

# Modernizing Iowa's System of Services for Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

**Iowa's system of services for victims of domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA), which emerged in the 1970s and 80s, is now modernizing to better meet the needs of survivors.** The current system of 28 mostly dual-service (both dv and sa) centers across the state offers emergency shelter care as its primary service option. Because the staffing and infrastructure needs to maintain a 24/7 shelter, this overwhelms the budgets of local programs, which limits other services that can be offered.

While shelter care remains an important part of the service continuum, it must not be the only perceived option. When battered women or victims of sexual abuse see emergency shelter care as the *only* gateway to help, many or most choose not to seek services. Sexual assault victims, in particular, rarely seek shelter care.

**The Iowa Attorney General's Office Crime Victims Assistance Division, which administers state and federal funds for DV and SA, has developed a plan reorganizing into comprehensive, outcome-based, community-based domestic violence and sexual assault services, including the provision of regional emergency shelter care.** The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) and their member programs were involved in the plan's development, and extensive public input has been sought. **ICADV and IowaCASA support the reorganization plan.**

Though the plan was initially driven by concerns about the sustainability of federal and state funds to serve Iowa's victims, emerging evidence shows by modernizing our service delivery, we can dramatically improve program outcomes.

Independently verified data from Needle Analytics indicates a minimum of \$6m in additional funding is needed to increase the capacity of programs. This will add 147 field advocates. These additional advocates will serve nearly 20,000 more victims. The data also shows this level of increase in funding will still leave a minimum 6593 victims without any services or support.

Add'l Funding	Add'l # Advocates	Add'l # Victims Served
\$2,000,000	49	6,654
\$4,000,000	98	13,308
\$6,000,000	147	19,961
\$8,000,000	196	26,615
\$10,000,000	245	33,269

For further information, please contact ICADV or IowaCASA, or Rachel Scott (515.979.4025 or [fgs.rachel@gmail.com](mailto:fgs.rachel@gmail.com)) or Amy Campbell (515.554.5838 or [amy@ialobby.com](mailto:amy@ialobby.com)).

## What Will a New System Look Like?

Though the primary services offered in the new system have been piloted very successfully in the states of Washington and Oregon (and to some degree, in a few of Iowa's local programs), Iowa will be the first state in the nation to modernize its DV and SA service system statewide.

Rather than expending the majority of funds on costs associated with a network of shelters (bricks and mortar, utilities, food, maintenance, and 24/7 staffing), contractors in six regions of the state will be responsible for providing comprehensive, community-based DV services, comprehensive SA services, and emergency shelter services.

Comprehensive services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault include, but are not limited to:

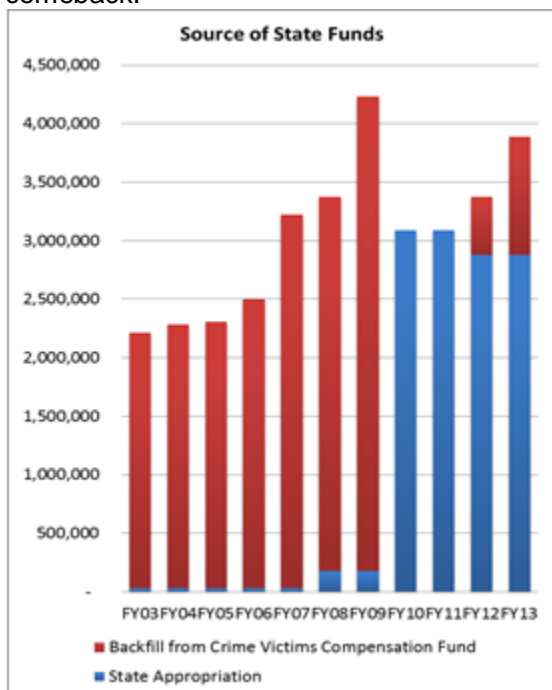
- **Rapid rehousing:** help securing permanent, safe housing for the victim; providing limited cash assistance, if needed, to pay security and utility deposits or rent.
- **Mobile tailored advocacy:** trained advocates meet the victim in a place of the victim's choosing to determine needs and develop a plan that provides as few or as many services as the victim needs. This is especially crucial for victims of sexual assault or abuse, who may be young adults or children, and for whom shelter-based care is not needed.
- **Financial or legal counseling to assist victims in a variety of matters:** seeking protective orders, divorce, child custody and support, affording the home after the abuser has left, troubleshooting rental agreements, etc.

# Using Funds Effectively for Iowa’s Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

## How Are Victim Services Funded?

The Iowa Attorney General’s Office, Crime Victims Assistance Division currently administers the federal and state funds to domestic violence and sexual assault programs on a grant basis. Services for victims are funded by a combination of federal, state, and local funds. Over the last ten years, federal funds have comprised 50-65% of all victim service dollars in Iowa.

The Iowa General Assembly appropriates funds in a line-item called Victim Assistance Grants within the budget of the Attorney General’s Office. In FY2003, the Legislature appropriated \$30,000 for Victim Assistance Grants, and the Attorney General’s Office made a transfer from the Crime Victims Compensation Fund (CVCVF), a fund paid by criminal fines and restitution to assist victims of all sorts of crime, to cover the deficit. This reliance on transfers continued until FY2009, when the Fund was drained. As the chart below demonstrates, this priority funding for victim services appears to be making a comeback.



## What are the Costs of Waiting to Modernize the System?

In the last ten years, 11 domestic violence and/or sexual assault programs in Iowa have closed their doors. Failure to address issues with the overall fiscal sustainability of Iowa’s victim services system means yet more programs will close this year. This is the reason the Attorney General’s Office, ICADV, and IowaCASA came together to find ways to ensure that needed services, instead of physical structures, are protected and that services are available to victims and survivors—no matter where they live.

**Sustainability of programs means not only providing an adequate and reliable state appropriation from year to year, but addressing with deliberate speed the well-documented, long-term drains on program effectiveness that severely limit the services.**

**Waiting to modernize costs taxpayers about \$3.3 million each year in unused emergency shelter beds.** 11.2% of victims served in FY2011 utilized shelter, which left 88.8% utilizing other outreach services. Across the state, the shelter vacancy rate is 42%--a trend consistent from year to year and with national figures. About 40% of Victims Services Support program resources currently maintain shelters, which serve only 11.2% of victims.

**Waiting to modernize keeps thousands of victims each year on an “invisible waiting list.”** Because currently we are not able to offer the community-based, client-based services they need, many survivors instead don’t ever seek our help, or only do so when the need for services has become intensified. For instance, it is estimated that only 8% of Iowa’s victims of sexual assault seek services.

**Waiting to modernize wastes momentum and resources for programs who have already developed regional plans together.** Though not without difficulty, our local programs have already made decisions for what makes the most sense as service models and providers in the six regions. Several shelters that would not be funded in the next grant cycle already know they will not be funded, and are making plans either for community-based funding, transition to other types of services, or dissolution. Prolonging the process of reducing the number of shelters will divert funds away from the development of new services to reach more victims.

**Waiting to modernize keeps our survivors, programs and communities from realizing the better outcomes and increased effectiveness that other communities have experienced.** Programs in Washington and Oregon report impressive long-term gains for families from rapid rehousing services. Families who have received these services are much more likely to be in stable housing, and they experience greater rates of safety, employment, and children’s academic success. Overall, they utilize fewer emergency and safety net services.