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Federal Support for Providing Housing to Individuals Experiencing Domestic Violence

Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) affects millions of people in the United States each year. In 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that an estimated 12 million adult women and men experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in the year preceding the survey. Reports from some victim organizations and law enforcement agencies indicated an uptick in DV during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Individuals who experience DV are especially vulnerable to housing instability and financial challenges. Housing instability can include having difficulty paying rent or a mortgage, being denied housing because of past credit or rental history problems, facing threats of eviction, living in over-crowded conditions, or experiencing homelessness. A one-day census count in September 2019 of about 1,700 DV programs (out of nearly 1,900 nationally) indicated that the programs provided 43,000 adult and child victims of DV with short-term emergency shelters, transitional housing (a temporary accommodation between emergency shelter and longer-term housing), or other housing. On that same day, these programs lacked the capacity to provide housing to nearly 8,000 adult and child victims. Separately, a 2008 Department of Justice-funded study of 3,400 residents in domestic violence shelter programs identified safety (85% of residents) and affordable housing (83% of residents) as their two primary needs.

Overview of Federal Supports

Three federal departments primarily address the housing needs of DV victims. The Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Justice (DOJ), and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administer multiple programs that support various types of housing for DV victims. Some programs are formula grant programs for states, territories, and tribes; others are competitive grant programs for organizations that provide housing services.

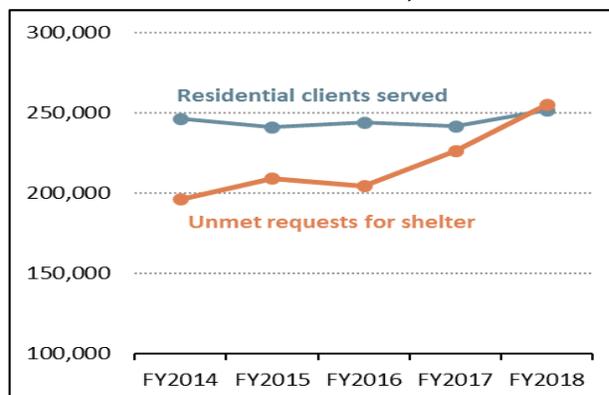
The populations served vary for these programs. For example, programs carried out under HHS's Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) and DOJ's Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) support victims and survivors of DV and dating violence (these terms are defined in VAWA), while HUD programs support homeless individuals. Together, HHS, DOJ, and HUD fund the Domestic Violence Housing Technical Assistance Consortium through the Safe Housing Partnership. The consortium provides technical assistance to housing and DV service providers on housing issues for DV victims and survivors.

HHS Programs

HHS administers programs authorized under FVPSA. The law focuses on providing temporary shelter and services for victims, as well as supporting children exposed to domestic and teen dating violence. The majority of FVPSA appropriations are allocated for formula grants, which fund (1) states, territories, and tribes that subgrant most funds to DV organizations that provide shelter and services; (2) state DV coalitions; (3) training and technical assistance; and (4) administrative and research activities. Original FY2020 appropriations for the formula grants were \$175 million (P.L. 116-94), and additional FY2020 funding of \$45 million was provided to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency (P.L. 116-136).

The FVPSA statute and regulations specify a variety of emergency shelter or short-term housing that can be funded: rental subsidies and temporary lodging in individual units such as apartments, safe homes, and hotel or motel vouchers. In addition, funds can be used for locating and securing a safe and affordable permanent housing and providing homelessness prevention services. Subgrantees that offer shelter must also provide support services, such as counseling and case management. **Figure 1** shows the number of individuals who have received shelter under FVPSA-funded DV programs and the number of requests for shelter that were unmet due to lack of capacity. The number of residential clients remained fairly stable over FY2014-FY2018, but the number of unmet requests increased. For more information, see CRS Report R42838.

Figure 1. Residential Clients and Unmet Requests for Shelter at FVPSA-Funded Shelters, FY2014-FY2018



Source: Created by CRS using data from HHS, *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates, FY2018-FY2021*.

DOJ Programs

The DOJ Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) administer grant

programs that support housing needs of DV victims. OVW programs are authorized by VAWA, and OVC programs are authorized by the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).

VAWA

VAWA programs focus on DV, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and sometimes additional crimes. VAWA grant programs address the criminal justice system and social service responses to these crimes, and certain programs address prevention as well. Among other purpose areas, several programs support transitional housing for DV victims and their children. One program, the Transitional Housing Assistance Grants for Victims of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking Program, solely supports housing needs. It supports organizations that provide 6 to 24 months of transitional housing with support services for victims who are homeless or in need of transitional housing due to DV, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, and for whom emergency shelter services or other crisis intervention services are unavailable or insufficient. FY2020 appropriations for this program were \$37 million (P.L. 116-93). Other VAWA programs that support housing (either short-term emergency or transitional) needs of victims, among other activities, include the following:

- STOP Violence Against Women Formula Grant Program;
- Enhanced Training and Services to End Violence Against and Abuse of Women Later in Life;
- Grants to Enhance Culturally Specific Services for Victims of DV, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking;
- Rural Sexual Assault, DV, Dating Violence, and Stalking Assistance;
- Grants to Indian Tribal Governments;
- Grants for Outreach and Services to Underserved Populations; and
- Grants to Prevent and Respond to DV, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking Against Children and Youth Program.

In 2016, these programs supported 4.21 million housing bed nights. For more information, see CRS Report 45410.

VOCA

VOCA programs support crime victims in states, territories, and tribes. The primary programs through which VOCA supports DV victims are the Victim Assistance and Victim Compensation formula grant programs. In FY2020, \$1.80 billion was allocated for these programs. Among other purpose areas, these programs may be used to support transitional housing or temporary lodging for DV victims and their children. States, territories, and tribes provide Victim Assistance funds to organizations that provide direct services to crime victims, which may include DV shelters as well as public housing authorities that assist crime victims. Further, funds may be provided to nursing homes for the purpose of emergency, short-term shelter for elder abuse victims for whom no other safe, short-term residence is available. States and territories use Victim Compensation funds to compensate victims directly for costs resulting

from crime, and temporary lodging is an allowable expense. States and territories may further determine the uses of this funding. In FY2018, 1.02 million individuals received housing/shelter assistance with Victim Assistance funds. The number of individuals compensated for housing expenses using Victim Compensation funds is not available. For more information, see CRS Report R42672.

HUD Homeless Programs

Individuals and families who are fleeing or attempting to flee their homes due to DV, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking may be considered homeless according to the definition used for HUD homeless programs if they lack resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing. Two HUD grant programs provide housing and services for people experiencing homelessness. For more information, see CRS Report RL33764.

The Continuum of Care (CoC) Program

CoC program funds are available for transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness. Funds are distributed competitively, and organizations serving people experiencing DV may apply for grants as part of their community application process, also called the Continuum of Care. HUD does not break out funding for DV organizations receiving grants through the CoC program. However, appropriation acts for FY2018 through FY2020 have included a set-aside within the CoC program of \$50 million per year for rapid rehousing projects serving people experiencing DV. Funds are used for short- to medium-term rental assistance (up to 24 months), together with supportive services.

Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG)

ESG funds are distributed via formula to states, localities, and territories, which can then subgrant funds to nonprofit organizations, public housing agencies, and local redevelopment authorities. Congress appropriated \$4 billion for ESG in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (P.L. 116-136). ESG funds can be used to support the costs of shelters, including hotel and motel rooms; for supportive services; and for short- and medium-term rental assistance and stabilization services (such as utility costs, credit repair, and help with moving costs) for people who become homeless. (HUD does not break out funding for DV organizations receiving grants through ESG.)

ESG-funded organizations can also assist people who are at risk of homelessness through rental assistance and stabilization services. The term *at risk of homelessness* includes individuals and families who are considered homeless under other federal definitions of homelessness, including VAWA. The VAWA definition of *homelessness* includes people sharing housing due to loss of housing or other economic hardship.

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