
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Information Memorandum

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance
Washington, D.C. 20447

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TO: State, territory and tribal agencies administering the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program, and other interested parties

SUBJECT: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH: OPPORTUNITIES AND TANF RESOURCES FOR PREVENTION AND ACTION

REFERENCE: Title IV-A, section 402 (a)(7) of the Social Security Act; and Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 260 Subpart B.

PURPOSE: In recognition of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Administration for Children & Families (ACF) program offices have released a series of Information Memoranda (IM) and other guidance discussing the importance of addressing domestic violence situations and providing resources and support for victims and their families.

INFORMATION:

The purpose of this (IM) is to provide TANF agencies and their partners with information about domestic violence training, resources, and potential opportunities for collaboration. All programs supported by ACF, including TANF, have an important role in helping families struggling with domestic violence every day. This IM is released in partnership with ACF's Family and Youth Services Bureau, Division of Family Violence Prevention and Services (FYSB/FVPSA), which is celebrating 30 years as the primary federal funding source for domestic violence shelters, supportive services, and the national domestic violence hotline.

One in four women has been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner, while one in seven men has experienced the same at some point in their lifetime.¹ Federal programs supported by ACF help provide life-saving services and supports to victims of domestic violence and their children. Efforts to eliminate poverty, increase self-sufficiency of individuals and families, and revitalize communities are directly related to the prevention and reduction of domestic violence. Here are some key facts:

- Up to 74% of TANF recipients report recent domestic violence victimization, versus up to 31% of the general population.²
- Domestic violence is the third leading cause of homelessness among families in the United States.³

¹ *Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness*, U.S. Conference of Mayors (2012).

² Cheng, T. C. (2013). "Intimate partner violence and welfare participation: A longitudinal causal analysis". *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 28(4) 808–830.

³ *Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness*, U.S. Conference of Mayors (2012).

- Many adults first experience violence as children. Millions of children and adolescents are exposed to violence in their homes, schools, and communities, as both victims and witnesses, each year in the United States.⁴
- Women and men who experienced food or housing insecurity in the past 12 months reported a significantly higher 12-month prevalence of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner, compared to women and men who did not experience food or housing insecurity.⁵

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, which is recognized by advocates, service providers, and communities all across the United States. This October, we invite you to stand with concerned citizens, service providers, and domestic violence survivors to inform your agency's employees and partners about what they can do to end domestic violence, and to celebrate the advancement of community responses and prevention efforts.

In support of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, ACF would like to remind states, territories, and tribes that they have the discretion to use federal TANF funds and state maintenance of effort (MOE) funds to assist victims of domestic violence, consistent with TANF rules on providing benefits and services. Previous TANF guidance on this issue can be found on the OFA website:

- **TANF Program Instruction**
Use of Federal TANF funds and State Maintenance-of-Effort (MOE) funds to assist victims of domestic violence (TANF ACF-PI-2009-08) – <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/policy/pi-ofa/2009/200908/pi200908>;
- **TANF Program Policy Questions and Answers**
Domestic Violence Waivers – <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/q-a-domestic-violence-waivers>

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PREVENTION AND ACTION:

Many victims of domestic violence turn to TANF as a temporary economic bridge when leaving abusive relationships. Victims who improve their economic situation increase their likelihood of living separately from their abusers. Additionally, domestic violence victims and survivors often need a range of other services, including counseling, case management, child care, transportation, housing, education and job training, and other employment services. Options for supporting such efforts through TANF are highlighted below.

Family Violence Option

When TANF was enacted as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996, Congress acknowledged the special challenges facing victims of domestic violence and encouraged states to make special efforts when serving them. Under section 402(a)(7) of the Social Security Act, states may elect to implement a special program within their TANF program to serve victims of domestic violence and to waive certain program

⁴ Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S., & Kracke, K. (October 2009). *Children's exposure to violence: A comprehensive national survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁵ Breiding, M. J., Chen, J., & Black, M. C. (2014). *Intimate partner violence in the United States – 2010*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

requirements for such individuals. Each state has the option to certify in its state TANF plan that it has established and is enforcing standards and procedures to: (1) screen and identify individuals with a history of domestic violence (while maintaining their confidentiality); (2) refer such individuals for counseling and supportive services; and (3) waive program requirements, as appropriate, based on safety and fairness concerns. For example, a state could temporarily exempt domestic violence victims receiving TANF assistance from time limits, child support cooperation requirements, and work participation. This provision is commonly referred to as the Family Violence Option. While the majority of states have submitted certification to adopt the Family Violence Option, all states are encouraged to review and strengthen the ways they are addressing the issue of domestic violence under their TANF programs.

Additionally, section 408(a)(7) allows states to exempt up to 20 percent of the average monthly number of families receiving cash assistance from the 60-month limitation on federally-funded cash assistance by reason of hardship or if the family includes an individual who has been battered or subject to extreme cruelty. The definition of extreme cruelty includes acts, threats, or attempts of physical or sexual abuse.

Assessment Practices

TANF agencies are encouraged to have a system in place for assessing a family's domestic violence history during TANF intake and assessment. Many states use electronic or other structured assessment tools to help case managers screen for domestic violence and facilitate appropriate referrals.

The Online Work Readiness Assessment Tool (OWRA) is one example of a structured assessment tool. OWRA is a free, interactive, web-based resource that was created with funding from ACF through the TANF Tech Connections Initiative. In addition to identifying TANF participants' key strengths and barriers, the tool provides access to skill, career, educational resources, and other assessments, including those related to domestic violence, that states and counties may use to help participants become and remain employed. States that have adopted OWRA (including the District of Columbia, California, Maryland, and North Dakota) have customized the tool to fit the needs of their populations. When customizing TANF assessment tools such as OWRA, local domestic violence coalitions and other partners can be key resources to ensure that domestic violence questions and issues are explored with sensitivity and that appropriate referrals are generated with consistency. For example, the Kansas Department for Children and Families partnered with the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence to develop a series of TANF assessment questions around domestic violence issues and signs of abuse for caseworkers to understand and recognize.

Training Partnerships

Investment in meaningful training partnerships is critical to helping human services staff provide support to victims of domestic violence and their children when accessing TANF programs. Staff should receive training by professional domestic violence advocates on both the dynamics of domestic violence and appropriate interviewing techniques to encourage disclosure and safe access to services, such as safety planning. TANF agencies are encouraged to contact domestic violence coalitions or domestic violence shelter programs to provide training to all staff at least once a year, and many states have already established these types of training partnerships.

In addition to training all caseworkers, states like Colorado and Vermont provide more in-depth training to a few TANF workers to ensure that there are more specialized resources within the agency when needed. Vermont initiated a special pilot, training TANF case managers to recognize signs of domestic violence. After doing so, the statewide average of TANF participants identified as having experienced domestic violence and notified – where appropriate – of the availability of deferments from the work requirement tripled (going from an average of six participants per month to 19).

Incorporating trauma-informed care and support in your agency's policies and practices will help to address and lessen the many barriers experienced by families impacted by domestic violence. Additionally, mutually beneficial training partnerships can help local domestic violence advocates and service providers better understand and make appropriate referrals to programs such as TANF, Head Start, Child Support, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Other Allowable Uses of TANF to Support Domestic Violence Victims and Survivors

States can also use TANF funds to provide non-recurrent, short-term (NRST) benefits to victims of domestic violence as emergency support – for example, as lump-sum cash payments toward housing or other necessities. NRST benefits must meet the statutory criteria in 45 CFR 260.31(b)(1) as follows: (i) Are designed to deal with a specific crisis situation or episode of need; (ii) Are not intended to meet recurrent or ongoing needs; and (iii) Will not extend beyond four months. Benefits that meet these criteria do not count against the 60-month time limit on federally-funded cash assistance.

As noted in the TANF guidance titled *Use of TANF Funds to Serve Homeless Families and Families at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness* (TANF-ACF-IM-2013-01), federal TANF and MOE funds may be used to address the housing-related needs of families who are homeless or precariously housed – including families in these situations due to domestic violence – consistent with TANF rules on providing benefits and services to needy or eligible families. Families do not have to be receiving TANF cash assistance in order to qualify for housing services, although those receiving a cash grant may use TANF assistance to pay for housing.

Federal TANF or state MOE dollars can also be used to help families relocate to find safe housing or employment, within or outside the state where the family is receiving assistance.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE:

TANF programs should make every effort to assist families and children who are experiencing domestic violence by sharing national, state, and local hotline information or numbers for local domestic violence intervention programs, either directly or by posting in public spaces that are frequented by staff and families.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month provides a great opportunity for TANF programs to develop or reinvigorate community partnerships with providers who have expertise in helping victims of domestic violence. We encourage you to share these resources with your TANF agency staff, and to encourage each staff person to visit an online domestic violence resource

center, participate in domestic violence training, or attend a domestic violence awareness event this October.

National Hotlines

Free and confidential help is available for victims of domestic violence 24 hours a day. The following hotlines can help victims of domestic violence and sexual violence find support and assistance in their communities:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline – 1-800-799-7233
- National Dating Abuse Helpline – 1-866-331-9474
- National Sexual Assault Hotline (RAINN) – 1-800-656-4673

In addition to these national numbers, please ensure that your TANF agencies are aware of and connected to any state and local domestic violence hotlines in your jurisdiction.

Domestic Violence Coalitions

Each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa, have a FVPSA-funded Domestic Violence Coalition. These coalitions are connected to more than 2,000 local domestic violence programs receiving FVPSA funding across the country. Every coalition provides comprehensive training and technical assistance on a multitude of social, legal, and economic issues that affect victims' safety and well-being. Coalitions partner with government, private industry, non-profit organizations, faith-based communities, and other stakeholders to effectively coordinate and improve the safety-net of services available to victims and their dependents.

The domestic violence coalition working with programs in your community can be found at: <http://www.vawnet.org/links/state-coalitions.php>. Additional information about FVPSA domestic violence coalitions can be found at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/dvcoalitions>.

Other Online Resources

- [Domestic Violence: Understanding the Basics](#) is an online learning tool developed by FVPSA grantee the [National Resource Center on Domestic Violence](#) and [VAWnet](#), the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women. This one-hour interactive eLearning module describes the dynamics and common tactics that characterize domestic violence, provides an overview of the scope and impact on individuals and society, explores the underlying factors that allow domestic violence to exist, offers insight into the various risks and choices that survivors face, and shares how to be part of the solution.
- [Promising Futures Without Violence](#) was developed by FVPSA grantee Futures Without Violence. It is an online resource center of best practices for serving children, youth, and parents experiencing domestic violence. This website houses evidence-based interventions, program models, training curricula, and tools focused on safe services that build resilience and competence in children and parents impacted by domestic violence. The [Domestic Violence Evidence Project](#), developed by FVPSA grantee the [National Resource Center on Domestic Violence](#), houses a comprehensive evidence review of domestic violence core services, programs, and innovative practices.

- [Trauma-Informed Domestic Violence Services](#) is a three-part [VAWnet](#) Special Collection Series reflecting an integrated perspective that incorporates an understanding of the pervasiveness and impact of trauma, supports healing and resiliency, and addresses the root causes of abuse and violence. This Special Collection was developed by FVPSA grantees the [National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health](#) and the [National Resource Center on Domestic Violence](#).

Culturally Specific Resources

Nationwide there are a number of organizations that address the impact of domestic violence and implement culturally relevant trauma-informed services for ethnic and racially specific communities. These organizations include the following:

- Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community – <http://www.idvaac.orgw>
- Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network of Healthy Families and Communities – www.casadeesperanza.org/national-latino-network
- Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence – www.apiidv.org
- Women of Color Network – <http://womenofcolornetwork.org/>

National and Special Issue Domestic Violence Resources

Other national organizations address the impact of domestic violence and dating violence within specific issue areas, such as health care, mental health, substance abuse, child protection, and legal services. These organizations include the following:

- National Resource Center on Domestic Violence – www.nrcdv.org & www.vawnet.org
- National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center – www.niwrc.org
- National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health – www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org
- National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence – www.futureswithoutviolence.org/health/national-health-resource-center-on-domestic-violence
- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (resources related to child protection and custody) – www.ncjfcj.org/dept/fvd
- Battered Women’s Justice Project: Criminal and Civil Justice Center – www.bwjp.org

Relevant Peer TA Webinars

The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within ACF has previously provided technical assistance for TANF agencies and their partners regarding issues of domestic violence. These can be found on the Peer TA website at:

<https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=viewTopic§ionTopicId=5&topicId=5&tabtopic=5§ionId=1&nav=5#domestic>

- Domestic Violence and Economic Security (February 2012)
- Domestic Violence and TANF Partnership in Indian Country (June 2011)
- Overcoming Domestic Violence as a Barrier to Employment through TANF Partnerships (October 2010)

Contact information for the ACF Office of Family and Youth Services Bureau, Division of Family Violence Prevention and Services:

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We all know that collective action is needed to ensure appropriate responses and support for all families struggling with domestic violence. It is important for all ACF programs, including TANF, to partner with individuals, families, and communities to end domestic violence. This October brings the opportunity to build on the Department of Health and Human Services' 30-year legacy of partnering with communities to address domestic violence and to create even stronger partnerships focused on building futures without violence for the thousands of families we serve every day.

INQUIRIES:

Please direct inquiries to the TANF Regional Program Manager in your Region.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to supporting all children and families.

/s/
Susan Golonka
Acting Director
Office of Family Assistance