

Family Violence Prevention Fund

An Agenda for Action to End Violence Against Women and Children: Recommendations for the Department of Health and Human Services

The physical and sexual abuse of women and children remains a public health problem of epidemic proportions in the United States. At least one in four women will be abused at some point in her life, and more than 15 million children witness this abuse every year. About 1,200 women are murdered each year by current or former partners, and almost 500 women and girls are raped or sexually assaulted each day in the United States. Despite the enormous progress that has been made over the last 30 years, domestic and sexual violence remain an urgent crisis in our midst.

While we tend to focus on the dramatic cases of children abducted from schools or playgrounds, far more often it is intimate partners who perpetrate the most extreme and horrific acts of violence on those closest to them. Witnessing or experiencing abuse as a child is frequently the trigger that begins a young person's desperate journey down a path of school failure, involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, substance abuse, early and unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and injury. New research documents the strong correlation between experience with violence and abuse and chronic health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Most importantly violence and abuse can be prevented by intervening early in families where we see violence and engaging with health systems and child and family-serving programs to recognize and respond to women, children and men who are experiencing or perpetrating violence.

Specifically, we recommend that the Department of Health and Human Services:

Increase Early Interventions for Children Exposed to Violence

Children who witness and experience physical and sexual violence are at much greater risk for future victimization and perpetration, as well as delinquency, school failure, substance abuse, illness and early mortality. Therefore it is essential that we target our limited resources in ways that maximize effectiveness, namely by focusing on identifying and providing services to children and their caregivers who have been exposed to violence and abuse.

- Convene a White House Conference on Successful Strategies to Help Children Exposed to Violence.
- Support the expansion of the Family Violence Prevention Services Act during the upcoming reauthorization to include services for children exposed to domestic violence and include funding for children's services in the FY '10 budget.
- Fully fund the *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* and support the addition of strong language on the need to address domestic violence as a critical strategy in promoting children's safety, permanence and well-being.
- Fund and implement the domestic violence and child welfare collaborations created in the 2005 *Violence Against Women Act*.

Ensure that Health Care Reform includes Training and Research to Address the Health Effects of Violence and Abuse and Funding to Implement Best Practices

We must train health providers to identify and help victims of violence and promote a public health response to the issue on par with that addressing tobacco and HIV/AIDS.

- Fully fund the health programs in the *Violence Against Women Act*.
- Decrease chronic disease and mental health problems and promote safe pregnancy by supporting education, assessment and interventions to address violence and abuse in Medicaid, Maternal Child Health (MCH) and community health center programs (FQHCs).
- Decrease unintended pregnancy by supporting education, assessment and interventions for abuse in Title X family planning programs.

Focus on Prevention that Engages Men and Boys and Works with Fathers

We must teach boys early that violence against women and girls does not equal strength and help men who have been violent stop their violence and support them as nonviolent parents and partners.

- Build on the President-elect's Father's Day speech to convene a day-long meeting on successful programs that teach boys about healthy relationships. Highlight successful responsible fatherhood programs that empower men and help them be nonviolent parents and partners.
- Ensure that any federally-funded marriage and fatherhood programs include domestic violence protections and positive domestic violence partnerships.
- Redirect marriage promotion funding to support broader family strengthening programs, including collaborations between domestic violence and fatherhood programs that improve safety and well-being for women, men and their children.

Target Resources to Youth and Teens

As young people begin dating, their risk for partner violence increases as does their receptivity to messages around relationships. We must target this age group with messages that violence and abuse are unacceptable, and give them the information and skills to build healthy relationships and prevent unintended pregnancy.

- Shift funding from abstinence-only sex education programs to healthy teen relationship education programs that include honest, evidence-based information to help prevent teen pregnancy, as well as information and skills-building on how to value and develop healthy relationships and prevent dating violence.
- Redirect funding from the *Adolescent and Family Life Program (AFLA)* to instead support pregnant and parenting teens who have experienced abuse.
- Ensure that youth in group homes and those aging out of foster care receive services and information to address past violence and abuse and prevent early parenthood and family violence.

Maintain Funding for Victim Services

As we increase our attention on prevention and early intervention we must still maintain services for victims.

- Fully fund the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act.

Address Family Violence Experienced by Military Personnel/Veterans

Our military families are already seeing increased rates of suicide, family violence and homicide. To address this, the DOD, VA and HHS should follow through on recommendations included in recent reports on domestic violence and sexual assault in the military and the recent RAND report on PTSD and suicide. Though most of our recommendations specifically target the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, HHS has a critical role in ensuring that the civilian community has the knowledge and ability to address family violence experienced by military families.

- Ensure that partners of active-duty personnel and veterans are informed about domestic violence and sexual assault services within the civilian community and that those community-based services have the capacity to serve military families.
- Request additional discretionary funding to begin pilot projects in collaboration with DOD on addressing domestic and sexual violence in the military, including prevention programs and services for victims.

Address the Particular Challenges Faced by Immigrant and Refugee Victims

The *Violence Against Women Act* includes many vital protections for immigrant victims of violence and trafficking, however services remain inadequate to address the complex needs of these victims, including language barriers, social isolation, anti-immigrant zealotry and poorly designed services.

- Domestic violence programs funded through the *Family Violence Prevention and Services Act* should receive targeted funding for serving cultural and linguistic minorities, and culturally-specific, community-based organizations should be able to receive funding.
- Voluntary resettlement agencies that serve refugees should receive training and technical assistance on domestic violence and how to serve families in ways that address safety for all family members.

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