

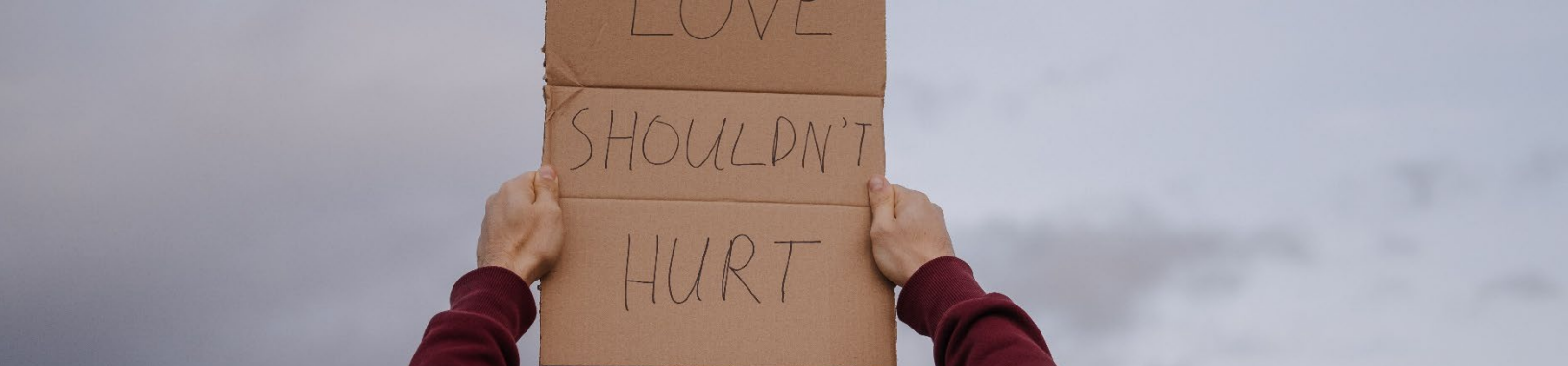


# Advisory Report

## Breaking the Cycle: A Comprehensive Statewide Strategy Would Benefit Domestic Violence Victims, Survivors, and Advocates

October 2023  
Report 2023-31





LOVE  
SHOULDN'T  
HURT

# Highlights

## Breaking the Cycle: A Comprehensive Statewide Strategy Would Benefit Domestic Violence Victims, Survivors, and Advocates

### Why this report is important

- Domestic violence has far-reaching health and societal effects. Over a third of adults in Oregon experience domestic violence in their lifetimes, and intimate partners are responsible for approximately one in five homicides nationwide. From 2009 through 2019, Oregon's 393 fatal domestic violence incidents resulted in 532 deaths.
- In 2020, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated that at least 32% of adults in families with children in surveyed homeless shelters were survivors of domestic violence, and 15% were currently fleeing unsafe situations.
- Ease of access is critical for timely and effective domestic violence interventions. However, victims face multiple access barriers. Victims and survivors often face fear, isolation, shame, and stigma, as well as financial, mental health, and cultural challenges. Regional organizations play critical roles in providing services.

### What our review found

1. Victims and survivors face multiple barriers to accessing community services and navigating the justice system. Systemic social welfare issues, such as the lack of available housing or access to services like childcare, mental health care, and legal assistance often translate to urgent unmet needs for domestic violence victims.
2. Oregon advocates report fragmented and under-resourced social services and complex criminal and civil justice systems contribute to access issues. Domestic violence service providers face high administrative burdens, staffing issues, and challenges expanding equitable outreach, prevention, and intervention services.
3. Oregon lacks a centralized, statewide response to domestic violence and does not strategically address risks through statewide data-informed prevention, mitigation, or intervention-related action. Oregon could do more to coordinate strategies, share data, and effect change across otherwise siloed agency and organizational responses.

### What we suggest

We suggest state leaders take several actions and strategic improvements to better support victims and survivors. These actions include developing and implementing a statewide strategy to address the needs of domestic violence victims and survivors, centralizing resources and statewide information sharing, including improved data collection, and adding financial stability to nonprofit operations.

# Background

In Oregon, over a third of adults experience domestic violence in their lifetimes and the COVID-19 epidemic strained social services critical to domestic violence victims and survivors. Domestic violence services are offered largely by local community-based nonprofits and the criminal justice system. The state provides administrative support and oversight of federal and state grants. However, Oregon lacks a state taskforce or holistic strategy to comprehensively address domestic violence.

**A note on terminology:** This report borrows the definition of terms “victim” and “survivor” from the 2023 White House National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence to refer to individuals who have experienced domestic violence. As defined in the National Plan:

“Both terms are important and have different implications when used in the context of advocacy and service provision. For example, the term ‘victim’ has legal implications within criminal justice, immigration, and other legal processes, and usually refers to an individual who suffered harm as a result of criminal or other harmful conduct. Many laws that give individuals particular rights and legal standing use the term ‘victim,’ as does federal law enforcement. ‘Survivor’ is a term used widely by service providers and advocacy organizations to recognize the strength and courage it takes to overcome victimization. Individuals... may choose to refer to themselves as ‘victims,’ ‘survivors,’ or by other designations; and this may change over the course of their lifetimes and may depend on whether they feel they have healed, whether they feel justice was served, and whether they have experienced additional harms.”

While “victim or survivor” is the term generally used in this report, both terms are used throughout.

## Domestic violence in Oregon is widespread and damaging

As defined in state policy, domestic violence is a specific subsection of interpersonal, family, and intimate partner violence. Domestic violence can be described as a behavior that a person uses to control a current or former intimate partner. Domestic violence takes many forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as threats and economic control. It is closely linked to other types of abuse, such as child abuse, sexual violence, and elder abuse.

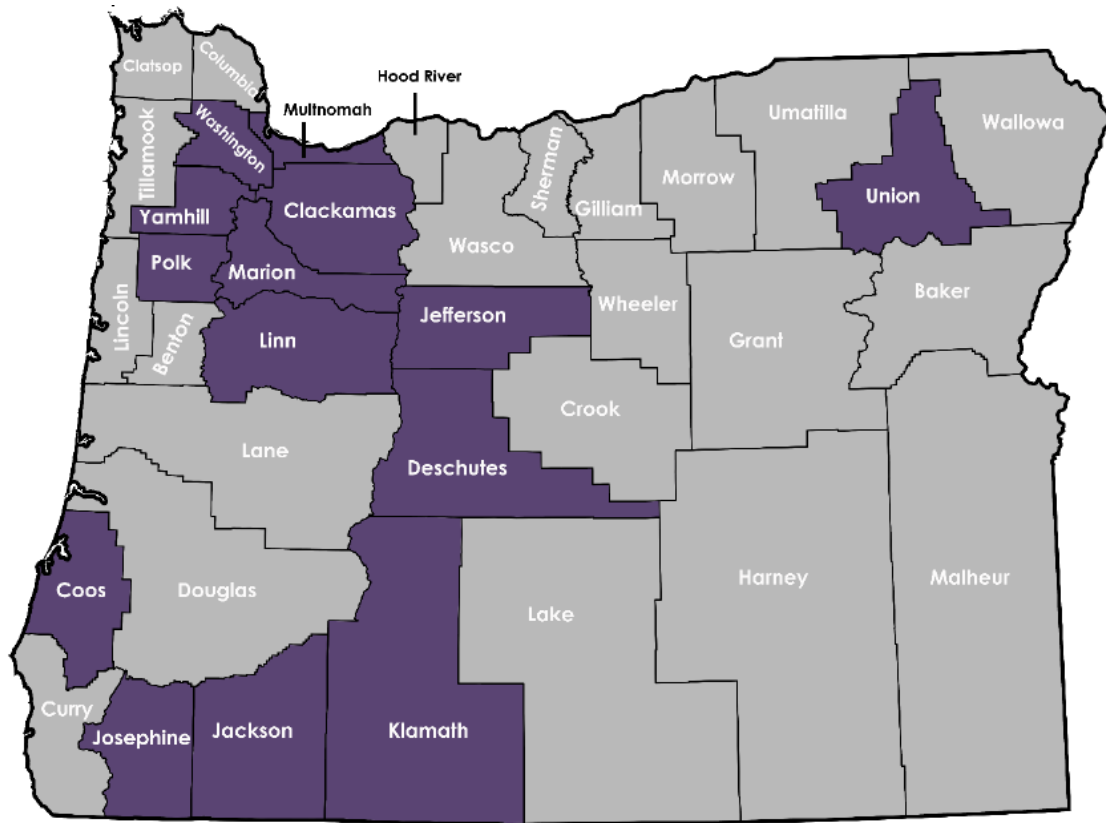
Domestic violence has far-reaching health and societal effects. National surveys estimate that over a third of adults in Oregon experience domestic violence in their lifetimes, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that intimate partners are responsible for approximately one in five homicides nationwide.<sup>1</sup> From 2009 through 2019, Oregon’s Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team identified a total of 393 fatal domestic violence incidents that resulted in 532 deaths.<sup>2</sup>

In 2020, 89% of female homicide victims in the United States were murdered by someone they knew; 60% were wives, common-law wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends of the offenders.

<sup>1</sup> Complete data on incidents of domestic violence is not regularly collected or reported at the state or national level. Domestic violence is also believed to be widely underreported to law enforcement. This report uses the most recent available data, but statistics may appear outdated and may not represent the full picture of domestic violence incidents.

<sup>2</sup> The work of Oregon’s fatality review team can be found at <https://www.ocadsv.org/our-work/dv-fatality-review/>

Figure 1: In 2019, 15 out of 36 Oregon counties had at least one fatal domestic violence incident



Source: Oregon Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence: 2019 Domestic Violence Fatalities Report

Domestic violence affects individuals of all backgrounds. However, women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds experience disproportionately high rates. Other high-risk groups include those who have lower incomes or educational attainment, are unemployed, have adverse childhood experiences, or are a member of a sexual minority. People who identify with more than one high-risk group may experience additional risk of being subjected to domestic violence in their lifetime.

### National Domestic Violence Statistics

Who experiences domestic violence in their lifetime...

More than one in three women and one in four men	Nearly two in five transgender people	Almost half of all American Indian/Alaska Native and Black women	44% of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women
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### Domestic violence is cyclical, damaging, and difficult to escape

Domestic violence can have impacts that extend beyond a single generation. Those who experience or witness violence or abuse in childhood may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress and have difficulties forming healthy relationships as adults. A 2012 report to the Oregon Legislature noted that one in three women who experienced domestic violence in the previous five years said a child witnessed a physical assault — putting each of those children at risk of ongoing harm even after they are no longer exposed to situations involving domestic violence.

Research shows that victims of interpersonal violence:

- Take an average of five to seven attempts to leave their abusers permanently.
- Return to their abusers at a rate of up to 50%.
- Cite lack of housing, income, and childcare options as major barriers to leaving.



In addition to injuries directly caused by an abuser, victims and survivors may experience other physical effects associated with chronic pain and trauma. They may also be at increased risk for posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicide. Abusers often control their partners physically, emotionally, and financially. Isolation from friends, family, and other supports may increase victims’ dependence on abusers and limit means of escape. Victims are in the greatest danger when they try to leave.

The reasons for staying — or returning — are many, such as shame, the needs of shared children, fear of losing access to shelter, emotional manipulation, physical threats, financial control, mistrust of the legal system, and concern for the safety of pets.

Figure 2: Domestic violence is part of a network of social issues

## CAUSE & EFFECT: The Interconnection of Social Issues and Domestic Violence

One in three women will experience domestic violence (DV) in her lifetime. DV does not occur in isolation; pathways exist to and from a whole spectrum of social issues. Individuals, families and communities experience these issues as deeply entwined and simultaneous, which calls for an integrated approach to addressing DV. The graphic below depicts three pathways from a much broader set of social issues.



Broader structural factors, such as discriminatory policies and cultural norms, shape the expression of these social issues and their relationship with DV. This results in disparities and inequities based on race, ethnicity, geography, socio-economic status, sexual identity, among many others. **It's time for leaders from multiple sectors to look at the whole picture and work together to develop bold response strategies that account for the complexity and scale of the issues.**

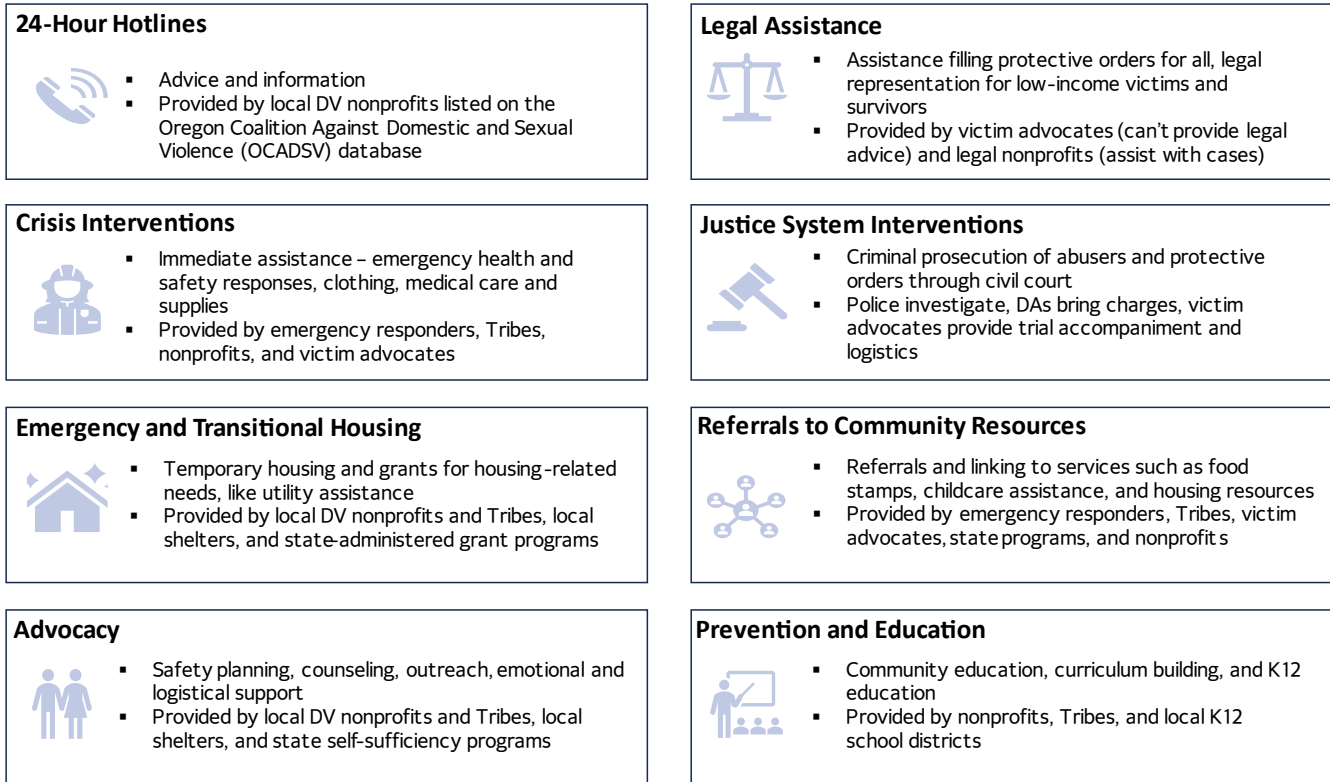


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# State agencies provide administrative supports and services for domestic violence victims and survivors

Emergency interventions, ongoing support, and prevention are basic domestic violence service categories. These are provided by community-based nonprofit organizations (nonprofits), Tribes, courts, emergency responders, and other state and community actors.

**Figure 3: Examples of domestic violence services and potential service providers**



Oregon’s state-level response to domestic violence centers on administrative and financial support.

Basic response elements involve:

- Formula-based state subgrants of funding from federal legislation: the Violence Against Woman Act and the Victims of Crime Act;
- State subgrants of Federal Funds to community-based organizations and to crime victim advocates within district attorneys’ offices providing regional supports such as crisis interventions, safety planning, housing, and crisis phone lines; and
- State grants from the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund, established in statute to provide flexible state funding to community-based organizations providing regional supports.

State legislation determines domestic violence victim rights, related processes, and criminal and civil charges and procedures. Legislative topics include:

- Civil court proceedings;
- Criminal citations, charges, and offenses;
- Victim compensation;

- Privacy and advocate-victim privilege;
- Tenant and employment laws;
- Batterers Intervention Programs; and
- State funding sources and their oversight, including the marriage license tax and the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund.

**Figure 4: Domestic violence responses have become formalized in federal and state policy**



Specific agency roles vary. **The Oregon Department of Justice** is one of two state agencies with a large administrative role. The Department of Justice's **Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division** distributes and oversees federal and state monies to programs that provide services to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. It establishes the funding formula that determines sub-grant amounts, provides grant and victim advocate supports to nonprofits, justice system programs and Tribes, and coordinates statewide task forces that address crime victim program best practices. The Crime Victim

and Survivor Services Division also runs the state's address confidentiality program, a state-guaranteed protection for crime victims.

**The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS)** also plays a significant role. ODHS is the official recipient of the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act federal grant, which is distributed by the Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division. ODHS also runs domestic violence programs through its Self-Sufficiency Division:

- The Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors grant, funded through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant;
- The Co-located Domestic Violence Advocates Program, a state investment that funds certified advocates within 33 local agencies across Oregon; and
- The Survivor Investment Partnership, a General Fund investment first established in 2021 to increase survivor supports for Tribes and culturally specific communities.

In addition, ODHS case workers are trained to recognize signs of domestic violence and assess household situations when they process applications for Self-Sufficiency programs. ODHS provides domestic violence safety planning services and access to temporary assistance grants at every local Self-Sufficiency office.

Other state agencies with important roles:

**The Oregon Judicial Department** provides training and administrative support to county court staff and judges and collects data on court cases.

**The Oregon State Police** responds to domestic violence calls on state lands or when providing backup for local police forces and create an annual report with a summary level overview of the number of cases where domestic violence was a factor for reported offenses.

**The Oregon Health Authority** tracks injury and homicide data, contributes research efforts for Oregon's annual Domestic Violence Fatality reports, and maintains a dashboard on violent deaths.

**The Oregon Department of Education** provides curriculum support for legislatively mandated healthy relationships curriculum in K-12 schools, including domestic violence prevention topics.

**The Oregon Housing and Community Services Department** reports on housing needs throughout Oregon and supports statewide housing projects to address unmet need.

**The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries** investigates complaints of workplace discrimination against victims of domestic violence and enforces state fair housing law. Status as a domestic violence survivor is protected under state housing and employment laws.

State agency representatives participate in and chair a variety of committees, commissions, and workgroups to discuss ongoing challenges and potential responses to domestic violence and related issues. Groups include the statutorily established Oregon Commission for Women, the Attorney General's Task Force on Victims' Rights Enforcement, the Oregon Domestic Violence Fatality Review team, the Batterer Intervention Program Advisory Committee, and the Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division Grant Management Section Advisory Committee. The Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force began as an attorney general initiative in 1999. It is now a nonprofit, non-



governmental agency and convenes a Task Force Advisory Committee with over 100 multi-disciplinary members. Its sub-committees include Advocacy Response, Campus, Criminal Justice, Legislative and Public Policy, Offender Management, and Prevention Education.

### Federally funded nonprofit coalitions provide statewide coordination for regional nonprofits

In addition to state agencies, the nonprofit **Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence** performs a significant state-level role. The coalition receives federal funds to provide coordination, education, research, and support for Tribes and nonprofits. It also provides a database with contact information of regional services for victims and survivors.

Equivalent to the coalition exist in each state. The coalitions are part of a national network that provides some level of statewide organization and coordination to local organizations.

Coalitions provide education, support, and technical assistance to domestic violence service providers and support the development of policies, protocols, and procedures to enhance domestic violence services and prevention in the state. Some state coalitions run strategic statewide initiatives as part of this work.

“Living a life with resilience occurs when we stop hiding.”

### One Survivor’s Story

I am a survivor and a Victim’s Advocate in Roseburg, Oregon. As a survivor, I have lived experience that continues to serve healing connections within professional and personal areas of my life. With help from the agency where I now work, and after many attempts to leave my abuser, I successfully petitioned a restraining order. Services received were shelter, legal support, peer support, healthy relationship education in group sessions, clothing, and more.

I have witnessed firsthand that there are professionals who deliver unethical treatment. Some even exert authority over a survivor using intimidation, power, and control. I encountered many ‘wrong doors’ when I sought help in active addiction (self-medicating), abusive relationships, and complex PTSD with co-existing health conditions within health care systems. I know firsthand the barriers and challenges one faces when seeking help. Stigma is still present and continues to make professionals uncomfortable.

Advocates saw in me what I could not. I could care for and protect my children and myself, and I learned that having boundaries is a protective factor. I gained self-worth. Further, I came to believe everyone is entitled to live without fear of abuse. Freedom from violence is a right one should not have to fight for.

Through an advocate’s role, I bridge communication gaps, educate community partners, coordinate wrap-around care, and more. Living a life of resilience occurs when we stop hiding. Connecting survivors with appropriate health care and peer support empowers sustainable engagement for adequate care. A survivor with a working knowledge about the importance of caring for their health and working through their traumas is life-changing. Further, having a confidential, safe person with access to resources holds a promise that support is available despite a ‘wrong door’ response.

With that, I found the heart of advocacy work. Today, I have a career focused on health care supporting survivors and a degree in psychology. People do not like to hear the truth about the interpersonal dynamics of abuse. I love my job, and I love the work. The work is hard and emotionally challenging. Witnessing life-changing growth and giving back to those who need it most is a gift. Life is Precious!

# What We Found

## Barriers to timely, equitable, and effective assistance leave domestic violence victims and survivors at risk

Victims and survivors face multiple barriers to accessing assistance from both community-based programs and the justice system. Systemic social welfare issues, such as the lack of available housing or access to services like childcare and mental health care, often translate to urgent unmet needs for domestic violence victims. Victims and survivors need timely interventions, support to escape their abuser, and social supports that allow them to thrive after leaving. Without these, they risk ongoing harm, returning to their abuser and, for hundreds of people each year in the United States, death.

## Victims and survivors may struggle to locate available support and crisis intervention services

Searching for support services can be both complicated and dangerous for victims and survivors of domestic violence. Underscoring the danger, many domestic violence websites have “Escape” buttons to quickly clear the page so victims can hide their search for resources from an abuser.

The screenshot shows the Oregon Judicial Branch website's "Domestic Violence Resources" page. The page features a navigation menu at the top with options like "How Do I?", "Online Services", "Forms/Rules/Fees", "Self-Help", "Opinions & Law Library", and "Programs & Committees". A search icon is visible in the top right corner. The main content area is titled "Domestic Violence Resources" and includes a sidebar with categories such as "FORMS", "SELF-HELP", "CHILDREN & FAMILIES", "DIVORCE, SEPARATION, ANNULMENT", "GUARDIANSHIP & CONSERVATORSHIP", and "DOMESTIC VIOLENCE". The "DOMESTIC VIOLENCE" section lists various legal orders and acts, including the Family Abuse Prevention Act (FAPA), Restraining Orders, Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities Abuse Prevention Act (EPPDAPA), Sexual Abuse Protection Order (SAPO), Stalking, and Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO). A prominent red circle highlights a "Quick Escape" button located in the "CHILDREN & FAMILIES" section. A warning message is displayed at the top of the content area, stating: "Warning! If an abuser is monitoring your computer activity, it may be impossible to erase all trace of the sites you visit on your computer or mobile device. For more information on erasing your browser's history, visit ComputerHope.com. Learn more about safety and technology at Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence." Below the warning, a disclaimer states: "This webpage has many links to other websites that were not created by the Oregon Judicial Department. The OJD has not reviewed these websites for accuracy or appropriateness and the OJD is not responsible for their contents or policies." The main content area also features several links to resources, including "Crisis Help and Information About Local Programs", "Financial Assistance for Abuse Victims", "Finding a Lawyer/Legal Help", "Resources for the Legal Community", and "Information on Divorce, Child Custody, Parenting Time, and Child Support".

The Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence provides a searchable database of regional domestic violence organizations, but victims must individually navigate, follow-up, and research their available services. For example, to access the 24/7 crisis hotline provided in their region, victims must search the database, identify who offers a hotline, then navigate separately to that website to find the number. Additionally, not all database links are active, which could limit access further for victims and survivors with restricted time or ability to search.

National research suggests co-located, multi-disciplinary service centers for victims of family violence and their children are a best practice. For example, Multnomah County has established the Gateway Center to bring services together into the same physical space so victims and survivors can access them in a “one-stop shop.” It is administered by the county government as part of a collaboration with nonprofit and state services. However, these types of centers can be resource intensive and require substantial collaboration to establish.

## Victims and survivors face multiple barriers accessing urgent domestic violence services

Ease of access is critical for timely and effective domestic violence interventions. However, victims face multiple access barriers. Some barriers are inherent to the nature of domestic violence. Victims and survivors often face fear, isolation, shame, and stigma, as well as financial, mental health, and cultural challenges. These barriers may be amplified for marginalized and historically underserved communities, such as people of color, those who identify as LGBTQ, those with visa documentation concerns, those who have disabilities, and those in rural communities. Outreach and prevention are key services that help address these elements.

Other barriers are functional, like capacity of resource providers and emergency responders or lack of transportation, childcare, and translation services. These services may not be offered directly by domestic violence service providers but are often critical to successful intervention.

“Each advocate holds keys to services built from their personal and professional experience. When we lose staff, we lose their knowledge, and the client loses trust that we’re able to help.”

*– Agency director struggling with increasing staff turnover due to grant funding levels that require maintaining persistently low salaries.*

Domestic violence providers face multiple challenges to providing sufficient crisis intervention services, including:

- Inadequate community resources such as housing and mental health services;
- Staff retention difficulties, low salaries, and burnout, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic began;
- The inflexibility and unreliability of grant funds to provide sustainable programs, including intervention and prevention services and for closely related issues like sexual assault; and
- Challenges specific to serving historically underserved communities, such as a lack of language and cultural capacity.

The National Network to End Domestic Violence surveys community-based organizations around the country one day each year on how many people seeking services were turned away. On September 7, 2022, 36 out of 54 identified domestic violence programs in Oregon participated. They reported providing services to 1,681 adult and child victims of domestic violence, including:

- 914 recipients of emergency shelter or transitional/other housing.
- 767 recipients of non-residential supportive services related to legal needs, housing, advocacy, transportation, mental health, public benefits, and more.
- 498 hotline contacts, averaging nearly 21 contacts per hour.

Organizations reported 234 unmet service requests, 39% of which were for emergency shelter, hotels, motels, and other housing.

Direct funding can be very helpful for victims, but it can come with challenges. For example, the Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors grant, a primary source of direct victim funding, only provide up to \$1,200 over a 90-day period. They are also only available for individuals who qualify for the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and who are either taking care of a minor child or currently pregnant. The grant was originally intended to help pay emergency rent, but the amount has not increased since 1997, leaving it too low to cover the current price of most rentals. Funds can also be used for housing-related resources like utilities or safety cameras but must be paid directly to landlords or service providers, further complicating their use.

Advocates report that domestic violence services historically focused primarily on crisis intervention. But helping victims gain independence and avoid returning to their partners is also critical. Systemic social issues increase the risk that domestic violence victims and survivors are unable to escape their situation. However, advocates say, not enough attention is paid to critical long-term victim and survivor stability. Without addressing these needs, the cycle of domestic violence continues.

The lack of available housing is a significant barrier for those who consider leaving an abusive relationship, and, one Oregon housing advocate reports, a common reason victims and survivors decide to stay. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development conducts a national point in time count of people staying in homeless shelters. In 2020, an estimated 32% of adults in families with children in the surveyed shelters were survivors of domestic violence, and 15% were currently fleeing unsafe situations. This is likely a significant undercount, as the survey does not include those staying in shelters designated specifically for domestic violence victims.

In Oregon, some nonprofits have used state funding from Project Turnkey<sup>3</sup> to expand housing for domestic violence survivors. Even so, housing needs continue to outpace available supply.

*“Despite purchasing a hotel and increasing our housing, we turn people away every week,” says one nonprofit director.*

*Another director commented they have housing services but can only provide 30 days of housing. “That’s not enough for someone to find new housing in most places, let alone someone who has had to pack up and leave on a moment’s notice, and is trying to put their life together with limited income.”*

In addition to significant housing concerns, advocates report victim and survivor needs have grown increasingly complex. Victims and survivors may have experienced multiple traumas and need mental health counseling, addiction services, or other social supports. Addressing these complex needs is challenging as well as time consuming. Victims and survivors often must navigate fragmented social service systems to find services that meet their needs.

### **Despite ongoing efforts, domestic violence services are not equitably available in all parts of the state or to victims and survivors of all backgrounds**

Oregon funds support a network of over 50 regional nonprofits and Tribes — at least one organization in most counties — to respond to domestic violence victim and survivor needs. Each county also has a

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<sup>3</sup> [Project Turnkey](#) is a public-private partnership created to address both immediate and long-term housing needs. In 2020 the state legislature approved \$65 million for community organizations to buy local motels and convert them to emergency shelters.

crime victim advocate that works with the district attorney to provide support to victims of crimes, including victims of domestic violence. However, variations exist across the state. These variations suggest potential for disparities in areas such as:

**Community-level offerings and collaboration:** Collaboration among nonprofits, police, and the court system vary widely at the county level. Some counties have established groups who meet regularly to address issues in a shared capacity. Others do so informally, while others report strained relationships between advocates in community-based organizations and those who work within the justice system.

Some regional community organizations have multiple grants designed to address a variety of domestic violence-related issues, while organizations in other regions rely primarily on more narrowly focused state and federal grants. Within the legal system, we heard that some judges who hear protective order or child custody petitions receive training that can help create trauma-informed courtrooms, while others do not seem to prioritize this — a decision which can significantly affect civil and criminal case outcomes based on how familiar a given judge is with domestic violence and trauma.

**Crime Victim Advocate Services:** Crime victim advocates work within the district attorneys' offices to help guide victims of crime through potential prosecution. While all counties have crime victim advocates, their approach to how and when they provide victim assistance can greatly affect a victim's decision to assist prosecution. While a district attorney can press charges without the victim's willingness to testify, some may not. Some advocates reach out to victims as soon as a report comes in, while others do not connect unless the case goes to trial. Services reported by crime victim advocates around the state range from providing victims with basic information about their rights and trial dates to finding funds to help victims with basic needs like housing and clothing.

**Inclusive outreach:** Advocates describe challenges serving non-English speakers, communities with different cultural backgrounds, immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ communities, and people with disabilities. Some advocates report difficulty serving non-traditional demographic groups due to staffing and the inability to perform necessary outreach. Others report working to expand but cite the need for intentional and ongoing work. These gaps mean that victims from marginalized backgrounds, such as indigenous women, people of color, LGBTQ communities, immigrants and refugees, and those with accessibility needs, may lack access to critical services at key times. This lack is particularly concerning because these populations may be at disproportionate risk of harm from domestic violence.

"Domestic violence is a root cause of social issues and it is underfunded throughout the state. It's an act of bravery for women to flee with their life and children and end up on the street. We're seeing them on the streets because they were brave and fled and still have a life."

*-A shelter director with over twenty years of experience in social services*

**Small, rural, and Tribal organizations:** While basic services such as safety planning, confidential advocacy, a 24/7 crisis hotline, and emergency shelter are common, the method and approach to service delivery varies by region. Larger metropolitan nonprofits may have more staff and may participate in countywide service networks, giving them access to a variety of independent grant funding opportunities, community connections, and donations allowing them to provide a broader array of services. Tribal organizations and nonprofits serving rural areas may function with limited staff to provide basic services and may need to do more to address transportation barriers. Four rural counties

in northeast Oregon — Gillam, Sherman, Wasco, and Wheeler — share one domestic violence services nonprofit operating from a single location. Recently, this nonprofit experienced administrative turnover when a former director was arrested for embezzling funds. Organizational upheaval in isolated areas increases the risk that victims and survivors will not receive critical services.

ODHS's new program, the Survivor Investment Partnership, aims to address some access concerns for survivors from culturally specific groups and Tribes who historically may not have had access to domestic violence services. The program received \$10 million in one-time funding in the 2021 legislative session to help eight nonprofit organizations and all nine federally recognized Tribes around the state address culturally specific services and outreach. Program outcomes will be created in collaboration with recipients to determine impact and could become a best practice for increasing equitable state services.

## **Available domestic violence services do not meet existing needs**

Oregon advocates report that victims and survivors do not have access to sufficient social services or support navigating the justice system. Provider challenges include the high administrative burdens of grant-based funding, staffing needs, and challenges expanding equitable outreach, prevention, and intervention services.

### **Grant funding requirements create significant administrative barriers for community-based service providers and hinder efforts to address complex community needs**

Direct victim and survivor services are largely grant funded. Little financial assistance goes directly to the victims or survivors. Advocates report that grant requirements create significant administrative burdens, complicating efforts to address community needs. This puts the availability and sufficiency of service provision at risk. In addition, during COVID-19, providers experienced increased burnout, high staff turnover and difficulties maintaining staff at full capacity.

The Department of Justice and ODHS developed a centralized formula-based joint application for federal and state grants, including competitive and non-competitive funds. The joint application allows programs to submit a single, streamlined application, allocates funds by county using an equity formula, and offers greater funding stability for providers. In state fiscal year 2022, 65 domestic violence/sexual assault victim services providers across the state of Oregon used the joint application to request a combined \$24 million, 45.2% percent of which were from state funds. State funds for the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund totaled just under \$4.9 million of that amount.

However, funds from the joint formula retain the spending and reporting requirements of the underlying grants, which can pose barriers to the provision of effective and sustainable victim and survivor services. For example, while it might make sense logistically for one person to provide a combination of services, such as prevention as well as direct survivor support, grant restrictions might require organizations to fund that position through multiple grants. Grants also come with strict but often varying reporting timelines.

Advocates report seeking multiple grants to address community needs — a strategy gaining importance as they see victim and survivor needs increasing in both severity and complexity. This leads to higher administrative burdens, including complicated and time-consuming payroll administration and

grant reporting tasks. This administrative burden is unsustainable or impossible for organizations with limited administrative staff, effectively limiting the services they can provide. Larger organizations may be able to manage multiple grants and provide separate services, but still struggle to meet the administrative requirements. Some advocates also report that the statewide data collection system is poorly designed for the required state and federal grant reporting. The system's design increases administrative burdens as well as the potential for underreporting by frontline staff due to their strained capacity.

Some organizations report maintaining 20 or more different funding sources, many of which require submitting quarterly and annual reports on different timelines.

High administrative burdens can also lead to under or inaccurate reporting. Community-based organizations report that they struggle to keep up with reporting requirements, and express frustration with the shared reporting system maintained by the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.

Federal and state funding allocations often fluctuate depending on legislative decisions, which can significantly reduce funds for specific services. Flexible funds that can be shifted around to different services can help nonprofits fill these gaps. The Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund provides flexible state funds, but the amount is relatively small (under \$5 million statewide in fiscal year 2022). Many organizations also received one-time funds as part of the federal pandemic funding packages, including the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act and the American Rescue Plan Act, but advocates report one-time funds are difficult to plan for and cannot be used to create ongoing programs. Providers who used them experienced challenges, such as:

- Delayed payments;
- Time-limited spending requirements for one-time funding; and
- Spending and reporting complexity — spending was allowed only on certain programs or to cover partial positions, additional reporting requirements, and increased financial audit requirements due to increased overall revenue.

Advocates and agency staff report that a significant need overall is simply increased funding. Federal Funds are forecasted to decrease in the next few years — a forecast the Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division has anticipated. The state has previously provided one-time funds that address some shortages, such as adding funding during the 2023 session for housing efforts. However, nonprofits cannot count on this funding, and so may wait until the end of a legislative session to know which of their programs they will be able to continue in the coming fiscal year. This creates instability for the community-based services around planning and staffing — as well, of course, for the victims and survivors who rely on those services.

Another example of underfunding is the ODHS co-located advocate services program. Despite its productivity, ODHS staff report that the program's effectiveness is at risk due to underfunding. Funding is distributed per county, according to population size and domestic violence prevalence rate. Funding starts at \$50,000 salary per FTE and 20% base administrative rate — with a \$5,000 salary increase for Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington, and Lane Counties. The program's budget —

currently \$4.4 million per biennium — has not changed since its original 2012 implementation, beyond small inflation increases. Funding shortages mean some nonprofits now must hire part-time positions, which have greater turnover and are more difficult to fill.

Co-located DV advocates are staff from nonprofit, community based DV agencies who are available on site in state ODHS Self-Sufficiency and Child Welfare offices in 36 counties. The goal of having advocates co-located is to provide confidential advocacy and support for domestic violence survivors and their children.

In 2022, state co-located advocates...

- provided over **33,400** hours of direct services to ODHS clients;
- supported over **7,900** survivors statewide, and
- completed more than **7,000** safety plans.

On a positive note, the state’s Survivor Investment Partnership program, launched in 2023, provides one-time flexible funding to eight community groups statewide to address cultural outreach and equity needs. If sustained, this funding approach could provide a model for addressing funding stability statewide, as well as an impact and equity-focused approach.

### **Civil justice interventions provide legal protections but are complex to acquire and may not be consistently enforced**

Protective orders are the primary civil justice intervention available to victims and survivors of domestic violence. Victims and survivors may seek protective orders that prevent an abuser from being in any contact with them. However, many advocates do not believe Oregon’s current process is effective because protective orders are difficult to get at best, dangerous at worst, and too often are not enforced.<sup>4</sup>

Those seeking protective orders must first determine which to apply for — a complex process due to Oregon’s six different order types, each with similar but distinct requirements.

### **Family Abuse Prevention Act (FAPA) Restraining Order**

Oregon offers several different protective orders depending on the situation. A FAPA is one option for victims of domestic abuse. It provides protections like prohibiting the abuser from contacting, harassing, or coming near the victim, ordering the abuser to leave a shared residence, and more. Qualifications include:

- The abuser must be a family or household member, defined by ORS 107.705, if the victim is an adult, or the abuser must be the spouse or former spouse of the victim or in a sexually intimate relationship with the victim if the victim is a minor.
- The abuser must have physically injured, attempted to physically injure, or placed the victim in fear of imminent bodily injury or threats of force within the last 180 days.
- There is continuing, imminent danger of abuse.

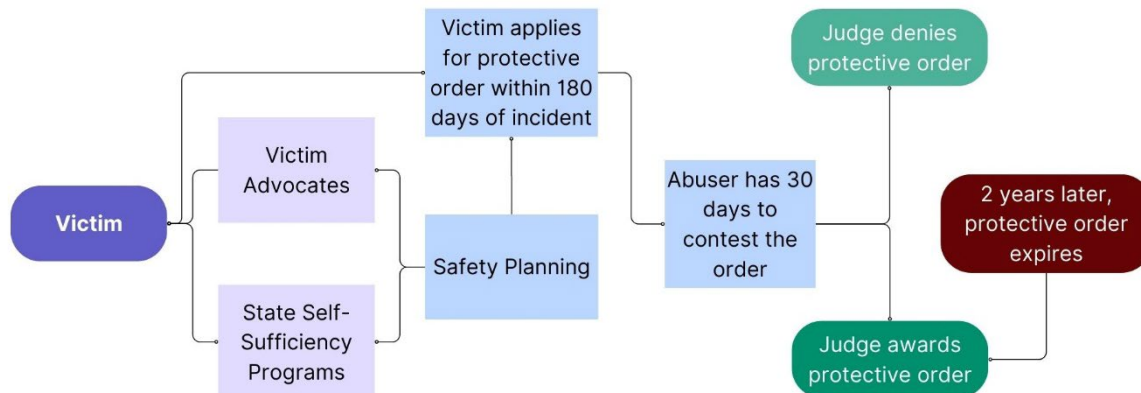
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<sup>4</sup> For a recent report on Extreme Risk Protective Orders, see Secretary of State Advisory Report: Increased Awareness and Training Could Enhance the Effectiveness of Oregon’s Extreme Risk Protection Order Law <https://sos.oregon.gov/audits/Documents/2023-26.pdf>



The application for a FAPA restraining order includes complex legal documentation with specific and time-limited evidence requirements. If a victim applies for the incorrect order, it may simply be denied. If a protective order is contested, victims may have to face their abuser in court, often without legal resources. An approved order does not automatically renew. Victims must go through a renewal process if they need to extend it, and they need to convince a judge the danger still exists. 2023 legislation recently extended the duration of the Family Abuse Prevention Act protective order to two years from one.

**Figure 5: FAPA protective orders may be contested within 30 days of issue and expire after 2 years**



Advocates report the cumulative effects of domestic abuse can leave victims at a severe disadvantage for successful court outcomes in both civil and criminal cases — particularly when faced with a better-resourced abuser. Existing barriers can be even more detrimental for those with fewer resources, from finances to English language proficiency. Often, advocates report, domestic violence victims cannot afford a lawyer while those charged with abuse are entitled to one. Nonprofits such as Legal Aid and the Oregon Crime Victims Law Center provide civil legal assistance but report they cannot always meet demand. Legal Aid can only work with very low-income victims and survivors but report they have only had the capacity to take on around 15% of victims seeking services, and the Oregon Crime Victims Law Center is not able to assist with custody hearings.

One woman filing for a contested protective order was 15 minutes late for the hearing and was told by that judge to come back the next day. When she arrived, a different presiding judge told her that because she had missed her hearing her request was invalid and there was nothing he could do. Despite being afraid for her life based on previous episodes, the survivor was required to restart the process to apply for a new protection order.

– *Crime Victim Advocate (Justice System)*

Abusers may push the boundaries of protective orders by starting with little things. For example, the order may specify times a parent can call their children. Abusers may start by calling at different times. Then they may change visitation times, just a little bit. The victim might feel the behavior doesn't warrant calling the police — or if they do the police may not respond. Advocates encourage victims to get violations on official record but acknowledge the difficulty of calling and not have their concerns addressed. Worse, calling for minor violations can leave the victim with a damaged reputation with the police, who might start to believe “she's the problem.” When victims aren't taken seriously, they stop trusting the system.

– *Community-Based Victim Advocate*

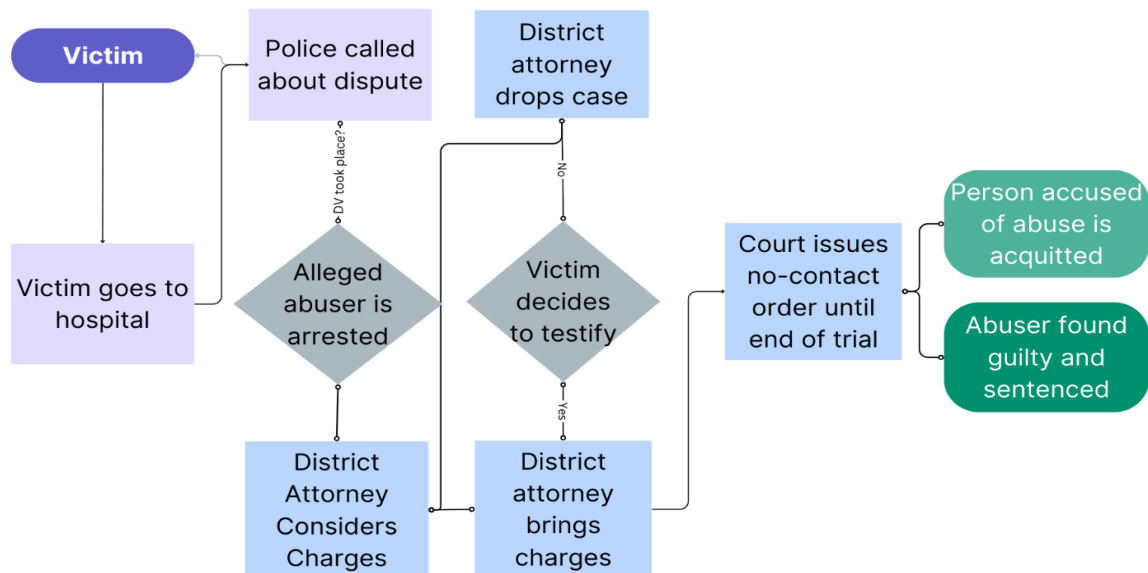
Research shows financial abuse — where an abuser controls the victim’s spending or access to cash, assets, and other finances, and may ruin the victim’s credit — may take place in as many as 99% of domestic abuse cases. This makes it likely that significant financial disparities between victim and abuser exist. The burden of self-representation is particularly difficult for victims navigating traumatic situations such as enduring ongoing abuse, navigating unstable housing, and caring for and protecting their children. Available court resources and differences in how well judges understand domestic violence also affect the success of victims seeking protective orders.

After a protective order is issued, its effectiveness depends on regional police response. The abuser is supposed to be arrested if they violate any part of the order — including calling at unspecified times or contacting children on an incorrect day. Advocates report that police do not always respond to victim calls if the victim is not in immediate distress or may make a report without going to the scene in person so they do not have to make an arrest. They say sometimes if police do respond, protective order violations are not treated as criminal charges worthy of arrest but rather something closer to contempt of court, meriting a fine. And even when there is an arrest, the abuser may be out of jail the next day. Advocates report significant concerns that despite the victims’ right to protection, protective orders are currently ineffective at keeping them safe.

**Successful criminal justice outcomes require active victim and survivor participation, but limited victim supports exist**

Federal legislation — primarily the Victims of Crime Act — funds states’ justice system-based crime victim advocacy programs. Justice system-based crime victim advocates work with county district attorneys to provide resources and services to crime victims. Basic services include providing key trial information such as dates and times, accompanying victims to trials, and providing information about testimonial needs and trial outcomes. Victims do not have to testify for district attorneys to prosecute, but crime victim advocates and district attorneys report it often has significant influence on whether the case moves forward due to the need for strong evidence to convict.

**Figure 6: Criminal justice interventions are more successful when victims are active participants**



Advocates say victims are often unwilling to offer testimony in their trials for multiple reasons. They may not feel safe doing so or may have concerns about supporting themselves and their dependents with the abuser in jail. In some cases, the trial may occur months or even over a year after the original offense. While district attorneys may prosecute without victim participation, many do not. The case may be difficult to prove without victim testimony, or it simply becomes a lower priority in an overburdened court system.

Advocates also state that adequate social supports are critical to enable victims' participation in a criminal case. They report that victims who do not have housing, childcare, transportation, or sufficient financial resources are much less likely to be able to navigate a complex legal system and participate in a criminal trial if they are simultaneously dealing, unsupported, with the effects of abuse. Some crime victim advocates provide victims with supports like housing or clothing funds, using internal funding or separate grants. In some counties, however, advocates reported that defense attorneys may use resources given to support victims as evidence of bias.

“There are many reasons a victim might refuse to testify, or to take several episodes of abuse to decide to leave their partner. One is that they love the person, despite what they've done. There's a lot of love in these relationships, and a lot of shame and a lot of stigma. Sometimes a victim will agree to testify, but by the time the trial happens, they aren't willing to. If the victim can get away from the abuser, it can help break the cycle, and they'll be willing to testify.”

– District Attorney and Crime Victim Advocate

Despite the high costs of criminal justice interventions, research shows typical criminal justice processes may not improve incident rates of domestic violence and may play a role in continuing a cycle of harm for both victims and abusers. Advocates report that better basic resources to support victims — including housing, childcare, financial subsidies — as well as better access to legal assistance, would significantly increase victims' abilities to take advantage of both civil and criminal court resources to escape their abusers.

Scholars and advocates also point to the inherent flaws in solving cyclical violence by centering a justice system designed to punish offenders rather than offer restorative justice solutions — particularly in a system where racial and gender biases are known to play a role in arrests and sentencing, and where common, unsolved social problems such as poverty, under-education, and lack of mental health resources increase the risk of domestic violence occurring. Batterer Intervention Programs are a national best practice offered as criminal diversions or for abusers seeking help, but Oregon's programs operate regionally and ten counties offer no programs. The Oregon Department of Justice publishes a list of Batterer Intervention Programs but does not include information on their effectiveness or data on their outcomes. There is no easy solution to addressing and preventing domestic violence, but restorative justice advocates urge considering approaches to domestic violence that dedicate resources to prevention and harm mitigation.

## Providers and agencies collaborate on response, but the state lacks central leadership focused on impact and prevention

Oregon's decentralized response to domestic violence mirrors the national approach. However, the state could do more to coordinate strategies, gather data, and effect change across otherwise siloed agency and organizational responses. Without a centralized, data-informed response, Oregon cannot strategically address domestic violence risks through prevention, mitigation, or intervention-related action.

### National and statewide data do not accurately quantify needs or impact of provided services

Oregon's limited data collection and lack of coordinated data review hinders state-level strategic opportunities beyond federal grant administration. The Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division periodically creates an implementation plan for Oregon's use of federal Violence Against Women Act funds. This plan includes information such as state demographics, available domestic violence crime statistics, some service provision data, and a limited review of regional trends. However, the Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division states it is difficult to report a complete picture of domestic violence action statewide because state and federal grants make up only a portion of service provider funding. Day to day, information on domestic violence and related service provision is largely siloed within organizations, agencies, or regions. Oregon's data difficulties mirror issues at the national level. Data collection concerns at the state and national levels include:

- Underreporting by victims due to inherent bias and stigma;
- Concerns for victims' and survivors' privacy and security;
- Fractured police, court, and service provider systems;
- Fragmented grant funding that requires extensive and siloed data reporting; and
- Nationally reported incident rates that often rely largely on older research.

Data collected within agencies and organizations includes sources such as: regional police reports, hospital injury and fatality data, community and justice-system based organization service outputs, civil protective orders sought and denied, community-based advocacy outputs, and state agency service outputs. Ongoing state-level data aggregation and analysis of these sources, particularly if presented in a consistent and easily navigable format, could provide stakeholders with useful insights

Collecting and ensuring accurate domestic violence statistics, however, is an inherently difficult effort. For example, the process of creating the state's annual domestic violence fatality review report, led by the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence with support from state agencies, includes everything from investigating hospital data to tracking down individual police reports and news reports to substantiate findings.

Nonprofit organizations report outputs for various federal, state, and local grants, but total outcomes are not aggregated or analyzed for statewide use. A significant number of local law enforcement agencies are not reporting domestic violence related incidents consistently or at all into the state system. Statewide analysis of court trial data is limited in part due to differences in local data collection techniques.

Underreporting is also a significant concern. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's 2022 national report on violent crime estimates that almost 50% of domestic violence crime was not reported to the police.<sup>5</sup> Community-based organizations also report that low administrative capacity and difficult-to-use software can contribute to underreporting the services they provide. The Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division compiles state-level reports for the state's federal grants and provides outcome-based reports to the Legislature on request. However, these reports only address a portion of services provided to victims since organizations may receive significant outside funds.

While some regions track and use data across different service sectors and organizations in a collaborative and strategic way, similar formalized efforts do not occur at the state level outside of periodic federal and state grant reporting.

### Regional task forces could provide a model for data-informed state action

In Deschutes County, community-based organizations, emergency responders, court staff, and state agencies meet quarterly as part of an established stakeholder group. They share data and consider solutions, like analyzing police data on domestic violence call hotspots, and coordinating prevention efforts accordingly.



### Oregon has no statewide strategy to address domestic violence or measure impact

Despite multiple state agencies, workgroups, commissions, and task forces engaging in domestic violence service provision, Oregon has not established a holistic strategy or formal set of initiatives to address domestic violence or measure the impact of ongoing efforts. Multiple state committees meet and discuss needs and best practices, but no single entity comprehensively tracks statewide efforts or progress or identifies gaps that could be filled by state-level efforts.

Without a plan and associated metrics that incorporates action and data from law enforcement, social services, community organizations, the justice system, and public health agencies, Oregon risks duplicated efforts, resource waste or redundancy, and a lack of synergy when responding to domestic violence at the state and community level.

Several states have been recognized for their leadership efforts through federal grants awarded by the CDC. These national grants are part of the Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliances (DELTA): Achieving Health Equity through Addressing Disparities (AHEAD) program. Recent data-focused and centralized state efforts include:

<sup>5</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation: Crime Data Explorer <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/home>



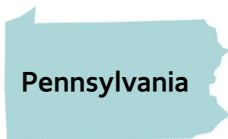
Ohio's Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence published results from a statewide survey on domestic violence victim's experiences with law enforcement, courts, child welfare, and social services systems in 2022. The survey results provide insights for addressing domestic violence in a holistic way.



Rhode Island's Department of Corrections received a competitive grant in 2020 from the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance to analyze the impact of domestic violence services and track data in a centralized way. They are partnering with the Council of State Government's Justice Center to address policy and practice changes and create metrics for outcome measurement.



Indiana's Coordinated Entry System mandates geographic regions provide survivors of domestic or dating violence, stalking, sexual assault, or human trafficking with safe, affordable housing based on vulnerability and severity of service needs. The system matches survivors with housing services regardless of how or where they sought help, the order in which they request help, or admission criteria for specific projects.



Pennsylvania runs a statewide coordinated effort focused on economic justice through their state's Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. The goal is to improve social conditions that prevent long-term independence. The program provides advocates resources to help survivors access education, develop budgeting skills, repair credit, build savings, find affordable housing, and gain meaningful employment.

A statewide strategy would also help Oregon connect existing related efforts across multiple social service sectors. The National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, released by the White House in 2023, could act as a model for a statewide framework. This national plan highlights national evidence and breaks goals into related objectives and strategies for action, building on existing federal initiatives and incorporates evidence and action across multiple sectors.

Critically, the national plan recognizes that domestic violence is connected to other types of violence and focuses on preventing violence through recognizing it as “a social problem with causes and impacts that require more comprehensive approaches and prevention efforts.”

Regular, overarching coordination through a single dedicated state workgroup with significant stakeholder involvement could help align efforts and would be key to stakeholders' understanding of what data is available, how it could be used, and where to effectively deploy resources for efficient and equitable outcomes.

# Potential State Action

Local service providers and advocates provide direct services while state-level organizations and agencies play important, but fragmented, support roles. No specific group or agency currently leads efforts against domestic violence, which is why these potential state actions are not directed to a specific audience. However, state policymakers may consider the following actions to strategically improve support for domestic violence victims and survivors, using national and state best practices as a guide:

1. Develop a statewide strategy to align state efforts to address domestic violence and identify areas where additional state support is needed. This may require conducting preliminary research, such as the survey Ohio completed in 2022 on domestic violence victim's experiences with law enforcement, courts, child welfare, and social services systems.
2. Consider implementing statewide strategies to address urgent domestic violence victim and survivor needs in all social service sectors, such as Indiana's Coordinated Entry System that prioritizes housing needs for domestic violence victims. Consider working closely with the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence to run statewide initiatives addressing the specific needs of domestic violence victims and survivors, as Pennsylvania did on their economic justice initiative.
3. Where possible, centralize resources and statewide information sharing, including improved data collection and use. Use data to support statewide and regional intervention and prevention strategies. Where helpful, pursue federal grants such as DELTA AHEAD and use existing state models to implement data-informed strategies across service sectors, agencies, and regional actors.
4. Legislators could add stability to nonprofit operations by making flexible state domestic violence funds permanent budget items with inflation adjustments, rather than addressing funding needs through one-time funding.

# Project Approach

This advisory report — a research-based, non-audit project — included interviews and a review of statutes, national and state reporting, and best practices on domestic violence from research organizations and other states.

Those interviewed included:

- State legislators;
- Staff of Oregon state agencies, including the Oregon Department of Justice, Department of Human Services, Health Authority, Judicial Department, State Police, and Department of Education.
- Directors and staff of community-based domestic violence nonprofit, county government, and Tribal organizations.
- Domestic violence victim state and regional advocates.

We reviewed existing state legislation, historical domestic violence policy, and state and federal grant information, data and reports produced by multiple organizations, including:

- Federal research and reporting such as National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, the National Crime Victimization Survey, and the National Point-in-Time homelessness count.
- National advocacy group research and reporting by organizations such as the National Coalition Against Violence and the National Network to End Domestic Violence.
- State-level reporting such as the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic Violence’s annual fatality report, one-time legislative reporting performed by the Oregon Department of Justice, and domestic violence crime reporting by the Oregon State Police.
- Federal and state grants such as the Violence Against Women Formula (VAWA) Grant Program, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Grant Program, the Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliances (DELTA): Achieving Health Equity through Addressing Disparities (AHEAD) funding, and the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund.

We chose to perform this work as a non-audit project because no single agency oversees this statute in a programmatic manner. Accordingly, this report does not adhere to the complete set of government auditing standards, including standards for detailed planning of fieldwork steps and internal control reviews of auditees. This advisory report has undergone the same rigorous quality assurance process as does each audit from the Oregon Audits Division, with auditors not involved in the project checking evidence for each assertion in the report.

We would like to thank all staff and management in agencies and Tribes as well as the many participants in domestic violence service fields for providing their time and information to us for this project.

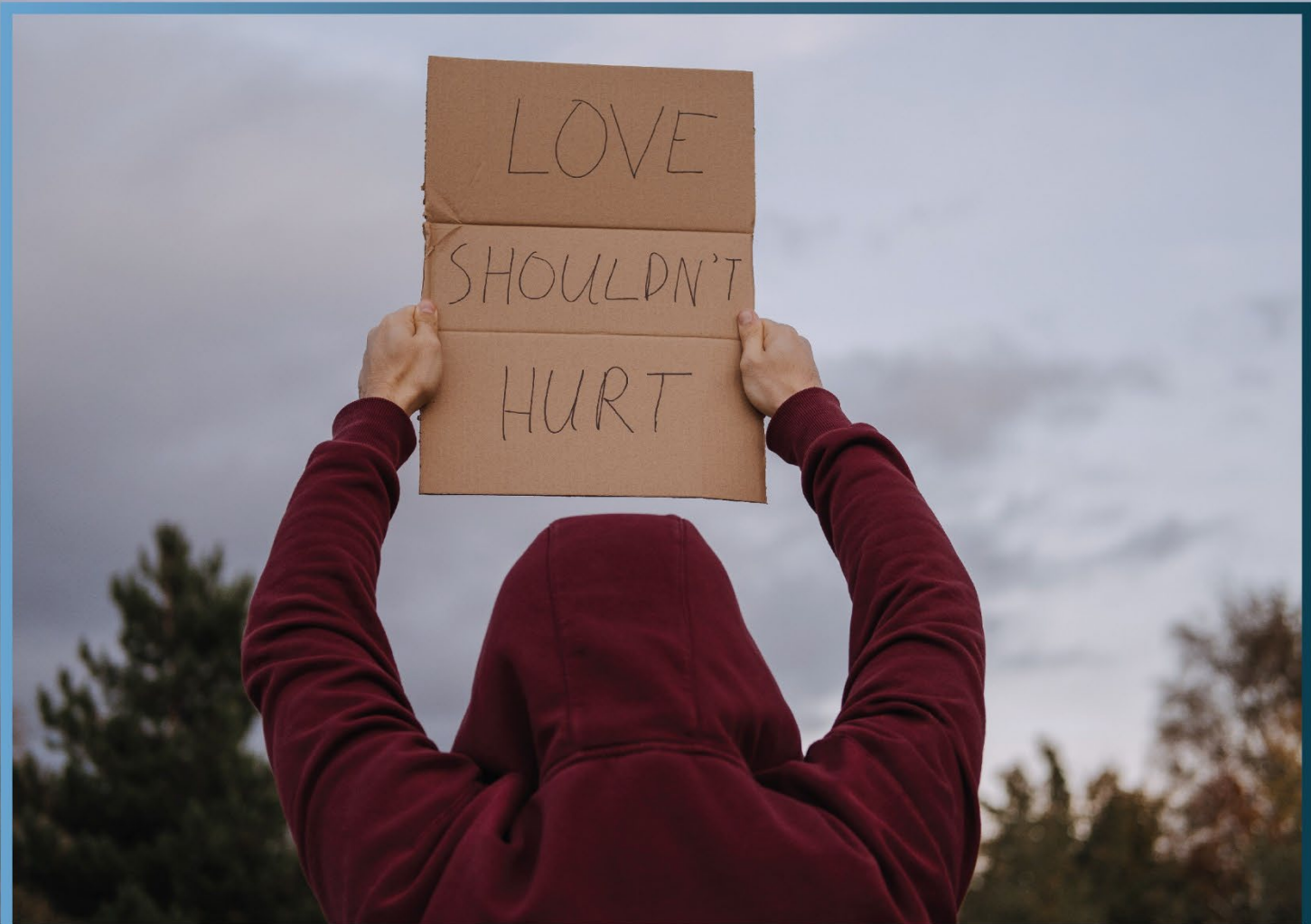


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