



## About the Office on Violence Against Women

The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) was created to implement the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and subsequent legislation.

OVW provides financial and technical assistance to communities to help them create programs, policies, and practices to end sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. In 2002, OVW became a permanent part of the Department of Justice with a Director who is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

### A Coordinated Community Response

VAWA requires a coordinated community response to sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. The law asks jurisdictions to bring together stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to share information and use their distinct roles to improve community responses to violence against women.

Community stakeholders include, but are not limited to: victim advocates, police officers, prosecutors, judges, probation and corrections officials, health care professionals, leaders within faith communities, and survivors.

VAWA takes a comprehensive approach to violence against women by combining tough new penalties to prosecute offenders while implementing programs to aid victims.

### Grants Available

Currently, OVW administers several grant programs authorized by VAWA, including formula grants and discretionary grants. Since it was established in 1995, OVW has awarded over \$6 billion in grants and cooperative agreements and has launched a multifaceted approach to implementing VAWA. In addition to overseeing grant programs, OVW often undertakes a number of special initiatives in response to areas of special need. These special initiatives allow OVW to explore different innovations in the violence against women field and share knowledge that can be replicated nationwide.

## What Is the Violence Against Women Act?

The Violence Against Women Act is a comprehensive legislative package designed to improve criminal justice responses to *sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking* and to increase the availability of services for victims and survivors.

VAWA was first passed by Congress in 1994, and was reauthorized in 2000, 2005, and 2013. Each reauthorization has made the law stronger and more inclusive.

VAWA 2013 reauthorized critical grant programs established by the original law, and creates innovative new programs. The reauthorization strengthens federal laws by closing a jurisdictional gap that left many Native women without adequate protections and by banning discrimination against domestic violence survivors in public housing. Additionally the law increases protections for immigrant women and ensures that LGBT Americans have equal access to the services many funded by VAWA.



## Four Focus Areas

OVW's grant programs focus on ending sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. These crimes can happen to *anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or gender*. They affect people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels, and they occur regardless of whether the victim and perpetrator are currently or formerly married, living together, dating, friends, or strangers.

**Domestic Violence** is a pattern of abusive behavior in a relationship that is used by one partner to maintain power and control over another current or former intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behavior that intimidates, manipulates, humiliates, isolates, frightens, terrorizes, coerces, threatens, hurts, injures, or wounds someone.

**Sexual Assault** is any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without consent of the recipient. Falling under the definition of sexual assault is sexual activity such as forced sexual intercourse, sodomy, molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape. It includes sexual acts against people who are unable to consent either due to age or lack of capacity.

**Stalking** is a pattern of repeated and unwanted attention, harassment, contact, or any other course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear. Stalking is dangerous and can often cause severe and long-lasting emotional and psychological harm to victims. Stalking often escalates over time and can lead to domestic violence, sexual assault, and even homicide. Stalking can include frightening communications, direct or indirect threats, and harassing a victim through the internet.

**Dating Violence** is violence and abuse committed by a person to exert power and control over a current or former dating partner. Dating violence often involves a pattern of escalating violence and abuse over a period of time. Dating violence covers a variety of actions, and can include physical abuse, physiological and emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. It can also include "digital abuse", the use of technology, such as smartphones, the internet, or social media, to intimate, harass, threaten, or isolate a victim.

## Resources

If you are victim or survivor of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking and need assistance, you can find local resources at [www.justice.gov/ovw/local-resources](http://www.justice.gov/ovw/local-resources). Or to speak with a trained advocate call:

*National Domestic Violence Hotline:* 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

*National Sexual Assault Hotline:* 1-800-656-4673 (Calls are connected to a local rape crisis center)

*National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline:* 1-866-331-9474 or 1-866-331-8453 (TTY)