



**Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**

**2021 Victims of Child Abuse Act**

**Annual Report to Congress**

NCJ 305833

## **Introduction**

The Victims of Child Abuse Act (VOCA) provides for the submission of an annual report to both the Senate and House Committees on the Judiciary. *See* 34 U.S.C. § 20307(b). The following report provides information about the VOCA Programs administered by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

## **Overview of VOCA Programs**

OJJDP administers funds to support children's advocacy centers as authorized by VOCA. These funds support programs as well as training and technical assistance (TTA) that provide all children and families access to strong multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) of highly qualified professionals who respond to and help heal victims of child abuse. The overarching goal of these VOCA-funded programs is to improve the community response to child abuse through strategic leadership, collaboration, and capacity building. The VOCA-funded grantee organizations provide specialized TTA, elevate the expertise of child abuse professionals, and develop and improve the functioning of MDTs, Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs), and state CAC chapters to strengthen the system's response to child abuse and neglect as well as provide direct funding to local CACs through subgrant funding.

Currently, OJJDP's VOCA program portfolio comprises five interconnected initiatives. These initiatives provide focused support at the local, regional, and national levels to maximize the impact of services for child victims of abuse and ensure access to services and TTA for communities and involved professionals. These five initiatives include the following:

### **Children's Advocacy Centers Membership and Accreditation**

This program supports an organization to manage a national membership, accreditation, and outcome measurement system to provide quality assurance of CACs meeting national standards. CACs are facility-based programs that coordinate an MDT response to the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse. The program develops and promulgates membership criteria for eligibility, implements performance standards for program accreditation, and disseminates information among current and potential member organizations. These goals and objectives are accomplished through annual membership meetings and other training conferences for member organizations, and by providing structure and support for establishing membership criteria and processes. All accredited CACs receive an onsite performance review, conducted by a two-person site review team, every 5 years to ensure they continue to provide high quality care to abused children. This initiative has created national standards for accreditation and an annotated bibliography of research supporting these standards that can be found at <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/ncas-standards-for-accredited-members/>.

### **Regional Children's Advocacy Centers**

This program supports four regional centers, one situated within each of the four U.S. census regions, that: 1) help to build and establish MDTs, local programs, and state chapter organizations that respond to child abuse and neglect; and 2) deliver TTA that strengthens existing MDTs, programs, and state chapter organizations. Regional Children's Advocacy Centers (RCACs)

promote and support widespread, consistent implementation of evidence-based practices and a multidisciplinary approach to child abuse investigations, assessment, intervention, and prosecution ensuring effective outcomes for child abuse victims and their families.

The four U.S. Census regions are:

- **Northeast Region:** Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The Northeast Region includes a total land area of 162,258 square miles and a population of 56,283,891.
- **Southern Region:** Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Southern Region includes a total land area of 870,812 square miles and a population of 121,223,863.
- **Midwest Region:** Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The Midwest Region includes a total land area of 682,540 square miles and a population of 61,823,731.
- **Western Region:** Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The Western Region includes a total land area of 1,752,952 square miles and a population of 76,044,679.

### **National Subgrant Program**

This program funds local CACs, state chapters of CACs, and MDTs by: 1) developing funding strategies for coordinated and comprehensive MDT services to child abuse victims and their families; 2) developing and publishing requests for proposals (RFPs), as approved by OJJDP; 3) providing TTA to support OJJDP-approved RFPs; 4) managing a national peer review process to evaluate applications for funding; and 5) providing fiscal oversight and grant administration functions for successful award recipients. The National Subgrant Program is part of a multi-category solicitation that includes the National Subgrant Program, the National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Pornography, and the CAC Military Partnership Pilot Project.

### **Training and Technical Assistance for Child Abuse Professionals**

This program provides training and technical assistance to child abuse professionals instrumental to the protection of children, intervention in child abuse cases, and treatment of victims of child abuse. The program will help: 1) improve the quality of such protection, intervention, and treatment; and 2) promote the effective delivery of the evidence-informed CAC model and the multidisciplinary response to child abuse. Activities under this program include technical assistance, online digital resources, and conference presentations for child welfare professionals, law enforcement, judicial personnel, forensic interviewers, and crime victim advocates.

## **Training and Technical Assistance for Child Abuse Prosecutors**

This program's goal is to provide training and technical assistance to attorneys and other allied professionals instrumental to the criminal prosecution of child abuse cases in state or federal courts, for the purpose of improving the quality of criminal prosecution of such cases. Grants are made to national organizations to provide TTA to attorneys and others involved in prosecuting child abuse cases in state or federal courts. The program focuses on 1) providing training and technical assistance to prosecutors and related criminal justice professionals, and 2) developing and disseminating publications and resources for prosecutors and related criminal justice professionals.

### **Reporting Requirements**

#### **Summary of OJJDP's efforts to monitor and evaluate the RCAC program activities under 34 U.S.C. Section 20303(d). *See* 34 U.S.C. § 20307(b)(1).**

OJJDP has developed a system to regularly monitor and evaluate grant activities to ensure grant recipients comply with award requirements across programmatic, administrative, and fiscal components of the grant. This monitoring system includes tracking progress of the original grant proposal (i.e., application) as well as any approved modifications. OJJDP conducts this oversight and assessment through a number of mechanisms that are designed to parallel key points in the grant cycle, as outlined below.

Each RCAC award has an assigned OJJDP program manager who participates on the OJJDP VOCA team that meets monthly to coordinate programmatic activities and monitor the entire VOCA portfolio. At the beginning of the grant award, the VOCA team convenes a kick-off meeting with the grantee to review the proposed grant deliverables. Program managers confer with each RCAC at least bi-monthly, and more frequently as needed. Conference calls are held to review progress toward stated grant deliverables, and discuss any needed modifications. The RCAC submits any suggested changes to the original proposal via the official grant file for OJJDP review and approval.

OJJDP program managers complete an annual desk review of the grant file for each RCAC award to evaluate compliance with an array of grant administration requirements. Grantees are required to submit semiannual progress reports and performance measures data, which program managers review to assess program performance and monitor program activities. OJJDP program managers also conduct onsite monitoring visits across their grant portfolios at least once during the life of a grant award. This is the case for the four RCAC grantees. More intensive monitoring and technical assistance is provided when needed. Finally, OJJDP reviews and approves all key product deliverables, and attends onsite events and activities conducted through VOCA funding—such as trainings, conferences, MDT meetings, webinars, etc.—to observe and review performance and products firsthand.

#### **Method by which amounts are allocated to grantees and subgrantees under this subchapter, including to local CACs, state chapters, and RCACs. *See* 34 U.S.C. § 20307(b)(2)(A).**

OJJDP has adopted a funding strategy based on a Government Accountability Office program audit conducted in 2015 (GAO 15-351). The strategy fully funds three of the five VOCA grant program

initiatives for a 36-month project period on a rotating cycle.<sup>1</sup> These 3 programs are: CAC Membership and Accreditation, TTA for Child Abuse Professionals, and TTA for Child Abuse Prosecutors. Each of these solicitations is released every three years and the awardees are fully funded for that time period. The funding levels of the remaining two programs—National Subgrant and RCAC—prohibit fully funding them in any given fiscal year due to limited availability of funding based on appropriations.

As such, these two programs receive an original award and two supplemental awards for a minimum 36-month project period. This revised strategy not only reduces the number of project period extensions needed to successfully achieve project goals and objectives, but also benefits grantees by allowing ample time for comprehensive program planning and eliminating the burden of submitting an annual grant application for funding.

This revised funding strategy started in fiscal year (FY) 2018 by recompeting and fully funding the CAC Membership and Accreditation program for 36-months. In FY 2019, OJJDP recompeted and fully funded the TTA for Child Abuse Prosecutors program for a 36-month project period. In FY 2020, OJJDP recompeted and fully funded the TTA for Child Abuse Professionals program for a 36-month project period. This rotating cycle will continue so that these VOCA programs are recompeted every 3 years.

OJJDP allocates \$5 million to support the four RCACs at \$1,250,000 each per year with supplemental awards made in the same amount for two consecutive years. When the Agency has discretion to determine allocation among VOCA programs, OJJDP takes into consideration language regarding VOCA programs that may appear in appropriations committee reports. For example, OJJDP follows the joint explanatory statement the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, which states that the Department is directed to continue following the directives and reporting requirements in the joint explanatory statement accompanying Public Law 116-260 (the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021), which states that “*Within the funds provided, \$5,000,000 shall be for Regional Children’s Advocacy Centers (RCACs) Programs.*” In addition, OJJDP has also allocated \$1 million for the CAC Military Partnership Pilot Project per the FY 2021 joint explanatory statement, which states, “*The agreement supports efforts by CACs to use their unique model and expertise to help military installations address cases of child abuse, and again provides \$1,000,000 from within the funds provided to continue to support a pilot project to identify, develop, and operationalize best practices.*”

The National Subgrant Program was last competed in FY 2018 as a part of the Victims of Child Abuse Act Support for Children’s Advocacy Centers Programs solicitation. This solicitation included three categories: the National Subgrant Program, the National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Pornography<sup>2</sup>, and the CAC Military Partnership Pilot Project.

The National Children’s Alliance (NCA) competed and received the award for each category.

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<sup>1</sup> The OJJDP competitive funding cycle for these programs entailed recompeting them every three years. These programs were competed in Fiscal Year 2015, prior to the release of the audit report. OJJDP began incrementally implementing the new funding strategy in FY 2018 when these three programs were scheduled to be recompeted.

<sup>2</sup> The CAC National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Pornography under the OJJDP FY 2018 VOCA Support for Children’s Advocacy Centers Programs solicitation is partly supported by the Domestic Trafficking Victims Funds authorized under the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015 (Pub. L 114-22)

Through the National Subgrant Program, NCA releases annually a competitive RFP to award funding to local CACs and state Chapter CACs for a variety of grant categories, including: Program Improvement for Mental Health Services; Program Development; Program Expansion to Rural and Remote Communities; Tribal Expansion of CAC Services; Improving CAC Response to Children with Sexual Behavior Problems; Improving CAC Response to Physical Abuse; and CAC Response for areas without an Accredited NCA Chapter (such as the District of Columbia and U.S. territories: Guam, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands).

Under the National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Pornography, NCA provides subaward funding to CACs under the following categories: Improving CAC Response to Child Pornography Cases, Provision of Services to Victims of Child Pornography and Human Trafficking, and Training Awards on Technology-Facilitated Child Sexual Exploitation/Child Pornography. Lastly, NCA offers subaward funding to CACs for Coordination of CACs for Military Installations under the CAC Military Partnership Pilot Project.

Every year, NCA develops eligibility criteria for each of the National Subgrant RFPs with OJJDP approval and based on an analysis of historical data and consideration of the complexity of the goals and objectives of each grant category. In preparation for a new RFP cycle, NCA gathers information from the previous year on how the grants were used, how much funding was requested and used by subgrantees, and the outcomes for each grant category. NCA also considers needs identified by the field and includes feedback from state chapters, CACs, and accreditation site reviewers.

Furthermore, NCA considers areas needing expanded services, including rural and remote areas where there is insufficient infrastructure to support a fully operational CAC, or in large urban areas where the volume of cases justifies adding services to outlying areas.

The following chart outlines a history of funding amounts for each VOCA program.

VOCA Program	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY2020	FY 2021
Membership and Accreditation Program	\$700,000	\$1,400,000 (3-year award)	-	-	\$2,500,000 (3-year award)
TTA for Child Abuse Prosecutors Program	\$750,000	\$750,000	\$2,400,000 (3-year award)	-	-
TTA for Child Abuse Professionals Program	\$900,000	\$700,000	\$800,000	\$2,400,000 (3-year award)	-
RCAC Program	\$4,800,000	\$4,800,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000
National Subgrant Program	\$10,372,636*	\$9,889,799	\$10,835,750		
National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Pornography	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$18,317,104
CAC Military Partnership Pilot Project	-	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$2,000,000
					\$1,000,000

*\*In FY 2017, \$1,000,000 to support CACs' collaboration with military installations was included in the National Subgrant Program award.*

## **Steps taken to minimize duplication and overlap in the awarding of amounts under this subchapter.**

OJJDP is responsible for managing the solicitation development and award processing steps for the entire VOCA portfolio. As such, OJJDP program staff assigned to manage these activities are fully aware of the goals and objectives in each program solicitation and the organizations that submit applications in response to these solicitations. Each of the five solicitations released by OJJDP have distinct and separate goals and objectives. These separate solicitations are designed to encourage collaboration and avoid duplication. For example, the VOCA solicitations include a requirement for program coordination. The specific solicitation language is as follows:

“Successful operation of the regional children’s advocacy centers program requires significant coordination and collaboration. To achieve the necessary level of coordination, OJJDP will require each of the four successful applicants to work in close partnership with each other and with other programs funded under the Victims of Child Abuse Act.”

OJJDP has also put in place mechanisms to help avoid inappropriate duplication of funding. For example, each applicant is required to disclose whether it has a pending application—or is proposed as a subrecipient under any pending applications—for federally funded grants, or cooperative agreements that: 1) include requests for funding to support the same project being proposed in the application under this solicitation, and 2) cover any identical costs outlined in the budget submitted to the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) as part of that solicitation’s application. Any applicant with one or more pending applications as described above and submitted within the last 12 months must provide the following information:

- The federal or state funding agency
- The solicitation/project name
- The applicable federal or state funding agency’s point of contact

Furthermore, per the Department of Justice’s *Policy and Procedures to Address Potential Overlap Among Grant Programs and Duplication of Grant Awards*, OJP conducts an overlap review analysis related to a solicitation or program that addresses subject matter, activities, focus groups, target populations, and eligible applicants. The goals of the policy are to:

- Identify the extent of overlap among grant programs.
- Address actual overlap at the solicitation planning and development stages.
- Identify duplication of grant programs at the grantee level.
- Remedy unnecessary or impermissible duplication among grant awards.
- Enhance coordination in the management of awards with intended duplication.

During the funding decision process, OJJDP program staff meet to discuss strengths, weaknesses, and any areas of duplication of all applications selected through the peer review process prior to the development of the funding recommendation memorandum.

Finally, each of the awards made to the organizations funded through the VOCA appropriation are cooperative agreements. Generally stated, under OJP cooperative agreement awards,

responsibility for the day-to-day conduct of the funded project rests with the recipient. OJP, however, may have substantial involvement in matters such as substantive coordination of technical efforts, as well as review and approval of project work plans, research designs, data collection instruments, and major project-generated materials.

OJJDP's role in managing these awards includes, but is not limited to, the following tasks:

- Hosting a grantee kick-off meeting to ensure that the selected grantee is prepared to produce the deliverables stated in their application, and to provide input on the details of these deliverables.
- Reviewing and approving major work plans, including changes to such plans, and key decisions pertaining to project operations.
- Reviewing and approving major project-generated documents and training materials.
- Providing guidance in significant project planning meetings and participating in project-sponsored training events or conferences.
- Monitoring grant performance and progress, reviewing and processing requests for changes in the grant as needed, providing for technical assistance to the recipient regarding programmatic issues, conducting site visits, and closing grants in a timely fashion.

OJJDP seeks to identify and address any issues of overlap or duplication at the point of award, and throughout the performance period of each award it administers.

### **Analysis of the extent to which both rural and urban populations are served under the RCAC program.**

All VOCA partners work together to address both urban and rural needs across the country and through the regional CACs. The RCACs create a coordinated plan to provide TTA to child abuse professionals in both rural and urban jurisdictions. This includes a general strategy to provide TTA to all CACs in their region, a targeted approach for urban CACs, and a targeted approach to provide TTA for rural CACs.

As of the submission of this report, there are a total of 757 accredited CACs in the United States. That total represents 122 accredited CACs in the Western Region (16 percent), 185 accredited CACs in the Midwest Region (24 percent), 115 accredited CACs in the Northeast Region (15 percent), and 335 accredited CACs in the Southern Region (44 percent). Of the 757 accredited CACs, 230 reported being a rural CAC as measured by zip code in accordance with the Rural Health Information Hub (<https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/am-i-rural>), which is supported by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In the 2020 NCA members census, which includes Accredited, Associate/Developing, Affiliate, and Satellite members and is collected every two years, 308 of 895 total members reported as rural under the Rural Health Information Hub. All VOCA partners work together to address both urban and rural needs across the country and through the regional CACs. Subaward funding under NCA includes specific support for program expansion in rural and remote areas to provide important resources for increased access and quality service. In 2021, 34% of the active NCA subawards (64 of 191 awards) were identified as rural. The RCACs then create a coordinated plan to provide TTA to child abuse professionals in both rural and urban jurisdictions. This



includes a general strategy to provide TTA to all CACs in their region, a targeted approach for urban CACs, and a targeted approach to provide TTA for rural CACs.

Programming strategies for all types of CACs/MDTs include:

- Secondary traumatic stress training.
- Evidence-based mental health practices training.
- MDT and MDT facilitator training.
- Team building.
- Chapter subaward funds to increase access to services in both rural and urban areas.
- Diverse online trainings.
- Strategic planning for CACs and state chapters.
- Building capacity for state chapters to increase access to and improve quality of services.
- Building capacity for state chapters and CACs to address disparities in care and service delivery.
- Customized onsite TTA.
- Travel assistance for core trainings and tuition assistance.
- VOCA partner collaboration on coordinated service delivery.

The urban specific programming strategies include:

- Active engagement of RCACs in the annual urban CAC summit.
- Travel stipends for urban CACs to participate in the annual urban CAC summit.
- Specialized MDT training for urban settings.
- Secondary traumatic stress-informed organizational training.

OJJDP, RCACs, and NCA recognize the challenges facing rural communities, and continuously assess and adapt strategies for meeting their needs related to implementing the core functions of a CAC. It is not always possible to implement a standalone CAC that satisfies all 10 criteria for a fully accredited CAC. Therefore, RCACs have begun developing strategies to ensure that implementing the core functions of a CAC will provide rural communities with access to services critical to the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse.

For example, medical evaluations are a critical part of an investigation and are frequently the first step in addressing the physical and emotional trauma of a child victim. More than 50 percent of CACs are located in rural areas where medical providers with specialized child abuse training and knowledge are scarce. The effects of this lack of local expertise are twofold. First, abuse victims do not have access to healthcare providers with relevant expertise in identifying and treating trauma. Second, rural healthcare providers do not have access to quality hands-on training and mentorship that would allow them to reach the standards for CAC accreditation. In an effort to meet better the needs identified by medical providers, particularly those in rural areas, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act- or HIPPA-compliant online training platforms were created under the RCAC program. Examples of these telehealth programs include Medical Training Academy, myCasereview, National

Peer Review Program, myQIportal, and numerous continuing education webinars and supplementary online programs.

In addition, innovative ways to meet the mental health needs of children living in rural communities who have experienced abuse and neglect are being implemented. Under the leadership of the Western RCAC, the Rural Mental Health Partners, a telemental health network of trauma specialists to support rural and frontier communities, convened a forum, developed strategies and now meets quarterly to strategize and operationalize plans for addressing the lack of access to trauma treatment in remote communities. The Western RCAC has also taken the lead on piloting this telemental health initiative and has identified ways to assist communities in accessing evidence-based mental health services for children and families.

Beyond the general TTA provided by a RCAC to all CACs in their region, the following includes additional rural community specific programming strategies:

- Expert consultation and training programs for forensic interviewers.
- Comprehensive medical training and quality improvement initiatives, including foundational, hands-on clinical, and expert case review (evaluations have shown the greatest increase in knowledge and skills for providers working in rural areas).
- Mental health discussion groups for CAC leadership which provide consultative technical assistance to Executive Directors on implementing evidence-based mental health services.
- New Mental health peer consultation forum to provide peer-to-peer consultation for clinicians who have transitioned to telemental health service delivery to rapidly respond to pandemic cases
- Free and reduced-fee training for evidence-based mental health treatment in rural areas.
- Pilot telemental health in two frontier states, Washington and Montana.
- Ongoing webinar series for rural and remote CACs as well as webinars on telemental health.
- Telemental health resource center.
- Specialized publications for CACs on implementing trauma-focused mental health services in rural and frontier regions such as the “Rural CAC Coalition Guide” under development.
- Specialized MDT training for rural and developing CACs.
- “Rural Think Tank” to fact-find and address rural challenges.
- Training prosecutors on the unique aspects of building MDTs and responding to abuse in rural communities.
- Customized TTA for Alaska Native and American Indian populations.

OJJDP will continue to support efforts to prevent and investigate child abuse and mitigate its negative impact by funding programs and training and technical assistance that promote a multidisciplinary approach. For more information about OJJDP and its child protection efforts, [visit ojjdp.ojp.gov](http://visit.ojjdp.ojp.gov).