

# OVS Outreach

## Spring 2021

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### From the Director's Desk



We are 13 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is finally some good news on the horizon. For the last few months, New York State has been focused on implementing a robust vaccination program, with over 40% percent of our State's population at least partially

vaccinated, and we are seeing far fewer New Yorkers hospitalized. As our state, and the country, begin to open up, it gives us a chance to consider the impact that COVID-19 has had on us and on our work.

We know that there was an increase in domestic violence cases during the pandemic because so many victims were forced to stay at home with their abusers and they felt unable to access help. Measures, such as a text helpline, were quickly put in place to provide easier ways to find help. Victim service providers did an incredible job staying open and continuing to assist survivors.

But we also learned that other vulnerable populations, such as older adults, faced the same isolation and inability to access services. Not only was this community hardest hit by the virus, they suffered significant victimization as well. Elder abuse was already considered a serious public health issue before the pandemic. It is estimated that one in 10 individuals over the age of 60 will experience abuse. According to Psychiatric Times, since the start of the pandemic, there has been a massive increase in reports of elder abuse, including family violence, neglect and financial scams. The abuse is often perpetrated by a caregiver or family member, thereby further isolating the older adult from accessing help. We know that elder abuse is an especially underreported crime.

The number of Americans over 65 will more than double over the next 40 years -- by 2040 one in five Americans will be age 65 or older. It is critical that we address these issues of

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### Don't Forget! OVS 2021 Conference Proposals due 4.30!

OVS is accepting proposals for plenary and breakout presentations for our biennial conference.

Proposals are due by end of day on Friday, April 30th.

More information can be found by clicking the button below:

**Click Here to Submit a Proposal for the OVS 2021 Conference!**

### Save the Date: OVS 2021 Conference



**20 Years Later:**  
*Mass Casualty Events  
and the Evolution of  
Victim Services*



**2021 Conference • August 25 – 26 • New York, NY**



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## From the Director's Desk

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isolation and victimization now. We must consider what needs exist now, what needs might be identified, and what gaps exist. How do we prepare for the future of caring and protecting some of our most vulnerable citizens? This is especially important for communities of color, ethnic minorities and lower income elders, who are traditionally underserved.

To that end, the New York State Office of Victim Services (OVS) is proud to partner with Lifespan of Greater Rochester on the OVS 2021 Summit focusing on elder abuse in underserved populations. This targeted, virtual event will help Lifespan develop their third Elder Abuse Action Agenda, to shape the future of elder abuse prevention and treatment in New York State.

Just as a reminder: National Crime Victims' Rights Week will be held April 19-25 to recognize and honor those survivors, service providers and families impacted by crime across New York State. Many organizations will offer virtual programs and ceremonies as they did last year. Watch for announcements from OVS about our programming.

It's always important to recognize the work you do to make such a tremendous difference to individuals in their time of need. But during the last year, your efforts have been monumental. On behalf of the entire staff of OVS, thank you for your continued commitment to providing the highest quality services to innocent victims of crime in New York State.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Cronin, Esq.

## Compensation for 60 Years of Age and Over

Factors such as physical health or cognitive impairment often leave our senior population in need of assistance with daily activities, such as shopping, preparing meals and managing money. Unfortunately, this often leaves individuals vulnerable to abuse by individuals who inflict mental or emotional anguish by means of threats, humiliation, intimidation, financial and material exploitation, or other physical and abusive conduct.

OVS can assist these victims with compensation. Crimes involving physical abuse may make victims eligible for the unreimbursed, out-of-pocket medical and counseling expenses. This includes related medical transportation. In sexual assault crimes, OVS offers free forensic rape exams and reimbursement for related expenses.

In crimes with no physical injury where personal property was a factor, OVS can pay up to \$500.00 for essential personal property reimbursement or \$100 in cash. OVS is keenly aware that older adults are often the victims of financial crimes and fraud. Victims of these schemes can apply for compensation for each instance that their debit cards have been misused, checks were forged, or unauthorized withdrawals/transfers were made, as long as the incidents are documented in a criminal justice agency report. OVS further expanded eligibility to include assistance with "loss of savings" for a special category of seniors who

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## Compensation for 60 Years of Age and Over

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are considered vulnerable adults. The vulnerable adult population includes elderly persons or incompetent or physically disabled persons, as defined in section 260.31 of the New York State Penal Law and is comprised of seniors who are unable to perform daily life-functions for themselves. Once a claim is evaluated and confirmed by appropriate criminal justice authorities and proper medical documentation, a victim of loss of savings could be eligible up to \$30,000.00. In addition to reaching out to OVS directly, seniors may be eligible for compensation by reporting abuse to law enforcement, adult protective services, or Family Court.

To learn more, or for questions about services to help Senior Crime Victims, visit [“OVS Compensation Training Series” on YouTube](#) to view a series of informative videos on OVS compensation. You can also call 800-847-2035 or submit any inquiries to [info@ovs.ny.gov](mailto:info@ovs.ny.gov). ■

## Executive Order Modifying Laws Under Which OVS Operates Continues

New York State has been responding to the COVID-19 pandemic for well over a year now. During the early stages of our response, the Governor’s COVID-19 Domestic Violence Task Force made certain recommendations, and on June 18, 2020, Governor Cuomo signed Executive Order 202.43 (EO), which temporarily suspended and modified the laws under which OVS operates. This EO has since been periodically continued; it is in effect as of the writing of this and is expected to remain in effect as New York’s COVID-19 response continues.

This EO provides expanded access to OVS victim compensation in instances where victims of domestic violence-related crimes are unable to report their crimes to law enforcement due to COVID-19-related restrictions but can access a certified residential program for victims of domestic violence. OVS, with the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), issued a joint letter explaining the EO. This letter explained our coordinated efforts to ensure local programs are able to carry out the conditions of this EO, which extend the following:

- Any certified residential program for victims of domestic violence is considered a criminal justice agency for purposes of the Executive Order;
- Relocation expenses shall include reasonable, temporary lodging expenses, such as motel or hotel, for victims of a crime or crimes related to domestic violence, subject to the fiscal limitation in subdivision 2 of section 631 of the Executive Law;
- OVS shall determine claims submitted by victims of crimes related to domestic violence, subject to the following:
  - ◊ If there is a physical injury, the claimant may submit medical records of the injury and a statement from any certified residential program for victims of domestic violence that the injuries were the result of a crime.
  - ◊ If there is no physical injury, the certified residential program for victims of domestic violence, after consultation with police or district attorney’s office, may determine that such actions include one or more of the enumerated charges under subdivisions 11 or 12 of section 631 of the Executive Law and specify such crime or crimes in the application or information submitted to OVS.

Please reach out to your OPDV liaison or OCFS regional office contact if you have any questions about the EO or how it pertains to your program and those you serve. ■

## Elder Abuse in the Time of COVID

*By Paul L. Caccamise, LMSW, ACSW, Vice President for Program, Lifespan of Greater Rochester*

The COVID-19 pandemic brought threats of infection and serious illness; it also brought new threats of mistreatment for older adults already at risk for abuse. For many older New Yorkers, often isolated due to chronic illness, lack of mobility and inadequate support systems, the pandemic meant further isolation from family, friends, and caregivers and limited access to food and medication. Social isolation is documented as a prime risk factor for abuse. In cases of elder mistreatment, including situations of domestic violence, lockdown often meant spending time in close contact with perpetrators without others being aware of the consequences.

Lifespan of Greater Rochester, an aging service provider in Upstate New York, has been assisting victims and those at risk of elder abuse since 1986. The agency's Upstate Elder Abuse Center (UpEAC) provides investigation and intervention in elder abuse cases in a 10-county area, as well as statewide education and training. When the pandemic hit, UpEAC temporarily suspended home visits for the safety of staff and clients. Staff made weekly calls to assess clients' needs for basic supplies, food and medicine and to check on their safety plans. This also provided some respite from some of the isolation. With fewer opportunities for monitoring by family, neighbors, professionals and others who typically report mistreatment, abuse referrals decreased initially.

Limited home visits have resumed and referrals have gradually increased. UpEAC has maintained its statewide preventive and education activities virtually and continued advocacy around elder abuse issues through the New York State Coalition on Elder Abuse.

OVS has been a supportive partner in Lifespan's regional and statewide efforts to combat elder abuse.

- Since 2017 – OVS has partnered with Lifespan, New York State Office for the Aging, and New York City Elder Abuse Center to establish Elder Abuse Enhanced Multidisciplinary Teams in every county.
- In 2019 – OVS provided a VOCA grant to UpEAC to expand fraud, scam, and ID theft prevention services into rural counties.
- Spring 2021 – Plans for an OVS and Lifespan jointly-sponsored, in-person third NYS Elder Abuse Summit were put on hold in 2020 but were reimagined as an expanded virtual series of events, focusing on outreach and service to underserved communities. Summit activities include:
  - ◇ Six webinars on elder abuse in LGBTQ+, African American, Latino, Native American, rural, and new American communities. Summit participants have been asked to complete follow-up surveys for each webinar.
  - ◇ Widespread distribution of webinars and surveys to gather additional information.
  - ◇ Small Summit workgroup sessions to discuss and develop recommendations for an updated New York State Elder Abuse Action Agenda, which will guide policy decisions and service development well into the future.

For further information about UpEAC, please go to <https://www.lifespan-roch.org/upstate-elder-abuse-center> or contact [pcaccamise@lifespan-roch.org](mailto:pcaccamise@lifespan-roch.org). For information on the 2021 New York State Elder Abuse Summit, please go to the New York State Coalition on Elder Abuse website at <https://www.nyselderabuse.org/>. ■



## Article Review: An Overview of Ageism During the Pandemic

In an article in Psychiatric Times, “[Elder Abuse and Ageism During COVID-19](#),” the authors discuss the ramifications of ageism in our culture and its effects on our elderly population during the pandemic. As reported, since March 2020, there has been a “massive increase in reports of elder abuse.”

As defined by the National Institute of Justice, elder abuse includes “intentional actions that cause harm or create serious risk of harm to a vulnerable elder by a caregiver or other person who stands in a trust relationship to the elder, or failure by a caregiver to satisfy the elder’s basic needs or to protect the elder from harm,” and can manifest in physical, emotional or sexual abuse; neglect or abandonment; and financial exploitation. According to the National Council on Aging, up to 5,000,000 older Americans are abused every year, with an estimated \$36.5 billion annual loss by victims of financial abuse. These statistics are shocking enough but are all the more heartbreaking when we consider that two-thirds of those persons suffer abuse by a trusted family member or caregiver. This further exacerbates their trauma because even if these crimes are reported – and only one in 24 are – the victims are unlikely to pursue legal action against the perpetrator due, to shame and/or family bonds.

Socially isolated elders are particularly vulnerable to abuse, either via their physical conditions – they live alone with limited contact from friends or family – or when that isolation is compounded by mental impairment (Alzheimer’s or dementia). When we consider that the abuse can lead the victim to depression and withdrawal, this can present in an ever-spiraling condition of isolation and vulnerability.

These vulnerabilities are prevalent in the best of times but were made even worse with the COVID-19 pandemic. The very nature of the virus’ increased risk to elderly people required that they shelter in place, with their only interactions being with direct caregivers. The frenzy and panic at the beginning of the pandemic, and the call to protect the elderly, put the very systems upon which they depend into crisis and thrust them further into isolation.

But there are resources. Victim Assistance Programs throughout New York State had staff on the ground to address the unique needs of the elderly and assist with these increased reports of abuse. From traditional, community-based programs in areas with concentrated aging populations to rural, geographically dispersed areas, these programs deploy mental health counselors and case managers to provide in-home services and advocacy where transportation is limited. There are innovative hospital-based programs working with telehealth to provide safe, social work consultation in the home, as well as geriatric psychiatrists and social workers trained in the special needs of some elderly people. There are programs that serve as centralized network hubs to provide related information and referral to concerned people close to victims to help guide them to advocate directly on behalf of loved ones. Other programs provide legal services targeted to elderly people and help them navigate the new virtual court processes to obtain protection orders. Through these dedicated programs, the goal is to keep older adults safe, and provide whatever support they need.

For more information on how to identify elder abuse:  
<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/overview-elder-abuse> ■



## Introducing OVS Resource Connect

In honor of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, OVS is pleased to announce the launch of **OVS Resource Connect** ([ovs.ny.gov/connect](https://ovs.ny.gov/connect)), a concern-based online search engine connecting users with potential crime victim resources in New York State.

Featuring enhanced search functionalities, **OVS Resource Connect** allows users seeking crime victim services and information to search for resources by concerns, keywords (i.e. "advocate", "safe housing", etc.) as well as geographic location. This new search engine immediately returns information provided by Victim Assistance Programs (VAPs), who can provide help to crime victims and offer additional services that are not directly offered by OVS.

Replacing the previous OVS Locate-a-Program tool, **OVS Resource Connect** comes equipped with more than **10,000** keywords and search terms and can connect users with nearly **500** resources through a custom-tailored search experience. In addition, users can browse alphabetical listings of concerns and resources and have access to a detailed map of VAPs.

Click the hyperlink below to access the site now!

[ovs.ny.gov/connect](https://ovs.ny.gov/connect)

This project would not have been possible without the collaboration and contribution of resource information from VAPs. OVS extends sincere gratitude to all the programs who volunteered their time and information.

A guide on how to use **OVS Resource Connect** has been made available [here](#) and more information is also accessible at [ovs.ny.gov/help](https://ovs.ny.gov/help). Please note, programs interested in submitting new or additional resources for publication in the site will have an opportunity at a later date, so stay tuned for an announcement from OVS.

On behalf of OVS, thank you for your continued commitment to providing the highest quality services to victims of crime in New York State. ■

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