

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 2023 Victims of Child Abuse Act Annual Report to Congress

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 (CACs) as authorized by VOCA. Children's advocacy centers coordinate the investigation, treatment, and prosecution of child abuse cases by utilizing multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) of professionals involved in child protective and victim advocacy services, law enforcement and prosecution, and physical and mental health. VOCA funds support programs, as well as training and technical assistance (TTA), that provide children and families access to strong MDTs of highly qualified professionals who respond to and support the healing of victims of child abuse. The VOCA-funded grantee organizations provide specialized TTA to elevate the expertise of child abuse professionals, and develop and improve the functioning of MDTs, 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 is comprised of six interconnected initiatives. These initiatives provide focused support at the local, regional, Tribal, 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 six initiatives include the following:

Children's Advocacy Centers Membership and Accreditation

Through this program, OJJDP supports an organization to manage a national membership, accreditation, and outcome measurement system to provide quality assurance of CACs meeting national standards. 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 every five years, conducted by a two-person site review team, to ensure they continue to provide high-quality care to abused children. This initiative has created national standards for accreditation based upon research. The national standards can be found at https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/ncas-standards-for-accredited-members/.

Regional Children's Advocacy Centers

Through this program, OJJDP supports four regional children's advocacy centers (RCACs), 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. RCACs promote and support widespread, consistent implementation of evidence-based practices and a multidisciplinary approach to child abuse investigations, assessment, intervention, and prosecution, thereby 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.
- **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.
- Midwest Region: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.
- Western Region: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Tribal Children's Advocacy Center Training and Technical Assistance Program

This national program funds an organization to deliver coordinated training and technical assistance to federally recognized Tribes and children's advocacy centers serving American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities to improve the investigation and prosecution of child abuse and neglect.

Children's Advocacy Centers National Subgrant Program

The Children's Advocacy Centers National Subgrant Program is a multicategory solicitation that includes: the National Subgrant Program, the National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), (formerly known as the National Subgrants Program for Victims of Child Pornography), and the CAC Military Partnership Program.

Under the National Subgrant Program, the largest of the programs, OJJDP funds an organization to provide subgrants to local CACs, state chapters of CACs, and MDTs based on their identified needs and priorities. The goals of the program are to: (1) develop funding strategies for coordinated and comprehensive MDT services to child abuse victims and their families; (2) develop and publish requests for proposals (RFPs), as approved by OJJDP; (3) provide TTA to support potential applicants for OJJDP-approved RFPs; (4) manage a national peer review process to evaluate and select applications for funding; and (5) provide fiscal oversight and grant administration functions for successful award recipients.

The National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse Material provides subgrants that support local CACs, state chapters of CACs, and MDTs to improve the response to and provide CAC services to children who are victims of child sexual abuse material, including those victims of child sexual abuse material who are also victims of commercial sex trafficking. The CAC Military Partnership Program provides subgrants to local CACs to identify, develop and operationalize best practices to help military installations address cases of child abuse.

Training and Technical Assistance for Child Abuse Professionals

This program provides TTA to child abuse professionals who are instrumental to the protection of children, intervention in child abuse cases, and treatment of victims of child abuse. The program helps (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

The goal of this program is to provide TTA to prosecutors and other allied professionals who are instrumental to the criminal prosecution of child abuse cases in state courts, for the purpose of improving the quality of criminal prosecution of such cases. Grants are made to national organizations to (1) provide TTA to prosecutors and related criminal justice professionals and (2) develop and disseminate 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. § 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 kickoff meeting with the grantee to review the proposed grant deliverables. Program managers confer with each RCAC at least bimonthly, and more frequently as needed. Conference calls are held to review progress toward stated grant deliverables and to 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. More intensive monitoring and technical assistance are 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). Following an initial planning period, this funding strategy was launched in fiscal year (FY) 2018 by recompeting and fully funding three of the six interconnected initiatives for a 36-month project period on a rotating cycle. These three 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 CAC Membership and Accreditation program will be recompeted in FY 2024, the TTA for Child Abuse Prosecutors program was recompeted in FY 2022, and the TTA for Child Abuse Professionals program was recompeted in FY 2023. In addition, in FY 2022, OJJDP competed the Tribal Children's Advocacy Center Training and Technical Assistance (TCAC) program to improve access and expand CAC services for Native youth. This program was funded at \$750,000 for a 12-month period, and OJJDP awarded \$800,000 in supplemental funding under this program in FY 2023.

OJJDP establishes funding amounts for the CAC Membership and Accreditation, TTA for Child Abuse Prosecutors, and TTA for Child Abuse Professionals programs based on funding availability in the year these programs are competed. In general, OJJDP maintains funding levels for these programs comparable to previous years. This overall strategy not only reduces the number of project period extensions needed to successfully achieve project goals and objectives, but it also benefits grantees by allowing ample time for comprehensive program planning and eliminating the burden of submitting an annual grant application for funding.

For the remaining three programs—National Subgrants, RCACs, and TCAC—OJJDP provides an original award and two supplemental awards for a minimum 36-month project period. This approach provides OJJDP with the necessary flexibility to support these programs, as limited availability of funding based on annual appropriations prevents OJJDP from funding the full three-year project period in any given fiscal year.

In FY23, OJJDP allocated \$5 million to support the four RCACs at \$1,250,000 each. In addition, in FY23, OJJDP allocated \$1 million for the CAC Military Partnership Program. These funding amounts reflect the language of the joint explanatory statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023.

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

² In FY 2023, the National Children's Alliance—the grantee implementing the CAC Membership and Accreditation program—received a supplemental award of \$750,000. This supplement was awarded due to an increase in appropriations in FY 2023 under Victims of Child Abuse and the recognized need to support membership and accreditation activities that have generally exceeded the availability of funding provided under this award.

The National Subgrant Program was competed in FY 2021 under the OJJDP FY 2021 Children's Advocacy Centers National Subgrants Program solicitation, which indicated that OJJDP could provide supplemental funding in FYs 2022 and 2023 based upon availability of funding. Per the funding strategy, OJJDP will recompete this program in FY 2024. This solicitation included three categories: the National Subgrant Program, the National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse Material,³ and the CAC Military Partnership Program. The National Children's Alliance (NCA) applied for and was competitively selected for the award for each category. 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 - Meeting Accreditation Standards, Program Development, Expanding Reach and Access, Equipment Support, Provision of Core Direct CAC Services, CAC Funding for Statewide Projects Coordinated by State Chapters, and State Chapter Organizational Capacity (including the District of Columbia).

Under the National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse Material, NCA provides subaward funding to CACs to improve the response to CSAM cases using two approaches: Provision of Services to Victims of Child Sexual Abuse Material and Human Trafficking, and Training Awards on Technology-Facilitated Child Sexual Exploitation/Child Sexual Abuse Material. Additionally, NCA offers subaward funding to CACs for Coordination of CACs for Military Installations under the CAC Military Partnership Program. Through these subawards, CACs collaborate with military installations to improve access to CAC services to military-affiliated children and families.

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.

In FY 2022, OJJDP released the *OJJDP FY 2022 Victims of Child Abuse Regional Children's Advocacy Centers* competitive solicitation. This program supports four regional centers—one situated within each of four designated U.S. Census regions—that enhance and support the development, expansion, and continuous quality improvement of MDTs, local CACs, and state chapter organizations responding to child abuse and neglect cases to improve the investigation and prosecution of child abuse and neglect and the provision of children's advocacy center services to child victims and their families. The four regional providers that competed and received awards under the RCAC program are: Philadelphia Children's Alliance (Northeast), National Children's Advocacy Center (Southern), Children's Hospital of Minnesota (Midwest),

_

³ The CAC National Subgrant Program for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse Material under the OJJDP FY 2021 VOCA Children's Advocacy Centers National Subgrants Programs solicitation is supported by the Domestic Trafficking Victims Funds authorized under the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015 (Pub. L 114-22).

and Rady Children's Center (Western). In FY 2023, these grantees each received a supplement award of \$1,250,000.

Also in FY 2022, the TCAC program was competed and awarded to the University of Montana's National Native Children's Trauma Center, which operates the Native Children's Advocacy Resource Center and provides TTA to Tribes and CACs working to improve access and services for Native youth and their families. In FY 2023, the TCAC program received a supplemental award of \$800,000 for one year. The TCAC program also works in partnership with the RCAC TTA providers and supports NCA sub-awardees as well, through direct TTA provision.

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

VOCA Program	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Membership and	\$1,400,000	-	-	\$2,500,000 (3-	-	\$750,000
Accreditation Program	(3-year award)			year award)		
TTA for Child Abuse	\$750,000	\$2,400,000	-	-	\$2,700,000	-
Prosecutors Program		(3-year award)			(3-year award)	
TTA for Child Abuse	\$700,000	\$800,000	\$2,400,000	-	-	\$3,000,000
Professionals Program			(3-year award)			
RCAC Program	\$4,800,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000
TCAC Program					\$750,000	\$800,000
National Subgrant Program	\$9,889,799	\$10,835,750	\$15,387,563	\$18,317,104	\$19,583,455	\$25,674,791
National Subgrant	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000
Program for Victims of Child						
Sexual Abuse Material						
CAC Military Partnership Program	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$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 solicitations released by OJJDP has distinct and separate goals and objectives. These separate solicitations are designed to encourage collaboration and avoid duplication and include a requirement for program coordination. For example, the specific solicitation language in the FY 2022 Regional Children's Advocacy Center solicitation states the following: "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." In addition, in FY 2022 and FY 2023 solicitations, OJJDP included an expectation that all VOCA partners develop, maintain, and update a 5-year strategic plan and a related workplan to align efforts, maximize resources, and outline clear roles and responsibilities across the partners. The VOCA partners have made significant progress in this area, developing a draft strategic plan (soon to be released) and continuing to engage in the development of the workplan.

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, all 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. However, OJP 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 kickoff 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, NCA reports that 954 CACs nationwide served 380,494 children this past year and trained 1,598,005 people in child abuse prevention. Further, NCA reports a total of 773 fully accredited CACs in the United States. For purposes of data collection and analysis, NCA began collecting data using a uniform definition of rural beginning in 2020. All data reported are from the NCA 2022 Census Report and are collected every two years. Of the 773 accredited CACs, 309 reported being a rural CAC as measured by ZIP Code in accordance with the Department of Health and Human Services' Rural Health Information Hub,⁴ and 396 of the 954 total member CACs (which includes accredited, associate/developing, affiliate, and satellite members) reported as rural.

Subaward funding under NCA includes specific support for program expansion as well as in development and improvement of teleservices and equipment support to provide important resources for increased access and quality service, particularly in rural and remote areas. In 2023, 38.5 percent of the active NCA subawards (92 of 239 awards) were identified as rural.

_

⁴ https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/am-i-rural.

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 stand-alone CAC that satisfies all 10 criteria for a fully accredited CAC. Therefore, RCACs have begun developing strategies to increase access to the core functions of CACs in rural communities, services that are 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 40 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. To meet the needs identified by medical providers, particularly those in rural areas, online training platforms compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act 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. In 2023, the Western RCAC developed and disseminated a resource toolkit and a readiness and planning guide for state chapters and CACs for developing telemental health programs in their states. This resource is housed on their Telemental Health Resource Center website along with a variety of training opportunities, research, and resources on telemental health.

In addition to the general TTA that RCACs provide to all CACs in their region, RCACs also provide TTA designed specifically to address the needs of rural communities. Some TTA examples from recent years include:

- 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 consultations to executive directors on implementing evidence-based mental health services.
- Mental health peer consultation forums to provide peer-to-peer consultation for clinicians who have transitioned rapidly to telemental health service delivery in response to the pandemic.
- Targeted technical assistance to state chapters in varying stages of planning and implementation of statewide telemental health networks.
- Offering free and reduced-fee training for evidence-based mental health treatment in rural areas.
- Piloting a mentor program in the Western Region to partner newer clinicians with experienced clinicians to support the delivery of telemental health services to children and families.
- Hosting an ongoing webinar series for rural and remote CACs as well as webinars on telemental health.
- Managing a telemental health resource center launched in 2021.
- Developing 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.
- An All Nations Conference in Seneca, NY, to address the needs of Tribal CACs and Native youth.
- Scholarship support to attend comprehensive TTA opportunities for Tribes, such as the International Symposium on Child Abuse and Neglect.
- Customized and multimodal TTA for Alaska Native and American Indian populations.
- Conducting a needs assessment for child abuse professionals serving Alaska Native and American Indian children and families.
- Provision of 13 practice briefs for improving access to MDTs and CAC services for Tribes.

 Ongoing peer-to-peer network calls for child abuse professionals interested in expanding access to Alaska Native and American Indian children and families through developing and improving MDTs and CACs.

OJJDP will continue to support efforts to prevent and investigate child abuse and mitigate its negative impact by funding programs and TTA that promote a multidisciplinary approach. For more information about OJJDP and its child protection efforts, <u>visit ojjdp.ojp.gov.</u>