted by federal cuts because it uses a different formula.)

## Resources:

- State [budget request](#) letter for victim services
- List of [current grantees](#) for state funds and federal victim services grants to Iowa administered by Iowa AG
- Iowa One Day Count – DV [Services Provided](#) in Iowa
- List of victim [support services](#) offered by local victim service provider agencies
- Summary of state and federal [victim services funding](#) sources

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