

The National Evaluation of State Victims of Crime Act Compensation and Assistance Programs: Trends and Strategies for the Future

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Abstract

This report presents the Urban Institute's and the San Diego Association of Government's national evaluation of victims' compensation and assistance programs funded in part with federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds. This study was sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) with funds from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). The purpose of the study was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of victim compensation and VOCA assistance programs at helping to deliver a seamless web of support to assist victims in their struggle to recover from the financial, emotional, physical, and psychological effects of criminal victimization. We approached this task through telephone surveys, site visit interviews, and focus groups with state administrators; members of oversight bodies; victim advocacy groups; VOCA-funded local service providers; victims who claimed compensation; and victims who accessed VOCA-funded direct service programs.

From 1986 to 2002, OVC has disbursed to state compensation and assistance programs over \$3.7 billion in collections from federal offenders into the Crime Victims Fund (CVF). These funds have supported direct payments to victims, survivors, and providers for crime-related expenses (compensation), as well as thousands of community-based direct service providers who assist victims of a broad range of crimes with a variety of needs (assistance).

We found that many compensation programs have enhanced their client-service orientation in recent years, developing innovations to improve policies and case processing and outcomes for victim claimants. We recommend that this trend be continued through ongoing expansion of services, which should be feasible with recently increased federal allocations as long as state budget crises and other recent trends do not negatively impact program budgets. Programs should continue to develop administrative activities, such as needs assessment, strategic planning, coordination, and automation, to enhance client services. Outreach to underserved and unserved populations through direct service providers can be very useful for cultivating eligible claims and assisting in claims processing. Streamlined procedures to improve case processing should be continued. Although most claims are approved, methods for explaining denials and appeals options when a claim is denied may need improvement.

State programs administering VOCA assistance funds and community-level direct service providers have been functioning well under difficult funding circumstances. Program clients who participated in our survey reported that VOCA-funded services met many of their needs and were very satisfactory. It should be useful for future efforts to focus on making funds available for victim services while providing stability in year-to-year allocations; providing additional support for state administrators to expand their administrative activities; allowing subgrantees to access VOCA funds for critical administrative activities such as coordination efforts; addressing direct service programs' operational challenges, such as staff burnout, limits on usefulness of volunteers, and burdensome reporting requirements; and expanding direct services to serve

unserved and underserved victims, and to address victims' unmet needs, including needs for justice system advocacy, needs assessments and service referrals, and financial counseling.

Coordination between compensation and VOCA assistance programs, and among VOCA and other victim service funding streams, is critical to ensure efficient program operations and effective services to victims. Coordination can occur through such means as cross-training of compensation and assistance staff and provision of referral materials and other resources, and collaborative involvement in other agencies' decision-making processes.

Executive Summary

Victims of crime must struggle with a wide variety of physical, psychological, emotional, and financial problems caused by the crime they suffered. Victims may be left with physical injuries; the need to improve security measures or even move to avoid being victimized again; feelings of fear, anger, grief, and even shame; bills to pay for medical, counseling, and funeral services; lost income from missing work due to the crime, the time needed to get medical or other services to help in the recovery, and the time to participate in the criminal case; and long-term or permanent loss of support due to the victim's death or disability. Fortunately, resources are available to help many victims recover, and there are various sources of funding for these resources. This report presents a detailed examination of programs supported in part by one major federal funding source, Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds.

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) administers the Crime Victims' Fund (CVF) established by the 1984 Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). Collections into the CVF come solely from fines, fees, and penalties imposed on those found guilty of federal offenses; no tax dollars are involved. OVC has disbursed over \$3.7 billion from the CVF in formula grants to state victims' compensation and assistance programs from 1986 to 2002. These funds have supported direct payments to victims and providers for crime-related expenses, as well as thousands of community-based direct service providers across the nation who assist victims of a broad range of crimes with a variety of needs. These include law enforcement- and prosecution-based victim advocates, domestic violence programs, rape crisis centers, child abuse programs, programs for homicide survivors, and programs for victims of drunk driving, hate crimes, elder abuse, and many others. Despite this level of investment, no broad-based research has yet documented how the funds are managed and how well they are put to use.

To this end, OVC provided funding to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), who commissioned The Urban Institute and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) to conduct a national evaluation of state victims' compensation and assistance programs supported in part with VOCA funds. The goals of this evaluation are to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of state programs at helping to deliver a seamless web of support to assist victims in their struggle to recover from the financial, emotional, physical, and psychological effects of criminal victimization. This study and another study on victims' needs and help sources grew out of a workshop on victim research sponsored by NIJ and OVC in 1997.

The evaluation had several phases and gathered information from state administrators; advocates, members of advisory bodies, and others who provide input on state program administration; local service providers; and victims who have accessed compensation and assistance services. Getting input from stakeholders at various levels allowed us to examine the effects of state policies on local service delivery and how these policies, relationships, and coordination issues impact victims. Our methods included a phone survey of all state compensation and assistance administrators; site visits to six states to interview state

administrators, members of oversight bodies, and local VOCA-funded assistance providers; focus groups with assistance program clients; and phone surveys with compensation claimants and assistance clients. The six states that hosted the in-depth analysis – California, Idaho, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Vermont, and Wisconsin – were selected to represent diversity on a number of administrative, demographic, and geographic factors.

Prior research, program standards, and recommendations for future developments helped frame the issues for this research and provided an evaluative lens through which to view the research tasks. This report presents policy and practice information obtained from our research, and offers recommendations for improvements to policies and operations. This report is comprehensive, including all research tasks, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Victim assistance and compensation programs serve different functions, use different operating procedures, are often administered by different state agencies, and may serve different groups of victims. In this executive summary we therefore have separate sections on each of these programs. Each section presents an integrated summary of all our work on that program. Issues of coordination between the two programs are discussed in the final section of the executive summary.

CRIME VICTIMS' COMPENSATION

Crime can leave victims and their families with bills for medical, counseling, and funeral services; with lost wages from missing work to receive services or participate in the criminal justice system; with long-term or permanent loss of support for the family because the victim was killed or left disabled; and with the financial costs of a number of other consequences of the crime, such as the need to improve security measures or even move, to avoid repeat victimization. Some victims have means to meet these expenses, such as private insurance policies, employment-related benefits, or access to public benefits. However, many victims cannot pay crime-related expenses on their own. Crime victims' compensation is available to some of these victims, so that they do not have to bear the financial burdens of crime. Compensation was the earliest public response to victims of crime, with the first program established in 1965. Compensation programs are run by state governments with state and federal funding; all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and three territories now have compensation programs. Compensation is housed in a wide variety of state agencies, including independent agencies, various criminal justice agencies, human service agencies, labor agencies, and financial administration agencies.

Compensation programs make payments to victims, their survivors, or those who have provided services (such as hospitals, mental health counselors, or funeral homes) necessitated by the crime. These programs are funded by allocations from the federal Crime Victims Fund (CVF), administered by OVC, and by state funds. Like the CVF, which is offender-generated revenue, most of the states raise their funds from criminal offenders rather than tax revenues.

Federal allocations have exceeded \$1 billion from 1986 to 2002, with annual amounts increasing by about 400 percent over this period. In 2002, the average allocation to states was \$1.7 million, and the median amount was \$630,000. Allocations for FY 2003 will rise sharply from 2002, since the federal payout formula – a percentage of state expenditures – increased by half, from 40 percent of state expenditures to 60 percent, under the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001.

The Use of Compensation Funds

Both federal and state laws and guidelines govern how compensation funds are used. OVC guidelines provide that federal funds are for victims of state and federal violent crimes with injury (physical or otherwise, at each state’s discretion), and for certain counseling services to victims of nonviolent crimes. Federal funds may be used for medical/dental expenses, mental health counseling, funeral and burial costs, economic support (lost wages and loss of support), and crime scene clean-up expenses, but not for property losses. Compensation programs must promote victim cooperation with the reasonable requests of law enforcement authorities, and may not deny compensation because of a victim’s relationship with the offender, except to prevent unjust enrichment of the offender.

The states stipulate further that compensation may be denied to victims whose “contributory misconduct” played a role in the crime. All states treat compensation as the payer of last resort, so that all other means of meeting crime-related expenses must be exhausted for compensation to be awarded. The states also impose claim filing and law enforcement reporting (to document that a crime occurred and to encourage cooperation with the justice system) requirements, but the specifics of these requirements vary from state to state. States also vary on the types of losses that are eligible for compensation, with some states going far beyond federal provisions to cover a wide variety of crime-related expenses (such as moving expenses, replacement services, travel expenses, rehabilitation services, attorney fees, some property expenses, and pain and suffering in three states).

Compensation funds are used mostly to pay the types of expenses provided under federal guidelines. In 2001, nearly half (47 percent) of compensation awards, averaging across states, were for medical/dental expenses. Economic support (lost wages and loss of support) accounted for 20 percent of payments, and funeral/burial expenses averaged 13 percent. Mental health expenses averaged nine percent of payments. One-third of the states use compensation funds to pay for sexual assault forensic exams. Only eight percent of payments, on average, are for “other” types of expenses allowed by state regulations. These are cross-state averages; the exact amounts do of course vary a great deal from state to state.

Compensation serves victims of a broad range of crimes, with a heavy emphasis on violent crimes. The states average 55 percent of awards for assaults, including both domestic and non-domestic assaults.¹ Homicide accounts for 18 percent of awards across the states, on average.

¹ Statistics on the numbers of claim paid indicate that 18 percent of claims are for domestic violence-related crime.

Five percent of compensation funds are spent on sexual assault claims, averaging across states, and another eight percent are spent on child abuse. Drunk driving claims account for an average of four percent of state payments; robbery accounts for two percent; and other crime types receive eight percent of payments. Again, the exact distribution of funds across crime types varies a good deal from state to state.

All but two states impose a cap on the amount that can be paid to claimants, and many states have caps on categories of expenses within the overall amount (such as medical, lost wages, and so on). The overall caps vary widely but average around \$35,000 (the extremes are \$5,000 and \$180,000). Only catastrophic injury claims come near the maximums; the average claim is about \$2,800 per claim across states. In 2001, the states and territories paid a total of \$367.5 million in over 147,000 claims.

Program Standards and Goals

In 1996 the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards (NACVCB) developed standards for program operations in four key areas. These include:

- Outreach, training, and communication to recruit eligible claims from a broad range of victims, and to work effectively with victims and advocates in the claims process.
- Expedient and accurate claims processing, so that eligible victims may receive funds promptly and in accordance with compensation regulations.
- Good decision-making on claims, to ensure that the mission of serving crime victims is implemented in a fair and consistent manner.
- Sound financial planning to promote long-term financial stability while paying claims as fully as regulations allow.

OVC sponsored a broad-based and wide-ranging examination of the victim service field, including victim compensation, which produced the landmark *New Directions From the Field: Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century* (OVC, 1998). In this work OVC made similar recommendations for program management, and additional recommendations to improve coordination with victim assistance programs, and to expand benefits and reduce requirements.

These earlier efforts helped to provide a framework from which we approached our task of describing and evaluating how well policies and operations function to serve victims, and to offer recommendations for future developments. The following sections integrate the findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the various research activities we implemented – the national survey of all state compensation administrators in 1999; two rounds of site visits for in-depth analyses of compensation in six states through interviews with program administrators and staff, members of oversight bodies, advocacy groups, and direct service providers; focus groups with clients of VOCA assistance programs, in which compensation issues were discussed; and a survey of over 450 compensation claimants to get the clients' perspectives. The presentation is organized around major themes of program policies and operations.

The Mission of Compensation Programs

Compensation programs have a dual mission: to meet victims' financial needs as fully as possible, while also complying with regulations limiting payments to certain conditions and guarding against misuse of public funds through fraud or abuse. Our administrator survey and site visit interviews indicated that many programs are adopting a client-service orientation, emphasizing the goal of meeting victims' needs more completely by identifying obstacles and developing innovative solutions. Program requirements, such as law enforcement reporting or claim filing deadlines, are being relaxed to allow more victims to be served more completely. Some states will allow reports to other agencies, in order to verify that the crime occurred while still serving victims who are reluctant to report to law enforcement. Claim filing deadlines can be waived under certain circumstances that may delay victims' ability to file for compensation, such as long period of secrecy often surrounding chronic crimes occurring during childhood. Cumbersome case processing procedures, such as verification requirements, are being streamlined to serve victims better. For example, some states are being more proactive in their attempts to obtain verifications necessary to comply with program regulations, and have consequently seen an increase in the number of claims approved for payment and a decrease in the time it takes to process those claims. Some states are raising overall or categorical payment caps to better meet victims' needs. One area in which cap increases may be particularly needed is funeral/burial costs, since these expenses may come closest to program caps.

These efforts are paying off in high levels of client satisfaction. Our survey of claimants found that they were generally satisfied with the process and outcome of their experiences of compensation programs; the average score on a satisfaction scale ranging from 12 to 24 was 21.8. Claimants with the most positive perceptions of the compensation experience were those whose claims were processed more quickly, and with more claimed expenses paid. White female claimants were also more satisfied than male or minority claimants, even accounting for the effects of other factors associated with the claim. This finding seems worthy of further examination.

Financial Planning

Since 1997 OVC has allowed a four-year obligation period, so that compensation administrators have the year of award plus the following three years to spend federal funds. Our 1999 survey found that many state administrators make use of this flexibility, and are able to expend the funds during this period. This provision is likely to become even more useful in the immediate future, when FY 2003 allocations from OVC rise sharply from FY 2002 allocations, because of the recent change in the payout formula. However, some states which had been in sound financial health in the late 1990's are now finding themselves facing challenges to their fiscal stability. In more recent years many states have developed severe budget crises, which may make compensation funds potentially open to "raids" by state legislatures to fund other types of programs. In addition, crime rates seem to be rising again after a ten-year decrease, healthcare costs are increasing rapidly, and public and private insurance coverage is less likely to

meet costs (NACVCB, 2002). It will be critical for compensation programs to protect their allocations and continue to grow the programs, so that they can continue to fulfill their mission of meeting crime victims' financial needs.

Program Management

While the goal of compensation is to provide payments for crime-related expenses, some funds must be used to run the programs if they are to be well-run. OVC guidelines allow state administrators to use up to five percent of their federal allocation for administrative activities, and support for these activities may be available from state funds as well. Our 1999 survey found that about half the administrators used this allowance to its fullest extent, but the other half did not make use of it or made very little use. Site visit interviews shed some light on this finding: those who did not use the federal allowance may have had support from other sources, they may have felt that diverting funds from direct payments would be a political misstep, or they may have felt that all funds were desperately needed for payments.

The administrators' survey and site visit interviews indicated that administrative activities generally focus on "basic" activities such as staffing, training, and office equipment. More "advanced" administrative activities, such as strategic planning, needs assessments, coordination, and the development of operational manuals and technology, are less widely in use (although there are of course exceptions). Those states that did undertake these activities found them to be very useful.

More administrative activities and more advanced administrative activities could benefit compensation programs and the victims they serve. While the overall federal allocation for 2003 will increase by about 50 percent, the proportion of funds that can be used for administrative activities will remain stable at five percent. The actual amount of funds available for administration will increase when the overall allocation increases, but the percentage remains stable at five percent rather than increasing proportionately to 7.5 percent. This means that states will have more funds to manage with only the same proportion of administrative funds. Some states do use the administrative allowance and find it useful but insufficient; these states may find it even more difficult to improve program operations when they have more funds to award without a proportionate increase in support for program management.

Outreach and Communication

Since victims' compensation is not a household name like workers' compensation is, it is critical for victims and those who work directly with them – law enforcement, prosecutors, advocates, health care providers, counselors, and so on – to be familiar with the compensation program and how it works. The more familiar they are with compensation, the more likely it is that a larger number of qualified claims will be submitted and benefits paid. Most compensation programs reported providing training to service providers, especially victim advocates and

criminal justice personnel. One state, for example, has recently developed a special training unit that offers a number of training opportunities and resources to a wide range of providers. It is important to familiarize new providers with compensation, and it is also important to keep providers abreast of changes in policies and procedures. We visited one state in which a number of policy changes had recently been made to improve client service. However, the providers in that state that we spoke with were not familiar with the changes, so the information they provided to victims was not up-to-date, and victims may not have been as well-served by compensation as they would if their providers were operating on more current information.

Compensation programs may also interact directly with victims. Many programs have toll-free statewide numbers for victims to call, and some have hired staff to serve as victim liaisons. These staff may not only assist victims with the compensation process, but may also provide useful information and referrals to help victims meet other needs. One state reported an innovative approach to working directly with victims, through personal meetings to explain the program's decision and allow opportunity for input when claims are denied for contributory misconduct.

The claimants we surveyed generally reported learning about compensation in a timely manner, but since we only talked to those who did apply for compensation, it is certainly possible that a number of potentially eligible claimants never learned of compensation or learned of it too late to apply. The most common referral sources were victim service programs, the police, and prosecutors, and some victims never access any of these agencies so may not be likely to learn of compensation without direct outreach from compensation programs, or referrals from other providers with whom they do have contact.

The majority of compensation administrators indicated that a number of groups of victims may be underserved, including members of demographic categories and victims of certain types of crimes. Comparisons of characteristics of our survey sample with victimization statistics indicated that victims of assault, younger victims, male victims, and minority victims might be less likely to access compensation than would be expected. It is possible that eligibility criteria may account for these patterns, and these criteria may or may not be amenable to changes designed to reach more of these victims. It is also possible that outreach to these groups could be improved to increase their representation among claims.

Claims Processing

Once a victim learns of compensation, there is a process that must be activated to file for benefits. All states require an application form and the verifications needed to ensure compliance with program regulations. They must document that an eligible type of crime occurred, that the victim's misconduct did not contribute to the crime, that eligible types of expenses were incurred, that there were no other sources of payments for these expenses, and so on. Victims, and advocates assisting them with the claim, may have to provide police reports,

bills for services, insurance statements, employment verifications, death certificates, marriage licenses, children's birth certificates, and other relevant documents. This can be a burdensome process for people traumatized by violent crime and pressured by mounting debts.

State laws or constitutional amendments often require law enforcement or prosecution staff to assist victims with compensation claims, and VOCA-funded assistance providers are mandated to help victims with compensation. About half the claimants in our survey sample received services, often a broad range of different types of help, usually from victim service providers. Despite the fact that half the claimants did not receive assistance with the claim, few claimants reported needing assistance they did not receive. However, with claim approval rates near 90 percent in our survey sample, two-thirds of surveyed claimants still reported a median of \$600 in unrecovered losses. Since many of these losses were for types of expenses covered by compensation, but for which they did not file claims, the claimants may have needed more assistance than they realized.

Claim processing time averaged ten weeks for our survey sample, which is well within recommended timeframes for efficient program operations. Three-quarters of the claimants in our survey indicated that their claim was processed within a reasonable amount of time, and since case processing time was a key determinant of overall satisfaction, this is a strong endorsement of program operations. Streamlined verification procedures are likely to be responsible for shorter processing times, since the verification segment of case processing was reported as the most time-consuming in our survey of state administrators.

Claim Outcomes

Claims can be approved in whole or in part, or denied on any of a number of grounds. In general approval rates are high; they were 87 percent in our survey sample. However, when claims are denied there may be barriers to effectively conveying information to claimants about reasons for denials and appeals options. Our survey found that only half the claimants with full or partial denials reported being given reasons for denials, and 16 percent reported receiving information on the appeals process.

One reason that claims may be denied is contributory misconduct issues. While this is not the most common reason for denials, it is one of the trickiest, since it may require judgments on a case-by-case basis. Our administrator survey found that states' approach to this issue varies considerably, with some states requiring causal connection between the victim's illegal behavior and the crime to justify denials, while other states would deny claims when the victim was engaging in illegal behavior even if it was not causally connected to the crime. Three-quarters of the states have written policies to guide these difficult decisions.

Recommendations for Compensation Program Development

Our research findings indicate that compensation programs are generally functioning in accordance with identified goals and standards. They seem to be performing the most essential activities to promote effective program management and financial planning; outreach and communication; claims processing; and decision-making. Programs place a high priority on serving victims as the underlying mission, and are taking proactive steps to provide high-quality client services in a number of areas. Useful directions for future developments may include:

- *Service expansion where funding allows.* Many states will have significantly more funding available in FY 2003 and the coming years because of the increase in the federal payout formula. These funds are needed because of rising crime and decreasing insurance coverage to meet increasing health care costs. As long as the funds remain dedicated to victim compensation and program budgets are not negatively impacted by state budget crises, programs may be able to continue the trend of increasing caps, expanding benefits, and reducing eligibility criteria to serve victims more completely.
- *Program management.* Advanced administrative activities are very helpful to those programs that have undertaken them. While funding for these activities is likely to continue to be in short supply, those programs that can access such support are likely to benefit from needs assessments, strategic planning, coordination, automation, and related activities. Technical assistance from OVC and others with expertise in these areas may be needed to help administrators explore these new areas in productive ways.
- *Outreach.* Compensation programs provide training and resources to service providers who work directly with victims, in order to cultivate eligible claims and enhance claim processing. Outreach to victim service providers and criminal justice personnel should continue, to orient new staff and to keep existing staff current on policy and program changes. Outreach should also emphasize a broader range of service providers to reach broader groups of victims who may have been historically underserved, including groups who work with racial, ethnic, language, or cultural minorities. Direct communications with victims can also be enhanced by having victim liaisons on compensation program staff, and by innovative approaches to interacting with victims in a sensitive fashion on delicate issues, such as contributory misconduct denials.
- *Claims processing.* Many programs have made great strides to reduce burdens inherent in the application process, such as more proactive verification procedures to increase approval rates and decrease case processing time. Case processing is likely to see further improvements as advocates and other service providers are better trained in compensation policies and procedures, and can provide better assistance to victims.
- *Claims decision-making.* While approval rates are high, special efforts may be needed when claims are denied to help claimants understand why their claims were denied and what their options are. Again, better-informed service providers may be

able to assist victims whose claims were denied, so that they can take additional steps if appropriate.

VOCA VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Victims of crime may need crisis intervention, emotional support, system advocacy, and help with emergency and longer-term needs for safety and shelter. These needs may be met by family, friends, and other social supports; by privately-funded providers such as counselors in private practice; or they may be met by formal victim assistance programs. Victim assistance programs are based in law enforcement agencies, prosecutor's offices, or private non-profit organizations such as child abuse programs, rape crisis centers, domestic violence programs, MADD programs, programs for homicide survivors, programs for victims of hate crimes, programs for elderly or disabled victims, and so on. These programs are supported from various federal funding streams, from state funds, and from private sources such as United Way and other charitable foundations. Our study examined VOCA-funded victim assistance programs to assess how VOCA funds are managed by state administrators and how they are put to use at the community level. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the five territories receive VOCA assistance funding from OVC, as part of the formula grant distributions from the CVF. About 40 percent of the approximately 10,000 local assistance providers receive support from VOCA, along with many other sources in most cases.

OVC allocates these funds to state administrators, who may be housed in a variety of different types of state agencies, for distribution to community-level direct service providers. OVC issues guidelines governing the administration of funds at the state level and the use of funds by community subgrantees. As specified in 1997 guidelines, state programs must award at least ten percent of funds for domestic violence victims, ten percent for sexual assault victims, ten percent for child abuse victims, and ten percent for underserved populations, with the remainder at the administrators' discretion. State programs have four years to obligate federal allocations, and may use up to five percent for administrative activities and one percent for training activities (with the rest to be distributed to community-level agencies). OVC guidelines specify that VOCA funds awarded to community-level service providers can support public non-federal and private non-profit organizations that provide a 20 percent match and do not charge victims for services. VOCA funds can only be used to support direct services (although this requirement may be relaxed with new guidelines currently under consideration), and providers must assist clients with compensation.

From 1986 to 2002, OVC distributed \$2.7 billion to state VOCA assistance programs. Annual allocations increased at a fairly steady level until 1995, but then increased steeply during 1996 and 1997, dropped significantly in 1998 and 1999, and increased again in 2000. The fluctuations which marked the years from 1996 to 1999 were caused by fluctuations in collections into the CVF and allocation formulas that provide all formula funds not needed to meet the compensation payout to the assistance programs. In response to these fluctuations,

Congress began capping allocations in FY 2000, with remaining funds to be held in the CVF for allocation in future years. Since then allocations have stabilized, showing relatively modest increases from 2000 to 2001 and from 2001 to 2002. However, expected allocations for 2003 are expected to be seven percent less than 2002 allocations, because of the increase in the compensation payout formula and earmarks and set-asides for other uses, despite an excess of about \$638 million in unallocated collections (after expected 2003 allocations).

The Use of VOCA Assistance Funds

In 2002 the states received an average of \$6.8 million each, with a midpoint of \$4.8 million. Allocations are based on population so state-by-state figures vary considerably; the largest allocation was California's \$42.7 million. In 2001 over 5,400 awards were made with VOCA assistance funds, and over 3.5 million victims were served by VOCA-funded programs.

Use of the funds to serve victims of different types of crimes varies widely across states, but averages from 2001 data illustrate general patterns. Domestic violence victims are by far the most frequent recipient of VOCA-funded services. Across states, an average of just over half of all victims served were victims of domestic violence. Victims of adult sexual assault averaged about five percent of all victims served, and child abuse victims averaged about 15 percent. Assault victims represented five percent of victims, and homicide survivors were three percent. Drunk driving victims accounted for one percent of victims served, and robbery was two percent. Victims of other types of crime, such as elder abuse, adults molested as children, and other crimes, averaged 17 percent of all victims served across states.

Statistics from 2001 are also available to describe services provided. From half to 69 percent of victims received telephone information and referrals; in-person information and referrals; criminal justice system advocacy and support; and follow-up contacts. From 20 to 41 percent of victims received crisis counseling; other types of services; personal advocacy; and assistance in filing compensation claims. Fewer than 15 percent of victims received group treatment and support; shelter and safehouse; emergency legal advocacy; therapy; and emergency financial assistance.

Policy and Program Issues

In 1997 OVC held regional meetings of state VOCA assistance administrators to discuss critical issues in program administration and share innovative funding strategies and programs. These meetings were spurred by the enormous increase in allocations that year, and by new OVC guidelines allowing the four-year obligation period. The issues identified as critical included funding fluctuations and long-range planning; needs and service assessments; use of administrative funds; outreach to underserved victims; outreach to providers; coordination of federal funding streams and reporting requirements; use of advisory boards; implementing victims' rights legislation; training efforts; statewide toll-free numbers for victims; and use of

technology. OVC's New Directions (1998) expanded on these issues with recommendations to develop services for special situations (such as mass crisis events) and special victims (such as the disabled). Other recommendations include assisting victims in interacting with the media, public awareness activities, development of program standards, staff training and certification, and program evaluation.

These earlier efforts helped to provide a framework from which we approached our task of describing and evaluating how well state grant administration and local service providers function to serve victims, and to offer recommendations for future developments. The following sections integrate the findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the various research activities we implemented – the national survey of all state VOCA assistance administrators in 1999; two rounds of site visits for in-depth analyses of assistance in six states through interviews with program administrators and staff, members of oversight bodies, advocacy groups, and direct service providers; focus groups with clients of VOCA assistance programs; and a survey of nearly 600 VOCA-funded program clients to get their perspectives. The presentation is organized around major themes of program policies and operations.

Funding Supports Valuable Services

Congressional caps on CVF allocations from 2000 to 2002 prevented the wide fluctuations seen in the previous four years and provided relatively moderate increases from year to year. However, expected allocations for 2003 will produce a seven percent decrease in VOCA funds available to assistance programs, the first drop since 1999. Many in the victim field find a cutback in funding to be unpalatable, given the approximately \$638 million in collected but unallocated funds in the CVF. With the uncertainty of the annual Congressional appropriations process, and wide variations in CVF collections from year to year (with a possible decrease in collections in the current year), state administrators are challenged to do long-range planning in this climate of instability. The four-year obligation period helps to relieve pressures on state administrators, but a greater measure of predictability would be very useful for long-range planning. Mechanisms for smoothing allocation fluctuations and reducing uncertainty as much as possible are needed.

It is critical that policies be developed for putting funds to work for victims in a timely way and in accordance with the legislative intent of VOCA. According to the clients we spoke with, VOCA funds services that meet many of their needs and are very valuable. Our survey of VOCA-funded program clients, drawing on a broad base of program types and victim characteristics, found that VOCA funds are supporting services that meet many victims' needs and are highly regarded by clients. The survey found that victims had an average of four different types of needs, and that, while many victims get help from other sources as well, the VOCA-funded program addressed 60 percent of their needs. Victims' satisfaction with services was assessed through a scale with possible scores ranging from eight to 24; the average score

was 22. This indicates that many victims were very satisfied with the VOCA-funded services they received.

However, there are still gaps that could be addressed if additional funding were available. Fifteen percent of the victims in our survey had service needs that were not met by any source, including the VOCA-funded program, other formal services, and informal help sources. These needs were most often service needs assessments and referrals, assistance with the criminal justice system, and assistance with finances or creditors. Members of racial/ethnic minorities were more likely to have unmet needs. It may be useful to expand services to these victims and expand services related to needs assessments, referrals, the justice system, and financial matters, to meet victims' needs more completely. In addition, many state administrators and direct service providers felt there are large groups of victims who do not access services at all, and more efforts should be concentrated on reaching these victims. These may include members of racial/ethnic minorities as well as victims of certain types of crimes, disabled victims, rural victims, and gay/lesbian victims.

State Program Management

According to our 1999 survey, assistance administrators tend to make fairly full use of the five percent administrative allowance, with two-thirds of state programs reporting at least some use and the others reporting full use. These funds have supported staffing, training, subgrantee monitoring, and the purchase of office equipment, which may be described as "basic" administrative activities. More "advanced" activities, such as strategic planning, improved coordination, and automation, were less commonly reported. Many administrators expressed the need for greater support for administrative activities.

This survey of state administrators also found that only half had a formal strategic plan to identify priorities and future developments in subgrant funding. Continuation awards are the norm. While it was the original intent of VOCA legislation to provide core funding to stabilize services, and this is very important, it may be difficult to expand into new areas when funds are committed to current subgrantees to continue ongoing work. Administrators may also be reluctant to undertake new projects given the uncertainties of future funding availability. Since there is a considerable emphasis on continuation funding of current subgrantees, it is not surprising that state administrators' outreach to potential subgrantees to publicize funding availability tended to emphasize current subgrantees (although there were exceptions, with some site visit states describing proactive efforts to recruit and assist new applicants).

Needs assessments can be useful to identify gaps in services and plan priorities. We found that most states use a specific process for identifying needs, usually informal processes such as consulting with those working in the field. Formal systematic methods are not without drawbacks, but can be more inclusive than methods that rely on people already working in the

area. We found in site visits that needs assessments may be conducted at the local level by community-based groups, or in a more centralized fashion through a state-wide process.

States use various methods for making subgrant award decisions, and each procedure has its advantages and drawbacks. Some states concentrate the decision-making power in the administrative agency, others use a state-level multidisciplinary board, and others use a decentralized system with decision-making power effectively evolved to local-level bodies across the state. Each is subject to at least perceived political pressures. Service providers that belong to a strong network, such as domestic violence coalitions, are often thought to have the advantage in obtaining funding because of the strength and the connections of the coalition. There is no single model that works best in all circumstances, and any method of distributing funding will be subject to criticism because of the sensitive nature of this function.

As with needs assessment procedures, monitoring processes are largely informal and constrained to review of progress reports (unless problems are noted, then more active monitoring such as site visits may occur). Monitoring is very important to ensure that funds are put to best use, particularly in an atmosphere of largely continuation funding. Some states are stepping up monitoring procedures and many providers welcome these efforts. However, few proactive efforts by state administrators to monitor and enforce providers' compliance with requirements to assist victims with compensation were observed. As monitoring efforts are enhanced, this would be an important area to include.

One percent of the VOCA allocation can be used for training, with a 20 percent match (these restrictions may be expanded under pending new guidelines). Many state administrators access these funds to provide training to subgrantees, but some have not made use of them because state and other federal (such as STOP VAWA) funds are explicitly targeted for training activities. This suggests that the use of VOCA funds for training could be directed toward service providers who would not be eligible for training supported by other funds. For example, STOP VAWA funds focus on violence against women, so training of providers who serve victims other than domestic violence and sexual assault might be a priority for VOCA training funds.

An important resource for state administrators is their new professional association, the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators. The Association can be a very useful vehicle for exchanging information among administrators on these critical activities, so that states can learn from each other's experiences and innovative ideas. While this association is too new to have been included as a focus of the evaluation, it seems to have the support of administrators and good resources to accomplish useful program development goals.

Issues for Direct Service Providers

Our site visit interviews with VOCA-funded providers focused on several important issues in service provision. Some of these issues revolve around program administrative activities –

outreach, coordination, and reporting requirements – rather than direct service, so cannot be supported with VOCA funds under current OVC guidelines. Some providers have difficulty finding support for administrative activities, and would like to have an administrative allowance from their VOCA subgrants.

Many VOCA-funded program clients also turned to a variety of other sources to meet their crime-related needs, including a range of formal help sources (such as other victim service providers, other types of social service or healthcare providers, and criminal justice personnel) and informal sources (such as family and friends). Clearly, VOCA-funded victim service providers need to coordinate, and often do coordinate, with other providers in the community, to avoid gaps or duplication of services to shared clients. This coordination should reach across traditional boundaries of “victim service providers” and include those working in other fields as well, such as healthcare. Coordination activities can take various forms, such as cross-training, developing coordinated policies or procedures, developing referral procedures and resources (such as palm cards), or multidisciplinary task forces. Issues arising from conflicting missions and victim confidentiality are likely to arise and must be resolved for coordination efforts to move forward.

There is consensus that many types of victims (defined by both type of crime and victim characteristics) are underserved. Our survey found that, even among clients who had accessed VOCA-funded service programs, members of racial/ethnic minorities were more likely to have unmet needs. Our discussions with professionals in the field identified a number of underserved victim groups, along racial/ethnic lines as well as by type of crime and victim demographics and other characteristics, such as sexual orientation, disability, and residence in a rural area. Efforts to meet these needs may involve expanding current victim service programs, including developing new programs as well as new staffing patterns or training to respond appropriately to new victim populations. Another approach is to develop victim service programs within other types of organizations that currently work with underserved populations.

Staff often work under stressful conditions for low pay. The use of volunteers is problematic for some programs, because of the nature of the services provided, limits on volunteers’ availability, and privacy/confidentiality concerns. Efforts to improve the pay scale, reduce disparities between various segments of the workforce, and recognize special contributions are helpful in improving quality of life and reducing staff burnout and turnover. It would also be helpful to some programs if the requirement for using volunteers was relaxed to respond to particular concerns with the use of volunteers.

Coordination of reporting requirements across various funding sources (including the many federal funding streams) would help reduce programs’ record-keeping requirements. Currently, each of many funding sources may have its own reporting requirements, and this requires programs to spend a good deal of time keeping the same data in many different ways. A multi-

agency federal task force has explored ways to coordinate reporting requirements, but a unified form has not yet been made available.

Survey participants were less satisfied with their experiences with the criminal justice system than they were with VOCA-funded program services, although their levels of satisfaction were still fairly high on the whole. Efforts by victim service programs to strengthen the justice system's response to offenders, primarily in the form of more severe punishment, would fulfill a major unmet service need of many victims and address the primary source of victims' dissatisfaction with the justice system. These efforts may take the form of system advocacy, in which advocates work to strengthen sentencing laws across the board. Or they may do case advocacy by working with prosecutors to represent the victim's experiences and input in an effective way that the court will heed (such as victim impact statements). Victims who were served by public-based programs were more satisfied with the justice system experience than were victims served by nonprofits. This may indicate that public-based advocates are well-placed to assist victims in their needs related to the criminal case. Some victims also reported problems with how justice personnel handled the case, including failure to protect victims, cultural misunderstandings, system inefficiencies, and failure to respond to victims' rights, needs, or input.

Victims' rights are codified in legislation and state constitutional amendments, but implementation is often less than perfect. More training and resources to assist justice agency personnel in their efforts to provide victims' rights as specified by law are necessary, as are corrective mechanisms for cases in which victims are not provided their rights.

Recommendations for VOCA Assistance Program Development

State administrators and community-level subgrantees who provide direct services are clearly functioning well in a number of areas. This is commendable particularly in light of the difficult funding situation. Useful directions for future developments may include:

- *Make funds available for victim services.* VOCA funds support services that address many of victims' needs and are highly valued by clients. Given the service gaps that exist – many victims do not access services, and even some of those who do still have needs that are not met by any source – it seems crucial to make funds available to support and expand these services. There is over \$600 million in collected but unallocated funds currently dedicated by law to victim service uses.
- *Balance the need to provide funding with the need to provide stability.* One approach to making funds available would be to disburse all collections from the CVF in lump sum allocations to states. However, given the instability of collections into the CVF from year to year and recent trends toward much lower collection levels, this would be unlikely to be a prudent long-term strategy.

Instead, it may be a wiser course to develop provisions for drawing on the unallocated collections in years in which CVF collections are down, and replenishing these “cushion” funds when collections are high. Such a plan was included as part of the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, but was deleted from FY 2002 Justice Department appropriations legislation. Since other allocations are made from the CVF and changes to these allocations (such as increases in the compensation payout formula and changes to earmarks and set-asides) can affect amounts available for VOCA assistance programs, the more directly such a plan addresses assistance allocations specifically, the more stability it will provide to these funds. It would also be very helpful to develop additional methods of funding victim assistance programs that do not rely on CVF collections, to increase support and provide more stability.

- *Support state administrators’ activities to enhance fund management.* We found that programs are generally well-run but that administrators could, and would like to, do much more if more support for these activities was available. More systematic needs assessments, development of strategic planning, enhanced coordination with other fund administrators, expanded training, more active monitoring of subgrantees, and development of automated systems could greatly enhance grant management and the delivery of services to victims. Since many states can and do make use of the federal administrative and training allowances, increases in these allowance could provide very valuable support. This may work best when overall allocations increase, so that reserving more funds for administrative and training activities would not contribute to a decrease in funds available for subgrant awards. State administrators have recently formed a professional association, the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators. This may be a very useful vehicle for exchanging information among state agencies so that states can learn from each other’s experiences and innovative ideas.

- *Support service providers’ administrative activities.* Pending guidelines that would allow subgrantees to use some of their VOCA awards to support essential administrative activities such as coordination and outreach would be very welcome to many providers. Our survey found that many clients of VOCA-funded programs work with other providers as well, so it is critical to coordinate services. We also found in the survey and site visits that many groups are unserved or underserved; outreach is essential for reaching these groups of victims. In some cases the development of new services or specialized training to meet specific needs of newly-served victims may be important. Our survey found that VOCA program clients are more frequently referred to the VOCA program by some agencies (such as law enforcement) than by others (such as prosecutors’ offices or healthcare providers). This may provide useful directions for where to target outreach and training efforts in the future, to reach new groups of victims.

- *Address operational challenges to direct service programs.* Staff burnout, due to demanding work conditions and low pay, is problematic for many programs (especially nonprofit programs, where pay scales may be lower than public-based programs). Some programs are able to use volunteers with great success, whereas others are reluctant to make extensive use of this resource because of the nature of the work, limits on volunteers' availability, and privacy and confidentiality concerns (particularly in rural or tribal areas). Another challenge is posed by unique reporting requirements imposed by many funders, which requires a great deal of record-keeping. These challenges could be addressed by enhancing staffing resources and pay scales, relaxing requirements around the use of volunteers where warranted, and promoting efforts to coordinate reporting requirements, at least across federal funders of victim services.
- *Develop direct services to fill unmet needs.* Our interviews and client surveys suggested several areas in which services should be expanded. Services for underserved groups of victims, such as racial/ethnic minorities and others, should be developed in culturally appropriate ways and efforts should be made to reach these victims and offer them services. Advocates should continue to focus on improving the justice system's responsiveness to victim concerns, including implementation and enforcement of victim rights, providing victims' input on appropriate criminal case outcomes, and improving the treatment of victims by the justice system. Finally, needs assessments, service referrals, and financial counseling should be enhanced to better meet victims' needs.

COORDINATION OF VICTIM ASSISTANCE AND COMPENSATION PROGRAMS

Sources of Help for Victims

While not all victims have recourse to the assistance needed to recover from criminal victimization, there is a wide range of resources available to at least some victims. Victims' financial needs may be met by private insurance, including life insurance, health insurance, or automobile insurance that can pay the financial costs resulting from crime. Some also have employment-related benefits such as paid leave or employee assistance programs. Other victims may be able to access public benefits such as workers' compensation, unemployment compensation, and housing and food subsidies. Some victims may receive restitution from the offender or civil awards, although these occur relatively rarely. Victims with no other resources for paying crime-related expenses can turn to the payer of last resort, state crime victim compensation programs.

Victims' needs for physical recovery and future safety, and for emotional and psychological healing, may also be met by various sources. Many victims turn to informal resources such as family and friends, or social supports such as faith-based institutions and community support groups. Victims may also access formal sources of assistance. The justice system can help

address victims' needs for justice by investigating and prosecuting offenders, or in some cases through restorative justice programs such as victim-offender reconciliation. Private health and mental health care providers assist victims with physical and psychological/emotional recovery. Agencies that explicitly provide services to victims, such as rape crisis centers, domestic violence programs, child abuse programs, MADD organizations, law enforcement- and prosecution-based victim/witness staff, programs for survivors of homicide, and others clearly serve many crime victims. These programs may be supported in part with VOCA funds and/or other federal funding streams (such as VAWA, Byrne, Preventive Health and Health Services, and Family Violence Prevention and Services Act funds), as well as state funding for victim services, and private funding such as United Way agencies.

The Need for Coordination

Ideally, all sources of help for victims would work together collaboratively to provide comprehensive, effective services in an efficient, integrated system. This ideal has yet to be achieved. As part of this study's focus on VOCA assistance and compensation programs, we examined how these programs work together and how coordination could be improved. Clearly, VOCA-funded assistance and compensation programs cannot be expected to provide all services needed by all victims. However, these programs can coordinate to effectively leverage their resources to *help* provide a seamless web of support for victims' recovery from the many adverse consequences of victimization.

According to both OVC and the NACVCB, coordination should move beyond communication and toward active collaboration. In *New Directions*, OVC (1998) recommends coordination to improve outreach and public awareness about compensation, to improve the compensation program's understanding of victims' needs, and to increase the range of services available to victims. The programs themselves have developed recommended strategies for improved coordination (NACVCB, 1998). These include strategies to assist claimants, such as training VOCA assistance subgrantees about compensation requirements, placing a VOCA-funded victim advocate in the compensation office to assist claimants, and sending brochures and application forms to all VOCA assistance subgrantees based on a list provided to the compensation office by the VOCA assistance administrator. Recommended coordination strategies for policy development include asking compensation directors to participate in the VOCA assistance grant review process, inviting VOCA assistance administrators and subgrantees to review compensation statutes and policies, and working together to identify underserved populations and develop outreach plans.

Methods of Coordination Between VOCA Assistance and Compensation Programs

The various research methods we employed showed that coordination can occur at two levels of operation: at the case level and at a more systemic level.

Case level coordination

Compensation and VOCA assistance programs can work together on specific cases to improve services for victims. VOCA-funded assistance programs are required to inform and assist victims with compensation applications. Well-informed providers can perform valuable pre-screening activities (assessing who may need compensation and be eligible for it); provide assistance to eligible claimants with the application process and documentation requirements; and serve as a liaison between the victim and the compensation program, explaining the program to the client and representing the victim's needs and experiences to the program. These forms of assistance can both benefit the victim and improve the efficiency of compensation program operations.

We found in our survey of compensation claimants that one-third were informed about compensation by victim advocates, although it was not possible to tell whether these claimants had contacted victim service programs, or whether the advocates worked for VOCA-funded programs (given that VOCA helps support about 40 percent of service providers, it seems likely that many did). Half of the claimants received help with the compensation application; of those, the most frequent provider of assistance (for 41 percent of the claimants who got help) was a victim advocate. Similarly, our survey of VOCA-funded assistance program clients found that while under half (45 percent) were aware of compensation, of those who were aware the most frequent source of information was the VOCA-funded program (54 percent), and the most common source for assistance with the compensation application, for those who got such help, was the VOCA-funded program (73 percent). Our focus groups with VOCA assistance program clients indicated that many of these victims were unaware or misinformed about compensation, although some had applied and received benefits.

Our interviews during site visits indicated that many victim service providers may not assist clients with compensation. Some, although certainly not all, private non-profit providers typically refer clients to prosecution-based providers, viewing compensation assistance as a victim rights service for which prosecution-based providers are responsible. Other direct service providers from various sectors may not help victims with compensation because they are not well-informed about the program and its procedures, or because they have had difficult experiences working with compensation in the past and do not view it as beneficial to victims. Some providers may retain this view even after compensation programs have altered their policies or practices to make them more responsive to victims' and advocates' concerns.

However, many direct service providers clearly do assist victims with information about compensation and help with the application process. While we did not find specific protocols for compensation-related assistance, many programs had clearly evolved working procedures. Some programs kept brochures and application forms in their offices, and helped clients with securing verifications as well as filling out the application form. Some programs stayed involved in the compensation process past the initial filing of the application, for at least some clients, and were able to provide follow-up assistance and explanations as needed.

Case-level coordination is a two-way street. Compensation program staff can assist claimants in identifying their needs for other types of services and locating providers. These providers may also be able to help claimants or potential claimants through difficulties they may encounter with the compensation process. Many claimants may not have contacted victim assistance programs, and it seems likely that many of these claimants may be able to benefit from the services provided by VOCA programs.

There are several ways in which compensation programs can help victims with their needs for the types of services provided by VOCA assistance programs. Some programs are employing victim liaisons or advocates on staff, whose express function is to assist victims with their compensation-related questions, and to identify and make referrals to services for victims' other needs. These positions may be supported with VOCA assistance subgrants to the compensation program. In our telephone survey of compensation administrators in 1999, 42 percent reported that their program has a victim liaison/advocate on staff, although few had applied for VOCA assistance funding to support this position. While some of these staff may serve multiple functions, we found in our site visits in more recent years that at least some programs are employing staff who are dedicated victim liaisons/advocates.

Compensation programs without designated victim liaisons/advocates can also assist victims with needs other than compensation by having generalist staff provide needs assessment and referral services to claimants they speak with. Slightly over half (54 percent) of our claimant survey participants reported that they had spoken with someone at the compensation program; one-third of those said that the person they spoke with asked if they needed referrals to other services. We did not ask exactly who the claimant had spoken with, since they would be unlikely to know whether the individual was a designated victim liaison/advocate, but it seems likely that the staff member was often the claims processor (some of these programs did not have victim liaisons/advocates on staff).

Compensation staff need information about victim service resources in order to provide effective referrals. Three-quarters of state compensation programs reported that they had a statewide directory of providers. The vast majority (85 percent) reported that compensation staff receive training in victimization issues, to help them interact more effectively with claimants.

Systemic coordination

Case-level coordination can be enhanced through coordination at the system level. Systemic coordination can also lead to more effective decision-making and more efficient operations by both compensation and assistance programs.

Compensation programs can help assistance providers meet their requirement to aid victims with compensation by offering introductory and ongoing training on the purposes, policies, and procedures of compensation. It is particularly important to keep assistance

providers abreast of policy and procedural changes, so that providers can give clients current information. They can also keep service providers well-stocked with materials such as program brochures and application forms. Another very useful case-based link between compensation programs and assistance providers is one that allows providers to check the status of claims being processed and offer whatever help the claimant may need in forwarding the claim decision. Compensation and/or VOCA assistance administrators can also monitor claim referral sources, to assess the need for assistance to service providers to enhance their ability to refer clients.

Just over half (56 percent) of state compensation administrators reported training VOCA assistance providers, in our telephone survey. There may be a trend toward expanding this training, as several of our site visit states have been developing initiatives in recent years. One state, for example, has used administrative funds to develop a separate training unit; develop training materials and offer orientation and special topics training; make applications and other program materials available through the Internet; and develop an automated methods for victim service providers to file applications and follow-up to assess claim status.

Coordination between compensation and VOCA assistance administrators can also occur by providing input into each other's operational or decision-making processes. Some compensation administrators reported in our telephone survey that they ask VOCA assistance administrative agency staff to comment on their statutes, policies, forms, or procedures (27 percent). About one-quarter of assistance administrators reported in our telephone survey that staff from the state's compensation program sits on assistance grant review panels (25 percent) or assists in the planning process for distribution of assistance funds (21 percent). One of the site visit states specifically leverages compensation and VOCA assistance funds by not using assistance funds to support services that can be paid through compensation (such as mental health counseling). This policy maximizes resources by minimizing duplication of services and increasing the state's compensation allocation from OVC. However, since compensation has a number of eligibility criteria that do not apply to assistance services, channeling resources through compensation may limit access for some victims (e.g., those who choose not to report the crime to the police).

We found in our visits to six states that one important factor that may influence the success of coordination efforts is co-location of compensation and VOCA assistance administrators. Co-location is a matter of degree: compensation and assistance programs may be run by the same staff, by staff in closely aligned offices, by separate offices within the same governmental agency, or by entirely separate agencies of state government. Our observations indicated that the more closely aligned the program offices, the more likely coordination was to occur, and the more likely it was to exceed simple communication and reach actual collaboration. Closely aligned programs had significant logistical advantages in terms of shared office space, staff or managers, and formal and informal communications. However, even in states with very little co-location coordination was certainly possible and often successful, but it may require greater effort.

Coordination Between State Administrators of VOCA Assistance and Other Victim Services Funding

VOCA assistance grants are far from the only funding support for many direct service providers. There are several other federal funding streams; states provide their own funds; and many private funding sources are also used. State administrators of VOCA assistance funds and other federal and state funds may be able to leverage funds to the most advantage when they make subgrant award decisions collaboratively. Coordination is necessary because the separate federal funding streams are often administered at the state level by separate state agencies. State funds for victim assistance may or may not be administered by a state agency that also administers one or more of the federal programs.

In our telephone survey of state VOCA assistance administrators, one-third reported that all federal and state funding sources were tracked at the state level (most often by the VOCA administrator), 45 percent reported that the federal sources were co-tracked, and 21 percent reported no co-tracking. In about three-quarters of the states, this information was used to identify service gaps and duplications, to make funding decisions, and to coordinate service programs. We learned through the site visits that true collaboration among funding administrators is complicated by the dispersion of administrative responsibilities across various state agencies, to different staff with different agency missions, policies, and procedures. Even when a single agency or office administers several funding sources, different decision-making processes may be used for each and different personnel may be involved in these decisions. Coordination can be increased by consolidating funding streams into a single agency (although some feared this concentration of power), or by coordination mechanisms such as shared advisory boards.

Recommendations to Improve Coordination Efforts

Based on our telephone surveys with program administrators, claimants, and clients, as well as our site visit interviews with a range of staff in the victim service field, we believe that coordination between compensation and assistance programs and among state assistance administrators can be improved by:

- *Continued expansion of training efforts to inform direct service providers about compensation.* It is very important to keep providers up-to-date on important changes in compensation policies or procedures. Training activities can be supported with the use of the state programs' administrative allowances.
- *Further efforts to make compensation materials available to direct service providers and provide increased access to the claims process.* Automation can be very helpful here; program brochures and applications can be (and often are) made available through the Internet, and states can develop automated claim filing and follow-up procedures.
- *Continued efforts to make compensation staff more responsive to claimants' needs, including training to inform compensation staff about assistance resources and victimization issues.* Compensation programs can hire dedicated victim

liaisons/advocates, or train generalist staff, to provide services to claimants. These services need not be limited to help with the claim; they can also provide very valuable needs assessment and referrals. Specialized staff and training can be supported from the administrative allowance.

- *Expanded coordination activities to move beyond simple communication toward more active collaboration.* Only a minority of the state compensation and VOCA assistance programs seem to become involved in each other's policy-level decision-making; these ties should be strengthened. Degree of co-location is an important factor in determining what needs to be done to enhance collaboration. Programs separated by wide administrative gulfs may need considerable effort to initiate collaboration mechanisms.
- *Enhanced coordination of the various sources of funding for direct service providers.* States should continue their efforts to maximize resources by leveraging the various victim assistance funding streams against each other. Again, degree of co-location of administrative offices may indicate what efforts are needed to improve coordination. Various mechanisms of coordination exist, with none clearly preferred over the others. States should examine what has worked well for them in efforts to date, and past missteps that could be avoided in the future.