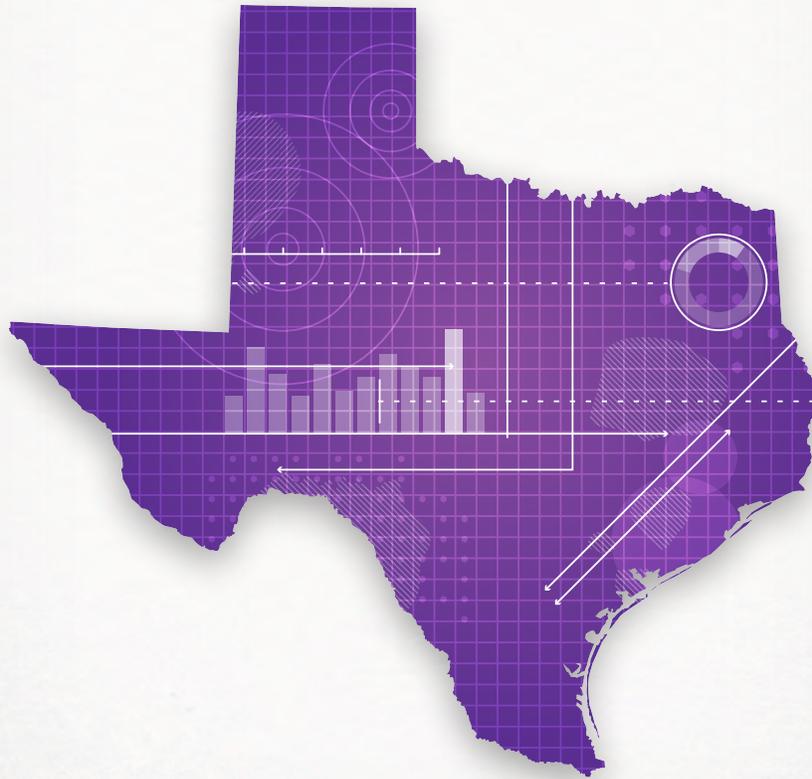


THE 2013 UPDATE TO THE TEXAS STATE PLAN

ACCESS TO SAFETY, JUSTICE AND OPPORTUNITY:

A Blueprint for Domestic Violence Interventions in Texas



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Texas Council On
FAMILY VIOLENCE



Over Thirty Years of Building a Safer Texas

Family violence threatens over 79,000 Texans each year.¹ As the second most populous state in the United States with the most counties, Texas represents a daunting challenge in creating a State Plan that can serve as a blueprint for family violence service availability. In an effort to continue Texas' statewide response to this critical issue, the 2013 update to the Texas State Plan provides in-depth insight into the availability of, and need for, family violence services across the state as seen through the eyes of a survivor of family violence attempting to seek services.

This project originated with a 2001 mandate by the Texas Legislature directing the agency now known as the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to develop and maintain a plan for delivering family violence services, commonly referred to as the 'State Plan.' The 2013 update to the State Plan had many components beginning with focus groups that the Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) conducted with executive directors of family violence programs from across the state in order to gain a deeper understanding of the unmet needs of underserved populations in Texas. Additionally, TCFV, with the support of HHSC's Family Violence Program, commissioned the Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (IDVSA) at The University of Texas at Austin to develop and collect information from 91 service providers across Texas via a 176 item structured questionnaire regarding the geographic distribution of core and additional support services, underserved populations, emerging initiatives, among other items. IDVSA and TCFV ultimately accomplished a 100% response rate.

Following the above mentioned process, TCFV identified its own remaining and unanswered policy questions related to how availability of services correlated to the need and how to best target the critical funds aimed to provide interventions that promote the safety of survivors and their children. In order to answer these questions, TCFV again collaborated with IDVSA to analyze a variety of statistics currently available in Texas on family violence; the additional investigation sought to gain a better understanding of the county-level needs for family violence services and the role demographics play in analyzing the need for services.² The findings contained in this summary and the full State Plan update, results from these cumulative efforts.

*"I'm fighting for my bright light."
- Survivor of Family Violence*

KEY FINDINGS

COUNTY COVERAGE

In Texas, programs stretch to provide services to a vast geographic area in order to reach as many survivors of family violence as possible. Although 66% of Texas counties have some form of physical access point for services, only 27% of these counties have a family violence shelter. The remaining 39% of counties have a physical presence via an outreach office, nonresidential center, or office in a partner location, which can be open regularly or on varying days of the week. Twenty-six percent (67 counties) offer access points via meeting a survivor at an agreed location, but a survivor must call for services first. Seven percent of counties (19) have no access point currently past meeting at the county line.³

CORE CHAPTER 51 & ADDITIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

With few exceptions, family violence programs offer the core comprehensive services outlined in Chapter 51 of the Texas Human Resource Code within their primary county, particularly those programs funded by HHSC. These services include critical supports for survivors such as access to emergency shelter and hotlines and advocacy services focused on the safety of the survivor. Surveyors also asked respondents

about the supportive services they offer to survivors in their community such as childcare, legal representation, and housing. In order to facilitate widespread access to the availability of these services, TCFV has created charts, as in past iterations of the State Plan, to allow survivors, funders, and other interested parties to assess the availability of these services available in their county. To learn more go to www.tcfv.org/resources/texas-state-plan.

UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Survivors who are limited English proficient represent one of the most critical underserved populations due to Texas' unique makeup as a state where the average percentage of residents who speak a language other than English in the home ranks much higher than the national average.⁴ In order to meet this need family violence programs strive to enhance their access to bilingual services. A majority of organizations, 84%, reported having a bilingual Spanish-English hotline. Of those, over half reported having bilingual advocates available on the hotline for over 75% of the time. All but two organizations reported having Spanish-English bilingual staff, and more than half of organizations reported the availability of bilingual services 100% of the time.

In addition to survivors with limited English proficiency, the State Plan process most often identified as underserved in Texas (in no particular order):

- Survivors with mental health and/or substance abuse concerns
- Communities of Color
 - African-American
 - Asian communities
- LGBTQ
- Men
- Youth
- Survivors from rural areas

This state-specific audit of communities allows for a directed approach to enhancing services to survivors from these communities; however, wide-spread consensus has developed that family violence centers must develop policies and procedures that create supportive and accessible services for all survivors of family violence who may be from an underserved population.

“Home is where you are safe.”
- Survivor of Family Violence

SUCCESS OF TARGETED INITIATIVES

In recent years the movement against domestic violence has targeted key initiatives in the move to intervene and prevent violence. TCFV has supported many of these pieces at the state level and the State Plan indicates that these strategic efforts have yielded strong results. For example, 80% of all respondents safety plan around survivor use of technology and 60% regularly offer financial literacy education. Expansion of primary prevention efforts further marks success occurring across the state.⁵ According to the State Plan, nearly one-half of all programs report that they integrate primary prevention strategies into all areas of the agency’s work and one third has staff dedicated to primary prevention efforts.

BARRIERS

The State Plan also asked respondents qualitative questions that focused on survivors’ unmet needs as well as potential barriers to accessing services. Respondents identified finances and housing as the most common barriers to safety for their clients indicating a need for further investments in these areas.

When asked the reasons organizations are not able to provide assistance to someone seeking services, an interesting dichotomy of response occurred. Along with capacity issues, respondents offered that they would either never turn a survivor of family violence away or that perceived eligibility issues (i.e.

caller is not a survivor of family violence) or past issues with the survivor’s behavior in shelter may prevent them from offering service. Because many survivors of family violence already experience barriers in leaving the abusive relationship, ranging from financial isolation to fear of retaliation from their batterer, this data indicates a need to work together as a state to ameliorate these additional barriers.

“We try to provide services to everyone who seeks our help.”

- Family Violence Program Advocate

AVAILABILITY AND NEED

This analysis showed that county-level characteristics related to family violence need might help to explain an increased need for funding. Above all else, the number one indicator of need stemmed from the population density of a county. For females, additional county characteristics indicate an increased need in rural counties, counties located on the Texas-Mexico Border, and counties with higher percentages of women aged 20-24. To review the full findings of this analysis and review state maps, go to www.tcfv.org/resources/texas-state-plan.

IN CONCLUSION

As Texas moves forward in addressing the complex needs of all family violence survivors across the state, effective funding solutions and resource availability present the greatest challenges. Funders, policy-makers, and counties should look to a dual approach of balancing the directions suggested by the 2013 State Plan update with their unique knowledge of a community as they strive to meet these challenges. Additionally, the needs of underserved populations and survivors of family violence should be at the forefront of all of Texas’s efforts to provide successful interventions that respond to, and prevent, family violence in our state.

1) Texas Health and Human Service Commission Family Violence Program. Family Violence Program Legislative Report 2012.

2) These statistics included the family violence service numbers collected by HHSC, family violence incidents as reported by the Texas Department of Public Safety, Texas-specific family violence prevalence statistics, and a variety of measures from the United States Census.

3) The 2013 data update shows that 8 of these counties now have some form of access.

4) United States Census Bureau. Texas State and County QuickFacts. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48000.html> (Accessed May 5th, 2013.)

5) According to the Prevention Institute, primary prevention is a systematic process that promotes safe and healthy environments and behaviors, reducing likelihood or frequency of an incident, injury or condition occurring.



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The Texas Council on Family Violence
promotes safe and healthy relationships by
supporting service providers, facilitating strategic
prevention efforts, and creating opportunities
for freedom from domestic violence.