



# Survivor Voices

WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T, AND HOW CAN CALIFORNIA BETTER SERVE VICTIMS OF CRIME

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# Executive Summary

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Countless individuals will become victims of crime and violence in their lifetime. In fact, according to a 2019 survey by Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, one in three Californians have been a victim of crime. The impact of victimization can last weeks, months, and years after the incident. Those impacts, if untreated, can have implications that extend well beyond the individual themselves, as untreated trauma can be turned inward or outward: hurt people often hurt other people. As a result, failing to treat trauma in victims of crime isn't just a failure to help those who deserve our support, it's a failure that poses a threat to community safety.

To inform policy and public spending aimed at prevention and healing, this study of survivors and the work of the Survivor Center at the Prosecutors

Alliance aims to highlight critical gaps that exist in the current system. Traditional approaches to victim services centered in the criminal justice system purport to care about crime victims but continue to fund and fuel a system that is focused on punishment rather than healing. Central to criminal justice reform is modernizing the way victims are served and treated. If we condemn violence and want to help people recover from experiences of violence, we must dedicate our resources and energy to their healing. This report surveyed 711 survivors who shared their experiences in listening sessions, interviews and by survey of what worked, what didn't, and what help they needed most to recover from the trauma of victimization. It gives us a blueprint for how to improve support for victims that come directly from survivors.

# Summary of Results

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## 1

**Survivors need more support, not just immediately after the crime, but for significant time after the crime, outside of business hours, and for the things they need to rebuild their lives.**

- 41% of survivors said they needed emotional support after victimization.
- 43% of participants said they needed money right away to pay for rent, food, or other necessities.

## 2

**Most survivors do not know about or are not connected to services and resources that help them recover physically, emotionally, and financially. Victims' compensation is underutilized by victims, it is hard to access and has barriers that prevent most crime survivors from using it.**

- Just 61% of victims are offered victims compensation after victimization.
- Black, AAPI and Latina/o/x participants were offered compensation less often than White participants.

## 3

**Survivors want advocates to have trauma informed training and have more advocates with lived experience as crime survivors.**

- When survivors were asked if they could provide survivors with anything they needed, emotional support was mentioned in 53% of the comments including someone to talk to, someone to listen to, information, crisis support and counseling.

## 4

**Survivors want access to needed resources for healing and recovery regardless of who or how they were harmed.**

- 30% of participants discussed barriers for them or family members due to probation, parole status or those who had experienced violence at the hands of law enforcement.
- 50% of participants said they did not have money to pay out of pocket for expenses like mental health or relocation, so they just did not access services or move.

## 5

**Restitution is not working for survivors.**

- Only 61% of participants had restitution explained to them.
- 70% of participants did not know why restitution was not ordered in their cases.

# Survivor-Driven Recommendations

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## WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

# 1

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**Develop intensive, trauma informed services for crime survivors that assess immediate, short-term and long-term needs, connect them with services and resources and are available to survivors 24/7.**

# 2

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**Reform California's Victims Compensation Program to be more accessible, responsive to the immediate needs of survivors and include all people harmed by violence and crime.**

# 3

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**Ensure advocates are trained in dealing with survivors struggling with trauma.**

# 4

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**Reform restitution to a model in which the survivor is paid upfront regardless of the offender's capacity to pay.**

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# Introduction

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Countless individuals will become victims of crime and violence in their lifetime. In fact, according to a 2019 survey by Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, one in three Californians have been a victim of crime. The impact of victimization can last weeks, months, and years after the incident. Those impacts, if untreated, can have implications that extend well beyond the individual themselves, as untreated trauma can be turned inward or outward: hurt people often hurt other people. As a result, failing to treat trauma in victims of crime isn't just a failure to help those who deserve our support, it's a failure that poses a threat to community safety.

The good news is that, as we continue to reform our criminal justice system to be less excessive and inequitable, crime in California has been steadily decreasing for the past decade. According to the most recent 2020 National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS), violence in the United States has continued to decline over the last several years. The report which analyzes all violent crime for adults ages twelve and older (except homicide) found a decrease of 15% from 2019 to 2020 and there was a decline in property crime from 7.37% in 2016 to 6.19% in 2020. While this is great news, it does not mean that the work is done. Far more must be done to expand violence prevention and

healing, and those efforts must be rooted in data, science, and survivor voices.

To inform policy and public spending aimed at prevention and healing, this study of survivors and the work of the Survivor Center at the Prosecutors Alliance aims to highlight critical gaps that exist in the current system. Traditional approaches to victim services centered in the criminal justice system purport to care about crime victims but continue to fund and fuel a system that is focused on punishment rather than healing. Central to criminal justice reform is modernizing the way victims are served and treated. If we condemn violence and want to help people recover from experiences of violence, we must dedicate our resources and energy to their healing.. This report surveyed 711 survivors who shared their experiences in listening sessions, interviews and by survey of what worked, what didn't, and what help they needed most to recover from the trauma of victimization. It gives us a blueprint for how to improve support for victims that come directly from survivors.

Below is a summary of the literature on the experience of crime survivors in the United States.

## **MOST CRIME SURVIVORS DON'T GET HELP TO HEAL & RECOVER**

Research shows that most victims of crime do not receive support to recover after harm. Unfortunately, there are not adequate services available for survivors of violence.

**While the state of California spends roughly \$50 billion annually on local law enforcement, the criminal legal system and incarceration in state prisons and county jails (Graves & Hoene, 2020), it only dedicates \$100 million to support for victims (California State budget FY 22-23).**

This makes it difficult for community and system based advocates to provide survivors with meaningful support after they have experienced violence. Our system prioritizes the punishment of the accused over the need of survivors.

Victim/witness advocates in county district attorney's offices across California provide vital services to tens of thousands of crime survivors every year. They offer support, navigation within the criminal justice system, information about the status of the case, access to California Victims Compensation (Cal VCB), and referral to services in the community. These services are vital for those who report a crime and engage with the criminal justice system, but there are many people affected by crime who do not. While some will seek support from community based organizations, many more go without any formal support, relying on family and friends to help them meet their needs.

Not everyone reports crime or engages with the criminal justice system. According to the Pew Research Center, most violent crimes and most property crimes in the U.S. are not reported to police, and most of the crimes that are reported are not solved (Gamlich, 2020). According to researchers Morgan and Thompson in an annual report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BSJ), in 2020, only 40% of victims of violence and 33% of victims of property crime reported these incidents to police (Morgan & Thompson, 2021). BJS notes several reasons for not reporting crimes including fear of reprisal or getting someone in trouble, belief that law enforcement wouldn't do anything or help, and belief that the crime is too trivial to report.

***Most violent crimes and most property crimes in the U.S. are not reported to police, and most of the crimes that are reported are not solved.***

Certain crimes are reported at lower rates than others. The 2009 National Institute of Justice Special Report on Domestic Violence (Klien, 2009) found that only 27% of women and 13.5% of men who were physically assaulted by an intimate partner reported their assaults to law enforcement, and less than 20% of women victims reported intimate partner rapes to police.

In her book *Ghettoside: Investigating a Homicide Epidemic*, journalist Jill Leovy cites research that found Black victims of crime may be less likely to make formal reports of their victimization and less likely to cooperate with police officers (Leovy, 2015). Age is also a factor in reporting crime. In 2005, Sims, Yost, and Abbot explored the use of victim services and found that older victims of violent crime are more likely to report than younger victims of non-violent crime. Whether reported or not, violence and crime impact individuals, families, and our communities.

Among victims who do come forward and report a crime, few get the support they need to recover. According to seminal study by Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice (2019), less than 1 in 5 victims of crime report receiving financial assistance, counseling, medical assistance, and other types of healing services that can help them recover or stabilize. Only 11% of victims of violent crimes received assistance from a victim service agency (Moran & Kena, 2018). In the 2016 Alliance for Safety and Justice study, only 1 in 10 crime victims surveyed received assistance from a district attorney's or prosecutor's office and 2 in 3 crime victims received no help from the criminal justice system following the crime (ASJ, 2016).

*Whether reported or not,  
violence, and crime impact  
individuals, families,  
and our communities.*

ONLY  
**11%**   
**OF VICTIMS OF  
VIOLENT CRIME**  
RECEIVED ASSISTANCE

**2** OUT OF **3**   
**CRIME VICTIMS**  
RECEIVED NO HELP FROM  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

## MARGINALIZED PEOPLE ARE MOST AT RISK FOR CRIME VICTIMIZATION

Across a range of studies, we see that not all people are at the same risk of being a crime victim. Race, age, gender and income play a key role in determining risk. Using data from the 2018 National Crime Victimization Survey, researchers Anna Harvey and Taylor Mattia found that Black survey respondents were 22% more likely to experience a serious violent crime than non-Hispanic White respondents (Harvey & Mattia, 2021). In 2018, researchers Morgan and Kena found that African American and Latino men are most likely to be repeat victims of crime (Morgan & Kena, 2018). The most common group of crime victims are 18-24 years old, who experience crime at nearly twice the rate of other groups (ASJ, 2016). Black women are also significantly more vulnerable to violent crime. Dr. Jameta Nicole Barlow of George Washington University found that more than 20% of Black women are raped during their lifetimes, higher than among all other women and two and a half times more likely to be murdered by men than their White counterparts (Barlow, 2020). According to The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, 40% of all confirmed sex trafficking survivors in the U.S. are Black. A UCLA study found that transgender people are more than four times as likely to be victims of violent crime compared to people who are cisgender (Flores, et al. 2020). Finally, those making less than \$25,000 are two times as likely to be victims of crime as those making \$50,000 or more (Morgan & Kena, 2019, Gamlich, J. (2020).

**MOST LIKELY TO BE REPEAT VICTIMS**

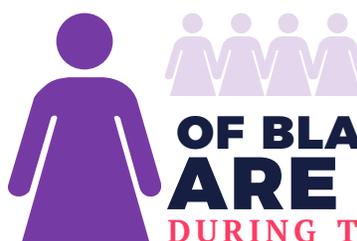
**AFRICAN AMERICAN & LATINO MEN**

**BLACK WOMEN SIGNIFICANTLY MORE VULNERABLE TO VIOLENT CRIME**

**18-24 YEAR OLDS**  
**MOST COMMON GROUP OF CRIME VICTIMS**



**20% OF BLACK WOMEN ARE RAPED DURING THEIR LIFETIME**



These statistics highlight the need for services and support that meet the needs of all victims, not just those who have been the traditional focus of support.

**Hurt people hurt people.**

## **CRIME & VIOLENCE CAUSE RISK OF FURTHER VICTIMIZATION AND CAUSING HARM**

The research tells us that the biggest predictor of future victimization is past victimization. Sadly, victims of violent crime are four times more likely to experience repeat victimization (ASJ, 2016). This is particularly true for child victims. More than a quarter of male victims of completed rape (28%) were first raped when they were 10 years old or younger (Black, et al. 2011). About 35% of women who were raped as minors also were raped as adults compared to 14% of women without an early rape history (Black, et al. 2011).



The effects of victimization also have implications for community safety. The expression, hurt people hurt people, reminds us that untreated pain and trauma can result in more harm to the individual or others. When someone has been the victim of violence and crime and that trauma is not addressed, treated, and healed, it can lead to future violent acts. In New York, 80% of incarcerated people sampled in prisons reported some form of childhood victimization (Weeks & Widom, 1998).

In just one Arkansas prison, one third of adult prisoners reported witnessing murder, 40% before the age of eighteen. In a press release from the Prison Policy Initiative (PPI), Alexi Jones, a policy analyst at PPI, states that an additional 36% of incarcerated people reported they had been seriously beaten or stabbed before incarceration (Jones, 2020). Victimization at an early age is a predictor of future violence for juveniles too. In Cook County Chicago, 90% of juveniles in the detention facility reported that they had experienced one or more traumas before incarceration (Abram et al. 2004).

These tragic statistics and the people who have suffered these traumas provide us with meaningful opportunities to improve public safety and community wellness through modern trauma informed approaches for survivors of crime. Treating harm holistically when it happens reduces future harm to that victim and will help us avoid future harm to others.



# 90%

## JUVENILES IN THE DETENTION FACILITY EXPERIENCED 1 OR MORE TRAUMAS BEFORE INCARCERATION

### COOK COUNTY CHICAGO



# Prosecutors Alliance California (PAC) Sponsored Research

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In the Fall of 2021, the Survivor Policy, Training and Resource Center of the Prosecutors Alliance California (PAC), in partnership with the University of San Francisco, commenced a three-phase research study to better understand how victims and survivors of violence and crime are engaged, informed, and served through current statewide victim services and resources. To improve access, diversity of responses, and reach a large audience, we offered the survey in three languages and multiple formats. Survivors were invited to share their experiences of what worked for them, what didn't, and what needs to be improved. Due to Covid restrictions, most sessions for this study were completed online over Zoom. A total of 711 survivors participated in the research study.

## Phase 1: Listening Sessions

During the months of August through November of 2021, we conducted 9 virtual listening sessions with 29 survivors of crime and two in-person sessions in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The lead researcher and trained volunteers, helped facilitate break out groups with survivors of various crime types, and lead discussions on the research questions.

## Phase 2: Interviews

In October 2021, we conducted 19 private interviews with survivors of violent crime. Survivors signed up through an online application for a one-hour virtual interview. Interviews were conducted by the primary researchers and trained graduate student research assistants over Zoom.

## Phase 3: Survey

Beginning November 2021, we launched a multilingual (English, Spanish, Cantonese) digital survey that was completed by 663 respondents. The survey was shared broadly with community organizations working with survivors as well as posted on social media to reach people that may never have been connected to services or support for the harm they suffered.

# Research Questions

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A full list of survey questions used in listening sessions, interviews and the survey can be found in Appendix A of this report. Below is a summary of the areas explored in this study.

## **VICTIMS' RIGHTS:**

Many states have enacted victims rights laws. In California the state Constitution, Article 1 Section 28 (b) confers certain rights to victims of crime. This law known as Marsy's Law provides victims of crime certain rights that include fair treatment, access to information and input, and notice on the outcomes of the case. Victims and survivors must be informed of these rights and must tell the attorney or advocate they want to be informed about the case. .

## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:**

Many states have crime compensation programs to help survivors recover after victimization. In California, the California Victim's Compensation Board (CalVCB) provides reimbursement to victims/survivors of violent crime. Expenses like medical, mental health, dental, funeral and burial, crime scene clean-up, lost wages, relocation, and home safety improvements can be covered. The program requires cooperation with law enforcement (except in domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual assault cases) and no contribution to the crime (mutual combat, in the act of breaking a law) to qualify.

## **INFORMATION & ENGAGEMENT:**

When crime victims engage with the criminal justice system, they have the right to receive information about their case including arrest and release of the defendant, charges filed or declined, pre-trial disposition, notice of all public proceedings, outcome of the case, and sentencing recommendations.

## **RESTITUTION:**

Survivors of crime who suffer financial losses because of that crime have the right to seek and secure restitution from the person who caused the harm. Restitution can be ordered in every case where there is financial loss, regardless of the sentence or disposition imposed.

## **SERVICES:**

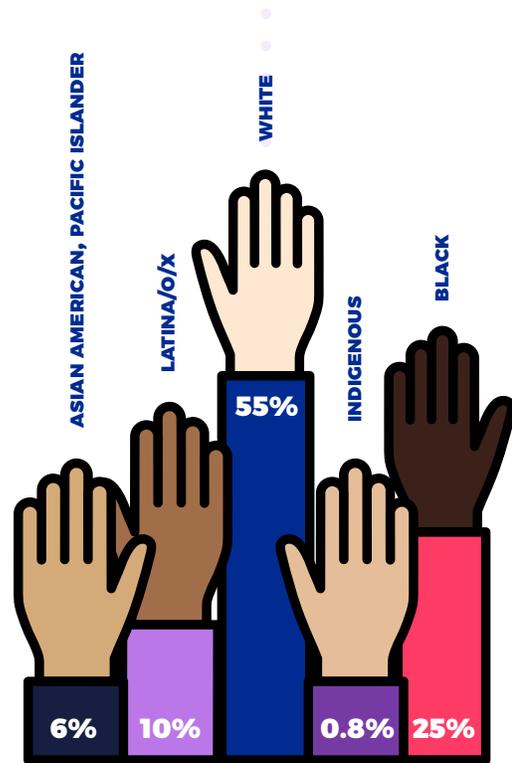
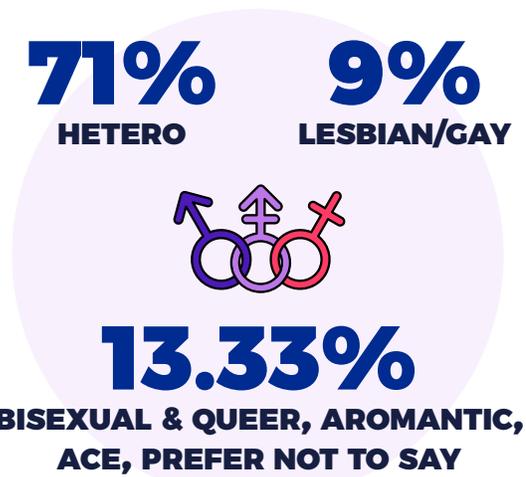
Every survivor has a different experience with crime and violence. Some survivors report their crime, and their case is processed through the criminal justice system, and some never report the violence or harm they experience. For those that report a crime, they are entitled to system-based victim services. The goal of victim services is to support the survivor through the criminal justice system and assist them in accessing the services and resources to recover and heal.

# Participants



There were a total of 711 people who participated in listening sessions, interviews, and surveys. Not all participants of the listening sessions and interviews shared demographic information, therefore this report will rely on the 633 participants of the survey who provided demographic information. Unless otherwise stated, results from the survey are highlighted in this report.

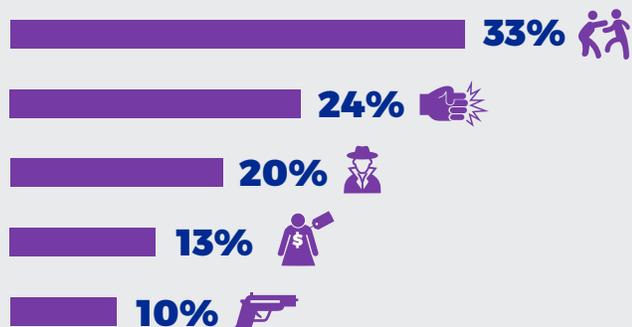
The age of participants ranged from 18 to 75 + years old. The largest group represented were 41- to 55-year-olds. Just over half (54%) of the participants live in California. Participants reported speaking more than 18 languages with English spoken by 90%. Most respondents were women (60%). Seventy-one percent of the respondents identified as heterosexual, 9% as Lesbian or Gay, 13.33 as bisexual and queer, aromantic, ace or prefer not to say. A little more than half of the respondents were White (55%), followed by Black at 25%, Latina/o/x at 10%, Asian American Pacific Islander 6% (South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander), and Indigenous at .80%. Twenty-eight percent identified as disabled (physical, cognitive, emotional) and 76% identified as a survivor of a violent crime.





**FROM DA  
OFFICE VICTIMS'  
SERVICES PROGRAM**

**TYPES OF CRIMES EXPERIENCED BY PARTICIPANTS**



Only 153 out of 663 (24%) survey participants said they received services from a District Attorney's Office victims' services program, but we found that Black and Latina/o/x survivors accessed services at a DA's office (14% and 27%) higher than their demographic representation according to the 2020 census, while White survivors accessed DA office services at a lower rate than the 2020 census representation at 16%. The largest number of survivors received services in four counties: San Francisco, 17%, San Joaquin 14%, Alameda 13%, and Los Angeles 10%. A total of 663 participants identified the types of crime they experienced (average of 1.69 times per person) for a total of 1122 crimes. Sexual assaults accounted for the largest number of crimes at 33%, followed by intimate partner violence 24%, stalking 20%, human trafficking 13%, homicide 10%. This means most of our participants were the victims of multiple violent crimes, most involving relationships with the person causing harm.

# Survey Results

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## VICTIMS' RIGHTS

Many survivors expressed how challenging it was to have so much information given to them upfront, in the hours or days following the violence and crime, while they were still in shock and experiencing trauma. Many survivors told us they got initial support immediately following the crime, but then never heard from anyone after that. When asked how we could better get information to victims about their rights or case updates, survivors' said the top two responses were written (17%) and email (17%).

Crime survivors reported experiencing a range of physical, emotional, and financial challenges from victimization that affect their daily functioning and capacity to manage information. They suggested that reaching out initially was helpful, but they needed follow up in the days, weeks, and months after being harmed. Many told us they found themselves alone, unsure how to access resources, particularly after business hours, evenings, in the middle of the night and weekends as the impact of the crime began to have multiple effects on them. Listening session participants noted how challenging it was to track all the resources, referrals and information and said they needed one place to go to get questions answers, seek out support 24 hours a day, any day of the week. Some listening sessions and interview participants told us when they didn't know where to turn, or when they could not get the information they needed, they just gave up and did not access services. This is a lost opportunity to support the healing of survivors. As discussed above, this puts the victim at greater risk of future victimization.

*Some listening sessions and interview participants told us when they didn't know where to turn, or when they could not get the information they needed, they just gave up and did not access services. This is a lost opportunity to support the healing of survivors.*



### MOST COMMON EXPENSES COVERED



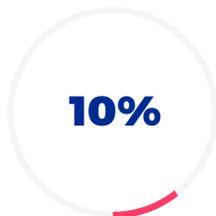
MENTAL HEALTH



MEDICAL EXPENSES



LOSS OF INCOME



RELOCATION

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

**Only 61.30% of the respondents said they were offered victims compensation after their crime. Black, AAPI and Latino/a/x participants were offered victim compensation less often than White participants who were offered the resources 68% of the time.**

Black survivors were only offered compensation 56% of the time, AAPI 55%, and Latina/o/x 45%. It is important to note that when survivors were offered the opportunity and applied for compensation, Black survivors were approved at a rate of 99% and Latina/o/x at a rate of 100%, compared to 92% for White participants. Also significant, AAPI survivors were denied compensation in 23% of their applications.

**Additionally, of those survivors who were denied compensation, 70% never knew why they did not qualify or receive compensation.**

For those who did receive compensation, the most common expense covered was mental health at 39%, followed by medical expenses at 29%, loss of income at 22%, and relocation at 10%.

In addition to the disparities in both knowledge of and approval for victims' compensation, survivors shared many challenges with victims' compensation programs.

**Thirty percent of participants discussed barriers for them or family members due to probation or parole status or those who had experienced violence at the hands of law enforcement.**

Others shared experiences of not even applying for compensation because they had not reported the crime immediately or were concerned for their safety if they spoke with law enforcement.



**One survivor told us in an interview that she did not want to talk to law enforcement directly after the crime because she was too upset that her son was in surgery fighting for his life and was later told she would not get compensation if she applied because she did not cooperate.**



**Another survivor shared that he was questioned in the emergency room, while experiencing multiple gunshot wounds and did not qualify for compensation because law enforcement thought he knew who shot him and would not disclose the person's name.**



**When asked why they did not apply for compensation, the majority said it was too hard or they didn't understand the application process. Many also said they did not have assistance to apply, did not know about compensation, or did not want to share personal information.**

One of the most troubling findings was that many people did not have the financial resources to cover their needs after being harmed. Fifty five percent of respondents said they did not have money to pay out of pocket for expenses like mental health or relocation, so they just did not access services or move. The reimbursement model used by the California Victim's Compensation Board appears to create a significant hurdle for survivors without the financial ability to pay for the costs up front. For those who could not move, they said the fear for their safety was a major concern that affected their day to day lives. Sadly, 25 participants mentioned having to raise money through online fundraising, car washes or food sales to help bury their loved ones.



**NO MONEY FOR OUT OF POCKET EXPENSES**

**25**

**PARTICIPANTS RESORTED TO FUNDRAISING TO BURY THEIR LOVED ONES**



# Access. Resources. Information.

## INFORMATION & ENGAGEMENT

A total of 63% of survivors said they were kept up to date on their cases, primarily by district attorney's, 55%, and victim advocates, 42%. The vast majority, 80%, were offered information in their primary language if that was English. Also important, 83% of participants said they understood the information that was provided to them, but only 62% said they were able to give input about their wishes or how the crime impacted them.



When asked the open-ended question, “What could have been done better to include you in the process of your case?” Survivors had a lot to say. Participants in all three formats shared two major themes: access to more information and immediate services and resources.

Many survivors shared their frustrations and said they did not know who to go to for information and resources. One survivor said, “Someone followed up and offer (sic) me services, got one call and that was it”. Another survivor said she needed someone to answer questions and walk her through what was going on. One survivor summed up the sentiment of many survivors well, saying “Victims shouldn’t have to reach out for information on case (sic), it should be automatic”. The second issue was about immediate access to resources, primarily mental health services,



*Restitution works if the person can pay you,  
but they probably can't so you will never see it.*

**– SURVIVOR ON RESTITUTION**

and financial assistance. Several survivors said they needed mental health support for themselves or children in their families soon after victimization but did not know how to get it or were told there was a long wait for services.

Additionally, approximately 43% of interview participants said they needed money right away to pay for rent, food, or other necessities because they could not go to work or the person who worked in the home was injured or deceased after the crime.



## **RESTITUTION**

Sixty one percent of survivors said restitution was explained to them. Forty five percent got information from victim advocates, 39% from district attorney's and 14% from community-based advocates. Restitution was ordered in 66% of the cases. Among those who did not have a restitution order, however, 70% did not know why it was not ordered. Participants were asked what would make restitution more accessible and effective, and responses raised two major issues: For those who received payments, the payments were slow and unpredictable, and many never received enough to make them whole from their financial losses. One survivor receiving restitution from an incarcerated defendant said, "Don't send small checks that just remind us we will never get paid." Another said, "We need money right away, especially for people struggling with financial abuse."

**Many survivors in the interviews said they never got restitution orders because their cases were dropped, or no one was ever arrested. They shared stories of how the property damage or lost property affected them after the crime.**

One survivor said her ex-boyfriend took her computer when he left after a violent fight rendering her unable to work. Another survivor said her car was shot at while parked on the street and she could not afford the cost to replace the window or pay the insurance deductible, so she had to drive around with her kids in a car with a missing window and gunshots on the side of the car. Another survivor told us her partner broke her phone and she had to continue to use a shattered phone for months because she did not have the money to replace it. Finally, a survivor summed up many responses with her quote, "Restitution works if the person can pay you, but they probably can't so you will never see it."

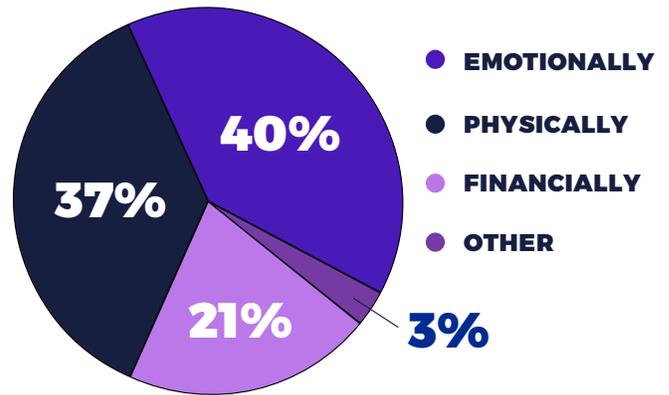
## SERVICES

Survivors were asked how the crime affected them and 40% said emotionally, 37% physically, 21% said financially and 3% said “other”.

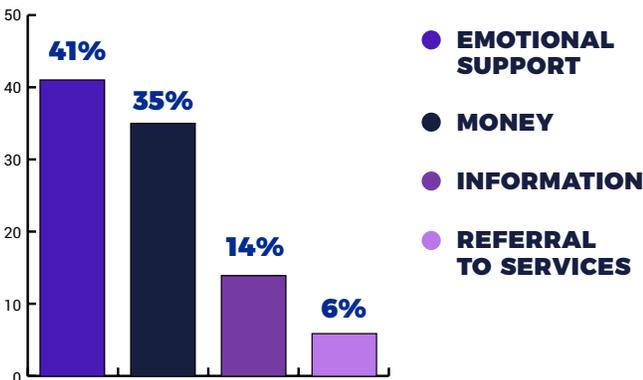
Survivors also told us that effects from crime are long lasting. 24% reported experiencing the effects for weeks, 29% for months, 17% for years, and, unfortunately, 30% said victimization still affects them.

On the question of how long the crime affected you, “still affecting the survivor” was the most common response: Other (Indigenous/bi/multiracial) 61%, Latina/o/x 58%, AAPI 40%, and White, 28%. The only group who did not endorse “still affecting” is Black participants who listed months at 37% as the most common response. Months was the second most common response for all other groups except Black survivors who said weeks. These responses indicate that the effects of crime linger long term for most survivors.

HOW CRIME AFFECTED SURVIVORS



MOST HELPFUL AFTER CRIME EVENT



HOW LONG CRIME AFFECTED SURVIVORS





***Give victims money to rebuild their lives.***

**- SURVIVOR**



***Compassion and empathy, this is the worst time in your life.***

**- SURVIVOR**

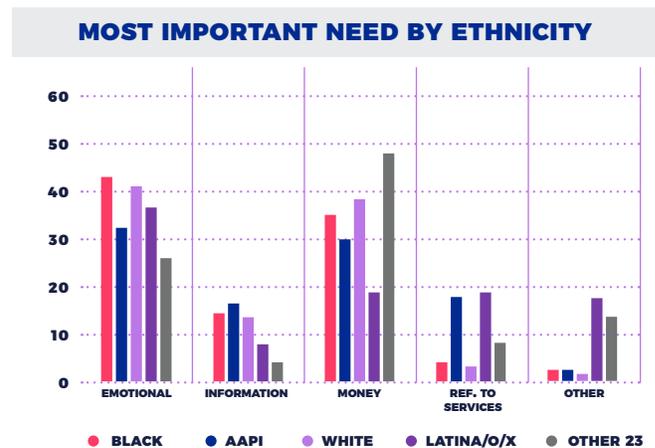
**When asked what was most helpful after a crime event, 41% said emotional support, 35% said money, 14% said information, and 6% said referral to services.**

The question of the most important need analyzed by ethnic identity is interesting. Four ethnic groups, Black, AAPI, White and Latina/o/x endorsed emotional support as the largest need, while those who identified as Other (Indigenous/bi/multiracial), said money was the most important.

For the second most common answer Black, AAPI, White and Latina/o/x survivors said money was second most needed while those who identified as Other (Indigenous/bi/multiracial), said emotional support.

Our final question was the “miracle question”. The miracle question is a popular therapy intervention used to help find solutions to problems. It asks the person to imagine and discuss the possibilities of change. In our listening sessions, interviews, and surveys we asked, “If you had the resources and power to provide survivors anything they needed after a crime, what would you give them?” We received more than 300 hundred responses ranging from “empathy and understanding” to “cash and housing.” Each survivor’s experience was different, but responses fell into two overarching categories of emotional support and financial resources. Emotional support was mentioned in 53% of the comments included someone to talk to, someone to listen to, information, crisis support and counseling. One survivor told us, “Compassion and empathy, this is the worst time of your life.” Another said, “People working with survivors need to learn to work with them and not make it worse for them.”

Many victims recommended immediate financial assistance to help them return to safety, access the tools they need to heal and put their lives back together. One survivor said, “Give them a safe



place to go if they can’t go home, it’s probably not safe.” Another said, “Pay for security alarm systems and technology to protect yourself (sic) on phone and social media.” And one survivor summed it up well, “Give victims money to rebuild their lives.”



***Give them a safe place to go if they can’t go home, it’s probably not safe.***

**- SURVIVOR**

# Survivor Recommendations

Based on the responses of the survivors we worked with, we developed a set of recommendations that are reflective of their wisdom, concerns, and ideas to help survivors heal.

## 1. INTENSIVE TRAUMA-INFORMED SERVICES

Develop intensive, trauma informed services for crime survivors that assess immediate, short-term and long-term needs, connect them with services and resources and are available to survivors 24/7.

Crime survivors shared stories of their experiences and how it impacted them for days, weeks and months following the traumatic event. Some survivors said they received offers of services or support immediately after the event happened, particularly for those that reported the event, but most survivors said that they had trouble finding or accessing resources as time went by.

Survivors expressed that they experienced different stages of trauma and their need for assistance changed over time. Initially, they were responding



*I didn't even know what to ask for or what I needed. I was in shock. People ask you what you need, and you just say nothing, you can't think straight, you are in survival mode. -SURVIVOR*

to the trauma of the event, experiencing fear, anger, anxiety, sadness, and confusion. They discussed challenges common with trauma including problems with sleep, nightmares, irritability, trouble making decisions, and hyperarousal. When offers of help came early on, many survivors said they didn't even know what they needed yet. In the days following the incidents, some survivors began to experience immediate needs for things like safe housing, food, replacement of items they lost or did not have access to, like medications and clothing. Some survivors expressed needs for information about the case such as access to resources and someone to talk to.

## 2. REFORM CALIFORNIA'S VICTIM COMPENSATION PROGRAM

Reform California's Victims Compensation Program to be more accessible, responsive to the immediate needs of survivors and include all people harmed by violence and crime.

### Increase access and information

State victim compensation programs are incredibly important resources for crime victims, but all too often these programs are bureaucratic and complicated for victims to access. The California Victim Compensation Board (CalVCB) contribution and compliance requirements leave many survivors of crime without access to this financial support. In addition, the current reimbursement-based program disproportionately fails survivors with limited financial resources.

Although the victim compensation program processed 32,649 assistance claims in the amount of \$47,226,240 in 2021 there are still thousands of victims of crimes who would qualify for the program but do not know the program exists or are excluded from support. Forty percent of the Survivor Voices Survey respondents did not know about the victim's compensation program. Similarly, a 2016 survey from Californians for Safety and Justice reported that two thirds of survey respondents were unaware they could get assistance by filling out a victim's compensation application. Even when the survivor reported the crime to law enforcement, many survivors were not made aware of how to apply for compensation.

### Remove eligibility barriers and include all people harmed by violence

Victim compensation applications require proof of victimization in the form of a police report, impact statement from the DA, or similar documentation. Many survivors shared that they did not report crimes because they did not think police would do anything, they had bad experiences with law enforcement, or they were afraid of getting in trouble. The current California Victim Compensation Board guidelines make exceptions to the documentation and reporting requirements for crimes involving sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking. In these cases, verification can be provided by health, mental health, or service providers. All other victims must continue to show proof of victimization.



***My children literally watched their father die on T.V.***

***They needed help, they needed therapy, but we didn't qualify for any help.***

***- HOMICIDE VICTIM FAMILY MEMBER AT A SURVIVOR LISTENING SESSION***

### **Provide direct cash assistance to survivors upfront and end the reimbursement model**

In 2021, President Biden signed the Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) to Sustain the Victim Fund Act which helped financially secure the Crime Victims Fund (CVF). The Bill increased funding available to the states to support victims of crime. Importantly, it also eliminated the requirement that victims must cooperate with an investigation to be eligible for financial assistance.

Many survivors told us that they did not apply for victims' compensation because they were told they would need to pay the expenses upfront and then submit proof of service and payment to be approved for reimbursement. Survivors gave examples of barriers that included not having money to pay for the services upfront (funeral burial, relocation, health, or mental health services) and not being able to manage documentation and submitting information when recovering from the immediate effects of trauma. Survivors said they were struggling to care for themselves, their children or family members and remain safe. They could not keep track of applications and documentation as they could before the crime incident, several saying they struggled to work, go to school and function in their daily lives.

Many survivors also expressed that the things they needed were not covered by victims' compensation. When the violence and crime they suffered affected their immediate physical and emotional safety, survivors said they needed immediate cash assistance to get to safety, including shelter or relocation, food, clothing, and personal items.

## **3. TRAINED ADVOCATES**

### **Ensure advocates are trained in dealing with survivors struggling with trauma.**

Most of our participants said that the trauma they experienced was still affecting them years after the crime event. Forty percent of our participants said they were emotionally affected by their crime and 41% said emotional support was the service that was most helpful to them after the crime, even above money (35%). These statistics speak to the huge impact trauma has on survivors of crime and violence. Trauma occurs when a person experiences a negative event that overwhelms their coping mechanisms and causes long lasting impact on the victim's mental and emotional health. Every person has a different response from trauma, but the symptoms associated with trauma including intrusive memories, avoidance, negative thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions can be debilitating.

We heard from numerous survivors who said they interacted with people who did not show them empathy or understanding and who did not have the knowledge and skills needed to work with trauma survivors. When survivors feel invalidated, are met with disbelief, or interpret justice professionals as blaming, trauma symptoms are exacerbated. They are less likely to cooperate with police and more likely to discontinue participating in the formal criminal justice process (Franklin, et al. 2020). Advocates who work with crime

survivors are also exposed to disturbing and traumatic information, including frustrations and injustices with the criminal justice system, and tend to the range of reactions and emotional needs from crime survivors put them at risk for secondary trauma. (Salston & Figley, 2003). There are significant emotional, cognitive, and physical consequences for victim advocates and their mental health and well-being needs to be a priority.

***Understanding how trauma works and how to use that information to be responsive and supportive to survivors is imperative in helping them to heal.***

Trauma Informed Care (TIC) is a framework for raising awareness, knowledge, and skills in working with people who have experienced trauma. Understanding how trauma works and how to use that information to be responsive and supportive to survivors is imperative in helping them to heal. TIC helps change practice but also works to help change attitudes and behaviors of those working with survivors and build empathy and understanding with survivors (Berliner & Kioko, 2016). Finally, TIC provides information and resources for advocates to prevent, identify, manage, and treat their own reactions from working in trauma. Learning about trauma, how to work with people who experience it and how to take care of your own mental health is the key to healing and healthy mental health for survivors and practitioners.

## **4. UPFRONT RESTITUTION**

### **Reform restitution to a model in which the survivor is paid upfront regardless of the offender's capacity to pay**

Restitution is an order from the court that requires the person who is convicted of causing the harm to pay the victim for their financial losses. This is distinct from the Cal VCB program discussed above. It is meant to help the individual recover from financial damage caused by a crime and as a measure of accountability to the person who caused the harm through reparations. In theory, this system is meant to help make the victim whole and assist in the recovery process. The problem with this model is that an order of restitution for financial compensation paid by a defendant in a case only affects a small portion of those harmed by violence and crime and actual payment of that order is completely dependent on the defendant's ability to pay. This disproportionately harms low-income survivors and defendants (Lau, 2020).

To secure an order of restitution a survivor must engage with the criminal justice system. They must report the crime, the offender must be identified, arrested, charged, and convicted of the crime. The survivor must fill out the appropriate forms and produce documents verifying the losses associated with the crime. This requires that the survivor be offered and instructed

in how to apply for restitution, that the prosecutor in the case ask for the restitution order and that the judge grant the order. Nationally, restitution is ordered in eighteen percent of all state felony cases (Rosenmerkel, Durose, & Farole, 2009).

Collection of restitution depends on the final disposition of the case. If the defendant is sentenced to state prison, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) manages the collection and distribution of restitution from money deposited for them or from wages earned while incarcerated. If the defendant is in jail in a local jurisdiction or on probation, the court is responsible for the collection and distribution of restitution. Despite these processes, the payment of restitution is still dependent on the capacity of the defendant to pay.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) Office of Victim and Survivor Rights and Services (OVSRS) report they collect \$2.1 million in court ordered restitution monthly and in 2020, disbursed \$16,363,415 to victims from both fines and direct orders. Although this is a large amount of money, analysis of CDCR data show that across all California counties, only one percent of victim restitution was paid while an incarcerated person was serving their sentence (Lau, 2020). Many victims, particularly those who are low income and were harmed by people who are also low income will never be whole by the current restitution system.

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***I get a check, not every month, but sometimes. It's two, three, four dollars. It's almost worse than getting nothing at all. It's just a reminder of what he did to me. I will never get paid and I still need work on my teeth.***

**– A SURVIVOR OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

# Conclusion

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California's current system for supporting crime survivors was developed fifty years ago. It no longer meets the needs of many people harmed by crime and violence. The system was meant for middle class victims with existing resources like insurance, savings, and support. However, victimization is disproportionately visited on poorer, more disadvantaged communities. These are victims who often do not have sufficient trust in police and the criminal justice system to come forward and report crime, let alone cooperate in the investigation of crime, and that serves as a barrier to their health and healing. To better meet their needs and better prevent crime, we must ensure that everyone touched by violence and crime has the tools and resources they need to fully heal and recover.

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