

Hearing from Domestic and Sexual Violence Service Providers: Potential Impacts of Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Funding Cuts

The [California Partnership to End Domestic Violence](#) (the Partnership), California's domestic violence coalition, and [ValorUS](#)® (VALOR), California's sexual assault coalition, represent over 120 sexual assault, domestic violence, and dual (sexual and domestic violence) programs across California. Together, our organizations work collaboratively to advocate for policy solutions that prioritize the rights of survivors of sexual and domestic violence, support the sustainability of local programs, and advance a common goal to prevent and end sexual and domestic violence.

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding is a lifeline for California programs that provide services for survivors of crime. Collected through fines and fees from federal prosecution to fill the Crime Victims Fund (CVF), these programs that receive funding provide counseling, housing services, crisis response, and direct legal services, along with a range of other responses to address trauma and support their healing. Beginning in FY24-25, California is expecting a significant shortfall in this vital federal funding, which we estimate will result in a \$160 million+ gap in VOCA funding for California's victim service providers.

To better understand the impact of funding cuts, the Partnership and VALOR surveyed their member programs, and the results unveiled a shocking truth. Cuts to VOCA funding will be devastating for survivors, advocates, and the communities they serve.

Just a few days prior to the Partnership and VALOR disseminating this survey, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) convened its VOCA Steering Committee to discuss the projected shortfall and recommendations for how to implement the reduced funding levels. During the August 2023 VOCA Steering Committee meeting the following scenarios were considered:

1. Reduce competitive programs at 50% at next competitive cycle and reduce all other Subrecipients 30% beginning in FY 24-25
2. Reduce all programs 40% beginning in FY 24-25
3. Prioritize programs for tiered reduction approach beginning in FY 24-25
4. Use all funding for one competitive process beginning in FY 24-25

At the August 3, 2023 VOCA Steering Committee meeting, the committee voted to recommend Option #1 to Cal OES: Reduce competitive programs at 50% at next competitive cycle and reduce all other Subrecipients 30% beginning in FY 24-25. As of October 2023, that recommendation was still pending with Cal OES and no final determination has been made.

For more information about the survey results and advocacy related to VOCA funding, contact Grace Glaser with VALOR at gglaser@valor.us and Krista Colón with the Partnership at krista@cpedv.org.

“Significant cuts to VOCA funding [have] the potential of dismantling a system of care that has been developed and enhanced over decades. The services provided are essential not only to individual survivors, they have generational impacts and ripple effects on our communities.” ~Southern Region Program

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Overview of Respondents

The survey was disseminated to the Partnership and VALOR members via email on August 9th, with a one-week deadline for programs to submit their responses. In total, 90 survey responses were submitted, with one organization submitting twice.

Type of Organization

- **28 (31%)** are **Domestic Violence Assistance Program**¹ (DV) only recipients, **27 (30%)** are **Dual Domestic Violence Assistance and Rape Crisis Center** recipients, **15 (17%)** are **Rape Crisis Center**² (RC) only recipients, and **19 (22%)** are not currently DV or RC recipients.
- **10** respondents were from **culturally-specific organizations**;³ 3 of the culturally-specific organizations responding do not currently receive VOCA funding.
 - The 7 culturally-specific represent **10%** of all the organizations receiving VOCA funding for DV and/or RC services. There are **no** tribes receiving funding through the Domestic Violence Assistance or Rape Crisis Center programs.
 - Two programs were from the North, 3 from the Bay Area and 5 from Los Angeles.
 - Culturally-specific organizations reported serving: Asian Pacific Islanders, South Asian, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Sri Lankan, Korean, Arab, LGBTQ, immigrant, Latinx, and non-English speaking populations.

¹ The Domestic Violence Assistance Program is non-competitive funding for domestic violence organizations providing 14 core services, including operating an emergency shelter.

² The Rape Crisis Center grant supports the unique work of 64 rape crisis centers across California who provide essential supportive and healing services for survivors of sexual assault.

³ Respondents were asked if they identified as a primary purpose culturally specific community-based program with expertise in serving victims of violence.

- Approximately **40%** of organizations that did not identify as culturally-specific reported receiving funding to provide culturally-specific services to traditionally unserved/underserved communities. They reported providing services to:
 - Incarcerated survivors, Asian American, LGBTQ+, Latinx, farmworker, rural, Spanish/Mixtec speaking, victims of gang violence, Vietnamese, Black/African American, chronically homeless, mental illness, victims with disabilities, Indigenous, people of lower socio-economic status, geographically isolated, immigrant, South Asian, Hispanic, elder survivors, and undocumented worker populations.

Regional Distribution

- **41 (46%)** are Partnership members only, **13 (15%)** are VALOR members only, and **31 (35%)** are members of both coalitions. **Three** are not members of either coalition.
- Survey respondents per [Region](#):
 - Far North: 8% of survey respondents
 - North: 13% of survey respondents
 - Bay Area: 23% of survey respondents
 - Central Valley: 12% of survey respondents
 - Central Coast: 8% of survey respondents
 - Los Angeles: 20% of survey respondents
 - South: 16% of survey respondents
- Of the culturally-specific organizations, 20% were from the North region, 30% from the Bay Area region, and **50%** from the Los Angeles region.

The Current Positive Impacts of VOCA Funding

VOCA funding has allowed programs to enhance their programs in many ways including:

Culturally-specific programs:

- **100%** reported utilizing their funding to expand direct services including counseling and support groups.
- Over **75%** reported being able to expand housing services including emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Housing First.
- Over **66%** reported developing or expanding services for traditionally underserved marginalized populations, increasing salaries and/or benefits, providing new services they weren't able to provide prior to VOCA funding, expanding financial assistance to survivors – third party payments

to landlords, cash assistance for necessities, etc., and providing services to address issues beyond domestic and/or sexual violence (ex. human trafficking, child abuse).

- Over **50%** reported utilizing their funding to create a culturally-specific crisis line for survivors.

Non-Culturally-Specific programs:

- Over **75%** reported being able to hire more staff, provide new services they weren't able to provide prior to VOCA funding and expand direct services including counseling and support groups.
- Over **66%** reported developing or expanding services for traditionally underserved marginalized populations, increasing salaries and/or benefits, and expanding housing services including emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Housing First.
- Over **50%** reported expanding financial assistance to survivors – third party payments to landlords, cash assistance for necessities, etc., providing or expanding criminal justice system support – assisting victims and survivors to understand and participate in the criminal justice system, and providing services to address issues beyond domestic and/or sexual violence (ex. human trafficking, child abuse).

Regionally

- **All** of the Central Coast respondents reported utilizing funds to develop or expand services for traditionally marginalized populations and **over 80%** reported utilizing funds to hire more staff and expand direct services including counseling and support groups.
- **All of** the Central Valley respondents reported utilizing funds to expand direct services including counseling and support groups and **over 80%** reported utilizing funds to hire more staff, provide new services they weren't able to provide prior to VOCA funding, and expand housing services (including emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Housing First).
- **Over 80%** of the Far North respondents reporting utilizing funds to provide or expand financial assistance to survivors – third party payments to landlords, cash assistance for necessities, etc., expand direct services including counseling and support groups, and expand housing services (including emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Housing First).
- **Over 80%** of the North respondents reported utilizing funds to increase salaries and/or benefits, provide new services they weren't able to provide prior to VOCA funding, expand direct services including counseling and support groups, and expand housing services (including emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Housing First).
- **Over 80%** of the Bay Area respondents reported utilizing funds to hire more staff and provide new services they weren't able to provide prior to VOCA funding.
- **Over 80%** of the Los Angeles respondents reported utilizing funds to hire more staff, develop or expand services for traditionally marginalized populations, provide new services they weren't able to provide prior to VOCA funding, and expand direct services including counseling and support groups.

- **Over 80%** of the South region respondents reported utilizing funds to increase salaries and/or benefits and expand direct services including counseling and support groups.
- Several programs also added that they have been able to develop, expand, and strengthen strategic partnerships with other services agencies (i.e., legal services, medical services, law enforcement).

Impacts of the Potential VOCA Cuts

“For smaller, rural programs, many will be faced with closing our doors. We will not be able to provide the mandated services required by OES and the legislature.” ~Far North Region Program

“When we ask a survivor to wait, we reinforce the isolation they have been living in and the fear that no one can help. They will be less likely to seek help in the future and survivors will get lost in the system.” ~Bay Area Region Program

Respondents reported that an anticipated reduction in VOCA funding would impact their organization in several different ways.

Culturally-specific programs:

“Immigrant and refugee survivors of violence who face steep barriers to safe housing (e.g., no credit history, no rental history, waiting for work authorization and/or no income source yet, etc.) would have no choice except between returning to violence or choosing violence on the streets.” ~Bay Area Region Program

“This would impact our most marginalized survivors, such as people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, cis/het male survivors, and our children and youth.” ~Los Angeles Region Program

- Over **three-fourths** reported loss of more than one staff person and waiting lists for survivors to access services.
- Over **two-thirds** reported loss or significant reduction (more than 50%) in housing services including emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Housing First and loss or significant reduction (more than 50%) in direct services to survivors including counseling and/or support groups.
- Over **half** reported loss or significant reduction (more than 50%) of financial assistance to survivors and/or their families and loss of a staff position.

Non-culturally-specific programs:

- Over **three-fourths** reported the loss of more than one staff position.
- Over **two-thirds** reported waiting lists for survivors to access services and loss or significant reduction (more than 50%) in direct services to survivors including counseling and/or support groups.

- Over **half** reported loss or significant reduction (more than 50%) of financial assistance to survivors and/or their families and loss of a staff position and loss or significant reduction (more than 50%) in housing services including emergency shelter, transitional housing.

“These cuts would absolutely decimate our programs; losing a third of our funding means losing a third of our staff who are already overworked and underpaid. The message to survivors is that we don’t care about you. All of this on top of inflation, a drop in philanthropy, loss of Covid funding, and living in one of the most expensive places in California. This CANNOT HAPPEN!” ~ Central Coast Region Program

Regionally

- **100%** of the respondents in the Central Valley reported they would have a loss of more than one staff position and **90%** reported a loss or significant reduction (more than 50%) in direct services to survivors including counseling and/or support groups.
- Approximately **90%** of the North respondents reported they would have a loss of more than one staff position, loss or significant reduction (more than 50%) of financial assistance to survivors and/or their families, and loss of a staff position and loss or significant reduction (more than 50%) in housing services including emergency shelter, transitional housing.

Jeopardizing Survivor Safety:

“The loss of our housing program would devastate our survivors in sustaining housing.” ~ North Region Program

“People will die. Many survivors will have no help or support with criminal justice, civil legal, counseling, advocacy or accompaniment needs. Shelter options will be dramatically reduced.” ~Far North Region Program

“If survivors must wait longer to receive services, then they have to wait longer to get to safety. They are already in emergency situations and having nowhere safe to go means they remain victim[s] and cannot become survivors.” ~Bay Area Region Program

Respondents were asked to share what they believe the impact on survivor safety would be if programs were forced to waitlist survivors as a result of funding cuts. Universally, respondents noted that waitlisting:

- Further jeopardizes already marginalized populations.
- Compromises overall safety including increases in mental health challenges, further harm, and lethality.
- Increases housing instability/homelessness.
- Creates a loss of trust and faith.
- Damages partnerships.

Advocate Voices

“Victims of crime SHOULD not, and our counties and neighborhoods CAN not shoulder the instability and violence that these cuts will cause.” ~Bay Area Region Program

The impact of this reduction in VOCA will be of crisis proportions for the victim/survivor movement, especially survivor of sexual and domestic violence.” ~ Los Angeles Region Program

“Victims/Survivors cannot be the target for balancing the budget! There will be larger consequences that will cost this nation and state not only a financial consequence, but society will pay the price by not protecting survivors and their families.” ~Los Angeles Region Program

“Sixty percent of survivors currently utilizing our services do not report their assault to law enforcement. Reduction of VOCA funding could potentially result in a greater number of survivors not reporting their assault and experience increased vulnerabilities including revictimization.” ~Central Valley Region Program

“After the Pandemic there has been an increase in calls for services, this would further increase the waiting list putting more survivors and their children at risk for further harm and instability.” ~Los Angeles Region Program

“Waitlists impact immediate safety. Further prolonged states of crisis may lead to someone returning to the abuser, increased mental health issues including suicide, physical health issues, substance abuse, and homelessness. There is a shortage of resources locally so survivors and children will be left unserved.” ~South Region Program

“A reduction will leave many survivors and their children with no emergency housing or the possibility of not receiving a motel voucher. Housing options are scarce so lack of funding will not allow for the additional support that we have been used to providing.” ~Central Coast Region Program

“The emergency housing program housed 492 survivors and their children last FY, 100% of the survivors that received Homelessness Prevention financial assistance remained safely house at the end of the program.” ~Bay Area Region Program

“The courage that it takes to actually ask for help is sometimes all a survivor can muster. If there is no one to answer their calls, it only confirms that they are alone to deal with their trauma.” ~Central Coast Region Program

“Survivors won’t reach out. They will give up.” ~North Region Program

“Loss of cooperation with law enforcement, loss of relationships, increased basic needs going to already stretched county resources...” ~Far North Region Program

“[Our organization] has been funded by CalOES [for legal services] since 2016, which has allowed a legal partnership with Community Legal Aid SoCal in providing comprehensive, holistic services to victims of crime. Both agencies serve over 250 victims of crime each year.The grant partially funds a restraining order legal clinic at the Compton Courthouse... Reduction of [this grant] could eliminate this unique collaboration which in turn would limit the restraining order clinic hours and reduce [Domestic Violence Restraining Order] petitions for protection, reduce representation for the most vulnerable populations (non-English speaking, undocumented, disabled, Covid-impacted” and reduce staff in assisting victims on safety measures.” ~Los Angeles Region Program

“Around 40% of the survivors we serve within the Rape Crisis Programs are children.” ~Bay Area Region Program

“It will negatively affect survivor safety, but especially in jails and prisons.” ~Bay Area Region Program

Additional Respondent Demographics

Roles within Organizations

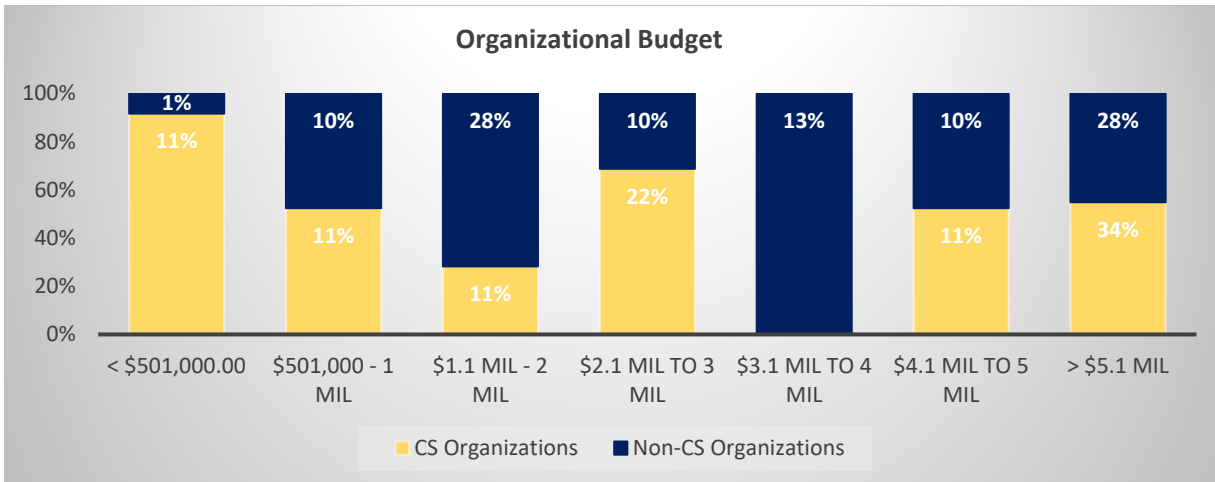
- Over **90%** of the respondents were in the role of an executive director or program manager.

Year Organization was Established

- The overall majority of respondents reported being established between 1970 – 1980.
- Six organizations reported being established prior to 1970. None of these are culturally-specific organizations.

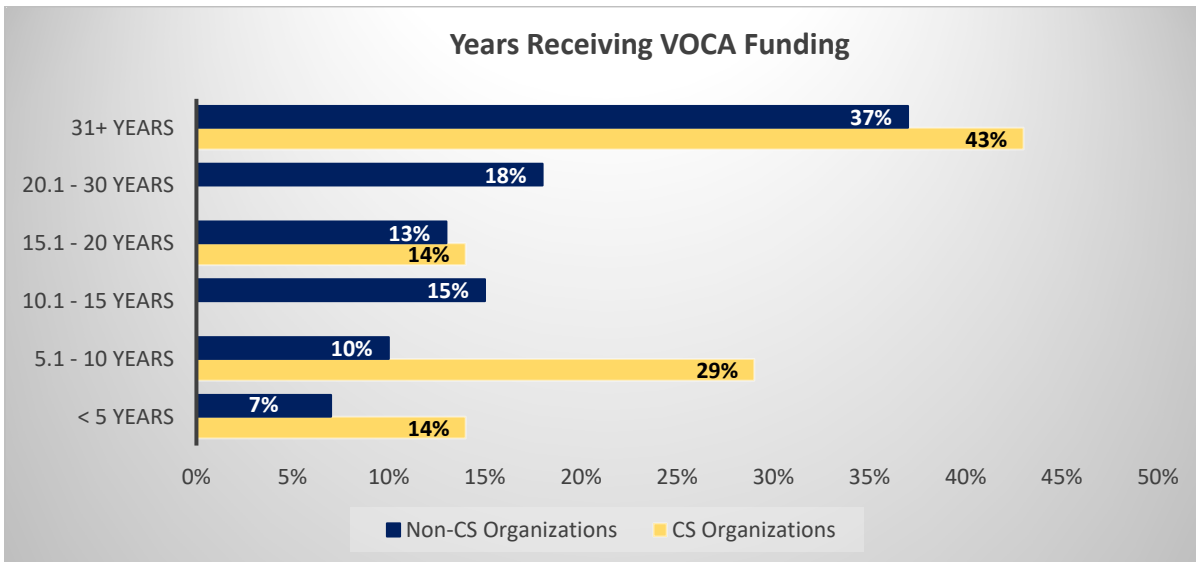
Organizational Budget

Of the organizations reporting the information is known, the chart below represents the overall organizational budgets for the respondent programs. 22% of culturally-specific organizations responding to the survey had total budgets of \$1 million or less, compared to 11% of non-culturally-specific organizations.



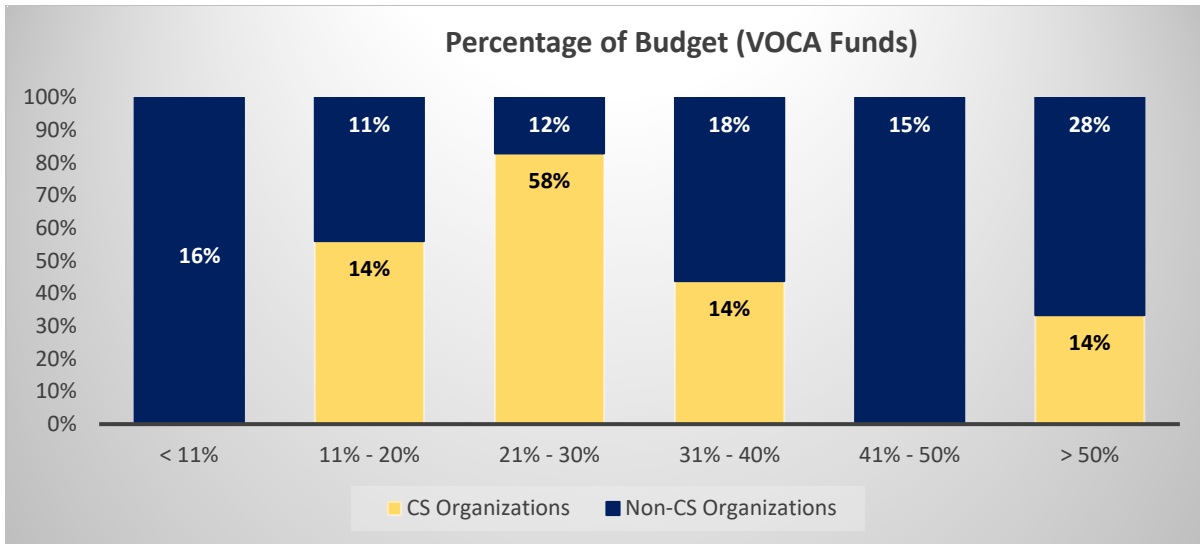
Years Receiving VOCA Funding

The organizations reporting that this information is known, culturally-specific organizations were significantly more likely to have only received VOCA funding for 10 years or less. 43% of culturally-specific organizations were in this category, compared to 17% of non-culturally-specific organizations. These culturally-specific organizations have only recently gained access to this critical funding source and are now at risk of reductions and the elimination of funding.



Percentage of Overall Budget Made Up with VOCA Funding

Of the organizations reporting the information is known, the below chart represents the percentage of the organization’s overall budget comprised of VOCA funds.



- Respondents reported that programs within their organization funded by **more than 75%** of VOCA funds included:
 - Transitional Housing (14 programs)
 - Rape Crisis Centers (12 programs)
 - DV Shelters (8 programs)
 - Direct Services (7 programs)
 - Underserved Victims (5 programs)
 - PREA programs (4 programs)
 - Victim Advocacy in Detention Centers (4 programs)
 - Children’s Services (4 programs)
 - Outreach and Education (3 programs)