

## **Supporting California's Domestic Violence Service Providers During COVID-19**

Across California, domestic violence service providers support survivors, their families, and their communities every day in finding safety and healing. This support includes 24/7 emergency response to crisis calls, emergency shelter needs, and law enforcement and medical responses to long-term housing stability, counseling, and prevention work to stop violence before it ever occurs, these organizations are a core component of our social safety net. This is true every day, and even more so as we grapple with the impacts of COVID-19 on our communities.

On behalf of the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence (the Partnership) and the more than 1,000 advocates, organizations and allied groups that we represent, we urge you to incorporate the following recommendations into all COVID-19 responses. With offices in Sacramento, the Partnership's diverse membership spans the entire state. Through our public policy, communications and capacity-building efforts, we align prevention and intervention strategies to advance social change. The Partnership believes that by sharing expertise, advocates and policy-makers can end domestic violence. Working at the state and national levels for nearly 40 years, the Partnership has a long track record of successfully passing over 200 pieces of legislation addressing domestic violence.

As Californians are urged to stay home to prevent the spread of this disease, we are starkly reminded that "home" is typically an unsafe place for survivors and their children. When home is dangerous, the safety net of housing, economic, legal, and healthcare, including mental health, supports should be there to protect survivors from further harm. As social distancing and isolation increase, so too does the risk of domestic violence, and the challenges of providing services, as was described in [this recent article](#). Despite these challenges, programs remain available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to assist those in need. As programs shift their practices to keep survivors and staff safe, they need the support of policymakers. While many funding streams include specific requirements for service delivery and documentation, the present situation demands trust and flexibility. Domestic violence service providers are adapting their services so that they can provide safety and support in ways that are new, innovative and creative. Safety at this time means flexibility and access.

### **Increase Funding and Minimize Restrictions for Domestic Violence Organizations**

Domestic violence organizations regularly operate on exceedingly tight budgets, which are now stretched beyond the limit as they mobilize to respond in this moment of crisis. As the conditions are continually shifting and needs are different in every community, the most vital resource for programs now is additional flexible funding.

We urge policymakers and funders to take the following actions:

- As part of the COVID-19 response package, new funding must be provided to domestic violence organizations with few restrictions on its usage, to best allow programs to respond to the evolving needs of the survivors and communities they serve. In each community the needs will continue to be unique and rapidly evolving, and programs need the flexibility to be nimble in responding to these immediate needs. Funding should also be flexible enough to support paying staff for time they may need to miss from work due to coronavirus impacts or as programs reduce staff hours due to site closures and restrictions affecting their ability to provide services in their usual manner.
- The state can specifically support three grant programs administered by Cal OES that are already addressing the full range of survivors' housing needs: a) emergency shelter services provided through the Domestic Violence Assistance Program; b) Transitional Housing; and c) Domestic Violence Housing First.
  - In FY 17-18 domestic violence emergency shelters provided 18,446 survivors and children with emergency shelter for a total of 627,410 bed nights.<sup>1</sup>



- The 38 Transitional Housing program grantees provided 2,027 clients with transitional housing for 430,234 bed nights. An additional 1,065 clients received short-term housing, and 3,051 clients received supportive services.<sup>2</sup>
- The Domestic Violence Housing First program provides flexible, trauma-informed advocacy for survivors and their children, financial assistance that addresses survivors' unique and evolving safety needs and allows survivors to choose how to rebuild their lives. In FY 17-18, the 65 funded organizations provided services to 3,505 new individuals.<sup>3</sup> A recently completed statewide evaluation tracked some of the initial implementing programs, and overall, 58% of survivors were able to use the flexible financial assistance to prevent homelessness.<sup>4</sup>
- The state should also require that a specific percentage of the housing funding provided to Continuums of Care through the COVID-19 relief package be specified for addressing the needs of homeless survivors of domestic violence, including those currently housed in domestic violence shelters. This funding should be directed to both housing and housing-related stabilization services for survivors, to be provided by programs already serving survivors. This will support direct housing needs as well as outreach, coordination, and services to assist survivors in accessing permanent housing and to promote housing stability.
- Ensure that current funding continues at its existing rates, regardless of whether or not programs are meeting the levels or specific type of deliverables anticipated. Contracts that pay based on per client billing or fund specific activities that can no longer be provided safely should maintain their payment levels from pre-COVID-19 impacts, to provide stability for programs and support them in returning to normal operations in the future.
- All funders should provide timely approval for budget modifications and changes to grant deliverables, as well as providing flexibility to extend the grant period and grant reporting deadlines.
- Our partners at CalNonprofits have identified recommendations to support the broad nonprofit sector, and we echo those recommendations. Our work is interconnected with others across the sector, and a wide range of community partners need support in these times.

### **Addressing the Urgent Housing Needs of Survivors**

Domestic violence is a leading cause of women's homelessness and housing is the most frequently requested need of survivors. Research has found that "women and men who experienced food and housing insecurity in the past 12 months reported a significantly higher 12-month prevalence of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner compared to women and men who did not experience food and housing insecurity."<sup>5</sup> The annual Point In Time Count data, despite its limitations, shows that between 6 – 24% of the homeless population counted on a single night in January over the five year period of 2015-2019 were survivors of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup> Between 22-57% of unhoused women report domestic violence was an immediate cause of their homelessness,<sup>7</sup> and 80% of women with children have experienced domestic violence.<sup>8</sup> Women are roughly 33% of California's homeless population.<sup>9</sup>

Many women become homeless when fleeing or attempting to flee an abusive situation, and are especially vulnerable to homelessness due to the dynamics of power and control present in a domestic violence situation, economic instability resulting from the abuse, the effects of trauma, and the need for safety and confidentiality as well as housing. Across California there are 102 domestic violence emergency shelters, as well as 65 programs implementing Domestic Violence Housing First, and programs providing transitional housing. In this moment, policymakers can take steps to support those housing programs and mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19 that may lead to housing instability and homelessness.

Policymakers should:

- Include domestic violence programs in any local and state planning for emergency response, including developing protocols for interventions with our homeless population and communal living sites. Many programs are especially concerned about what to do if a client in shelter exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 or tests positive for the virus.

Planning for these situations comes with specific confidentiality and safety planning requirements for domestic violence survivors. Local officials and government agencies should work closely with their domestic violence service providers to develop plans and ensure domestic violence programs are aware of the resources being made available. A list of domestic violence programs is available here: <https://www.cpedv.org/domestic-violence-organizations-california>.

- Provide essential supplies to support cleanliness and hygiene. Shortages of toilet paper, hand sanitizer, disinfecting cleaners, and others have severely impacted programs. These are essential for the well-being of staff and clients, and state and local agencies should assist with providing these supplies wherever possible.
- Provide flexible financial assistance to support survivors in preventing homelessness, including support for rental assistance and the full range of additional supports individuals need to maintain housing.
- Enact a moratorium on evictions, foreclosures, and utility shut-offs. No individual should fear losing their home or power during this time.
- Provide rental assistance for all who need it. Even with a moratorium on evictions, many will struggle to pay rent during these times and will be unable to make up those lost wages once COVID-19 impacts have eased. Rental assistance now will support our most vulnerable Californians in this crisis and in the long term.

### **Protecting Survivors from Economic Peril**

Personal safety and economic security are inextricably linked for victims of domestic violence. For many victims, concerns over their ability to provide financially for themselves and their children are a significant reason for staying in or returning to an abusive relationship. When survivors of domestic violence have stable access to resources that help them build economic resiliency, they and their families are much more likely to remain safe and secure. During this national crisis, our social safety net and employment protections are critical. Strengthening economic security holds great potential for improving a wide range of health outcomes for individuals, especially those who are already at greater risk of domestic violence. Timely access to paid leave and other related benefits helps support the household income, reducing financial stressors and other associated relationship discord that can prompt instances of relationship violence.

Policymakers should:

- Ensure that CalWORKs and CalFresh provide robust benefits and reduce administrative burdens and barriers that can prevent individuals from accessing these programs.
- Bolster the essential paid leave programs to support survivors and domestic violence program staff who are unable to work as a result of COVID-19. Our partners at the California Work & Family Coalition are crafting a robust set of recommendations to increase economic security for all workers, and we encourage all policymakers to implement these recommendations.
- We have particularly heard the following needs from the domestic violence service providers:
  - Provide additional paid sick days and family leave for individuals impacted by COVID-19 to ensure survivors can cover their day-to-day expenses and know they will have a job to return to, once they can work. This should include additional paid and job-protected leave for those who are sick, those who need to take time off to self-isolate due to high risk, and those who need to care for family members, including children whose schools are closed.
  - Increase the wage replacement level and length of time for unemployment insurance. We applaud the Governor for waiving the one-week waiting period to file for unemployment insurance. This critical safety net program can do more to keep individuals afloat by providing higher levels of benefits above the current maximum of \$450 per week.

### **Ensuring Access to Courts**

The courts remain an essential avenue to survivors in need of legal protections from the abuse they are experiencing and to navigate custody and visitation as this crisis creates additional stress on already fragile parenting arrangements.

- We encourage all Presiding Judges to consider ways to allow survivors to receive the relief they need, including providing automatic extensions of orders, or utilizing digital or fax filing and other forms of remote access. Providing these options with full language access for survivors is essential.
- Allow litigants to continue filing Domestic Violence Prevention Act restraining order requests, including a means by which requests for orders can be handled remotely. Create clear processes and clearly communicate them to the public.
- Extend the expiration dates of existing Temporary Restraining Orders and Restraining Orders After Hearing (ROAH) so that they do not expire in jurisdictions where survivors do not have access to courts.
  - Courts should provide a clear process for informing litigants and provide a clear process and timeline for informing law enforcement of these extensions. Information about these processes must be provided to community non-profits immediately.
- Courts need to clarify whether Sheriff's offices are available to serve restraining orders and whether they will continue to enforce move out orders.
- Courts should remain open for COVID-related custody/parenting time hearings with video conference or phone options, in addition to protection order hearings.
- As criminal courts stop conducting arraignments in misdemeanor cases, they must provide clarity on how domestic violence calls to law enforcement are to be handled. If individuals arrested for misdemeanor domestic violence are not held in custody even temporarily, safety planning for survivors becomes even more complex, at a time when law enforcement may be the only option for help in some areas. Court and law enforcement should communicate their new policies to their local domestic violence service providers and work with them to ensure survivor safety.

The Partnership is available as a resource to support domestic violence service providers, policymakers, and funders as we move through this time. Please contact Krista Niemczyk, Public Policy Manager, at [krista@cpedv.org](mailto:krista@cpedv.org) with any questions or for additional information.

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Legislative Budget Committee Report, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, Grants Management Victim Services & Public Safety Division. January 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriela López-Zerón, PhD, Kathryn Clements, PhD, Cris Sullivan, PhD. Michigan State University Research Consortium on Gender-based Violence. Examining the Impact of the Domestic Violence Housing First Model In California, A Multipronged Evaluation. October 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Breiding, M. J., Chen, J., & Black, M. C. (2014). Intimate partner violence in the United States – 2010. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>6</sup> Point In Time Count data available at [https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/?filter\\_Year=&filter\\_Scope=State&filter\\_State=CA&filter\\_CoC=&program=CoC&group=PopSub](https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/?filter_Year=&filter_Scope=State&filter_State=CA&filter_CoC=&program=CoC&group=PopSub).

<sup>7</sup> Wilder Research Center, Homelessness in Minnesota 2003 22 (2004); Center for Impact Research, Pathways to and from Homelessness: Women and Children in Chicago Shelters 3 (2004); Nat'l Center on Family Homelessness & Health Care for the Homeless Clinician's Network, Social Supports for Homeless Mothers, 14 26 (2003); Inst. For Children & Poverty, The Hidden Migration: Why New York City Shelters Are Overflowing with Families (2004); Homes for the Homeless & Inst. For Children & Poverty, Ten Cities 1997-1998: A Snapshot of Family Homelessness Across America 3 (1998); Virginia Coalition for the Homeless, 1995 Shelter Provider Survey (1995)(out of print), cited in Nat'l Coalition for the Homeless, Domestic Violence and Homelessness: NCH Fact Sheet #8 (1999).

<sup>8</sup> HUD Family Options Study; Aratani, Y. (2009). Homeless Children and Youth, Causes and Consequences. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty.

<sup>9</sup> HUD 2019 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations. Available at: [https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC\\_PopSub\\_State\\_CA\\_2019.pdf](https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_State_CA_2019.pdf).