

# **ESTABLISHING THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT COORDINATING COUNCIL**

## **SECTION I**

In June 2021, the Los Angeles County Commission for Women's (Commission) Violence Against Women and Girls Committee convened a group of stakeholders in response to a survey conducted in early 2021 regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on survivors of sexual assault and violence. The Commission then formed an AdHoc Committee on Sexual Assault (Committee) to bring forth recommendations to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors for the formation of a Los Angeles County Sexual Assault Coordinating Council (LACSAC, the Council). The Commission's mission is to seek to represent the interests and concerns of women of all races, ethnicities, social backgrounds, religious convictions, sexual orientation, and social circumstances.

Under the direction of Commissioner Barbara Kappos, chair of the Committee, a thorough review of data related to sexual violence within Los Angeles (LA) County was analyzed and discussed during regularly held Committee meetings. Members of the Committee are:

- The Los Angeles County Commission for Women
- Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Special Victims Bureau
- Los Angeles County Office of Women's Health, Department of Public Health
- Los Angeles County Office of the Domestic Violence Council, Department of Public Health
- San Gabriel Valley Medical Center Sexual Assault Response Team
- Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County
- Peace Over Violence
- Strength United
- YWCA – Greater Los Angeles
- East Los Angeles Women's Center
- Antelope Valley Medical Center Forensic Services Unit
- United American Indian Involvement

### **Introduction and Overview**

In LA County sexual violence is an everyday occurrence exacting a high toll on all communities, individuals, families, and ultimately on society at large. Sexual violence has a profound impact on lifelong health, opportunity, and well-being. It impacts every community and affects people of all genders, sexual orientations, races/ethnicities, and ages. It is a serious and costly public health problem. Decades of research have demonstrated the harmful and costly impacts of sexual violence on individuals' physical, psychological, social, and economic well-being.

Sexual violence is also an issue of social inequity and injustice with intersectionality across many sectors, including immigration justice, race equity, LGBTQ equality, economic justice, reproductive health, and public health. It also intersects with domestic violence, gang violence, child abuse, and human trafficking. Section II provides an overview of the rates, long term impact, and cost of sexual violence.

Currently, there is no formal, funded countywide infrastructure in LA County to bring together public agencies, law enforcement, the legal profession, Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs), Rape Crisis Centers, hospitals and other medical providers, and other entities that have the responsibility and expertise to respond to and assist survivors of sexual violence. In addition to impacting survivors of sexual violence, the lack of county-wide coordination weakens the County's ability to identify and address systemic needs. These needs include:

- Standardized, coordinated mechanism(s) for data collection and analysis for sexual violence to measure the prevalence of sexual violence in Los Angeles County.
- Methods to identify needed system-level service delivery improvements, eliminate gaps in services, avoid duplication of services, and maximize synergistic connections to existing resources for sexual violence survivors.
- Implementation of sexual violence prevention programs, and delivery of public education and messaging around sexual violence.
- Formalized processes for developing policy recommendations aimed not only at improving services and interventions for survivors but also innovating strategies to prevent sexual violence.
- Development of a process and structure to ensure sexual violence representation at multi-disciplinary tables, including those where domestic violence, human trafficking, community and gang violence, child abuse, suicide prevention, mental health and substance use are addressed.
- Advocacy that recognizes and comprehensively addresses the intersectionality of sexual violence and the totality of impacts on survivors, families, and communities.

## **Definition**

The definition of sexual violence and harassment often varies among law enforcement, service providers, advocates, and other stakeholders depending on their role. This report utilizes the definition of sexual violence used by Law Insider<sup>1</sup> and sexual harassment used by the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN).<sup>2</sup>

SEXUAL VIOLENCE encompasses various conducts of a sexual nature which can manifest itself in five possible forms, namely verbal, non-verbal, visual, psychological, and physical. These are of course not exhaustive and are meant strictly as a guide.<sup>3</sup>

SEXUAL HARASSMENT includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.<sup>4</sup>

## **Statement of Need**

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<sup>1</sup> Law Insider is a subscription-based contract database and resource center that helps more than 300,000 lawyers and business owners draft and negotiate contracts more effectively. | <https://www.lawinsider.com/about>

<sup>2</sup> RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. | <https://www.rainn.org/about-rainn>

<sup>3</sup> Law Insider | Forms of Sexual Harassment | <https://www.lawinsider.com/clause/forms-of-sexual-harassment>

<sup>4</sup> RAINN | Article on Sexual Harassment <https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-harassment>

The scope of sexual violence is clearly complex and requires collaboration and coordination of both private and public entities. Rape Crisis Centers across Los Angeles County have long recognized that efforts to address the complex needs of victims of rape and their families and communities require a collaborative approach. There are 12 Rape Crisis Centers in LA County, uniting and coordinating 10 SARTS. Rape Crisis Centers, through their advocacy and emergency services, help survivors navigate the maze of community services, law enforcement investigation, forensic evidentiary exams, prosecution and all subsequent proceedings, and the provision of or linkage to critical resources that facilitate their journey toward recovery, healing, and justice.

What is missing is a coordinating body to ensure that systems coordinate and collaborate for the benefit of survivors and their families. This would include a sustainable system of data collection and analysis; mechanisms to identify systems improvements, eliminate duplication of services, provide public education, and develop policies to improve service delivery; and developing methods to actively work toward the elimination of sexual violence through prevention programming. The #MeToo movement has helped uncover on a larger scale the depth of sexual violence in all its forms and LA County should follow suit. These past four years have shown the world what we already know to be true; that sexual violence is occurring in all its forms, in all spaces, at all times. Sexual violence occurs in the following areas and more:

- Workplace
- Military
- Colleges and Universities
- Educational Institutions
- Religious Institutions
- Sex trafficking
- Within the family
- Senior care facilities
- Residential and treatment facilities
- Foster care system
- Within relationships
- By strangers
- Within marriage
- Within dating
- Entertainment industry
- Service industry
- Hospitality industry
- Retail trade
- Manufacturing
- Immigration & Detention Centers
- Migration
- Farm workers
- Informal labor sector
- Prison
- War

Sexual violence happens across the lifespan including children, adolescents, adults, and elderly. It happens across all genders.

LA County has a need for LACSAC to be authorized, developed, funded, and sustained. LACSAC would ensure a coordinated and multidisciplinary system of response from law enforcement, crime labs, victim services, forensic nurses, rape crisis centers, the office of the district attorney, and child protective services. This would provide support, advocacy, and healing for survivors of sexual violence and make systemic improvements and improved response.

This multidisciplinary council should be separate in scope from the existing Domestic Violence Council. While sexual violence may occur within the context of intimate relationships and dating, the impacts, response and needs of sexual violence survivors are often different than those experiencing Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence (IPV/DV.) Additionally, DV/IPV efforts do not address sexual violence occurring outside of an intimate relationship, such as sexual

violence by a stranger, coworker, or date; campus sexual violence; or child sexual abuse. There are certainly overlaps and intersectionality however, experts in the field providing dual domestic violence and sexual violence services would defend the need to have separate councils. It is important to recognize the issues of domestic and sexual violence are addressed separately within all governmental structures at a State, County, and Local level. These entities have long recognized the need for these forms of interpersonal violence to be both distinct and unique.

- Legal and public policy are different for domestic violence and sexual violence cases.
- Forensic collection needs are different in each field, for example domestic violence investigations do not use rape kits in their forensic collection.
- Historically, these two issues have been handled in distinctly separate ways in our governmental agencies. On a National, Statewide, and Local level, investigation and prosecution of sexual violence crimes requires a different expertise than domestic violence prosecution and each lives in different prosecutorial/investigative divisions.
- Safety needs are also different. Domestic violence happens at higher rates with familial relations while forms of sexual violence perpetration happen in many more areas (workplace, military, school, etc.)
- In California, the social organizations that support sexual violence and domestic violence operate separately. For example, VALORUS supports sexual violence services and the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence (CPEDV) supports domestic violence services.

This work must be adequately funded and supported by a government agency to provide infrastructure to manage and coordinate systems of information, support, and resources; integrate best and promising practices; identify gaps; and take steps to avoid duplication effectively and efficiently.

### **Historical Impact of LACSAC**

An informal Los Angeles County Sexual Assault Coordinating Council (LACSAC) operated for a brief period from 2001 – 2006 in Los Angeles County. We are asking that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors support the formalization and sustained development of a new era of LACSAC because of the impact we have seen a multidisciplinary council have on our ability to service community members. LACSAC enabled the building of a system of support and made meaningful contributions through their work in the development of SART standards, advocating for a change in penal code to give survivors notification of status of their DNA kit testing, supporting the development of a new rape kit lab on California State University Los Angeles campus, and identifying and supporting practices to reduce the backlog in processing of DNA kits in LA County.

The original LACSAC and its achievements demonstrates that when we have resources and support, we can benefit society and our communities. The joint effort that was LACSAC benefited all members of the multidisciplinary team (law enforcement, crime labs, victim services, forensic nurse, Rape Crisis Centers, Child Protective Services, district attorneys) and enabled them to be more efficient. Unfortunately, without the backing of a government entity or a formalization of the council, the collaborative parties have been unable to meet the growing demands for care in our

communities. From 2006 to now, LA County has seen a decrease in number of SART sites from approximately 21 in 2006 to nine (9) SART sites in 2022. The population of survivors needing services has increased and diversified while we have lessened the availability of resources. More and more survivors are having to leave their communities to get the support they need. While Rape Crisis Centers have tried to fill the void, the scope and complexity of sexual violence in LA county has exceeded what can be supported by a volunteer-based support system. We cannot sustain a volunteer system of collaboration; sexual violence services need a structure that is supported through funded administration. It needs the power and authority that a county brings, that ensures vibrant participation on behalf of all relevant entities involved in addressing sexual violence in our communities.

### **Functions of LACSAC**

The purpose of LACSAC is to assemble all entities that have any connection to sexual violence (therapeutics, counseling, emergency services, etc.) to develop a coordinated system, facilitate communication, and create alignment between these agencies that will allow better service collaboration and integration, and therefore, more adequately meet the needs of the community.

Once assembled, LACSAC will facilitate collaborative services such as:

- Ongoing professional development and training in trauma-informed care and healing-centered engagement for all service providers across all disciplines to ensure consistency and quality of services and resources.
- Thoughtful and strategic decision-making processes and communication mechanisms to identify and share best and promising practices, identify and fill service gaps, eliminate duplication of services, and facilitate system improvements to ensure that all survivors can access trauma-informed and healing-centered services, support, and resources.
- Identify gaps in current policies and protocols across LA County and advocate for change on behalf of the community.
- Awareness and prevention education about consent, sexual violence, and sexual violence occurring under the influence of substances will be continuous, consistent, and respectful of cultural norms.

### **Request of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors**

**We request the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to authorize the necessary financial resources to create and implement the new entity, Los Angeles County Sexual Assault Coordinating Council (LACSAC).**

# ESTABLISHING THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT COORDINATING COUNCIL

## SECTION II RATES, LONG TERM IMPACT, & COST OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

### Rates of Sexual Violence

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that sexual violence occurs in more than one (1) in three (3) women in the U.S., and one (1) in five (5) women have experienced completed or attempted rape. Of female rape victims, one (1) in three (3) experienced rape between the ages of 11 and 17.

Because different entities measure sexual violence in different ways, it can be useful to review data sets collected by various entities to derive an overall estimate. For example, the LA County Health Survey (LACHS), run by the Department of Public Health every few years, asks a random sample of about 8,000 adults in the County about their lifetime exposure to forced sexual activity *by an intimate partner*. The sample is designed and statistically weighted to reflect the LA County population overall, including people who speak English, Spanish, Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Vietnamese.

In 2018, the LACHS found that 6.8% of the county population reported ever experiencing unwanted sex by an intimate partner-- an estimated 539,000 people. Reported rates of sexual violence by an intimate partner were higher among females (10.2%, or about 408,000 women) than among males (3.4%, representing about 131,000 men).

Further, data suggests that while sexual violence impacts all genders, it can be considered gender-based violence as it disproportionately affects women, and more specifically, those vulnerable due to poverty, gender, age, race, disability, sexual orientation, or immigration status. Moreover, sexual violence impacts LGBTQ communities at greater rates, especially transgender people.

The 2018 LACHS data showed an increase in reported lifetime sexual violence by an intimate partner in nearly every demographic category compared to the 2015 LACHS results. (See Table 1 below) It is possible that lifetime experiences of sexual violence increased dramatically during those three years, but the observed increase in reported sexual violence is much more likely due to heightened public awareness and elevated public conversation around sexual violence. In October 2017, the existing #MeToo movement was popularized by celebrities through social media and traditional media. A topic that often had been considered taboo became more frequently discussed in diverse social spaces. Some people who may not have been willing to disclose their experience of sexual violence in 2015 may have felt emboldened to do so by 2018.

**Table 1. LACHS Lifetime Experiences of Sexual Violence (Estimated)**

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>% Increase</b>
<b>Total Reported</b>	349,000	539,000	54%
<b>Men</b>	75,000	131,000	75%
<b>Women</b>	274,000	408,000	49%
<b>All Races - US Born</b>	263,000	373,000	42%
<b>All Races - Foreign Born</b>	81,000	150,000	85%
<b>Individuals with a Disability</b>	163,000	228,000	40%

It is important to note that health survey data are limited, as surveys can only count what people are willing to reveal about themselves. The stigma around sexual violence prevents many people from sharing their experience with loved ones, health care providers, or law enforcement, much less with a stranger conducting an interview over the phone. Myths and cultural and linguistic variations in how sexual violence is understood also impact the level of reporting by different populations. See the appendix for LACHS data showing lifetime experiences of sexual violence by an intimate partner for women in LA County by race/ethnicity and nativity.

### **Long-Term Impact of Sexual Violence**

Survivors of sexual violence often suffer from a host of chronic health issues, such as reproductive, gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, and sexual health problems, and mental and behavioral health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, suicidality, and substance use.

Furthermore, numerous studies suggest that sexual victimization in adolescence significantly increases the likelihood of sexual victimization in adulthood between two (2) and 13.7 times.<sup>1</sup>

### **Cost of Sexual Violence**

Recent estimates of the direct lifetime cost of sexual violence such as rape are nearly \$125,000 per victim. This includes medical costs, loss of productivity, criminal justice involvement, and other expenses.<sup>2</sup> However, the economic impact of sexual violence is difficult to determine because of under-reporting by survivors and different reporting methodologies by stakeholders. In California, the tangible costs of sexual violence, which include medical and mental health care, investigation, sanctioning, treatment, and victim services, were estimated at \$9 billion in 2012. Intangible costs, such as lost quality of life and lost work productivity, increased the total estimated economic burden to \$140 billion.<sup>3</sup> Allowing for inflation since 2012,<sup>4</sup> this represents roughly \$170 billion in 2021 dollars for the annual cost of sexual violence in California. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of

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<sup>1</sup> “Ending Sexual Violence: An Intersectional Approach,” California Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

<sup>2</sup> National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> The Cost and Consequences of Sexual Violence in California”

<sup>4</sup> The dollar had an average inflation rate of 1.96% per year between 2012 and today, producing a cumulative price increase of 21.43%. This means that today's prices are 1.21 times higher than average prices since 2012, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics consumer price index.

the State's population lives in LA County,<sup>5</sup> and using a simple extrapolation, that means that the cost of sexual violence is more than \$46 billion for the County alone – and this is likely to be a conservative estimate.

Data from the office of the Los Angeles District Attorney show that from 2018 to 2019, most sexual violence crimes increased, indicating that these costs have likely increased by more than inflation. Specifically, crimes categorized as sexual assault and battery increased by 31%, rape increased by 13%, sodomy increased by 3%. Crimes against minors within all the previously mentioned categories increased by 6% from 2018 to 2019.

The impact of the pandemic on sexual violence is also important to note. Anecdotal and cursory evaluations of criminal justice data since the early months of 2020 identified a declining trend in the number of reports of sexual violence to authorities. This suggests that during stay-at-home orders there may have been less accessibility to institutions for reporting incidents, fear of being “trapped” with an abuser/perpetrator if a response was not forthcoming following a report, and possibly a decline in the capacity of authorities to record those incidents and coordinate with SARTs.

This decline in capacity may have been due to staff shortages, diversion of resources, and other delays caused by the pandemic that ultimately may have impacted law enforcement's processing of sexual assault evidence kits (SAEKs). In 2018 and 2019, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) reported that all SAEKs, for both victims and suspects, had been processed; there was no backlog. This amounted to 1,409 SAEKs processed in 2018, inclusive of 1,127 adolescent/adult evidence kits (age 12+ years), 108 child kits (birth to 11 years) and 174 suspect kits. In 2019, LAPD processed 1,333 kits, inclusive of 1,165 adolescents/adults, 120 children, and 168 suspect kits. LAPD have not yet shared SAEK data for 2020 or 2021.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://lacounty.gov/government/about-lacounty/#:~:text=It%20is%20one%20of%20the,27%20percent%20of%20California's%20population>