

The Violence Against Women Act

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is the federal framework for the U.S. response to domestic and sexual violence. Initially enacted in 1994, VAWA was most recently reauthorized in 2013. VAWA has vastly improved our nation's response to domestic and sexual violence, with the 2013 reauthorization providing protections that are more comprehensive for vulnerable populations including racial and ethnic minorities, sexual and gender minorities, older adults, and people with disabilities.

Why is federal support needed?

Since the enactment of VAWA, rates of domestic abuse have declined in the U.S. However, exposure to violence is still very common—one in three women will experience rape, physical violence, or stalking in her lifetime.ⁱ

The risk of domestic violence and sexual violence is higher for women of color, women with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities, older adults, and other marginalized populations.

- Women with disabilities have a 40% greater risk of intimate partner violence than women without disabilities.ⁱⁱ The nature of this abuse is unique and may be hard to recognize.
- Rates of some forms of sexual violence are higher among LGB populations than for heterosexual populations; national data for transgender persons is not currently available, but studies suggest they have an even higher risk of victimization.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Native American women are victimized at higher rates than any other racial or ethnic minority. Seventy percent of those assaults are committed by persons of another race.^{iv}
- Immigration status is commonly used as a tool to control women in abusive relationships, and particularly those who have been trafficked.^v
- In later life, the nature of domestic violence shifts to include tactics such as taking advantage of dependencies and questioning one's capacity to manage one's affairs.^{vi}
- Common barriers to leaving an abusive relationship are income, cultural norms, access to children and family, substance abuse, feelings of isolation, and concerns of retaliation.

Women in these populations often face barriers to seeking and accessing help that can't be addressed by traditional domestic violence service providers. VAWA-funded programs are designed to address these barriers by providing safety for survivors; training health professionals, law enforcement, and others to provide sensitive and culturally competent victim assistance; and by coordinating responses across agencies. Additionally, the law authorizes key programs to prevent domestic and sexual violence, targeted at potential perpetrators, victims, and bystanders.

APA Recommendations

APA is urging Congress to fully fund VAWA programs to ensure that all survivors of interpersonal violence, especially those from vulnerable populations, receive the services and supports necessary for optimal mental and physical health and safety. Through sustained funding for VAWA, essential programs can ensure that those impacted by domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking continue to receive the critical services that they need.

We request full funding for VAWA in FY2018, and specifically for the following programs:

Protections and Services for Disabled Victims grants equip shelter facilities to meet the needs of victims with disabilities, and provide funding to plan a National Deaf Service Line that will enable Deaf victims to speak directly with a Deaf advocate or an individual who is fluent in their preferred mode of communication. *Current authorization: \$9 million.*

Training and Services to End Abuse in Later Life grants play an instrumental role in training health care providers and caregivers to spot the warning signs of elder abuse. *Current authorization: \$9 million.*

Grants to Tribal Governments enhance the response to domestic violence and sexual assault against American Indian and Alaska Native women; strengthen the tribal criminal justice system; fund violence prevention campaigns; and provide transitional housing and legal assistance for survivors. *Current authorization: \$5 million.*

Grants for Outreach to Underserved Populations train and assist grantees in providing culturally specific services. Funding is also used to help organizations better address the needs of communities of color and other culturally specific or underserved communities. *Current authorization: \$2 million.*

Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors (STOP) Grants provide funding to states to support coordinated community responses to address domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. VAWA 2013 created new purpose areas under these grants for LGBT victims, funding for violence prevention, and training on U and T visas (VAWA authorized immigration visas). *Current authorization: \$222 million.*

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ⁱ <http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/partner.aspx>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/women-disabilities.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc_nisvs_victimization_final-a.pdf. National Center for Transgender Equality. 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey.

^{iv} U.S. Department of Justice. Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and the Criminal Justice Response: What is known. 2008:7.

^v Katsiaficas, D., & Suarez-Orozco, C. (2013). Liminal Bodies: Clinical Implications for Unauthorized Women and Girls. *Women and Therapy*, 36, 286-301.

^{vi} National Center on Elder Abuse (1999). Types of elder abuse in domestic settings. Washington, DC: National Center on Elder Abuse.