

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven an increase in several risk factors for domestic violence (DV) and child abuse, including reduced access to resources and increasing stress, financial difficulties, and social isolation.¹ In addition, state-mandated school closures and stay-at-home orders have limited the ability of teachers and other mandated reporters (who have accounted for as much as 20 percent of all reporting of abuse and neglect) to monitor the welfare of at-risk children.² Additional pandemic-related risk factors are also increasing the risk of violence, isolation, and death of people from historically marginalized communities.³ DV hotlines and providers are seeing spikes in calls and outreach following the onset of the pandemic, and also worry that many escalating situations of abuse are going unreported due to quarantine-related isolation.⁴

Therefore, focusing on rehousing survivors of DV, dating violence, sexual assault (SA), and stalking is a critical component of an Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) recipient's COVID-19 response and an important factor to consider when awarding funding provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Ensuring Health and Safety of Survivors of DV During COVID-19

While the COVID-19 crisis compels ESG recipients and subrecipients to focus more intentionally on the physical health and safety of all people experiencing homelessness (particularly those with COVID-19 diagnoses or medical vulnerabilities), survivors may have some nuanced needs in rehousing and recovery. Those needs may include:

- Services that take into account physical health, mental health, and safety concerns resulting from abuse by an intimate partner;
- An urgent and safe connection to permanent housing;
- Assistance regaining economic independence and maintaining housing while fleeing; and
- Heightened confidentiality and information sharing protections.

ESG recipients should plan to accommodate the housing needs of survivors served directly by victim service providers (VSPs) as well as the survivors served by homeless services providers. Safe and swift rehousing of survivors requires a commitment to a trauma-informed approach in each phase of the rehousing process, including the design of funding competitions, cross-system leadership and collaboration, analysis of community impacts and need, housing identification, and more.

Consider Survivors of DV During Planning and Coordination

Consult with DV-focused leadership such as representatives from state coalitions, culturally specific organizations, coordinated entry (CE), and Continuums of Care (CoCs) to inform your funding allocation process to include considerations for survivors. Many CoCs have representatives from the DV community on the CoC Board of Directors or in DV- and SA-focused subcommittees or workgroups who can help inform allocation strategy. Reach out to counterparts in statewide DV and SA coalitions and state agencies that oversee DV funding to ensure that ESG funding award criteria (at a minimum) do not exclude VSPs from award—i.e., holding VSPs to the same data completion standards as homeless service providers.

¹ American Psychological Association: [How COVID-19 May Increase Domestic Violence Abuse](#)

² National Resource Center for Reaching Victims: [COVID-19 Survivor Impact Briefs: Children and Youth](#)

³ For more information, see COVID-19 survivor impact briefs from the [National Resource Center for Reaching Victims](#) on groups including people of color, people with disabilities, older adults, LGBTQIA+ populations, immigrants and Limited English Proficiency individuals, and people with justice histories.

⁴ [Domestic Violence Calls Mount as Restrictions Linger, Baltimore Sees Increase in Domestic Violence-Related Calls During COVID-19 Pandemic, In Remote Villages, Domestic Violence Kills More than COVID-19.](#)

Through these collaborative relationships, access and utilize data to project the total housing need for survivors of violence. Disaggregate data by race, gender, and LGBTQIA+ status to evaluate impacts on the community and help determine an appropriate goal for serving people who identify as members of these groups.

Consult directly with survivors about their needs to inform ESG policies and program design. ESG recipients are required to consult with persons with lived experience of homelessness in policy and decision-making aspects of the program. Seek out opportunities to hear from survivors about their experiences with violence and in receiving services and housing. Ask ESG subrecipients or VSPs to host these connections for you to help survivors share their experience comfortably. You can review [HUD's webinar on Engaging Persons with Lived Experience of Homelessness in Your COVID-19 Response](#) for ideas to incorporate lived expertise in your efforts. You can also [view further guidance on including lived expertise](#).

Considerations for Coordinated Entry:

- Review CE policies with your CoC to prioritize survivors for permanent housing if they do not already. Ideally, the system can refer from a VSP to a housing provider (and vice versa) seamlessly. If not, work collaboratively to develop policies and procedures.
- Make any necessary changes to how data is shared across systems and providers to ensure survivor confidentiality is upheld. Update policies accordingly.

Revise ESG Policies or Standards to Give Survivors of DV Better Access to Services

The following tips will help you make housing resources accessible to people experiencing DV:

Increase access to ESG funds by providers with a history of serving survivors of DV, dating violence, SA, stalking, and human trafficking.

- Design ESG funding application requirements to be inclusive of VSPs and community-based organizations even if they have not previously received state and federal grants.
 - Conduct targeted outreach to DV and SA providers to inform them of the funding opportunity and educate them on application requirements. Communicate through statewide Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalitions, culturally specific organizations, CoCs, and state agencies overseeing the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), other DV-specific funding. One example of leveraging partners to increase funding opportunities is found in Pennsylvania: [The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) and the Eastern Pennsylvania Balance of State CoC worked together to prioritize CoC funding and created a cohort of eight VSPs that now rehouse survivors.
 - Conduct outreach to community-based organizations—including culturally specific organizations—to inform them of ESG funding opportunities. Partner with local organizations to provide culturally specific services to subpopulations with high incidences of homelessness and DV.
 - Use the [Domestic Violence Resource Network list](#) of culturally-specific organizations to find new partners.
 - For example, [Daya in Houston, TX](#) provides rapid rehousing (RRH), specializing in serving South Asian survivors of DV and SA.
- Develop written materials explaining the ESG application process without jargon. Host webinars and Q&A with applicant organizations that may not be familiar with acronyms commonly used in the ESG Program.

Build capacity of VSPs to successfully manage and deliver ESG programs.

- Set VSPs up for success as ESG subrecipients from the beginning. VSPs will not use the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), but must use [a comparable database that can capture all data elements required](#) for rehousing programs and produce the ESG Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) at the end of the grant period. Refer to the [CAPER HMIS Programming Specifications](#) to ensure compliance.

- Highlight ways subrecipients are able to pay for critical support for survivors. As communities emerge from the COVID-19 shutdown, your ESG RRH or homelessness prevention funds may assist those fleeing violent situations by providing financial support that allows them to secure permanent housing while fleeing. These can include:
 - **Legal Services.** Survivors may benefit from this assistance by obtaining protective orders, restraining orders, and child support assistance, and by resolving criminal warrants.
 - **Credit Repair.** This service is beneficial to survivors because they often have not established financial independence from their abusers, or their credit may have been manipulated by the abuser.
 - **Rental Arrears.** Assisting a survivor with rental arrears will clear up or prevent a negative rental history, which can be a barrier to housing placement.
 - **Housing Search and Placement.** Safe housing placements with resource connections are critical to a survivor's ability to heal and remain in housing.
 - Consider ways to relieve administrative burden for subrecipients such as sharing full administrative allotments allowed to ESG subrecipients and their partner organizations.
- Train homeless service providers to adapt service delivery to meet survivors' needs during COVID-19:
 - Reiterate CoC [emergency transfer policies](#) to ESG subrecipients.
 - Share CE processes related to survivor confidentiality with all ESG subrecipients. Leaders in Connecticut [developed a cross-system model to improve survivor access to housing resources](#).
 - Educate homeless service providers about trauma-informed care: resources from [Safe Housing Partnerships](#) and [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) can help.
 - Inform homeless service providers about the intersection of DV and housing with this resource from [National Alliance for Safe Housing \(NASH\)](#).
 - Help providers design [RRH programs specifically for survivors](#).
 - Use the coalition guidance from the National Network to End Domestic Violence to brief ESG subrecipients about protocols adopted to help survivors during COVID-19.
 - Refer to [Safe Housing Partnerships](#) regularly for additional guidance to support families.