

Minimum Service Standards for Sexual Assault Programs in Texas September 2014

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Executive Summary

The anti- sexual assault field is a grassroots movement which started in the 1970's when the first Sexual Assault Programs (SAPs) in Texas were founded in Houston and Abilene. Today, there are 84 cities in Texas where community members have established SAPs. Because these SAPs were created locally, they have each evolved differently, responding to the needs of their particular community and working with existing systems. Local SAPs remain strong, independent voices today. SAPs have evolved in unique circumstances, but there are commonalities across the field and there is consensus on some important facets of providing sexual assault services. This consensus is reflected in the current statutory requirements which identify the minimum services to be provided by SAPs in Texas. These minimum services are listed in Chapter 420 of the Texas Government Code and include:

- 24-Hour Crisis Hotline
- Crisis Intervention
- Advocacy
- Accompaniment to Hospitals, Law Enforcement Offices, Prosecutor's Offices and Courts
- Public Education

In many states across the country the components of the core (minimum) services of sexual assault programs are defined by law, by funders, or by state coalitions. However, until now, there has been no consensus on the basic components of the five minimum services. While all Texas Sexual Assault Programs (SAPs) currently offer each of the five minimum services, they exist in many different forms throughout Texas, offering varying levels and degrees of service to survivors.

Therefore, the intent of developing and distributing standards for rape crisis programs is twofold:

1. To ensure that every survivor in the state of Texas has access to a minimum level of consistent services regardless of demographic characteristics or location in the state; and
2. To provide a formalized framework for describing and defining the components of each of the five minimum services that must be provided by sexual assault programs in Texas.

Development of the Standards

In January 2014, the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA), with funding from the OAG, formed a committee comprised of TAASA staff, representatives from local sexual assault programs throughout Texas, representatives from the OAG, and other community stakeholders.

The committee met on the following dates:

- February 19-20, 2014
- April 29-30, 2014
- June 24-25, 2014
- July 29-30, 2014
- August 12, 2014 (conference call)

Committee discussions were robust and often highlighted the difficult task of providing sexual assault services. Committee members wrestled with developing standards that every sexual assault program in Texas could be held accountable to, regardless of agency size, location (rural, suburban, urban, border) and structure (dual service agency or stand alone sexual assault program). The committee hopes that one day, the services of sexual assault programs will no longer be needed, but until then they strive to provide the best possible services to assist survivors in their healing.

Acknowledgements

We greatly appreciate the members of the Standards Committee, and the agencies they represent, for offering their expertise, time and hard work toward the completion of this project. We are inspired by their determination to end sexual violence and assist sexual assault survivors, as well as their efforts to contribute to statewide policymaking efforts to improve services. In addition, we appreciate the support and contributions of Torie Camp, Consultant; Kris Bein, Assistant Coordinator of the Resource Sharing Project; and Annette Burrhus-Clay, TAASA Executive Director. Finally, the Standards Committee wishes to acknowledge the state sexual assault coalitions from Ohio, West Virginia, Illinois, Washington, California, Florida, and Louisiana that blazed this trail before us and graciously shared their standards for our review.

24 HOUR CRISIS HOTLINE

CRITERIA

- The SAP must maintain a 24 Hour Crisis Hotline for survivors of sexual violence to provide immediate, confidential, non-judgmental support, crisis intervention, information and referrals.
- A 24 Hour Crisis Hotline means a telephone line answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by trained Sexual Assault Program (SAP) staff/volunteers.
- The Hotline number must be accessible to the public via the SAP's website and in public directories that cover the SAP's service area, if available.
- Where advertised, the Hotline indicates 24 hour availability and specifies 'sexual assault' or indicates the hotline provides assistance to survivors of sexual assault.
- SAPs must ensure employees/volunteers provide 24 Hour Crisis Hotline services subject to confidential communication requirements in the Texas Government Code, Chapter 420, Subchapter D.
- Hotline calls must be answered immediately either by a SAP employee/volunteer or a 3rd party answering service and connected to a trained SAP employee/volunteer within 5 minutes. Hotlines must have at least one bypass feature in place to accommodate more than one call at a time (busy signal and call-waiting features do not satisfy the bypass feature). Bypass calls must be answered or returned by a trained SAP employee/volunteer within 15 minutes.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing 24 Hour Crisis Hotline services shall complete training that meets the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Requirements contained in the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Guide.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing 24 Hour Crisis Hotline services must be supervised by a SAP staff member with at least one year experience providing direct services to survivors of sexual violence.
- Hotlines must be equipped to respond to callers who are deaf, hearing impaired or with limited English proficiency.
- SAPs must maintain a current resource/referral list responsive to individuals affected by sexual violence.
- SAP employees/volunteers answering the Hotline must have the current resource/referral list in their possession.
- The SAP must regularly evaluate the 24 Hour Crisis Hotline and, as needed, make adjustments based on the findings.

CRISIS INTERVENTION

CRITERIA

- SAPs must provide Crisis Intervention to survivors of sexual violence.
- Crisis Intervention means an immediate, supportive response in order to reduce acute distress, to begin stabilization, and to assist in determining next steps.
- Crisis Intervention must be provided by trained SAP employees/volunteers.
- The SAP must provide Crisis Intervention 24 hours/day, 7 days/week via the 24 Hour Crisis Hotline and via Accompaniment to Hospitals, Law Enforcement Offices, Prosecutor's Offices and Courts.
- SAPs must ensure employees/volunteers provide Crisis Intervention subject to confidential communication requirements in the Texas Government Code, Chapter 420, Subchapter D.
- The SAP must provide Crisis Intervention on a walk-in basis during the SAP's regular hours of operation.
- The SAP employee/volunteer providing Crisis Intervention must complete training that meets the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Requirements contained in the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Guide.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing Crisis Intervention must be supervised by a SAP staff member with at least one year experience providing direct services to survivors of sexual violence.
- SAPs must maintain a current resource/referral list responsive to individuals affected by sexual violence.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing Crisis Intervention must have the current resource/referral list in their possession.
- The SAP must regularly evaluate Crisis Intervention services and, as needed, make adjustments based on the findings.

ACCOMPANIMENT to HOSPITALS, LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICES, PROSECUTORS' OFFICES, and COURTS

CRITERIA

- Sexual Assault Programs (SAPs) must provide Accompaniment to Hospitals, Law Enforcement Offices, Prosecutors' Offices and Courts.
- Accompaniment to Hospitals, Law Enforcement Offices, Prosecutors' Offices and Courts means in-person support, assistance and provision of information about crime victims' rights during the survivor's interaction with medical or criminal justice professionals at hospitals, law enforcement offices, prosecutors' offices, and courts. To qualify as an Accompaniment to a Hospital a minimum of 45 minutes must be spent with the survivor.
- Accompaniment to Hospitals, Law Enforcement Offices, Prosecutors' Offices and Courts must be provided by trained SAP employees/volunteers.
- The SAP must provide hospital Accompaniment services for survivors of sexual violence for a sexual assault medical forensic exam 24/hours day, 7 days/week.
- SAPs must ensure employees/volunteers provide Accompaniment subject to confidential communication requirements in the Texas Government Code, Chapter 420, Subchapter D.
- SAP employees/volunteers must provide Accompaniment services until they are no longer needed by the survivor.
- The SAP must dispatch an employee/volunteer to provide Accompaniment to a hospital within 15 minutes of receiving a request.
- The SAP must have a system in a place to accommodate multiple or overlapping requests for Accompaniment to a hospital.
- SAPs shall initiate, lead or be a key participant in a sexual assault response team. A sexual assault response team includes, at a minimum, the following core members who are first responders as identified in the Office for Victims Crime SART Toolkit: community-based advocates, law enforcement, and forensic medical examiners including sexual assault nurse examiners.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing Accompaniment must complete training that meets the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Requirements contained in the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Guide.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing Accompaniment must be supervised by a SAP staff member with at least one year experience providing direct services to survivors of sexual violence.
- The SAP must regularly evaluate Accompaniment services and, as needed, make adjustments based on the findings.

ADVOCACY

CRITERIA

- Sexual Assault Programs (SAPs) must provide Advocacy to survivors of sexual violence.
- Advocacy means providing assistance on behalf of a survivor of sexual violence with third parties (e.g., schools, employers, law enforcement agencies, housing authorities, healthcare professionals, prosecutor's offices, CVC).
- Advocacy must be provided by trained SAP employees/volunteers.
- The SAP must provide Advocacy 24 hours/day, 7 days/week via the 24 Hour Crisis Hotline and via Accompaniment to Hospitals, Law Enforcement Offices, Prosecutor's Offices and Courts.
- The SAP must provide Advocacy on a walk-in basis during the SAP's regular hours of operation.
- SAP employees/volunteers must orient survivors of sexual violence to their constitutional and statutory rights and assist survivors in securing those rights.
- SAPs must ensure employees/volunteers provide Advocacy subject to confidential communication requirements in the Texas Government Code, Chapter 420, Subchapter D.
- SAPs shall initiate, lead or be a key participant in a sexual assault response team. A sexual assault response team includes at a minimum the following core members who are first responders as identified in the Office for Victims Crime SART Toolkit: community-based advocates, law enforcement, and forensic medical examiners including sexual assault nurse examiners.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing Advocacy must complete training that meets the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Requirements contained in the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Guide.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing Advocacy must be supervised by a SAP staff member with at least one year experience providing direct services to survivors of sexual violence.
- The SAP must regularly evaluate Advocacy services and, as needed, make adjustments based on the findings.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

CRITERIA

- The Sexual Assault Program (SAP) must provide Public Education to increase knowledge of the dynamics of sexual violence, its causes and consequences, and of services available through the sexual assault program.
- Public Education means workshops, speaking engagements, and distribution of printed materials.
- SAP employees/volunteers must provide Crisis Intervention, information and referral to individuals making a sexual assault related outcry at Public Education events.
- SAP Public Education must use accurate information and statistics with citations.
- SAP Public Education must include efforts to identify survivors of sexual violence that might not otherwise be reached (i.e., underserved or marginalized populations) and refer them to services.
- Public Education must be culturally and developmentally appropriate to the audience.
- Public Education must be intentionally inclusive of underserved and marginalized populations.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing Public Education must complete training that meets the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Requirements contained in the OAG's Sexual Assault Training Program Certification Guide.
- SAP employees/volunteers providing Public Education must be supervised by a SAP staff member with at least one year experience providing direct services to survivors of sexual violence or providing Public Education.
- The SAP must regularly evaluate Public Education and, as needed, make adjustments based on the findings.

For additional information on sexual assault programs, training and technical assistance and with any questions, please contact the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault.

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