



SASP Administrator Considerations during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- **Programs are trying to find as many innovative ways of connecting with survivors as possible.** Flexibility from state/territory administrating agencies is key to programs pivoting to provide services to survivors of sexual assault during this pandemic.
- **Sexual assault is still happening.** Although survivors may or may not be able to reach out due to lack of technology, safety or privacy reasons, etc., sexual assault is still happening and is likely increasing in frequency, especially for child survivors, dependent adults, and others experiencing sexual violence in the home or where they are sheltering in place.
- **The physical distancing required to keep everyone safe during this global pandemic has increased the risk of abuse for many older adults who are now isolated in their homes and facilities.**¹
- **Programs may not be seeing a lot of survivors in person, but depending on the program, they may be seeing a steady or increased number of survivors reaching out via phone and other technologies.**²
- **Programs are responding to far more complex situations.** Survivors of sexual violence are experiencing more difficulty in finding housing, having emergency medical and mental health needs met, and having existing difficulties with mental health and substance abuse issues exacerbated. Furthermore, the isolation and disruption of routine caused by physical distancing measures may be compounding survivors' preexisting trauma symptoms and needs.
- **Disclosures of current violence will happen later.** After stay-at-home orders are lifted, there is likely to be a higher demand for sexual assault healing services. We expect an influx of survivors reaching out immediately following the current wave of the pandemic. During disasters such as this pandemic, survivors are generally most concerned with meeting their basic needs. Once communities feel some form of immediate safety again and people resume "normal" activities, we need to be ready for a surge in reports to programs. Following the Hurricane Katrina disaster, for example, programs that were experiencing burnout from the relief efforts, became bombarded

¹ National Clearinghouse on Abuse Later in Life's [Supporting Older Adults During COVID-19](#).

² According to a [survey](#) conducted by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, programs are experiencing an increase demand for services.

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with requests for services from survivors and new clients.³ Programs will need to create outreach plans specific to a potential increase in disclosures and subsequent need for sexual assault services when stay at home orders are lifted.

- **Child survivors, who may have previously sought refuge in school and other activities, are now home, potentially with abusers, and with limited access to services.** Important conversations for state/territory administrating agencies, coalitions, and programs to have right now will include questions such as: What can services look like for child survivors right now, even in physical isolation? What services will be necessary after stay at home orders are lifted and school resumes? Are there supports for increased technical assistance to programs around responding to child victims and their non-offending family members that would be helpful to prepare? Are there very practical ways that communities and programs can offer non-trauma specific support during this time (i.e. general social connection, meals, check-ins)?
- **Victim service programs now have to rely on technology to be able to connect with and serve survivors remotely.** There are a number of issues to consider with remote services:
 - Unfortunately, technology only gets us so far when programs are trying to reach sexual assault survivors who are children. They're already very vulnerable, some of them are in abusive homes, and technology might be monitored at home. This makes it difficult for a survivor to reach out if they need to talk to someone. Confidentiality will be difficult if you have a house full of family members who are all staying home because of the pandemic.
 - Given the current need for increased remote services and the projected need for increased in-person services after stay-at-home orders are lifted, capacity building will likely need to be an area of focus for programs. If programs are having trouble meeting remote service needs, how can they build capacity to provide those services? If they are currently meeting remote service needs but do not feel prepared for the potential rise in disclosures after this wave of the pandemic has passed, how can they build capacity now in preparation? How can State/Territory Administrating Agencies help build capacity?
 - Although internet-based platforms have been invaluable to many programs as they transition to providing remote services, it is important to consider the

³ National Sexual Violence Center's [Disaster Response and Recovery](#).



accessibility needs of all survivors. Making services accessible by phone, text, and even mail may provide more survivors access to services in the midst of this crisis.

- It is also important that services are accessible to survivors who either do not speak English or do not feel most comfortable receiving services in English or spoken language. If programs are not currently utilizing interpretation services, how can they receive funding and support to make that required and important step toward ensuring responsive and accessible services to all survivors.

- **Programs are adapting to respond to the needs of survivors as communities are building different ways to provide access to forensic exams and accompaniment.**

When that is not possible, what support, advocacy, and counseling services for survivors who were unable to access forensic exams during the pandemic crisis could be put in place or enhanced?

- **Services may not be working perfectly in this crisis and that has to be ok.**

State/territory administrating agencies must be as flexible as possible with programs that are trying to be creative in the ways they serve survivors of sexual assault during this pandemic.

- **The everyday stress of this pandemic will likely trigger survivors of sexual assault.** How can service providers be proactive in reaching out to survivors to provide support and validation? This may be an opportunity to use text-based and other technological services to communicate this reality and create new avenues of support.

- **Working remotely, physical distancing measures, and the everyday stress of this pandemic will affect the staff working in programs, in coalitions, and in the state/territory administrating agencies.** Being aware of this and having flexibility in the different ways that people cope is important during this crisis.

How can State/Territory Administrating Agencies support all the ways programs must pivot to meet the needs of survivors of sexual assault?

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