Immigrant women are one of the groups least likely in California to seek domestic violence services due to added challenges such as language barriers, social and economic isolation, lack of local family support, and immigration barriers. Current anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy creates additional vulnerabilities for immigrant survivors that necessitate domestic violence agencies providing proactive responses.

More than anything, know that local and national environments of fear, xenophobia, travel bans, visa denials, separations of children from parents, and deportation make it harder than ever for immigrant survivors to speak up and ask for help. Immigrant survivors may feel more fraught with risk than they did just a few years ago. Therefore, it is up to service providers to demonstrate trustworthiness through preparation, response, and follow-through.

The next page contains a short list of considerations intended to help California’s domestic violence advocates and community-based organizations evolve our advocacy expertise to be responsive to the rapidly shifting contexts in which survivors are struggling to find safety.
7 WAYS TO EMPOWER IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS

Language Justice: In a state in which 44% of Californians over the age of 5 speak a language other than English at home, language justice is essential. Providers must ensure meaningful language access, including oral and signed interpretation and written translation, as well as emotional support and advocacy for limited English proficiency survivors. Develop a written language access plan, build it into budgets, hire trained interpreters, have equipment for deaf and hard of hearing survivors (videophones & TTY), and train staff/volunteers on working with interpreters.

Inquiries: Ask about immigration status in a sensitive and private manner after reassuring the survivor that you have no connection to local law enforcement, government or immigration enforcement. Remind them that they do not have to answer your questions, and you are only asking to help them think through all aspects of their safety.

Detention/Deportation Process: Train staff and volunteers on general immigration detention and deportation procedures and timelines as part of casework skills-building by tapping into resources from advocates supporting criminalized immigrants and immigrant survivors. Let clients know that, in the event that the immigrant parent is detained, they still have rights to their children, and they can plan for the safety and temporary custody of children.

Legal: Ensure you have capacity to meet survivors’ immigration legal needs quickly and comprehensively, including having attorneys on staff or by referral to those who can provide legal representation, advice, and up-to-date information on risks and benefits involved in different remedies (asylum, T-visa, U-visa, VAWA self-petition, etc.) Any legal services to address survivors’ violence must be coordinated with family immigration status (criminal, family, immigration, juvenile). If a survivor is considering to apply for financial and health benefits, refer them to local legal aid office to find out which health and public benefits they can access.

Documentation and Personal Belongings: Encourage clients to maintain original documentation in a safe, trusted place and to keep copies with them at all times. Advise clients to carry an extra few days worth of medication on them.

Resources: Learn from immigrant survivors and communities on what resources they have, such as apps, websites and emails for safety planning in case of detention or deportation of them or family members. Help survivors and families build or strengthen safety plans. Encourage survivors to memorize the phone numbers of at least two social contacts and legal/service providers in case they are detained.

Trauma-Informed: Recognize how traumatic it may be for immigrants and their family members to be in proximity of law enforcement. This has been true for many people of color, indigenous, and immigrant and refugee communities across U.S. history. It is still true now.