

A Tip Sheet for Navigating Community Resources in Times of Crisis: A Tip Sheet for Victim Service Providers (VSPs)

Navigating community resources during a public crisis can be extremely difficult. However, your role in serving victims in your community is more important than ever. This tip sheet provides VSPs with the information needed to effectively serve victims during times of public crisis.

Priorities & roles can vary by the VSP's role:

1. *Community-based VSPs* are usually from a nonprofit or grassroots organization. They may serve on a 24-hr crisis response team and/or provide direct services. These organizations and advocates usually have confidential or anonymous services that are not contingent on criminal justice system involvement.
2. *System-based VSPs* are usually based in a government, law enforcement, military, or the educational system and often have to balance victim needs with system objectives. The confidentiality of services provided by these advocates varies on their role and their organization.

Know your community and what is available within it:

- Update your resource list/binder/database with the most current information.
- If remote work becomes necessary, identify what other service providers are also working remotely and how they can best be reached
- Share information about revised contact information and access when services are reduced or remote work is required.
- Know service providers' emergency/disaster plans.
- Communicate with service providers about your clients' needs and ask about their abilities and capacities to meet those needs.

Manage Limited Resources in Certain Communities

Certain communities may have experienced a reduction in resources due to the current crisis situation. Other communities may face challenges in availability or access to resources, even before a crisis has emerged. VSPs need to anticipate these possibilities and ask victims whether they are in communities where resources have been reduced. It is also important to think about what can be done to help victims access resources in communities where they may be limited.

- Check with law enforcement agencies. How are they responding to calls for assistance? Are they coming to the location or calling? If they come to the location, how will they respond to a need for a private conversation with the caller?

- Check with the courts. How are the courts handling non-essential legal matters, e.g. custody, guardianship, divorce, child support, alimony? Do the courts use technology to support victim participation in hearings relevant to their cases? Typically, courts are only open for bail and protective orders and even then, procedures are varied and change often. Help manage victim expectations relevant to “virtual participation” in hearings and, that when the courts do reopen, there will be a significant backlog.
- Check with hospitals. How are victims able to access emergency medical care if it is needed? Many hospitals aren’t allowing people to come into the Emergency Department or to bring a support person in with them for appointments.
- Check with local, state, and federal correctional agencies about whether they are releasing offenders early due to COVID, and if/how victims will be notified about early release in accordance with state laws. Also ensure that victims are aware that correctional agencies currently do not provide for in-person visitation.

Financial Resources

- COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting people of low socioeconomic status. This includes those who:
 - Cannot work from home.
 - Live in areas with limited access to affordable, nutritious food (i.e., “food deserts”), and/or rely on free or reduced-cost lunches to feed children.
 - Experience job loss or income reductions which may result in loss of health care benefits and/or access to health care services for themselves or family members.
 - Are homeless or experience housing instability and may face decreased access to shelters and food banks, as well as increased stigmatization and vulnerability.
- Advise clients about possible scams regarding stimulus checks, victim compensation, or financial assistance
 - Advise victims not to engage in solicitations for money, surveys requiring financial or personal information (e.g., sharing PIN numbers, Social Security numbers, bank accounts, etc), or other suspicious requests/inquiries.
 - Know what sources are reputable for this information (IRS.gov) and how to do fact checks

Allocate available resources without overwhelming the system

- First, LISTEN. Providing resources and services is secondary to helping victims feel heard and providing a connection.
- Assess and prioritize the needs of victims
 - Before making a referral, ask: *Do you have access to resources or other ways to cope? What kinds of strategies, resources have worked for you in the past?*

- Create a protocol for referrals
 - Importance of giving local vs. national resources that may not include area-specific information, such as instructions to obtain testing for COVID-19, instructions about returning to work, business or store openings, etc. Examples of local resources include:
 - County Health Departments
 - State Departments of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC)
 - Municipal, County, State Officials (i.e., mayors, governors, emergency managers)
 - Provide a “warm hand off” by letting the victim know they can call back if the resource does not work for them for whatever reason.
 - Check back after the referral is made. Here are some suggestions for questions that can be asked during a follow-up check-in:
 - Did you contact the resource that was provided?
 - Did you receive services from the provider or someone else?
 - Have your needs been met?
 - Would you like some additional resources?
 - How was your experience with this provider/resource?
 - Use this information to provide better referrals for future client needs.
- Remember that your overall goal is to try to provide equitable distribution of resources to the extent that is possible. This means that each client has:
 - Fair access to resources and opportunities
 - The ability to be a part of the community
 - The independence and support needed to meet basic needs.
- Recognize and build on clients’ strengths and resilience
- VSPs should not give medical advice, but instead direct victims to available resources, information and appropriate medical professionals.

Providing Resources

- Ask clients what they need and what barriers to access they might have
- Ask area providers if they have the requisite training or experience for a specific client’s needs, such as type of victimization.
 - Remember: providing resource referrals should be more than simply compiling a list of available services in a community and sharing the options when asked.
- To identify and meet the needs of victims, it is important to be aware and knowledgeable about potential referrals. This will help to insure that area service providers and resources are utilized most efficiently and effectively. As Vu Le puts it:

*“Don’t just give three drops of water to your rainbow carrots,
wonder why they aren’t growing,
and then whine about the lack of color in your salad.”*