



The University of Texas at Austin  
Institute on Domestic Violence  
& Sexual Assault  
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# Resources for Texas Sexual Assault Survivors

Inventory and Survey Findings on Services, Gaps, and Accessibility

## Executive Summary

See [full report](#) for additional information.

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A REPORT TO THE SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS' TASK FORCE,  
OFFICE OF THE TEXAS GOVERNOR

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# Acknowledgements

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Survivors center our shared work. IDVSA’s vision is for all people to live peaceful and prosperous lives in a world free from violence. This research brings Texas one step closer to actualizing that vision.

Read our full list of acknowledgments in Appendix A.

# Executive Summary

## LEGISLATIVE CHARGE AND PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Texas is a leader among states on the issue of sexual assault, and has promoted and funded the study of sexual violence as well as created the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force<sup>A</sup> (SASTF) through the Office of the Texas Governor (OOG). Sexual assault is clearly established as a public health problem affecting 6.3 million women and men in the state, or 33.2% of adult Texans over their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> This statistic comes from thorough research by the Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (IDVSA) at The University of Texas at Austin on the prevalence and impact of sexual assault on Texans, service providers, and the social and economic system at large.

The bipartisan passage of HB 1590 (86R)<sup>B</sup> signifies a continued commitment by Texas lawmakers to serve sexual assault survivors. Lawmakers and Texans alike acknowledge the seriousness of sexual assault crimes. With the research findings derived from this project, survivors and their families, professionals supporting survivors, and lawmakers can better see the landscape of resources, service provision gaps, and unmet needs across our state.

The specific project aims were to:

- Inventory the sexual assault services available in Texas.
- Assess sexual assault survivors' needs by region for the 11 Texas regions.<sup>C</sup>
- Develop a sexual assault services resource inventory.

IDVSA accomplished those aims by:

- Developing and implementing a statewide survey to a broad and diverse set of providers who serve survivors of sexual violence.

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<sup>A</sup> More information is available at: <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/sexual-assault-survivors-task-force-holds-inaugural-meeting-in-austin>

<sup>B</sup> Full bill text: <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/86R/billtext/html/HB01590F.htm>

<sup>C</sup> As discussed in the report, this study uses the 11 regions of the state as defined by Texas Health and Human Services Commission. For a list of the counties by region, see Appendix D.

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- Conducting a collaborative analysis of the survey findings with a specific focus on service availability and service gaps, and presenting those in this report to the OOG.
- Developing an HB 1590 Inventory List of the resources available to survivors across the state and delivering it to the OOG to inform the creation of a comprehensive statewide service directory in the future.

#### METHODS-AT-A-GLANCE

- The survey was developed and then administered from July–September 2020.
- IDVSA and project stakeholders collaboratively designed a voluntary and confidential 28-item survey.
- Lines of inquiry included: services provided, location, survivors’ unmet needs, challenges in providing services, and the impact of COVID-19 on services.
- Services were defined using statewide and legislative service standards. Forty-six (46) unique services are aggregated into eight (8) service categories.
- Researchers identified and invited approximately 4,000 organizations providing services to sexual assault survivors to complete the survey.
- Of those, 342 distinct service providers participated in the survey, representing all 11 regions of Texas, and 209 out of the 254 counties.
- The overall survey response rate was 28%.<sup>D</sup> Response rates varied among types of service provider. Key service providers, such as both rape crisis centers and children’s advocacy centers, had 70% response rates. Other entities, such as law enforcement and hospitals, had considerably lower response rates.

#### Research in the COVID Context

The COVID-19 pandemic became a reality in Texas during this project’s launch, and the enormous impact of the crisis on sexual assault survivors and service providers can hardly be overstated. There have been increased hotline calls from survivors, an immediate need to switch to telehealth service delivery, and new health and safety requirements for providers. More Texans have needed and asked for services, particularly Texans from vulnerable and isolated populations. In light of this, IDVSA researchers designed the survey to continue this critical work to move the field forward while also minimizing the added burden on participating service organizations.

#### What Was Measured and How

Figure 1 lists the aspects of service provision measured for each participating organization.

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<sup>D</sup> Extreme scores are typically dropped from the response rate calculation—and were in this research—as they can falsely skew the results.

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Figure 1. Aspects of Service Availability Measured

Adult and Child Sexual Assault Service Availability	Four-Point Evaluation to Consider Depth of Service Provision	Three-Point Evaluation of Availability of Service Provision During Pandemic
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Directly	<input type="checkbox"/> Completely meeting needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Available at normal levels
<input type="checkbox"/> By Referral	<input type="checkbox"/> Largely meeting needs of service-seekers with challenges reaching others	<input type="checkbox"/> Less available
<input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat meeting needs of service-seekers with difficulties reaching others	<input type="checkbox"/> Not available
	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely meeting survivor's needs	

### KEY FINDINGS

IDVSA researchers employed an iterative action research process, an outcome-based model in which data collection, definitions, analyses, and key findings are discussed and developed collaboratively in order to provide and OOG's SASTF and its Steering Committee with actionable, research-driven policy recommendations.

The following four major findings emerged from the data analysis.

- 1) **Need Eclipses Capacity.** Service providers across the system said that they could not meet the needs of survivors given the finite amount of available resources. While providers wish to provide services to fully meet all existing needs, they are far from able to. There are substantial unmet needs among survivors in several regions of the state given current service availability levels; this is true even among services and categories of services that are typically available all across the state, at least in a limited way in communities. These unmet needs were present prior to COVID-19 conditions.
  - Upper East Texas and Southeast Texas have the greatest unmet needs across all service categories.
  - There are the highest levels of unmet needs for Therapy, Outreach/Prevention, and Legal services.
  - The lack of survivors' access to therapists and lack of funding for therapists constitutes the largest unmet need across the state. There is a particular need for therapists with specialized trauma training or experience working with children.
  - There is a lack of transportation options and resources, especially in rural areas. The need for transportation is directly related to a lack of service coverage in certain areas.

- Across all organization types, the need for additional staff was noted as significant. Additional staff would greatly impact the ability of organizations to meet the challenges related to serving sexual assault survivors.

2) **COVID-19's Widespread Disruption and Forced Innovation.** The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a substantial systemic risk for service disruption, particularly in the rural regions of Texas. Service providers also expressed deep concern and fear about the increased risk and lack of contact with their most vulnerable and isolated clients as a result of the pandemic.

- The most commonly reported concerns related to COVID-19 included:
  - The lack of in-person client contact, which has resulted in complete loss of contact from some clients and difficulty in developing trust and rapport with new clients.
  - The challenges presented by telehealth modalities, both technically and therapeutically.
  - The increased financial needs of survivors and their families.
- While providing services virtually has many challenges, providers discussed innovating certain services, including moving to telehealth for adult counseling, and to virtual modes for advocacy, education, and outreach for the public and volunteers.

3) **The Greatest Unmet Need: Therapy.** Texas lacks access and resources for therapists, especially therapists with specialized trauma training or experience working with children.

- Therapists maintain maximum caseloads and have long waiting lists.
- It is a reality that there are few or no therapists available in rural areas.
- Nine (9) out of the 11 regions reported therapy as one of their top three services where there are unmet needs.

4) **Providers Discuss Challenges.** Providers answered open-ended questions and discussed persistent challenges for their organizations and clients they serve.

- Lack of transportation is a major impediment, particularly in rural areas. Travel time exceeds one hour for a SANE exam or trauma counseling.
- Emergency shelter and transitional housing options are limited in several ways.
  - There is a need for shelters to be available to, and their services designed for, survivors of human trafficking and survivors of non-intimate partner sexual assault.
  - Transitional housing programs have long waiting lists. Some survivors remain in shelter longer than is ideal due to a lack of transitional housing openings.

- Survivors need financial support for basic needs (e.g., clothing, utilities, and rent). If a survivor’s basic needs are not met, they cannot attend to healing their own trauma, supporting their children, or engaging with the criminal justice system.
- The need for legal aid is a considerable challenge.
  - There are long waiting lists for legal aid programs.
  - Nonprofits report that they need attorneys on site, in addition to their existing legal advocates.
  - Legal representation in high-conflict child custody cases was identified as a particular need among survivors seeking services.
- Service providers discussed insufficient staffing and specific needs for therapists, advocates, legal aid staff, and forensic professionals.

The IDVSA research team presents this report and the findings herein for review by the Governor’s Office SASTF. The SASTF and the members of its Steering Committee have been charged with making actionable policy recommendations based on the discoveries presented from this research. It is our hope that this report will impact decision makers in Texas so that, ultimately, service providers are able to fully meet the complex needs of sexual assault survivors as well as contribute to the prevention of sexual violence in our state.

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