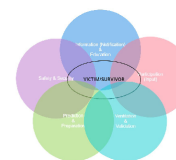


# National Gap Assessment Report: Prison/Parole Based Post-Conviction Victim Services



National Gap Assessment  
Prison/Parole Based Post-Conviction Victim Services  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Abstract:

The findings and recommendations in the full [Gap Assessment Report](#) are intended to identify a baseline snapshot of corrections-based and parole-based post-conviction victim services in the United States at the time of the project (2018-2020). The report provides a record of current practices and services provided by post-conviction victim service providers who were mostly housed in correctional agencies or paroling authorities and highlights areas of training and technical assistance needed by the post-conviction victim services field.

The National Gap Assessment was a component of the development of a Post-Conviction Victim Assistance Toolkit. The project vision was to improve and increase access to services available for victims of crime after the offender is sent to prison. Incorporating an initial national survey, a comprehensive 91 question national survey, facilitated focus groups, individual subject matter interviews and a relevant literature review, this comprehensive assessment provided copious data resulting in a sizeable volume of project related findings.

The quantitative and qualitative data of the gap assessment project were distilled into ten Key Project Findings, seven Recommendations to the Field, and four Calls to Action. Included in the appendices of the [Gap Assessment Report](#) is the data obtained through the Comprehensive Gap Assessment Survey (Appendix G), Comprehensive Gap Assessment Survey Findings (Appendix J), and specific Project Recommendations for post-conviction victim service providers and their host agencies (Appendix K).

*Note: Post-conviction victim services is abbreviated as PCVS throughout this document.*

### Key Project Findings:

**1. Needs and Responsivity:** PCVS programs endeavored to respond to the needs of victims in their jurisdiction through providing services that transcend the minimum services required by state statutes. The quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate there is significant room for improvement to meet the post-conviction needs of victims. PCVS programs have faced many challenges when expanding and maintaining services, especially during times of budget constraints, and programs have historically been pressured to provide only the very minimum required by law.

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**2. Input and Engagement:** Most PCVS programs and their host agencies do not provide victims of crime, a key stakeholder group, an opportunity to have a voice and participate in improving policies, procedures, and services within host agencies.

**3. Safety and Wellbeing:** Most PCVS programs and/or host agencies are deficient in meeting the safety and wellbeing needs of victims while offenders are incarcerated. Thus, missing a key opportunity for victim concerns and safety to be considered, addressed, and incorporated into offender case management and reentry.

**4. Access and Information:** Most PCVS programs operate during traditional government business hours. This can create barriers for victims to easily access information and services in a timely manner. In addition, PCVS program staff report other barriers including language challenges; confusion with multiple notification programs in their jurisdiction; lack of automation; difficulty in obtaining and maintaining accurate contact information for victims/survivors; and complete exclusion of some victims.

**5. Leadership and Influence:** Where PCVS programs were placed within the organizational hierarchy did not correlate to inclusion or exclusion of victim services program staff in the development of host agency strategic plans and policy.

*“Measuring outcomes for victims was seldom tackled or achieved.”*

**6. Training and Education:** PCVS programs exercised leadership in providing internal vital victim training despite their workload, lack of designated resources for these training efforts, and reported lack of agency support. Host agencies did not place a high priority on training for agency staff on impact of crime on victims and/or about services provided to victims by their agency.

**7. 21st Century Technology:** PCVS programs operating within governmental agencies utilized technology often described as old, outdated, and difficult to navigate. Significant challenges in quantifying and tracking the services provided were identified. Measuring outcomes for victims was seldom tackled or achieved. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, PCVS programs struggled with adapting their service delivery methods to ensure the safety and well-being of their staff. Reportedly this was due to the challenges of access to technology and governmental databases when working off-site. There is significant room for improvement in access to and utilization of technology for PCVS programs which would improve and expand services for victims and promote increased training opportunities.

**8. Victim-Initiated Restorative Justice Options for Victims:** PCVS programs reported strong bias within their host agencies to be offender focused on the development of restorative processes and programs. PCVS programs reported struggling with promoting internal host agency staff understanding of the importance of victim-centered restorative processes such as victim-initiated Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD). PCVS programs also reported a significant need for more training, technical assistance, and access to financial resources for developing and expanding victim-initiated VOD programs for victims/survivors who express a strong desire for these services.

**9. Reaching Underserved Victims:** Information obtained during the assessment affirmed there were still victims who did not fit neatly into a commonly identified post-conviction victim service category. Consequently, they were seldomly recognized and experienced decreased access to resources and services to predict and prepare for short- and long-term impacts of trauma and the entangling criminal justice processes. There was not consensus within PCVS programs regarding who should provide

services for these currently under-recognized and underserved victims/survivors. The Project Team identified four primary groups of under-recognized and underserved victims/survivors.

- A. Victims of Intimate Partner Violence
- B. Individuals with Wrongful Convictions, Factual Innocence, and Exonerations
- C. Staff Victimized While on Duty or Working
- D. Incarcerated Victims

*“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”*  
Rachel Remen

**10. Trauma-Informed Practices:** PCVS program staff reported they worked in agencies that were overwhelmingly not trauma informed and the nature of their work was often responding to victims in crisis. PCVS program staff who had previously worked in correctional settings but had not worked with crime victims reported that they did not feel properly equipped to appropriately respond to victims in crisis. Continuous exposure to trauma material (reading files and listening to the lived experiences of victims), organizational stressors, and external threats (such as a pandemic) overwhelm PCVS staff and contribute to compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout. Some PCVS programs reported staff work in remote locations in order to provide accessible services to victims. Isolation from colleagues presents additional challenges for staff and supervisors. PCVS programs need training, resources, and technical assistance for creating and maintaining trauma-informed and trauma-responsive working environments.

## Key Recommendations in 2020 which align with Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services Final Report (OVC 2013)<sup>1</sup>

1. National and state support is recommended to provide technical assistance to conduct continuous strategic planning in the post-conviction victim services field to effect real change and enhancements in services and outcomes for victims.
2. National leadership is necessary to assure that post-conviction victim needs are incorporated in the development of research focused on building a body of evidence-based knowledge, data, emerging trends, services and behaviors, and enforcement efforts.
3. National guidance, support, and funding of post-conviction victim services is recommended to ensure that:
  - victims’ constitutional and statutory rights are applied and enforced throughout post-conviction processes;
  - post-conviction agency policies incorporate victims’ needs and safety concerns; and
  - programmatic flexibility is safeguarded to address enduring and emerging crime victim issues specific to post-conviction processes.

<sup>1</sup> <https://ovc.ojp.gov/library/publications/vision-21-transforming-victim-services-final-report>

4. National and state funding, technical assistance, and support is recommended to improve and expand technological capacity for post-conviction victim services to be tele-ready to meet the 21st century needs and requirements of victims throughout all post-conviction processes of the criminal justice continuum. Safety and security of victim data must be prioritized in all post-conviction host agencies.

## Key Recommendations for PCVS Programs:

1. Every PCVS program should have a strategic plan that includes evaluation of services and outcome measures for victims.
2. The Model Standards<sup>2</sup> for Serving Victims & Survivors of Crime should be understood, adapted, and implemented by PCVS programs and their host agencies.
3. All PCVS programs must be funded appropriately to meet their strategic plan goals and objectives and to ensure conformity with model standards.

## Calls to Action:



PCVS programs should be supported locally and at the national level in developing processes that include victim's participation in focus groups and other informational gathering processes. The information gathered from victims/survivors must then be used to inform policy makers, funders, and criminal justice stakeholders about what victim/survivor needs are post-conviction. The needs identified should be incorporated into statutes and policies, used in the strategic planning processes of the PCVS program and the host agency, and must inform the development and implementation of services and programs.



Funding for PCVS programs must be allocated and dedicated. The funding, development, or enhancement of services for victims should be driven by strategic planning processes that center on the unique needs of victims in post-conviction processes. Post-conviction services should be dedicated and sustainable. PCVS programs should commit to accountability in programmatic services and outcomes for victims.



Technical assistance and support are essential for PCVS programs in the development of strategic plans that incorporate:

- o victim needs,
- o realistic and measurable programmatic goals and objectives to meet the needs of victims, and
- o victim outcome measurements.



National and state agencies must provide encouragement to incorporate the post-conviction needs of victims in future research projects and training and technical assistance offerings. Historically, data collection, research, technical assistance, training, and funding have been largely focused on pre-conviction victim needs.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/pubs/InnovativePractices/Practices\\_Best%20practices%20guidelines-508.pdf](https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/pubs/InnovativePractices/Practices_Best%20practices%20guidelines-508.pdf)  
*Executive Summary*