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Nearly 28,000 Survivors Sought Support for Sexual and Domestic Violence in 2025 as Funding for These Services Plummets

About Half of Domestic Violence Survivors Report Abuser Used or Threatened to Use a Gun Against Them as New Statewide Firearms Safety Laws Take Effect

Almost All Survivors Who Were Able to Access and Participate in Advocacy Services Report Increased Hope, Safety, and Confidence in Their Next Steps

Richmond, VA, July 13, 2026—Nearly 28,000 adults and children across the Commonwealth turned to their local Sexual and Domestic Violence Agency (SDVA) for help in 2025, according to a new report from the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance (Action Alliance), Virginia's leading voice on sexual and domestic violence.

The report, *Survivor Advocacy in Virginia 2025*, shows that survivors' needs for services persist even as the financial resources allocated to support them continue to shrink. In 2025 alone, 27,898 survivors received more than 309,000 hours of crisis response and advocacy services, and hotlines across Virginia were contacted via call, text and online chat 70,136 times.

Over the last 5 years, however, fewer survivors have been able to access the services they've sought. Since 2021, the number of people receiving face-to-face advocacy services has dropped by 13%, emergency shelter by 16%, and hotline contacts by 9%,

And for those seeking shelter and emergency housing, more survivors have been turned away because shelters are full. In 2025, 664 requests for emergency shelter from domestic violence survivors went unmet because programs simply didn't have room, a 63% increase since 2021.

These declines do not reflect a drop in need, but rather a drop in capacity. Since State Fiscal Year 2020, **Virginia has lost 54% of its federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding**, forcing SDVAs to eliminate positions and manage growing waiting lists while continuing to provide essential public health and public safety services.

This downward trend is especially striking given the report's findings on the effectiveness of crisis services when survivors are actually able to access them. Among survivors receiving services from SDVAs, 97% said they felt more hopeful about their lives, 96% said they knew how to plan for their

safety, and 95% said they knew where to find resources and how to take their next steps. Nearly all (97%) said they would recommend their local SDVA to a friend.

"Virginia's Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies have spent years doing more with less, and yet, sexual and domestic violence advocates continue to show up for survivors every day," said Kristi VanAudenhoove, Executive Director of the Action Alliance. "Resilience is not a funding strategy, though. SDVAs can only stretch so far before something breaks, whether that's a staff member leaving the field, a reduction in critical programming, or a survivor who calls and finds there's no room left to take them in. When agencies can no longer absorb funding cuts, survivors ultimately pay the price."

Dangerous Intersection Between Firearms and Intimate Partner Violence

The report reveals that, among survivors whose advocates assessed weapon use, about one in three (32%) sexual violence survivors and nearly half of domestic violence survivors (44%) reported that the person who harmed them used or threatened to use a firearm against them. These findings come only weeks after Governor Abigail Spanberger signed landmark legislation that fortified protections for survivors by strengthening firearms transfer laws and closing the "boyfriend" loophole, and they reflect a danger that is rarely random.

The overwhelming majority of survivors know the person who harmed them, and most violence occurred in the home. Almost all (97%) domestic violence survivors and 79% of sexual violence survivors reported knowing their perpetrator, and 94% of domestic abuse survivors and 64% of sexual violence survivors said the abuse occurred in their home. That proximity, paired with access to a firearm, helps explain why so many survivors reported their abuser made threats meant to terrify or control them. Nearly 1 in 5 domestic violence survivors (19%) reported that their abuser threatened to commit suicide or homicide, and 16% reported being strangled or having their breathing obstructed, both established warning signs of lethal violence.

"Advocates have known for years that most violence happens behind closed doors and at the hands of someone the survivor knows and trusts. Abusers use threats meant to terrify and control survivors, and when those threats are backed by a gun, abuse too often becomes deadly," said VanAudenhoove. "That's exactly why closing these loopholes was so imperative. It's not an abstract policy debate; it's the difference between a survivor who gets to leave and one who doesn't."

Prevention Efforts are Necessary

The report reveals that two-thirds (66%) of survivors who contacted Virginia's hotlines reported that their earliest experience of violence occurred before age 18. This finding underscores the need to teach youth about the dynamics involved in developing and sustaining a culture that nurtures and celebrates healthy relationships. In 2025, 20 Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies implemented 536 prevention strategies across the Commonwealth, mostly in schools and community-based settings.

"Crisis response is valuable and necessary, but it's equally essential to focus on stopping violence before it starts," VanAudenhoove said. "Prevention is how we change the conditions that allow violence to happen in the first place. It's vital that we invest as much as we can in our efforts to forestall violence, so that fewer survivors ever need crisis services at all."

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ABOUT VIRGINIA SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACTION ALLIANCE: The Action Alliance is Virginia's leading voice on sexual and domestic violence. As a network of survivors, sexual and domestic violence agencies, and allies, we work to strengthen Virginia's response to and prevention of sexual and domestic violence. We believe ALL people have the right to a life free of sexual and domestic violence. We strive to promote healthy relationships, create thriving communities, and build a more equitable world by centering racial justice, reproductive justice, and economic justice. For more information, visit <https://vsdvalliance.org/>

You deserve safety and support. Whether someone has hurt you in the past or is hurting you now, we're here to listen and connect you to resources closest to you.

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