

FACT SHEET

COVID-19, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault within Communities of Color

As our nation works to address the current and future costs of the COVID-19 pandemic on the broader society, data shows that Communities of Color have been disproportionately impacted with: higher contraction and death rates; significant economic hardship and an increased vulnerability to domestic violence and sexual assault. Disparities in the incidents of domestic violence and sexual assault within Communities of Color existed prior to the emergence of COVID-19. However, the current pandemic intensifies those disparities given that Women of Color often have a higher vulnerability to incidents of domestic violence and sexual assault during times of economic uncertainty. **This alarming reality underscores the need for community based culturally specific Communities of Color organizations to be a critical part of the short and long-term response to the COVID public health and economic crisis.**

The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 has also exacerbated the effect of domestic violence and sexual assault in Communities of Color.

- ❖ The increased isolation resulting from stay-at-home orders highlighted the unique challenges of addressing domestic violence and sexual assault within Communities of Color, who are often marginalized in systemic and service responses.
- ❖ Women of Color are overwhelmingly represented in essential service industry jobs such as restaurant, domestic, and janitorial services, which have higher vulnerability to sexual assault and ongoing risk to contracting the COVID-19 virus as the nation reopens.
- ❖ Lack of access to safe and affordable housing disproportionately impacts Women of Color survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault who experience higher rates of homelessness as a result of the violence.
- ❖ Children and Youths of Color are at an increased risk for victimization and abuse as they continue to be “sheltered” in unhealthy home environments and as a result of reduced access to safe childcare options and social supports.

Communities of Color organizations are lifelines of support for domestic violence and sexual assault survivors responding to their immediate trauma and safety concerns while providing access to resources that address basic human needs.

- ❖ Translating and Interpreting COVID related materials due to a lack of information for survivors who speak more than 300 languages.
- ❖ Responding to emergency needs by delivering food, cell phones, masks and other critical supports.
- ❖ Ensuring access to vital financial resources for survivors who live in food and transportation deserts and are unable to access unemployment benefits, rental assistance, and other COVID specific economic supports due to their immigration status and/or gig economy jobs.
- ❖ Providing virtual outreach and information to support parents and families about safety planning and addressing underlying mental health stressors.

Culturally specific Communities of Color (COC) organizations have historically been under resourced and have limited access to funding to support the increased needs of survivors resulting from the COVID-19 public health and economic crisis.

- ❖ Historically, racial and ethnic communities have been underserved by mainstream service providers. Yet culturally specific organizations that serve COC have not had equitable access to the funding provided by VAWA and/or FVPSA grants at the federal, state, and local levels. Further, these culturally specific programs and services are often the most vulnerable to funding cuts.
- ❖ Currently, many COC organizations do not receive funding from state and/or local governments to provide domestic violence or sexual assault services.
- ❖ Without a dedicated funding stream and clear guidance, federal, state, and local agencies often develop eligibility guidelines that serve as additional barriers for COC organizations—even when the funds are directed to support marginalized populations.
- ❖ The definition of core victim services is most often not inclusive of culturally specific responses that support survivors from Communities of Color, ultimately creating a barrier for these programs to state and local funds.
- ❖ In an effort to distribute funds quickly, in some states, COVID relief funds are specifically directed to support currently funded grantees which often leave out culturally specific Communities of Color organizations.

Funding must be intentionally directed to culturally specific Communities of Color organizations that are developed by and for their communities to address the historical and present day systemic issues that have left their communities vulnerable to the COVID-19 public health and economic crisis.

To effectively respond to the increased needs of survivors for Communities of Color as a result of this pandemic, we implore Congress to provide:

\$40 million in funding through the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program of the Dept. of Health and Human Services to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minority communities by providing culturally specific services and support to women and youth of color who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Our country has a long road toward recovery and Communities of Color organizations are an important part of the strategy to move our nation forward. But they must also be resourced and engaged to lead the response in our own communities. We cannot afford to maintain the status quo that has marginalized the voices of those that are at the greatest risk; the health and long-term well-being of our country depends on it.

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