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Office for Victims of Crime

Responding to September 11 Victims: Lessons Learned From the States



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Responding to September 11 Victims: Lessons Learned From the States

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Message From the Director

On September 11, 2001, thousands of people going about their daily lives became crime victims in a matter of hours. As an unprecedented demand for assistance and compensation services unfolded, victim service providers across the country began to address the complexities of responding to an overwhelming number of victims in need of swift, compassionate, professional, and coordinated assistance. In particular, staff from victim assistance and victim compensation programs in New York, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and California realized that they would play an integral role in addressing victims' needs.

In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) provided these states with approximately $65.2 million in emergency and supplemental grant funds to assist victims, emergency responders, and their families. State Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) administrator agencies were awarded grants to administer the funds. The agencies provided myriad assistance and compensation services directly to victims, while coordinating with countless other agencies at the federal, state, and local level. State VOCA administrator agencies faced significant challenges and overcame numerous obstacles to provide comprehensive, timely assistance. Undoubtedly, valuable lessons can be learned from their experiences.

OVC and the state VOCA administrator agencies believe it is important for all state victim assistance and compensation programs, as well as other entities involved in responding to mass criminal victimization, to be aware of their experiences. To accurately document the states' challenges, lessons learned, and promising practices in responding to victims' needs, OVC supported the development of this report, which describes their efforts. OVC plans to use this valuable information to help inform program and policy development.

OVC knows that other state VOCA administrator agencies provided important victim assistance and compensation services that are also worthy of recognition. Thus, OVC would like to thank not only the state agency representatives directly involved in developing this report, but also all of the victim assistance professionals at the federal, state, and local level who devoted their time, expertise, and financial resources to assisting September 11 victims, emergency responders, and their families. We commend and thank you all for your valiant efforts.

John W. Gillis
Director
Office for Victims of Crime

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Executive Summary

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) awarded crisis response grants and subsequent appropriated funding to a number of state Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) administrator agencies to provide a broad range of services to victims of the attacks. At a meeting from December 7–8, 2003, those grantees had an opportunity to describe their experiences and the lessons they learned as they mobilized to meet the demand for victim assistance and compensation after September 11. This report reflects the frontline perspective on victim assistance services by these state VOCA administrator agencies and offers lessons learned to state, federal, and private decisionmakers for organizing effective responses to possible future mass criminal victimization.

Even though grantees had solid resources in place before September 11 for victim compensation and assistance, they were challenged by the severity and magnitude of victims' needs. They found that although there were similarities, the needs of victims of mass criminal events were unique compared with the needs of victims of other crimes. Displaced workers, individuals affected by subsequent economic fallout, and victims and responders who face unknown long-term health hazards require special services following mass criminal incidents. The grantees also discovered that existing systems for emergency management or terrorism planning were based primarily on a public safety model of disaster response that focused on saving lives and ensuring citizens' immediate safety. For the most part, these models were not developed to take into account the human impact of mass criminal incidents and did not recognize the social, psychological, and economic toll that might manifest itself in physical or emotional symptoms.

Furthermore, the grantees pointed to thorough planning and coordination of resources as vital components for enhancing victim assistance as well as a need for federal support to perform both.

Promising Practices

The state VOCA administrator agencies launched a variety of innovative strategies to quickly and efficiently meet victims' needs, and they credit several of these approaches with having a positive effect on September 11 victims' lives. From their perspective, the following practices brought substantial benefits to all victims of mass violence:

- Providing emergency training that combines preparedness for the physical, psychological, and emotional effects of a disaster.
- Assigning tasks before, during, and after a disaster that capitalize on the specific strengths of both professionals and volunteers.
- Setting up toll free hotlines for access to assistance, compensation, and referrals.
- Integrating victim compensation and assistance personnel into emergency operations centers.
- Establishing centralized victim resource sites at local family assistance centers.
- Adopting a case management approach to coordinating and delivering services.
- Supplementing compensation and mental health services with counseling on legal, financial, and other daily concerns of victims.

- Offering victims and emergency responders a range of stress management and psychological care techniques to use as the process of post-event trauma unfolds.
- Streamlining compensation processes to accommodate a high volume of claimants.
- Scheduling public events as outlets for community expressions of grief and opportunities for healing.

Lessons Learned

In responding to the extraordinary demand for victim services prompted by the September 11 terrorist attacks, state VOCA administrator agencies faced several challenges that warrant consideration for planning and implementing future response protocols. They identified the following challenges:

- Compared with emergency management and response to natural disasters, mass criminal victimization demands specialized response strategies that address the complex toll on people.
- The impact of the crisis and the scope of victims' needs were not anticipated, severely straining existing resources and jeopardizing effective compensation and victim assistance.
- Financial responsibilities of state agencies and local organizations toward victims were unclear because of the numerous governmental and charitable programs and resources available to victims.
- The lack of a centralized database that would provide information about payments made by government agencies and prominent charities complicated determinations of what expenses should be covered by state compensation programs.
- Identifying and communicating with victims was hampered because VOCA administrator agencies could not share information about victims with charitable agencies and other government programs that provided similar services and financial assistance. This was primarily due to privacy and confidentiality concerns.
- The diverse needs, beliefs, and lifestyles of special victim populations had an impact on service delivery.
- Victims who lived far from the attack sites felt isolated and confronted barriers to receiving services.
- Depression and fatigue affected victim compensation and assistance staff who had to balance the emotions and demands of September 11 victims with those of other victims.
- A lack of coordinated resources impeded smooth delivery of services to victims, and any collaborations that were formed after September 11 were based on personal relationships among service providers rather than on institutional procedures and/or agreements.

Recommended Actions

Input from state VOCA administrator agencies also revealed several potential actions that may improve the response to mass criminal victimization. Among the top recommendations were the following:

- Consider emergency management not only from a prevention or intervention perspective, but also from a standpoint that takes into account the aftermath of the crisis.
- Balance funding for prevention, intervention, and aftermath services.
- Set aside funding to support advance development of a disaster response structure.

- Integrate victim issues seamlessly into emergency preparedness planning, training, and implementation.
- Adopt standardized emergency management procedures to formalize collaborative agreements that foster efficient service delivery and ensure a high level of accountability, particularly with state agency leadership.
- Address the unique needs of victims of mass criminal events through continual care that is backed by rigorous planning, prompt victim identification, and thorough outreach.
- Take prudent, measured action to ensure adequate but appropriate services to optimize response to victims' needs, rather than following a "one-size-fits-all" approach.
- Balance the needs of victims of mass criminal incidents with the needs of other victims.
- Conduct data collection and evaluation to inform decisionmakers and providers about the nature, duration, and effectiveness of victim services.

Without exception, state VOCA administrator agencies agreed that carefully crafted federal action will complement and enhance the efforts of state agencies to provide comprehensive services to victims of mass violence and will further the capacity of all Americans to cope with any future domestic incidents.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks resulted in the largest mass victimization in American history, with approximately 3,000 deceased,[1] thousands injured, and scores of survivors of the deceased. The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), which had experience working with communities that responded to five previous incidents of terrorism and mass violence, was identified to administer funds and programs to assist victims of the September 11 attacks.

Within days of the tragic events, OVC allocated funds from its Antiterrorism Emergency Reserve to assist victims in the three states where the crimes occurred, ultimately awarding about $3.1 million in victim assistance funding and $13.5 million in victim compensation funding to the State of New York and the Commonwealths of Virginia and Pennsylvania. The governor-appointed victim assistance and/or compensation agency in each jurisdiction received OVC funding to coordinate with state and federal agencies in assessing immediate needs and assisting victims through crisis counseling and other direct services and to offset out-of-pocket expenses incurred by victims and their family members for medical and mental health services, funeral and burial costs, and lost wages.

In addition to the 120-day crisis response grants, the Department of Defense Appropriations Act of 2002 (Pub. L. No. 107-117) authorized $68.1 million to address immediate and long-term needs of the September 11 victims. Congress specifically directed OVC to award grants for counseling programs to assist victims, family members of victims, and crisis responders.

Because funds could be used to support community-based victim service programs that provided crisis counseling, crisis intervention, mental health counseling, and peer support, funds were awarded to five state victim assistance agencies that administer victim assistance formula grants awarded annually by OVC. OVC awarded grants to two state crime victim compensation programs, also the recipients of annual formula grant awards. Nine grants were awarded directly from OVC to nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations that did not receive funding from any other federal source. In total, 6 states and 55 nonprofit organizations received funding from OVC to assist victims of the terrorist attacks.

As of May 2003, nearly 22,000 victims, crisis responders, and family members had been assisted by state agencies and local programs using OVC funds. Approximately 37,000 victims were assisted through OVC's 24-hour, toll free call center with referrals for financial, housing, and counseling assistance. In addition, 1,800 victims and family members traveling to funerals and memorial services received support via OVC's Victim and Family Travel Assistance Center.

From December 7–8, 2003, OVC convened a meeting attended by representatives of state Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) administrator agencies that were involved in managing OVC grants to provide assistance and compensation services to victims of the September 11 attacks. State representatives from California, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia participated in the meeting, which was held in Baltimore, Maryland. Representatives from Massachusetts were unable to attend because of severe weather.

1 According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's *Crime in the United States 2001*.

The meeting of state VOCA administrators was designed as an opportunity for grantees and OVC to strengthen the partnership they established with the initial 120-day crisis response grants from OVC's Antiterrorism Emergency Reserve and the subsequent $68.1 million in funding from the Defense Appropriations Act of 2002.

Background

Before September 11, 2001, the grantee states had well-established resources, tools, and relationships for providing services to victims of crime. However, the magnitude of the terrorist attacks and the resulting mass victimization forced them to adapt existing systems rapidly on an unprecedented scale. The following is a brief description of the structure of each state's victim service program:

- California's Victim Compensation Program (VCP) is the largest in the Nation. Since its inception in 1965, the program has paid out more than $1 billion to victims of violence and their families. VCP provides help for California residents regardless of where the crime occurred and for nonresidents who become victims of violent crime within the state. The program also assists the victim's spouse, domestic partner, child, parent, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or household member. While victim advocates are not connected to VCP through funding or administration, they are the ambassadors of the compensation program at the local level. Crime victims in California's 58 counties and the City of Los Angeles turn to advocates in victim assistance centers to gain information about victim compensation. In addition to helping victims navigate the criminal justice system and access community resources, advocates help victims apply for compensation and act as representatives to the program on behalf of the victim or claimant. The Office of Emergency Services funds the victim assistance centers.

- The Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance administers the federal VOCA victim assistance program, providing funding for state and community-based organizations to offer free mental health counseling and a range of other specialized services for crime victims. Each year, more than $7 million in VOCA funds are distributed to more than 100 programs across Massachusetts to help survivors of homicide victims, children who witness violence, and victims of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, drunk driving, hate crimes, elder abuse, and political torture.

- New Jersey's Victims of Crime Compensation Board, established in 1971 as an independent executive branch agency, covers nonreimbursable medical expenses or loss of earnings due to crime-related injuries, as well as funeral expenses or loss of support from a deceased victim. The board provides secondary coverage for New Jersey residents injured by acts of crime outside the state. The board works closely with the state's Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy, Office of the Attorney General, which maintains victim-witness units in 21 county prosecutors' offices. The victim-witness units are staffed with trained professionals who accompany victims through every step of the criminal justice system from the initial phases of arrest and prosecution to the final outcome of a case, including the parole process. They also help victims obtain other assistance services.

- The New York State Crime Victims Board provides emergency awards and regular compensation to victims across the state. The board also supports grants to almost 200 programs in community-based organizations statewide that offer victim assistance services, including the YWCA and grassroots groups as well as local government, state, and national programs. The board funds 80 programs in New York City's five boroughs, including homicide counseling programs, victim/witness programs within prosecutors' offices, and hospital-based programs that provide counseling services.

- In Pennsylvania, the Office of Victims' Services is a component of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and promotes victims' rights and services. The office administers the Victims Compensation Assistance Program, which originated in 1976 and handles VOCA assistance grants for Pennsylvania. The Office of Victims' Services also provides statewide education to victim service professionals and outreach to the public as well as support for the Victims Services Advisory Committee and its numerous subcommittees.

- The Virginia Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund (CICF) was created by the Virginia General Assembly in 1977 to pay unreimbursed expenses of victims who suffer personal physical injury or death as a result of a crime. CICF is administered by the Virginia Workers' Compensation Commission and is funded by court fees, assessments on offenders, and restitution; it also receives federal funds. Since its inception, the fund has processed more than 25,000 claims from Virginians who have been victims of violent crime. CICF receives about 1,800 claims and awards approximately $3 million annually to assist victims with medical costs, lost wages, funeral expenses, and counseling costs that are not covered by any other source. Virginia administers victim assistance through its Department of Criminal Justice Services, which oversees victim assistance program development, management, and monitoring, a victim resource center, training and mentoring for victim service providers, and a toll free statewide crime victim assistance information line.

Purpose of This Report

This report documents the lessons learned from state efforts to respond to the diverse needs of September 11 victims. It presents a summary of promising practices, challenges, and lessons learned from select state VOCA administrator agencies whose firsthand experiences in addressing victims' needs may assist others in their strategic planning. The report also describes the scope and impact of victim services offered and underscores their importance to victims. It details post-September 11 patterns for organizing, identifying audiences for, developing timetables for, and implementing a comprehensive response to victims' needs while pinpointing best practices. The report can provide useful information for state VOCA administrator agencies nationwide, OVC leadership, and other federal, state, and local organizations as they plan and launch collaborative actions to respond to future mass criminal victimization.

Sources Consulted

This report is based on a review of a written summary of the December 2003 meeting of state VOCA administrator agencies, indepth interviews with VOCA administrators from the six states, and content analysis of a variety of internal and external documents from the September 11 state VOCA grantees.

Before the state VOCA administrators' meeting, participants were encouraged to prepare responses to a set of focused questions designed to prompt open discussion at the plenary and group sessions. Attendees were asked to consider details about the resources, tools, relationships, and other key variables that had an impact on victim services in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Highlights of the topics discussed in those sessions were presented in the *Meeting Summary Report of the September 11th Grantees Meeting for State VOCA Administrators*.

To continue the dialogue between grantees and OVC that took place during the state VOCA administrators meeting, a series of 10 indepth telephone interviews were conducted within 2 months of the meeting. VOCA representatives from each of the six states were interviewed to further explore the lessons learned from their perspectives.

Additionally, interviewees from California, Massachusetts, and Virginia supplied sample written documentation including memos, activity reports, performance reports, resource guides, letters, press

releases, advertisements, and program agendas developed or distributed by agencies that contributed staff and resources to September 11 victim assistance or compensation services. The documents supplemented the comments of meeting participants and interviewees and supported the key points they had made.

While the information obtained through these methods is substantive and informative, it reflects the experiences of only a limited number of states. Nevertheless, their experiences shed significant light on the current and emerging mass criminal victimization issues confronting state VOCA administrator agencies across the country and offer direction for planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Chapter 2

Lessons Learned From State VOCA Administrator Agencies

Until September 11, 2001, the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City had been the largest scale terrorist incident on U.S. soil, prompting an extraordinary effort to help victims. One of the lessons agencies learned from this experience was that victims of terrorism share many of the needs of other victims of violent crime, but they also face unique challenges, as do the victim service providers and allied professionals who respond to them.

Promising Practices

During a mass criminal incident, saving lives and ensuring citizen safety are the preeminent considerations. Subsequently, the response shifts to treating the effects of violence, as victims seek a variety of immediate, short-, and long-term services. As state VOCA administrator agencies began to provide those services to September 11 victims, a number of practices emerged that were particularly effective in helping victims stabilize their lives and cope with the impact of the event.

Training and Responder Preparedness

Emergency response training traditionally has focused on response to and recovery from the physical impact of a disaster. Therefore, some emergency responders were insufficiently prepared to handle the significant human impact of the September 11 events. As one interviewee put it, "We were just completely taken by surprise."

However, some states were able to launch a swift, efficient response to victims' needs with resources that were already in place, highlighting the importance of thorough advance training for victim service providers and emergency responders. One state activated its existing crisis intervention team whose solid training, professionalism, and performance enabled them to act as liaisons between victims and those who made decisions about compensation.

Other states rapidly mobilized post-September 11, capitalizing on professional alliances and personal relationships to set in motion a comprehensive response to victims' needs. One state funded a daylong training session at which representatives from numerous agencies identified their particular areas of expertise. With visual support from a large map, agency personnel were matched with a specific victim's family members based on geography and anticipated need. Another state trained military casualty officers who then supported agency staff in helping victims fill out applications for compensation.

In some states, training for emergency responders extended to addressing their own unique needs. Unlike direct victims, emergency responders are more likely to be exposed to the aftermath of a crisis for a longer time, which can build on past exposure to trauma. Also, emergency responders are not always taught how to cope with their own emotional responses to traumatic events and therefore may require more support services in the future. One VOCA administrator agency collaborated with a hospital to develop a series of training sessions about general health and wellness, which included both the physical and mental challenges facing rescue personnel.

Professional and Volunteer Alliances

All of the grantees relied on volunteers extensively to optimize victim assistance and compensation, particularly in the days immediately following the terrorist attacks. One state's crisis response team represented a mix of professionals

and volunteers who were prepared to mobilize quickly to reach a crisis site with many victims. They also were trained to recognize and respond to the broad range of emotions, feelings, and physical symptoms that traumatic victimization can generate.

One VOCA administrator agency relied on personnel from other state agencies who volunteered their time to complete tasks such as data entry for compensation claims or to answer telephones until midnight or later. Each state, some in coordination with the state bar association, also offered pro bono legal services to victims and surviving family members.

Hotlines/Helplines

All of the grantees established hotlines, some almost immediately, to give victims access to assistance, compensation, and referral information. One VOCA administrator agency collaborated successfully with its state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to plan, staff, and implement a hotline that was housed at DMV headquarters. Drawing on the DMV's extensive technology resources, the toll free line was established within 14 hours and could be staffed by up to 30 operators (both DMV employees and victim/witness agency personnel). DMV staff screened calls, making referrals as necessary to victim/witness staff, and developed a resource and referral list to direct callers to appropriate services. In addition, DMV's automated resources featured a database that reported hourly on the number of calls, the number of rings, the purpose of the call, and resolution of the call, as well as the name, address, and phone number of the caller.

Emergency Operations Centers

For police, fire, and medical personnel trained to respond to dangerous situations, setting up an emergency command center is common practice. However, because the September 11 events were also crimes, VOCA administrator agencies in states with crash sites worked with their respective state departments of emergency services, most for the first time, to establish disaster field offices. With federal, state, military, and volunteer resources also on hand, victim assistance and compensation experts staffed emergency operations centers. They also coordinated data collection and ensured the number of claims received and paid was incorporated into daily situation reports for governors and federal agencies.

Family Assistance Centers

Three state VOCA administrator agencies described the family assistance centers that served as a positive precedent and model for consolidating services in one location. Set up in public or private facilities near the attack sites, family assistance centers gave victims one-stop access to a host of resources, including attorneys to assist with custody and probate issues, insurance companies, charities, personnel from the FBI and the Social Security Administration, and representatives from airlines. Clergy, therapists, therapy animals, childcare (while families completed applications and other paperwork), DNA draw sites (where DNA samples were collected from relatives to help identify the deceased), and onsite memorials were also available at the centers.

Equipped with computer terminals and Internet access, family assistance centers were staffed by compensation and victim assistance professionals, including those from urban areas and those with significant experience working with families of homicide victims. They linked people with grief counseling and made referrals to local victim/witness agencies, recognizing the anticipated need for ongoing counseling for some victims. Military personnel and victim/witness professionals from other states supported local personnel who were handling regular caseloads in addition to processing September 11 victim claims.

Case Management

State VOCA administrator agencies unanimously and vigorously supported a case management model with assigned case managers who advocated on behalf of victims, allowing them to bypass many complications and barriers to receiving comprehensive services. Two states cited the

effectiveness of a case management model for coordinating and delivering services to September 11 victims. Following an advocacy case management approach, state VOCA administrator agencies developed individual recovery plans to help victims return to predisaster status as quickly as possible by providing referrals to counseling, support groups, legal services, immigration services, job training, placement agencies, and other resources that matched an individual's specific needs.

Case managers also handled professionally many of the emotionally draining tasks that families faced. In addition to collecting DNA samples and transporting families to assistance centers and memorial services, case managers arranged for such basics as food, heat, and clothing when paychecks stopped and other assistance had not begun. They also assisted local police with death notification when the FBI confirmed identification of a loved one's body part. They helped families access the daunting array of charitable organizations that offered financial assistance and other services, and they campaigned for scholarships and additional remedies for families with college-age children.

One state VOCA administrator agency appointed case managers to work exclusively with particular victim categories, such as people who were at the World Trade Center, or those who were directly affected by one of the plane crashes. Case managers worked closely with survivors, family members, and rescue workers to coordinate benefits and services with charitable organizations and alternative funding sources. They explained benefits and claims eligibility requirements, managed and attended peer support group meetings, facilitated pro bono legal assistance, and simply listened compassionately.

Counseling

Immediately after September 11, state VOCA administrator agencies, particularly those that followed the case management model, collected information about local, state, and federal resources that could provide practical assistance for victims. They identified financial support entities with whom they typically had not worked and devised resource lists that included a broad range of services, from attorneys who would donate pro bono services for handling compensation claims or immigration issues to volunteers from benevolent associations who would rake lawns.

Two state VOCA administrator agencies commented that although the practical resources developed and the relationships fostered were beneficial to families, they were unique to the events of September 11 and in their current format would not likely be useful in the future. They suggested that states create more formal, comprehensive mechanisms for coordinating with other agencies in an effort to safeguard against misinformation or inappropriate victim referrals.

Mental Health Counseling, Support Groups, and Community Healing Rituals

No one who witnesses or is victimized by mass violence is untouched by it. Accordingly, all state VOCA administrator agencies facilitated mental health counseling for primary and secondary victims of September 11.

Because victims were vulnerable in different ways to stresses associated with the disaster and experienced distinct concerns and reactions, mental health counseling took various forms. In addition to contracting for crisis and individual counseling, states coordinated and scheduled support groups that generated a sense of closeness among participants. These groups were instrumental in helping victims deal with grief, guilt, and other repressed emotions and in understanding the impact of trauma.

In a pilot project, one state VOCA administrator agency collaborated with a university trauma recovery center to host a series of regional support group meetings, monthly at first and quarterly beginning in 2003.

Several states reported that the structure of support groups was important to addressing the needs of survivors who had been at the World Trade Center compared with sessions for grieving family members. The optimum structure was

found by presenting some components for all attendees followed by breakout sessions for subsets of the entire group. Other states pointed to the need to fund children's programs in the aftermath of a crisis. According to some state VOCA administrator agencies, local mental health experts continue to note behavioral issues among children who lost a parent and the importance of providing them with special support.

Mental health experts found that although survivors of mass criminal victimization react differently to the grief and stress produced by the tragedy, public or private rituals, spiritually oriented memorial services, grief seminars or educational programs, and nonreligious ceremonies such as military honors can significantly contribute to a victim's recovery. While none of the state VOCA administrator agencies reported sponsoring community healing events, one agency spearheaded state legislation in 2002 to allow the compensation board to pay families for wages lost during travel to and from memorial services or government events honoring victims. The agency also scheduled support group meetings to coincide with a statewide Day of Remembrance and anniversary memorials that included interfaith services.

Compensation

Victim compensation programs had been longstanding in each state. However, for victims of September 11, it was a challenge for states to process the extraordinary number of claims, especially in those states where the events occurred. Approximately 3 years after the attacks, payouts of up to $25,000 per claim have exceeded $10 million in one state, primarily for loss of support, but also for mental health counseling for survivors and those who were either physically injured or directly threatened by the attacks. Several states worked cooperatively for the first time as they identified which had primary and secondary jurisdiction for claims. Additionally, because state compensation schedules differed, it was imperative to determine which expenses (medical bills or loss of support due to physical injury or death) were to be reimbursed.

Having expanded customer service units, states assigned victim compensation personnel to staff family assistance centers where they helped victims complete applications and determine unmet needs. To ensure high-quality service to all claimants, one state developed the *9-11 Call Center Resource Guide* for customer service representatives and temporary agency staff. Another state dispatched its existing mobile compensation program to a crash site and supplemented its grant with emergency services funds that allowed the program to hire additional staff. All states streamlined their conventional compensation procedures to expedite September 11 claims, and one state instituted an abbreviated application for urban search and rescue workers who had been deployed to attack sites. Another state was successful in initiating a relationship with the governor's office to pass emergency legislation to expedite compensation payments to victims.

Challenges to Meeting Victims' Needs

As state VOCA administrator agencies and their colleagues addressed the complex needs of victims, they identified and implemented response models that not only contributed to the recovery of those victims, but also could be replicated for other incidents. However, despite the immediate and long-term positive impact these services had on the lives of victims, the experiences of state VOCA administrator agencies highlight several challenges that merit attention as planning and implementation go forward.

Different Requirements for Compensation and Victim Services

The inherently unpredictable nature of mass criminal victimization distinguishes it from many natural disasters and has implications for preparedness and response. Government agencies and nonprofit organizations, particularly those in high-risk meteorological or geological regions, traditionally have emergency management plans in effect, but these focus primarily on the safety and operational response to natural disasters and neglect to address the human impact of a mass

criminal crisis. State VOCA administrator agencies cited the need to recognize that mass criminal victimization and natural disasters generate distinctive circumstances and response requirements. As one interviewee remarked, "[We were] in uncharted territory."

The events of September 11 prompted a response unlike any previous response to a disaster and presented a number of challenges for victim service providers. State VOCA administrator agencies discovered that even experienced mental health providers were not necessarily adequately trained to deal with people struggling with grief and posttraumatic stress disorder. In addition, the different requirements of mental health providers and compensation agencies proved problematic. Many mental health providers did not ask clients to divulge personal information to receive services. Compensation agencies, on the other hand, wanted specific information and documentation of victimization, as required by statute and grant reporting specifications, causing some clients to become angry or upset. Also, coordinating referrals was jeopardized in some states where unlicensed victim assistance providers who had training and experience in dealing with grief and posttraumatic stress disorder were unable to contribute to counseling projects managed by mental health organizations that required counselors to be licensed.

Difficulty Responding to the Massive Impact

Despite awareness of victim service efforts that were launched in response to the Oklahoma City bombing, the scale of September 11 overwhelmed localities. The terrorist attacks far surpassed the 1995 event in Oklahoma City, in impact as well as scope of victim services offered. State VOCA administrator agencies were called on to apply existing procedures, systems, and personnel to address an exponentially greater demand for services.

More than 700 residents of one state died, triggering over 600 claims for compensation. One state VOCA administrator agency distributed more than 400 applications at the family assistance center. Another served more than 350 residents, providing nearly $4 million in reimbursement, mostly for loss of income or support, to survivors, family members, search and rescue workers, and victims of hate crimes that occurred after September 11.

Little experience existed to establish and guide appropriate services for terrorist-caused psychological trauma. As a result, federal and state agencies providing compensation for mental health services varied in terms of eligibility criteria, in particular, whether a documented physical injury was a prerequisite for support. Programs struggled with determining whether rescuers and responders were eligible for compensation, as they were not direct victims of the attacks. In addition, some state VOCA administrator agencies report that even now derivative victims such as rescuers are still coming forward to submit claims.

Lack of Uniform Standards and Criteria for Financial Assistance

The development of financial projections and identification of federal, state, and private funding resources is an essential component of a comprehensive response to mass criminal victimization. The importance of economic planning is underscored by the experiences of state VOCA administrator agencies that were forced to organize in a few days an effort that normally would take months or years. They pointed to the need for adopting standardized criteria for agency funding and financial assistance to victims.

In one state, existing homicide bereavement programs were called on to expand services without additional funds. While they were regarded as the state experts at providing direct services to survivors, these programs were underfunded even as mental health programs generally enjoyed adequate funding.

Also, as agencies sorted out financial responsibilities and payout procedures, some of the first victims to apply for compensation received generous payments, while those who applied later sometimes had difficulty gaining compensation. With no central database that included financial assistance provided by the plethora of charities,

federal agencies and funds, and other state agencies as well as victim compensation programs, it was difficult to determine whether a specific expense or bill was presented to different sources for duplicate payment.

Victim Identification and Communication Issues

Once state VOCA administrator agencies and their colleagues launched services for September 11 victims, they were faced with defining which populations actually needed assistance and the optimum methods for contacting people to announce service availability. Identifying victims was difficult, as victims' names were not always shared among agencies due to confidentiality concerns. One interviewee recalled how staffers resorted to reading local newspapers to obtain names and other victim information, aiming to identify individual victims and victim groups whose needs were unmet.

All of the state VOCA administrator agencies admitted to struggling with determining how to provide the services victims needed without compromising their privacy or overwhelming them. For their part, many victims felt they were falling through the cracks, but at the same time, expressed feelings of vulnerability and reluctance to disclose personal information. In one state that did not have a crash site, an airport became the default gathering place for victims' families; however, despite vigorous outreach, the state VOCA administrator agency encountered barriers to connecting people with resources.

While many states streamlined filing requirements and reduced application paperwork, government agencies differed from private organizations on the documentation necessary for obtaining benefits. The result was that individuals could use multiple providers, without documentation, or receive duplicate compensation. Also, from a management perspective, unanticipated supplemental federal reporting requirements added to administrative burdens of agencies as they balanced the priority of September 11 victims' claims with trying to avoid delayed processing of other victims' claims.

Barriers to Serving Special Victim Populations

A comprehensive response to a mass criminal crisis recognizes the social, emotional, psychological, and economic toll on victims. Several state VOCA administrator agencies found that services also need to be sensitive to the cultural, ethnic, and language considerations of the community and address the diverse and unique needs, beliefs, and lifestyles of affected victims. Particularly in communities with a wide variety of cultures and languages, certain ethnic or cultural groups can be vulnerable in unique ways and can experience distinct concerns and reactions that require specialized resources. State VOCA administrator agencies also addressed the needs of individuals and communities victimized by post-September 11 hate crimes.

Geographical Issues

Interviewees discussed a particular challenge in providing appropriate services to victims whose home base was far from the crisis center sites. Two state VOCA administrator agencies reported that due to their geographic distance from the September 11 events, victims within their states felt out of the loop and experienced a sense of alienation stemming from people who did not consider their state affected by September 11. With no critical mass of survivors and family members in their home communities, these victims felt isolated because others did not understand what they were going through.

In one large state with a greatly dispersed victim population, travel time was a barrier to victims attending monthly support groups. The other state VOCA administrator agency affected by geography also had to address providers' concerns about boundary or territorial issues related to handling referrals to victim services.

Emotional Impact

State VOCA administrator agencies had to manage the complex sensitivities that emerge in citizen/service provider interactions as they withstood, and often internalized, the force of victim emotions. Some victims felt that their status as

September 11 victims superseded the needs of victims of domestic abuse, homicide, or other victims. Likewise, those other victims, who were sympathetic at first, grew increasingly impatient as all attention was focused on meeting September 11 victims' needs.

All state VOCA administrator agencies reported that depression and fatigue, in varying degrees, affected staff. However, because people are often uncomfortable with terms associated with mental health and mental illness, it was important to put stress management and psychological care techniques in a context that made people receptive to them. For staff, training designed to help "take care of yourself" was a useful method of psychological intervention.

Fragmentation of Service Delivery

Mistrust or miscommunication among agencies within a jurisdiction can lead to fragmentation or unnecessary duplication of services and can even hamper service delivery. The majority of state VOCA administrator agencies cited collaboration and coordination of resources as having a significant impact on service delivery. They underscored the importance of coordination among disciplines and emphasized the need for organizations to actively commit to working together, drawing on the expertise of previously nonallied agencies to deliver timely services to victims.

In some states, victim assistance had not been coordinated with victim compensation and, at the same time, both entities found themselves working with emergency management personnel with whom they had virtually no history of collaboration. One state VOCA administrator agency had to schedule meetings with federal agencies simply to gain access to buildings, particularly those not normally open to the public. State VOCA administrator agencies also had to work with federal law enforcement organizations to obtain victim lists that substituted for police reports and death certificates for families seeking compensation.

Because they often take different approaches to psychological intervention, state VOCA administrator agencies had to persuade some mental health professionals of the need for targeted counseling in the aftermath of mass victimization. Subsequently, mental health providers welcomed the opportunity to schedule training in crisis response and trauma and grief counseling, especially when they learned that the mental health departments and the state VOCA administrator agencies shared some clientele.

State VOCA administrator agencies agreed that relationships formed after September 11 were tied to individuals and overly dependent on particular personalities. Since then, however, formalization has been launched in some jurisdictions. One state has established a team of state agencies, coordinated by the emergency management agency and chaired by the state's victim advocate, to develop a protocol for working cooperatively in the future, addressing relevant issues, and assigning roles to handle immediate, intermediate, and long-term concerns. Another state reported that a similar collaborative model met with early enthusiasm but that recent disaster planning meetings were less well attended, casting doubt on whether awareness of victims' needs had been raised to the institutional level.

Chapter 3

Next Steps

State VOCA administrator agencies provided a broad range of crisis counseling; social, financial and emotional support; and referral services to September 11 victims. Their experiences reflect current best practices and identify areas for improved victim services. Their know-how lends valuable guidance to other state VOCA administrator agencies across the country and to decisionmakers for focusing expertise and funds on preparing Americans for mass criminal incidents. In addition, their input offers a framework for a strategic approach to developing multidisciplinary response protocols. The following outlines their identified next steps to ensure followthrough for enhanced services nationwide.

Develop a National Perspective on Consequences of Mass Criminal Victimization

Many government agencies have had emergency management plans in place that focus mainly on the safety and operational response to natural disasters but do not address the impact of a mass criminal crisis that can be felt over wide or multiple geographic areas. Recommended next steps include the following:

- ✦ Recognize the importance of comprehensive planning, despite the inherently unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of mass criminal victimization.
- ✦ Integrate a focus on victims' needs into national preparedness planning.
- ✦ Merge the response to natural disasters with approaches to managing criminal disasters.
- ✦ Promote mutual respect and collaboration among agencies with disparate focuses (natural versus criminal disasters) and modes of operation (handling safety and security versus handling people).
- ✦ Develop broad written procedural guidelines or models for a response to mass criminal victimization, and define required policies, procedures, and protocols and how they will be devised.
- ✦ Involve top leadership, particularly governors' offices, in gaining priority status for victims throughout a state's administration.
- ✦ Develop and offer disaster training that focuses on the human impact of mass criminal events as well as the physical effects.
- ✦ Act collaboratively as members of a community of responders, understanding that victim service organizations need to work in tandem.
- ✦ Address the geographical and territorial issues inherent in a national approach to assisting large populations of victims.
- ✦ Safeguard the integrity of services to all victims, and ensure that funding for mass criminal victimization does not proportionally outstrip funding for other victim services.

Prepare To Respond to Immediate, Intermediate, and Long-Term Needs

Survival, safety, food, and shelter are the primary response considerations during a mass violence incident, after which the desire for information

and the location and condition of family members and other loved ones are the immediate victim needs. State VOCA administrator agencies point to additional immediate, intermediate, and long-term services that can diminish the negative effects of mass violence among survivors. They suggested these next steps:

- Establish a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with individual state government and nonprofit organizations to provide immediate crisis assistance to survivors, their families, and community members.
- Look beyond states where events occur to account for all potential secondary victims and their ongoing needs and to assess where resources and services are dedicated.
- Design and deliver flexible services that do not conform to a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Develop a service implementation plan that adapts to ongoing and changing victim needs and allows for smooth adjustment of services.
- Build awareness of how post-event trauma unfolds over a period of time and how it demands a continuum of care for primary and secondary victims.
- Provide services over an appropriately long period of time because grief can unexpectedly return, even as survivors and families begin to stabilize their lives and cope with the impact of the event.
- Deliver services that address the financial and employment concerns that can impede recovery.
- Offer crisis counseling related to birthdays of victims, holidays, important family anniversaries, and the first anniversary of the event.
- Craft a community mental health intervention program targeted to reduce long-term impairment to those directly and indirectly affected by mass criminal victimization.
- Organize and schedule support groups for specific populations (e.g., parents who lost children), and expand services, such as offering childcare, to victims with highly specific needs.
- Educate police, fire, emergency personnel, and other responders about the potential effects they might experience from assisting victims of mass disaster and how these effects can last for years and have implications for responders' long-term reactions and the support services they might need.

Set Assistance Parameters

Mass criminal victimization generates a broad range of emotions, feelings, and physical symptoms that different individuals or groups can experience at different times. However, according to one state VOCA administrator agency, "If you're counseling 3 days a week 2 years later, it's not about this. Trauma-related things are more short-term than that. At some point, you need to draw a new line, because instead of helping people with recovery, you may be helping them relive their victimization." These comments highlight the difficult decisions state VOCA administrator agencies and victim service providers face as they help victims transition from immediate to long-term support and beyond. State VOCA administrator agencies recommended the following next steps:

- Develop personalized transition plans for moving from short- to long-term assistance, taking into account individual reactions to tragedy, grieving styles, and recovery rates.
- Incorporate a response to mass criminal victimization into existing service systems.
- Follow a realistic methodology for action that acknowledges that initial needs of victims might not be monetary but rather counseling, comfort, or support.

- Clarify which individuals and groups are eligible for expanded benefits and services (e.g., grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws).

- Delineate in advance who will offer financial support to victims as a first and last resort, what it covers, and at what monetary levels to avoid duplication of payments and ensure identification of unmet victim needs. Offer training and technical assistance to respective agencies.

- Formulate shared administrative systems between states and prominent charities, other state agencies, and federal sources of assistance so that information on payments to victims can be tracked and shared.

- Describe precisely what the mental health response to mass criminal victimization will be, as referral and long-term response can become problematic after the first few days following a crisis.

- Prepare a calendar for long-term services such as support groups.

- Determine appropriate intervals for followup interventions (e.g., 3 months, 6 months, event anniversary), and offer services such as crisis intervention and transportation associated with anniversary commemorations.

- Create "drop-in" sites for counseling and other services for citizens and rescuers affected by generalized fear ("walking wounded") when they do not fit into traditional categories of victims eligible for funded services.

- Expand the categories of allowable activities under federal grant guidelines to include the provision of respite care for family caretakers of those injured.

- Forecast funding requirements beyond available grants and balance funding allocations and services equitably between victims of mass violence and other victims.

Formalize Response Channels

All state VOCA administrator agencies spoke of the value of formal, standardized practices and procedures to enable agencies within, and across, jurisdictions to work effectively in cases of mass criminal victimization. In fact, one state victim compensation board is now a member of a statewide terrorism task force headed by the state's Office of Emergency Services. It includes the Department of Mental Health, Office of Criminal Justice Planning, Department of Transportation, and additional state agencies. Before September 11, the compensation board had no continuing relationship with the Office of Emergency Services. Afterward, the board gained widespread respect for having met the tremendous needs of victims. Now, as members of the task force, board representatives help inform and influence the planning and direction of disaster response.

However, other states report that while positive relationships among agencies were formed following September 11, there has been little follow-through. They formed relationships with people in mental health, emergency management, and other departments but not with the institutions. They are convinced that they would have to start from scratch in another mass crisis and that, while the personal relationships are advantageous, they would operate only if the same individuals were in the same roles. Therefore, state VOCA administrator agencies advised taking the following next steps:

- Hold a series of cross-agency meetings to develop objectives and identify strategies and methods for comprehensive disaster response.

- Draft a long-range implementation plan that clearly defines response roles and responsibilities to avoid duplication of services.

- Involve local disaster assistance in all planning activities. Federal and state preparedness and emergency management programs

notwithstanding, the immediate response to mass criminal victimization is generally carried out locally.

- Develop formal mechanisms for communicating with, hosting, and directing multidisciplinary teams of disaster response and victim service professionals and volunteers from other states.
- Integrate victim services formally into any emergency operations center used by public safety agencies to command and manage responders.
- Recruit and screen volunteers with the essential training credentials to perform specific jobs successfully, eliminating well-meaning but inexperienced or untrained individuals. Categorize and name the specific qualifications and skills sought.
- Develop volunteer guidelines to define responsibilities in relation to other responders and describe performance expectations of them during a mass criminal victimization.

Reach Out to All Victims

In addition to helping direct victims who suffered physical or emotional injuries related to the September 11 crisis, communities responded to secondary or other victims, many of whom lost their employment. However, state VOCA administrator agencies faced some difficulty in finalizing a definition of "victim" and in reaching some groups and individuals who ultimately were deemed eligible for assistance. They recommended the following next steps:

- Develop an instrument to identify potential victim groups resulting from specific types of mass crisis and their potential needs (e.g., evacuees from a chemical attack would not need long-term shelter, but residents displaced from a radiological attack might never be able to return home).
- Recruit and assign response personnel who are culturally sensitive to working with ethnic populations and who are trained to work with special populations such as children, older people, and people with disabilities.
- Establish standing contracts with diverse media to advertise hotline numbers, victim services, and other information important to victims once a mass crisis occurs.
- Activate an easily accessible national clearinghouse for information about charitable giving and services from corporations and foundations that offer scholarships, mortgage payments, counseling, children's services, and other types of support to victims and families as well as ongoing donation opportunities.
- Write and distribute regular newsletters to victims and families to update them on the status of issues such as compensation, support organizations, meetings, and events.
- Disseminate information via a secure group Web site that also provides a chat feature allowing survivors and family members to communicate.
- Take an active approach to reaching victims by visiting community meetings, church services, fire departments, and other sites where victim assistance and mental health staff can interact with victims.
- Offer debriefing opportunities to emergency responders and victim service staff to prevent emotional burnout caused by exposure to intense human pain and anger.
- Recognize that some individuals choose not to take advantage of victim services and that outreach by letter, telephone, or other means should not become intrusive or overwhelming.
- Acknowledge that all participation in victim services must be voluntary and that there is a limit to what can be done to help people.

Monitor and Evaluate Interventions

Systematic data collection and evaluation are essential to determining the effectiveness of intervention on behalf of victims of mass criminal incidents. Similar to the continuum of care that state VOCA administrator agencies referred to in discussing the immediate, short-, and long-term needs of victims, a continuum of evaluation is a rational model for assessing whether benefits and services were helpful to victims and will contribute to decisions regarding the scope, nature, and duration of assistance delivered. Interviewees urged the following next steps:

- Plan for data collection before, during, and after incidents of mass violence.
- Obtain details about current and anticipated reporting requirements of federal agencies to plan for and set protocols to capture necessary data.
- Research and draft evaluation protocols and reporting requirements.
- Determine the nature, format, and usage guidelines for evaluation instruments.
- Capitalize on existing technology resources (e.g., DMV automated systems) to establish a comprehensive database of victims, inquiries, and needs.
- Conduct surveys and schedule focus groups with general and specialized victim populations and victim service providers to—
  - Identify program components or activities that merit continuation, fine tuning, or abandonment.
  - Explore whether victims still experience the physical and emotional symptoms typically associated with traumatic events.
  - Ensure services remain responsive to the changing needs of victims.
  - Determine what is appropriate followup, for whom, and over what period of time.

Balance Planning and Response

All state VOCA administrator agencies concurred that despite extraordinary efforts and successes in addressing the incomparable needs of September 11 victims, focus on the human impact of mass criminal violence lags behind the concentration on prevention and intervention. They understand that institutions traditionally have a difficult time dealing with the needs of victims during a crisis and that it is easier, on many levels, to secure a physical target than to help people cope with mental anguish. A complete integration of victims' issues into emergency management has not been achieved. Some states report they have now just begun to catch up on September 11 applications for assistance and have not yet performed any disaster planning for future events. State VOCA administrator agencies suggest the following next steps:

- Incorporate victim services into disaster planning and response protocols, also taking into account the psychological consequences of such events.
- Establish a state emergency management or a governor's office antiterrorism task force as the lead agency to formalize planning and response channels and ensure built-in accountability.
- Encourage victim assistance and compensation staff to participate in developing and updating state preparedness plans.
- Assign equal importance to victim benefits and assistance and to safety and security issues in preparedness planning.
- Allocate funding evenly among law enforcement, fire, EMS, and other equipment-dependent activities, and crisis aftermath services.

- Revamp preparedness and response plans as community variables shift (e.g., housing trends, school trends, commercial versus residential distribution).
- Schedule regular training sessions for victim assistance professionals, mental health providers, and emergency management personnel to enhance collaboration among state agencies.
- Establish MOUs between state and local agencies and encourage participation of professional associations such as state chapters of psychological associations. Request assignment of individuals with specialized training in victim assistance, particularly those who have assisted families of homicide victims and have experience with death notification and funeral arrangements.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The information gathered from select state VOCA administrator agencies supports developing comprehensive interventions on behalf of victims of mass criminal incidents. Central to their experiences are several themes that transcend unique circumstances of particular states. They cite the critical need for preparedness planning that recognizes the dramatic human impact of mass criminal victimization and the value of integrating victim services seamlessly into disaster response. They also point to the importance of understanding the special needs and vulnerabilities of victims of mass criminal events, particularly their requirements for mental health and emotional support services.

State VOCA administrator agencies call for smooth coordination of services among federal, state, and local agencies and organizations and for formalizing collaborative relationships at the institutional level to define realistic policies, procedures, and protocols. Additionally, they recommend addressing geographical and territorial issues inherent to assisting large populations of victims, as well as creating centralized databases to track compensation and dissemination of services to avoid duplication of efforts.

State VOCA administrator agencies counsel thoughtful, prudent action in providing services to victims and encourage adoption of a case management strategy to ensure that services fit precisely the immediate, intermediate, and long-term concerns of individuals and groups. They also agree that carefully crafted federal action will complement and enhance the efforts of state agencies.

Overall, the experiences and insights of state VOCA administrators lend sound guidance to programming and funding authorities as they set priorities, allocate resources, establish protocols, and determine accountability criteria for these important initiatives in which all Americans have a stake.



Responding to September 11 Victims: Lessons Learned From the States

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