



HARRIS COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAM

Biennial Report
December 1, 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and entities contributed their support, skills, and expertise to the development of the infrastructure of the Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team (HCSART). Thank you to Harris County Commissioner's Court with special appreciation to Commissioner Adrian Garcia, Pct. 2 for his commitment to survivors of sexual assault and for leading the charge in establishing a Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team (HCSART). To the Research and Analysis Division of the Office of County Administration, formerly the Justice Administration Department (JAD) with special recognition to Veronyka James, Ph.D., Survivor of Crime Policy Analyst, for her continued support, expertise, research to the Harris County SART since its inception. To the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) for their relentless advocacy, guidance, and tools throughout this process. To the leaders of each discipline represented for demonstrating the importance of collaboration and supporting staff in building the HCSART infrastructure. To the core members of the Harris County Sexual Assault Team (HCSART) for their dedication and commitment to survivor safety, offender accountability, for continuously showing up and willingness to work together and for recognizing that together we are stronger. To survivors for their bravery and willingness to share their experiences.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sexual violence is a public health crisis affecting 6.3 million women and men, that is 33.2% of adult Texans over their lifetime.¹ This is especially alarming given how underreported sexual assault is. All survivors deserve an opportunity for justice, access to resources, compassion and respect when engaging in services and navigating the criminal justice system. Sexual assault is a very traumatic experience with both short and long-term effects for survivors.

In the past several decades, attention to the issue of sexual violence has increased partly because of the amplified efforts of rape crisis programs, college campuses, and social media. The addition of specialized units and system-based advocates in law enforcement and district attorney offices, along with advances in medical forensic services have shined a light on this prevalent issue. Yet, our culture still blames survivors and struggles to hold people who commit sexual assault accountable.

The Harris County SART was established on November 9, 2021. Commissioner Adrian Garcia, Precinct 2, led the charge during Commissioners Court and gained full support, making sure that Harris County fulfilled the requirements of SB 476, passed during Texas' 87th Legislative Session. In January 2021, the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC) was elected presiding officer of the HCSART with Sonia Corrales, HAWC Deputy CEO, leading the team.

The HCSART's vision is to create a safe, equitable and violence free society where all lives are valued and respected. The mission is to provide a multi-disciplinary, collaborative response to all survivors of sexual assault with individualized and trauma informed care. The SART was charged with creating protocols, specific to the needs of adult sexual assault survivors that increase safety, promote continuity of care, support and empower survivors while holding offenders accountable in a fair and just system.

The protocols, which are included in this report, guide the team's collective response, eliminate gaps, and define roles and relationships. In addition, this report contains data that was required to be maintained by the team, including the number of sexual assaults reported to law enforcement, and the investigations, and prosecution of such offenses. The team also collected data from other core members including the number of adult sexual assault survivors served by community-based sexual assault programs, by system-based advocates, the number of individuals who received a medical forensic exam, and the number of rape kits completed.

The report is inclusive of all members and centers survivor's voices. The protocols created are a living document, continually updated based on the SARTs needs. In addition to successfully developing protocols and strengthening relationships, the team identified opportunities for making

¹ Busch-Armendariz, N., et al. (2015). Health and Well-being: Texas statewide sexual assault prevalence study. Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, School of Social Work, The University of Texas at Austin. <https://sites.utexas.edu/idvsa/files/2019/03/TX-SA-Prevalence-Study-Final-Report.pdf>.

improvements. The Harris County SART team members represent a diverse group of government and non-governmental agencies with impressive strengths, as well as limitations in the response to sexual assault. As the largest county in Texas and the third largest in the nation, Harris County's strengths in response to sexual assault include: the amount of existing resources available to survivors, the long-standing relationships among systems survivors interact with, specialized units within criminal justice, dedicated community based sexual assault programs, and access to medical forensic services.

The team understands that no one agency can effectively address all dynamics of a sexual assault alone. The long-standing relationships have facilitated communication, cooperation, and collaboration. The team identified opportunities for additional interaction among its members and concluded that improvements in collaboration provide the most comprehensive model for responding to sexual violence.

The following recommendations will guide the team's efforts in developing, implementing, and expanding trauma-informed, healing-centered policies and practices that ensure alignment with SART's mission and national best practices.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen framework for collaboration
- Improved access to community-based advocates
- Adopt a system's-based approach
- Interagency information sharing within criminal justice systems
- Mission-aligned training
- Improve offender accountability
- Identify and add new members to the SART
- Strengthen the inclusion of survivor voices
- Ensure compliance with legislation
- Develop a funding plan
- Develop a SART Sustainability Plan

EXTENT OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

According to the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), in 2019, there were an estimated 126,958 rapes² reported to law enforcement.³ In 2021, there were 104,573 rape incidents, and 108,373 sex offenses⁴

² This is the revised definition used by the UCR. "The revised UCR definition of rape is penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim. Attempts or assaults to commit rape are also included in the statistics presented here; however, statutory rape and incest are excluded" (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/rape>).

³ <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/table-12>

⁴ This includes rape, sodomy, sexual assault with an object, fondling, incest, statutory rape, and failure to register as a sex offender.

reported by law enforcement agencies nationwide to the Federal Bureau of Investigation crime statistics.⁵ However, this may underestimate the extent of sexual assault since many survivors do not report their victimization to law enforcement. Only about 21.5% of survivors reported their victimization to law enforcement in 2021 nationwide.⁶

Other research has attempted to examine sexual assault to get a better estimate of the extent of this victimization. An estimated 1 in 5 women in the United States (or 25.5 million women) reported a complete or attempted rape at some point during their lifetime.⁷ For men in the United States, approximately 27.6 million (or 24.8%) experienced some form of sexually violent contact in their lifetime.⁸ However, these still underestimate the extent of sexual assault. Even if the actual extent of sexual assault is not known, it is a serious problem affecting many individuals. There needs to be better responses for survivors.

In Texas, in 2021, there were 14,972 rapes reported to law enforcement.⁹ Yet, again, this is only capturing those cases reported to law enforcement, and so underestimates the actual extent of the crime.¹⁰ In Harris County, in 2021, there were 3,779 sexual assaults reported to law enforcement.¹¹

The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) estimates that more than 2 out of 3 sexual assaults go unreported. Further, of sexual assault incidents not reported, 20% of victims stated their reason for doing so was fear of retaliation, and 13% believed the police would not do anything to help. These barriers persist even when survivors do seek justice: investigations and the court process can be re-traumatizing, reported sexual assault arrest rates are low, case outcomes do not always result in jail time for the offender, survivor experiences with courts are not survivor-centered, and many survivors are not provided with connections to long-term stabilization support.

SART OVERVIEW

LEGAL MANDATES

Senate Bill 476 was passed during the 87th Texas Legislature and became law effective September 1, 2021. This law requires that Texas counties establish multidisciplinary adult sexual assault response teams. The response team is responsible for developing county or region-wide interagency protocols that are sensitive and responsive to the needs of sexual assault survivors.¹²

5 <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/crime-trend>

6 Thompson, A. & Tapp, S. (2022). *Criminal victimization, 2021*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

7 Smith, S. G., Zhang, X., Basile, K. C., Merrick, M. T., Wang, J., Kresnow, M. J., & Chen, J. (2018). The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey: 2015 data brief—updated release. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/60893>

8 Smith, et al., 2018.

9 <https://www.dps.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/crimereports/21/2021cit.pdf>

10 Texas Department of Public Safety (2021). *Crime in Texas, 2020*. <https://www.dps.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/crimereports/20/2020cit.pdf>

11 Texas Department of Public Safety (TX DPS) only had data from 44 Harris County agencies. However, there are over 60 law enforcement agencies in Harris County. These agencies might have also had sexual assault incidents reported to them; however, these were not captured in the TX DPS data. Thus, these data are an underestimation of the exact extent of sexual assault in the County. These data were gathered on March 9 and March 10, 2023, from the TX DPS website, <https://txucr.nibrs.com/Report/SexualAssault>.

12 Tex. Loc. Gov't Code 351.256(b), <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/LG/htm/LG.351.htm>.

ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAMS

Survivors of sexual assault have traditionally not received the best treatment by the criminal justice system. In recognition of this mistreatment and to improve the treatment of sexual assault survivors, the use of Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) was developed in the 1970s. SARTs were created to improve the community response to sexual assault. SARTs are community-level interventions which provide a holistic and collaborative approach to responding to and treating survivors of sex crimes.

Many SARTs adopt a ‘victim-centered’ philosophy in their work, meaning their fundamental priorities are to ensure victims’ choices regarding their participation in these systems are respected, and all victims are treated with sensitivity and consideration by all systems.¹³ Currently, there are hundreds of SARTs in the United States.¹⁴

These teams include individuals from different disciplines, community organizations, and criminal justice system agencies such as law enforcement, forensic nurse examiners, victim advocates, and prosecutors.¹⁵ SARTs work together as a group for the welfare and benefit of the victim in an attempt to eliminate confusion, anxiety, and negative experiences.¹⁶ These teams also work to ensure survivors receive the necessary services at every stage of their case (i.e., from report to final disposition) and that survivors are treated with respect and dignity.

There is variation in the way SARTs operate. Some are highly formalized collaborative groups, while others rely on informal information sharing and relationship building with the various systems. Many facilitate cross-disciplinary training to understand roles and share knowledge. Most “engage in regular collaborative meetings [which] may be used to discuss issues with their community’s response to sexual assault, delineate the desired response, create ways to implement and institutionalize the desired response (e.g., training responders, adopting policies, and protocols), and create accountability to the desired response.”¹⁷ SARTs also vary in their organizational structure. Most have a formal leader to facilitate and coordinate meetings. Even though SARTs vary in organization and operation, their core mission is the same: to prioritize victim’s needs and improve community response to sexual assault.¹⁸ Although there is limited research on the effectiveness of SARTs, one study found that improvements associated with the SART included shorter reporting delays, more types of forensic evidence collected, higher arrest rates, high victim participation in the criminal justice system, and higher charging rates. There are mixed results on whether having a SART impacts conviction rates with some indicating they did not make a difference, while others find SARTs help to increase conviction rates.¹⁹ Additionally, “studies have yet to ask the victims themselves about their experiences to see whether from their perspective, the SART has had a positive impact.”²⁰

13 Greeson, M. & Campbell, R. (2012). Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs): An empirical review of their effectiveness and challenges to successful implementation. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, p. 84.

14 Greeson & Campbell, 2012; Greeson, M. R., Campbell, R., & Bybee, D. (2015). Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) Functioning and Effectiveness: Findings from the national SART project. https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2015-05/publication_researchbrief_sexual-assault-response-team-functioning-effectiveness.pdf

15 Marcum, C. & Richards, T. (2015). *Sexual victimization: Then and now*. SAGE Publications.

16 Marcum & Richards, 2015, p. 47; National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], 2011

17 Greeson & Campbell, 2012, p. 84

18 Greeson and Campbell, 2012; NSVRC, 2011; Moylan, C., Lindhorst, T., & Tajima, E. (2017). Contested discourses in multi-disciplinary sexual assault response teams (SARTs). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(1), 3-22. doi:10.1177/0886260515585530

19 Greeson, Campbell, & Bybee, 2015; Moylan, Lindhorst, & Tajima, 2017.

20 Greeson, Campbell, & Bybee, 2015, p. 7

WHY A SART IS NEEDED

Two out of three sexual assaults will go unreported to law enforcement.²¹ Additionally, research by the University of Texas-Austin showed that only 9.2 percent of Texans reported their assault to law enforcement, and even less to other service providers, consistent with other national findings on reporting.²² Many survivors do not seek formal services following victimization either because they are not aware of these services, fear the systems will not be helpful or will be harmful to their well-being, or believe the services are inaccessible.

Even for those who report their victimization to law enforcement, many survivors live without feeling safe or supported enough to seek services and assistance. Additionally, “survivors who do seek help are often denied services, treated negatively, and inadequately supported by systems personnel.”²³ Further, even of those assaults that are reported to law enforcement, many perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions.

Case outcomes for sexual assault are very poor. A recent study showed that even for those who reported, there was only a 19 percent arrest rate, with 6 percent pleading guilty and 2 percent going to trial.²⁴ Conviction rates for sexual assault are also low with only 7-16 percent of cases resulting in the incarceration of the offender.²⁵ In order to empower survivors with choice, it is incumbent upon the government systems stakeholders to create policies and procedures that are trauma-informed and survivor-centered. With coordination of services, such as with a SART, this provides opportunities to improve response to survivors and their cases, improve help-seeking rates, legal outcomes, and survivor experiences with the criminal justice system.

HARRIS COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAM

On October 12, 2021, Commissioners Court approved a motion made by Commissioner Adrian Garcia instructing the Research and Analysis Division (RAD) of the Office of County Administration (then the Justice Administration Department [JAD]) to coordinate with all relevant stakeholders necessary to form a Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) in full compliance with SB 476 by Senator Jane Nelson. RAD was instructed to return to Court on November 9, 2021, with a list of candidates for Commissioners Court to appoint as inaugural members of the county’s adult sexual assault response team, including the Chief Administrator entity, and to call the team’s first meeting in accordance with Subchapter J, Chapter 351, of the Local Government Code. Harris County Commissioner’s Court established the Sexual Assault Response Team on November 9, 2021. Following approval by the Commissioner’s Court, the Houston Area Women’s Center was responsible for overseeing the administrative duties for the team and scheduled the first meeting on November 19, 2021, before the December 1, 2021 deadline. On January 21, 2022, the SART elected the Houston Area Women’s Center as presiding officer with DCEO Sonia Corrales, leading the team.

21 <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>.

22 Texas Association Against Sexual Assault [TAASA], 2021; University of Texas at Austin, Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (2015). *Health and wellbeing: Texas statewide sexual assault prevalence study*. <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/32721/idvsa-2015-texas-statewide-sexual-assault-prevalence.pdf?sequence=2>

23 Greeson, M. & Campbell, R. 2012, p. 83.

24 Morabito, M., Williams, L., & Pattavina, A. (2019). Decision making in sexual assault cases: Replication research on sexual violence case attrition in the U.S. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252689.pdf>

25 Greeson & Campbell, 2012

PURPOSE AND CHARGE

Pursuant to SB 476, the Harris County Sexual Assault Team consists of experts to improve practice in the investigation and prosecution of sexual assaults while also prioritizing the physical and emotional safety of survivors. This team brings together stakeholders with subject matter expertise. To empower survivors, with choice, it is incumbent upon the government systems to create policies and procedures that are trauma-informed and healing-centered. Coordination of services, such as with a SART, provides opportunities to improve response to survivors and their cases, improve help-seeking rates, legal outcomes, and survivors' experiences with the criminal justice system.

The protocols are policies, procedures, and agreements that guide the team's collective response, help eliminate gaps, and define roles and relationships. The team is charged with maintaining data on the number of sexual assaults reported to law enforcement, investigations, and prosecution of such offenses that will culminate in a written report to Commissioners Court. These protocols will be made available to various law enforcement and treatment providers throughout Harris County. It will be inclusive of all member voices and, ideally, survivor's voices. It will supplement individual agency policies and procedures. It should be a living document, updated based on the SART's needs. The SART will update and review it a minimum of once every 2 years. In developing the protocols, the team shall consider Chapter 56A, Code of Criminal Procedure.²⁶

MEMBERS

In accordance with SB 476, the Harris County SART created a response team that involves practitioners and those with subject matter expertise in responding/providing services to survivors of sexual violence. The Harris County Commissioners Court appointed* the following Harris County inaugural SART members. Also, included on this list are individuals who participated on behalf of their agency or members who were added.

Chief Administrator of sexual assault program

- *Sonia Corrales, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)
- *Emilee Whitehurst, President & CEO of Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)
- Leticia Manzano, Senior Manager- Sexual Violence Services, Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)
- Celinda Guerra, Director of Hotline & Crisis Intervention, Houston Area Women's Center
- Michelle Sacks, Director of Violence Prevention & Training, Houston Area Women's Center
- Kajuana Webb, Administrative Assistant, Houston Area Women's Center
- *Brenda Sykes, Executive Director, Bay Area Turning Point, Inc.
- *Wykesha Dixon, Deputy Director at Bay Area Turning Point, Inc.
- *Olivia Rivers, CEO/Executive Director, The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc.
- Kristi Wheelless, Advocacy Manager The Bridge Over Troubled Waters
- Robin Gandara, Director of Client Services, Family Time Crisis & Counseling Center
- A prosecutor with jurisdiction over adult sexual assault cases in the County
- Tiffany Larsen, Chief of Adult Sex Crimes and Human Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office (replaced Jamie Burro*, former Chief)

26 <https://taasa.org/resources/sexual-assault-response-teams/>; <https://jad.harriscountytexas.gov/Portals/70/documents/Presentations/11.9.21%20JAD%20SART%20Presentation.pdf?ver=vN12bUI8wkVyF9YQLGi-9g%3d%3d>

- *Celeste Byrom (back-up), Division Chief and Director of Victim Services Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office
- Denise Oncken, Bureau Chief of Special Victims and Mental Health Bureau, Harris County District Attorney's Office
Janna Oswald, Division Chief of Adult Sex Crimes and Human Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office (replaced Johna Stallings, former Division Chief)
The Sheriff of the County, or their designee
- *Lieutenant John Klafka, Criminal Investigations Bureau, Adult Special Crimes Section, Harris County Sheriff's Office replaced Lieutenant Gale Johnson*
- *Sergeant Tommy Smith, Criminal Investigations Bureau, Adult Special Crimes Section, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Harris County Sheriff's Office
- *Deputy Oscar Cisneros, Investigator, Criminal Investigations Bureau, Adult Special Crimes Section, Victim Assistance Unit, Harris County Sheriff's Office
- Karen Ahumada, Victim Advocate, Criminal Investigations Bureau, Victim Assistance Unit, Harris County Sheriff's Office

The Chief of the largest municipal law enforcement agency, if one exists, or their designee;

- *Lieutenant Jacinda J. Gunter, Special Victims Division, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Houston Police Department
- *Commander James B. Dale, Houston Police Department, Special Victim's Division
- *Commander Hong-Le Conn, Special Victims Division, Houston Police Department
- *Commander Harlan Daniel Harris, Victim Services, Houston Police Department
- Lieutenant Julie Pleasant, Victim Services, Houston Police Department
- Meulen Bajo, Victim Services, Houston Police Department

A sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Medical Forensic Examiner that provides exams within the County, or if they do not exist, a representative from the largest healthcare provider in the County;

- *Sally Henin, MD, CMQ, FACEP, Chief of Medical Operations, Memorial Hermann Health System - Forensic Nursing Services
- *Jamie Ferrell MBA, BSN, RN, CA/CP-SANE, SANE-A, SANE-P, DF-IAFN, F-AAFS, Director, Memorial Hermann Health System - Forensic Nursing Services
- *Sandra Sanchez, MSN, RN, CA/CP-SANE-A, SANE-P, AFN-C, Program Director, Forensic Nursing Harris Health System
- Joslyn "Joey" Fisher, MD, MPH, Co-Medical Director, Harris Health System, Forensic Nursing Program and VIVA
- *Khara Breeden, DNP, MS, RN, SANE-A, SANE-P, AFN-BC, Chief Executive Officer, The Forensic Center of Excellence
- *Micala Clark, Legal Counsel, The Forensic Center of Excellence
- Andrea Cressy, MSN RN CEN SANE-A, Forensic Nursing Program Director, Forensic Nursing Services, Houston Methodist

A mental or behavioral health provider within the County, or if they do not exist a representative from the public health department.

- *Wayne Young, Chief Executive Officer, The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD
- Jennifer Battle, The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD

Other persons or professionals the SART considers necessary for the operation of the response team

- *Barbie Brashear, Executive Director, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council
- Amy Smith, Senior Director of Operations and Communications, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council
- *Monica Gonzales, Senior Litigator, Felony Trial Division, Harris County Public Defender's Office
- *Amy Castillo, Ph.D., Chief Operating Officer, Houston Forensic Science Center
- *Courtney Head, Manager of Forensic Biology, Houston Forensic Science Center, Forensic Nursing Operations

ADDITIONAL MEMBERS

The Harris County SART believes that it is beneficial to include additional essential members that help strengthen the team. These may include agencies whose primary role or mandate is to respond to adult survivors of sexual assault as well as other allied professionals. Per SB 476, these members can be included based on the presiding officer's recommendations and current SART members and do not need Commissioners Court approval. In addition to the members, Harris County Commissioner's Court appointed member organization who sent members to participate in the SART. The Harris County SART designed a rubric to facilitate the identification of potential new members from various disciplines including law enforcement, civil legal assistance, sexual assault programs, healthcare, laboratories, clergy, and social service agencies.

The following organizations and/or agencies have been invited and or will be invited to participate:

- Law Enforcement Agencies within Harris County
 - Harris County Constable Pct. 1-8
 - Pasadena Police Department
 - Municipal Police Departments (23)
 - Independent School District Police Departments (18)
 - Community College and University Police Departments (12)
 - Metro Transit Police
 - Texas Medical Center
- Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)
- Montrose Center
- Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences
- Tahirih Justice Center Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

VISION, MISSION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Harris County SART developed a vision and mission statement and guiding principles that serves as a foundation that defines the team’s work and provides parameters of accountability, direction and focus of the team.

VISION

To create a safe, equitable and violence-free society where all lives are valued and respected.

MISSION

To provide a multi-disciplinary collaborative response to all survivors of sexual assault that is individualized, trauma-informed, increases safety, promotes continuity of care, supports and empowers survivors while holding offenders accountable in a fair and just system.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Harris County SART developed the following Guiding Principles to demonstrate commitment to providing a trauma-informed, healing-centered response to victim/survivors of sexual assault:

- Upholding victims’ rights, including privacy and confidentiality
- Pursuing justice for victims and the community (regardless of legal outcome)
- Recognizing the experience of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities with the criminal justice system and committing to building trust and providing safety when seeking services
- Honoring cultural, physical, mental, emotional, and language needs of victims
- Valuing victim/survivors’ voices within the criminal justice system
- Remaining professional, innovative, and curious
- Working with transparency and collaboration
- Communicating effectively, openly, and respectfully
- Treating everyone with dignity
- Continuing to improve the response to sexual violence at the individual and systemic levels
- Ensuring responses are victim-centered and trauma-informed.
- Prioritizing the safety and well-being of victim/survivors
- Holding offenders accountable
- Recognize that “victim” and “survivor” are terms that are appropriate within the criminal justice system and community-based services

CULTURAL COMPETENCE, RESPONSIVENESS, AND DIVERSITY - EQUITY AND JUSTICE

Sexual violence affects individuals of all genders, abilities, socioeconomic statuses, racial identities, and ethnicities. For survivors from historically oppressed groups, stigma can compound the trauma of sexual assault and may deter survivors from accessing help. Survivor’s experience of violence is impacted by how people and systems respond to them. The Harris County SART is committed to

ensuring survivors experience greater equity and justice and gain access to the best options available. The SART is committed to providing culturally responsive services to different marginalized groups by increasing knowledge, building our cultural competence skills and eliminating barriers that reinforce marginalization.

INTERAGENCY INFORMATION SHARING

The Harris County SART is committed to interagency information sharing, in accordance with state and federal law, to ensure the timely exchange of relevant information and enhance the response to survivors. The team developed steps that ensure appropriate, informed consent, release of information, and confidentiality policies and practices where they are needed. The SART will consider how each agency partner trains and cross-trains staff and team members on differing levels of information sharing, and how partner agencies will change their internal policies. In addition to adhering to the agreements contained in the Harris County SART protocols, each member will follow their own confidentiality policies and procedures.

PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVILEGE

The following are differences between privacy, confidentiality, and privilege. Clarity and common language around these terms and definitions will provide a foundation for understanding and respecting the roles and obligations of their team members. The following chart * provides a general overview of these concepts that are adopted by the HCSART.

PRIVACY	CONFIDENTIALITY	PRIVILEGE
<p>What is it? A right: a personal choice whether to disclose information.</p> <p>Who holds it? The victim</p> <p><i>“I decide who knows my information.”</i></p>	<p>What is it? The responsibility to protect someone else’s privacy, typically rooted in law or ethical rules.</p> <p>Who holds it? The professional</p> <p><i>“I have a legal or ethical duty to protect your information.”</i></p>	<p>What is it? A legal rule of evidence prohibiting the disclosure of private information against someone’s will.</p> <p>Who holds it? The victim</p> <p><i>“No one can make you share my information without my permission.”</i></p>

*Alicia L. Aiken and Confidentiality Institute, Inc., 2015, A Primer on Privilege & Confidentiality for Victim Service Providers. Retrieved June 14, 2017, from LINK

BYLAWS

The Harris County SART adopted Bylaws to govern the way we function as a SART and to help guide our work. The Harris County SART (HCSART) members chose a formal structure and developed and adopted bylaws as the team. The HCSART members believe that a structured model will be most effective in improving victim/survivor services and criminal justice outcomes in sexual assault cases in Harris County.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The Harris County SART is committed to making improvements in systems response to sexual assault. The Harris County SART utilized a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalize our commitment. The MOU formalizes the commitment of each member that will hold members accountable to the team process and outcomes developed.

MEETINGS

The Harris County SART is committed to meeting at least quarterly each year as required. No later than the 90th day after the last day of a regular legislative session, the HCSART will review and amend any response team protocols, forms, or guidelines required by Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 351, Subchapter J. The Harris County SART held the first meeting on November 19, 2021. On January 21, 2022, the Harris County SART elected the Houston Area Women’s Center (HAWC) as the presiding officer. Sonia Corrales, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of HAWC, served as presiding officer and led the team in developing the infrastructure. The team met monthly on the third Friday of every month for 2 hours. An agenda was sent out prior to each meeting and minutes were recorded and available to all members. Due to the pandemic, the first few meetings were held virtually. To help build and strengthen relationships and collaboration, the Harris County SART members met in person with a virtual option for members who were not able to meet in person. Meetings in person were held at the Houston Area Women’s Center, the United Way of Greater Houston, and the Children’s Assessment Center. Agenda, minutes, and access to other relevant SART information was provided to all members via a shared Harris County SART TEAMS Channel accessible to all members.

MANDATED TRAINING

Pursuant to Section 351.254(c), the Harris County SART Members are required to complete a minimum of four hours of cross-training related to sexual assault annually. The following section will detail how the Harris County SART members met and/or exceeded the requirements.

Sexual assault is any act of a sexual nature committed without consent, including sexual harassment, sexual touching, and rape. It is an act of violence, not sex. In many cases, survivors do not report a sexual assault to police for fear of retaliation or for fear that they will not be believed or treated fairly. Sexual assault has a long-term impact on victim/survivors, including adverse effects on the survivor’s ability to function mentally, physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. After experiencing sexual violence, victim/survivors often describe a loss of power that can stay with them for a long time. As a SART and responders, we know that it is important to learn how trauma affects the brain. Awareness to understanding the varied responses survivors will experience, especially with sexual violence, is critical. The key to providing the best support and services for sexual assault survivors is for providers to increase their knowledge of neurobiology of trauma.

When the neurobiology of trauma in advocacy and within criminal justice is better understood and skills learned are applied, it transforms the way service providers interact with survivors. It reduces trauma and promotes healing. The level of support a survivor receives from members of a multi-disciplinary team can benefit the healing process.

The team developed the Harris County Sexual Assault Response Training Series that includes training topics identified by the team members. Training was identified and coordinated specifically for SART members and other partners. Other professionals in the county who work directly or indirectly with sexual assault cases, were invited to attend. Neurobiology of Trauma training was offered in person and virtually multiple times. The SART believes that when training is conducted by at least two members from a multidisciplinary team and represents at least two different disciplines, it provides the opportunity to discuss issues of mutual concern, fosters teamwork, and strengthen relationships that extends to other team members. The training was co-facilitated by Lt. Jacinda Gunter, Houston Police Department, and Aly Kramer Jacobs, LMSW. Dr. Rebecca Campbell facilitated training on vicarious trauma and the training was offered to the SART membership. Dr. Campbell explained the effects of vicarious trauma on the brain including how the body and brain respond to trauma and how it affects professions working with survivors of sexual assault. Additionally, members attended sexual assault related training individually. The following is a summary of the training offered, coordinated, and attended by the team.

HSART TRAINING SERIES

TITLE: SUPPORTING VICTIM/SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT: UNDERSTANDING NEUROBIOLOGY OF TRAUMA

- Objectives: Understanding the impact of trauma presented through a cross-disciplinary lens for advocates, criminal justice professionals, law enforcement, medical professionals, and mental health professionals
- Goal: Use knowledge gained on the neurobiology of trauma to inform healing-centered approaches for working with victim/survivors in the aftermath of a sexual assault.

TRAINERS/FACILITATORS:

Aly Kramer Jacobs, LMSW

Aly is a doctoral student at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work and currently holds a Master of Education in Counseling Psychology and is a Licensed Masters Social Work. Aly has 16 years of counseling experience working with survivors of domestic and sexual violence and previously served as the Director of Behavioral Health at the Houston Area Women's Center. With almost twenty years of experience in the field of trauma, Aly has presented at international, national and regional conferences for advocates, criminal justice professionals, medical personnel, law enforcement and more, on a range of topics related to providing trauma-informed care to survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Lieutenant Jacinda J. Gunter, Special Victims Division, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Houston Police Department

Lt. Gunter joined the Houston Police Department in 1994 and worked in various divisions of the department, including patrol, Inspections, Internal Affairs, and ultimately joined the Special Victims Division in 2011. As the lieutenant of the Adult Sex Crimes Unit, she participated in a multidisciplinary task force that received funding from the National Institute of Justice to research the reasons a massive backlog of rape kits had developed in Houston. Lt. Gunter teaches courses on Sex Crimes Investigations and Neurobiology of Trauma to cadets and police officers at the Houston Police Academy. Lt. Gunter was also a presenter at the 2019 Conference on Crimes Against Women.

TITLE: UNDERSTANDING VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Goals:

- Acknowledge that exposure to trauma takes a toll on us.
- Describe how exposure to trauma takes a toll on us.
- Examine how exposure to trauma affects our health & job performance.
- Promote supportive solutions at individual- and organizational-level.

TRAINERS/FACILITATORS:

Rebecca Campbell, Ph.D.

Dr. Rebecca Campbell is a Professor of Psychology at Michigan State University. She holds a Ph.D. in community psychology with a concentration in statistics, also from Michigan State University. For the past 25 years, she has been conducting community-based research on violence against women and children, with an emphasis on sexual assault. Dr. Campbell's research examines how contact with the legal and medical systems affects adult, adolescent, and pediatric victims' psychological and physical health. Most recently, she was the lead researcher for the National Institute of Justice-funded Detroit Sexual Assault Kit Action Research Project, which was a four-year multidisciplinary study of Detroit's untested rape kits. Dr. Campbell also conducts training for law enforcement and multidisciplinary practitioners in civilian, military, and campus community settings on the neurobiology of trauma. In 2015, Dr. Campbell received the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, Vision 21 Crime Victims Research Award.

OTHER TRAINING ATTENDED BY SART MEMBERS:

Sonia Corrales, SART Presiding Officer, attended the following training:

- Best Practices in Meeting Confidentiality Obligations
- Protecting Survivors' Privacy & Other Rights
- Building and Strengthening Partnerships
- Sexual Assault Response Team Coordinator Training
- Keeping Your SART on Track

Tiffany Larsen, Chief of Adult Sex Crimes and Human Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office

- Harris County District Attorney's Office hosted a training, Advanced Adult Sexual Assault Investigations and was attended by law enforcement throughout the State, including the Houston Police Department officers and Harris County Sherriff's Office officers.

Robin Gandara, Director of Client Services, Family Time & Crisis Counseling Center

- TAASA sponsored training, SART: What's Next

The HSCART members identified additional training related to sexual assault that will support the team's improved responses to sexual assault. To develop a training plan, HCSART members discussed training needs during monthly meetings and completed a 12 question Center for Justice Innovation Training Assessment Survey. This survey is designed for individuals representing a cross section of multidisciplinary organizations and helped the team identify opportunities for future training. Training topics identified by the team include:

- The Role of the Advocate (HB 1172)
- Conflict Resolution
- Current Legislation
- Unique needs of military victims
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Unconscious Bias
- Needs of unique populations of survivors (elderly, male, LGBTQIA+, disabled, etc.)
- Immigration options for survivors of gender-based violence
- Incorporating an intersectional lens into gender-based violence
- Civil Legal Options for survivors
- Restorative Justice practices
- Historic and systemic oppression in gender-based violence
- Collaboration Strategies for cultivating buy-in
- Building and strengthening multidisciplinary partnerships
- Neurobiology of Trauma
- Vicarious Trauma

DATA

The following section includes data shared by Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team members in the following disciplines: Law enforcement investigations, District Attorney, community-based sexual assault programs, system-based advocacy, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, and laboratories. Included in this report is the data that was required to be maintained by the team, including the number of adult sexual assaults reported to law enforcement, investigations, and prosecution of such offenses.

The team also collected data from other core members including the number of adult sexual assault survivors served by community-based sexual assault programs, by system-based advocates, the number of individuals who received a medical forensic exam, and the number of rape kits completed. Data collected for this report includes data from 2022 through August 31, 2023. In at least one of the disciplines, data for adults and children could not be separated. It is important to note that the life of a sexual assault case may be longer than this period.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

The Houston Police Department and Harris County Sheriff’s Department are the two largest law enforcement agencies in Houston and Harris County. Both agencies have specialized units that investigate sexual assault cases. Data represents the number of sexual assaults and aggravated sexual assaults reported, the number of investigations conducted and the number of indictments and investigations where no indictment was presented. Pursuant to SB 476, this report includes required law enforcement data and represents the year 2022 and year to date through August 31, 2023.

HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT (HPD)

Houston Police Department Special Victim’s Division	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Number of sexual assaults* reports	853	666
Number of investigations conducted as a result of those reports	758	570
Number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition of those cases	Not collected	Not collected
Number of reports of sexual assault for which no incitement was presented	Not collected	Not collected

Source: Houston Police Department
*Includes aggravated sexual assault

The Houston Police Department’s Special Victims Division (HPD-SVD) manages four units and among them is Adult Sex Crimes. This specialized unit’s goal is to strengthen the quality of its investigations and support for victims by framing investigations in a victim-centered approach and by collaborating with victim support services and community outreach organizations.

The Houston Police Department- Special Victim’s Division took 1,519 reports and of those, 1,328 (87%) were investigated. The Houston Police Department was not able to provide data on the number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition of those cases citing that these statistics are not collected since the indictment and incitement statistics fall within the Harris County District’s Attorney purview.

Additionally, HPD reported a transition to a new reporting system in the next few years which may facilitate the collection of data to share with the HCSART. Without the outcome data, it is challenging to tell the full story. Sexual assault investigations are complex and involve victim engagement, evidence collection and testing, identifying suspects and witnesses, establishing criminal intent. This may be challenging, especially in non-stranger cases.

DNA evidence collection is only the first step in a very long process. All SAK evidence is currently outsourced to other labs from the Houston Forensic Science Center. Outsource labs are also reporting backlogs. Reports from initial testing are typically received 10 to 12 months from the time the SAK is submitted. Initial testing only determines if there is DNA suitable for comparison and/or CODIS entry. If there is DNA suitable for comparison or CODIS entry, additional testing will be necessary. This adds to an already very long timeline.

Other evidence that can take months to obtain and process includes digital and/or cellphone evidence, social media, and cellular carrier records. Social media evidence must be obtained from outside sources which are sometimes reluctant to provide requested evidence even when presented with a Grand Jury Subpoena. Cell phone and other digital extractions may be dependent on available technology if the computer or cell phones are newer models.

Houston Police Department Victim Services Division	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Number of Adults Served	269	446
Hospital/Medical Forensic Exam	2	4
Emergency Shelter Assistance/Transportation	8	8
Law Enforcement Interview Accompaniment	4	2

Source: Houston Police Department
Victim Services Division

The Houston Police Department has a specialized Victim Services Division with dedicated system-based advocates who are dedicated to positively affecting the quality of life for the citizens of Houston and exists to help crime victims and their families. HPD Victim Services Advocates will assist the victim with applying for Crime Victims’ Compensation and their chosen service providers to help them obtain benefits and services. The Victim Services Division works closely with various social services and legal agencies within the City of Houston and Harris County. Through a collaborative agreement with the Houston Area Women’s Center, the HPD Victim Services Division Advocates attend the 55-hour OAG Certified Advocate Training offered by HAWC.

HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE (HCSO)

Harris County Sheriff’s Office Adult Sex Crimes Unit	2022	YTD 8.31.2023	Total
Number of sexual assault* reports	503	209	712
Number of investigations conducted as a result of those reports	169	87	256
Number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition of those cases	77**	35**	112**
Number of reports of sexual assault for which no indictment was presented	479^	78^	557^

Source: Harris County Sheriff’s Office

*Includes aggravated sexual assault

**Charges accepted by the HCDAO as a result of the investigation

^Includes administratively closed (no offense or elements of crime not met), HCDAO declined, or lack of complainant participation

The Harris County Sheriff’s Office (HCSO) has jurisdiction over sexual assault cases that occur within unincorporated Harris County. HCSO sets forth procedural guidelines to ensure deputies uphold the trauma-informed and victim-centered approach when responding to sexual assault investigations.

The Adult Sex Crimes Unit investigates complaints that involve adult victims of sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, and other sexual offenses. The unit is currently comprised of a sergeant and five deputy investigators who handle all sexual offense cases, in unincorporated Harris County, which also include the constables and smaller agencies.

In most instances, patrol deputies are responsible for taking the initial report, though there may be instances where an investigator takes the initial report.

In 2022, The HCSO received 1,107 sexual offense-related calls for service and of those, 169 cases were assigned for investigation. Of those investigated, 77 cases had criminal charges accepted by the Harris County District Attorney’s Office (HCDAO). Of the total number of reports received, 479 were either administratively closed, closed due to the complainant not cooperating, closed due to lack of prosecution, or closed due to not meeting the elements of the crime.

The challenges reported by the HCSO include the difficulty in pulling accurate data from the current reporting system, and the lack of personnel assigned to investigate adult sex crimes-related cases. The reporting system is not user-friendly and can be cumbersome to navigate when extrapolating data. The area and responsibilities the HCSO covers do not equate to the amount of sex crimes investigators currently assigned to the unit and are not proportionate to the number of investigators in other nearby agencies of similar size. The numbers listed above do not cover all sex crime-related cases our investigators are assigned. By having only five sex crimes investigators, the number of incoming cases, and the number of cases pending, it takes approximately two years before a pending case will be investigated. Procedures are in place for a victim advocate to contact sexual assault victims while their case is pending to reassure them their case will be thoroughly investigated. The victim advocate also offers resources and assistance throughout this process.

Victim Assistance Unit Harris County Sheriff's Office	2022	YTD 8.31.2023	Total
Number of Adults Served	121	112	233
Hospital/Medical Forensic Exam	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*
Emergency Shelter Assistance/Transportation	6	2	8
Law Enforcement Interview Accompaniment	24	9	33

Source: Harris County Sheriff's Office
Victim Assistance Unit

*Hospital/Medical Forensic Exam accompaniment provided by outside service providers.

The Harris County Sheriff's Office has a specialized Victim Assistance Unit with system-based advocates who are dedicated to positively impacting the quality of life for the citizens of Harris County. The Victim Assistance Unit further assists victims/survivors and families by providing crisis intervention, advocacy, and access to resources that reduce the impact of trauma on individuals, and their families. The Victim Assistance Advocates envision a community where victims/survivors and witnesses of crime and crisis are not alone, receive services that are trauma-informed, experience compassionate support of choices, and are supported by the criminal justice system, social service agencies and community members, delivered with integrity and respect throughout Harris, Montgomery, and Fort Bend Counties. The Victim Assistance Unit's overall purpose is to empower victims/survivors through enhanced knowledge of rights and resources.

The Victim Assistance Unit provides law enforcement advocacy, personal advocacy, information and referrals, and other services as needed, to crime victims. This unit also provides assistance for affected family members of the victim.

HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER (HFSC)

Houston Forensic Science Center Sexual Assault Kits	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Total Sexual Assault Kits Received for Testing	1,124	847
Total Sexual Assault Kits where testing was Completed.	1,110	544
*Total Sexual Assault Kits Still Pending Testing (at the end of the time period)	387	681
Sexual Assault Kits Pending Testing over 30 Days Old	312	556
Sexual Assault Kits Pending Testing over 90 Days Old	129	328
Average Time for Testing to be Completed (IN DAYS)	118	143

Source: Houston Forensic Science Center

*Represents both children and adults. HFSC was not able to separate adults for this report.

The Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC) is the forensic lab that provides forensic testing services for HPD cases. HFSC conducts forensic testing in 7 disciplines, one of which is Forensic Biology. Forensic Biology either completes testing or facilitates outsource testing for all HPD sexual assault kits that are collected. Once a kit is tagged into the HPD property room, it is automatically picked up by HFSC for testing. Once testing is complete, HFSC sends a report back to HPD. HFSC also ensures any eligible profiles from the testing go into CODIS. HPD is dependent on HFSC for the test results (both the reports and the CODIS hits) from kits to aid in their investigations. When HFSC has a backlog, it does negatively impact the speed at which HPD can move sexual assault cases forward. Currently, HFSC is severely understaffed due to increased employee turnover, though HFSC is actively training DNA analysts to help with the staffing issue. HFSC also used federal grant monies to outsource the testing of sexual assault kits to aid impacts by the staffing shortage. Nationwide, there is a capacity shortage for DNA testing even in commercial labs, therefore outsourcing does not solve the fact that testing is taking more than an average of 90 days to complete.

THE HARRIS COUNTY INSTITUTE OF FORENSIC SCIENCES

Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences Sexual Assault Kits	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Total Sexual Assault Kits Received for Testing	589	582
Total Sexual Assault Kits where testing was Completed (of those received during time period)	483	440
Total Sexual Assault Kits Still Pending Testing (at the end of the time period)	106	142
Sexual Assault Kits Pending Testing over 30 Days Old	57	71
Sexual Assault Kits Pending Testing over 90 Days Old	0	1
Average Time for Testing to be Completed (IN DAYS)	63	65

Source: Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences Crime Laboratory provides forensic testing for approximately 84 law enforcement agencies within Harris County, excluding HPD. Testing is performed in the areas of seized drugs, firearms identification, gunshot residue, fire debris, DWI/DUI, postmortem toxicology, and forensic genetics (serology/DNA). The HCIFS Forensic Genetics laboratory performs DNA testing on sexual assault kits for these agencies in-house. The vast majority of sexual assault kits are completed in less than the state mandated 90 days and all eligible DNA profiles are uploaded to the State and/or National CODIS databases.

HARRIS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S OFFICE (HCDA)

The District Attorney of Harris County, Texas, represents the State of Texas in the Harris County courts. The District Attorney has assigned the prosecution of certain felony Adult Sex Crimes to the Adult Sex Crimes section of the Adult Sex Crimes & Trafficking Division, made up of one Chief prosecutor and four felony level 2 prosecutors. The Adult Sex Crimes section meets weekly with officers from HPD, HCSO, and other law enforcement agencies to review their investigations for charges. Once an adult sexual assault charge is accepted, the Adult Sex Crimes section receives the case for prosecution, where it is assigned to a dedicated Adult Sex Crimes prosecutor to handle in one of the twenty-three Criminal District Courts and/or the Emergency Relief Docket (ERD) court system through the resolution of the case. For purposes of this report, the following data was collected:

Harris County District Attorney Office Sexual Assault Cases	2022 - YTD 8.31.2023
Sexual Assault (SA) Charges Filed*	494
SA Indictments Filed (True Bill)	400
SA Indictments Rejected (No Bill)	52
SA Charges Convicted**	60
SA Charges Dismissed**	53
Insufficient Evidence	32
Missing Witness	8
Request of Complainant	9
To be Used As Punishment Evidence	3
Incomplete Lab Results	1
Defendants Acquitted	3

Source: Harris County District Attorney's Office (HCSA)

*Does not include investigations for which the law enforcement partner has not yet presented charges, or for which charges other than sexual assault (e.g. family violence assault, aggravated assault, burglary, robbery, prohibited sexual conduct, indecent assault, and sexual performance) were accepted.

**Does not include cases in which the defendant was convicted for other types of offenses arising out of the sexual assault investigation (e.g. family violence assault, aggravated assault, burglary, robbery, prohibited sexual conduct, indecent assault, and sexual performance).

The 386 charges that have not yet been no billed, convicted, dismissed, or acquitted (168 total) during the relevant time period are still pending awaiting trial or other resolution due to the backlog in the trial courts and the statutory requirement that other types of charges (e.g. murder and child abuse) be prioritized for trial above adult sexual assault charges. The life of a sexual assault case, from reporting to law enforcement to resolution of the case in court, far-exceeds the two-year reporting timeframe in most cases.

Total pending adult Sexual Assault Cases Office-wide as of 10/20/23: 844

Total pending adult Sexual Assault Cases in Adult Sex Crimes/Trafficking Division as of 10/20/23: 618***

***includes non-sexual assault companion cases

SEXUAL ASSAULT COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

The Harris County SART includes, as core members, four community-based sexual assault programs located in Houston, Pasadena, Webster, and Humble. All four programs are dual agencies meaning they provide sexual assault and domestic violence services. The four programs meet the requirements of Chapter 420.003, Government Code, and provide specialized services, including 24-hour hotline and/or CHAT, hospital accompaniment, legal advocacy, behavioral health services, emergency safe and longer-term housing. All services are free of charge. The community-based sexual assault programs have long histories of service delivery in the area and have long-standing collaborative relationships with various healthcare systems, multiple law enforcement agencies and, depending on their location, interact with other allied professionals in surrounding counties within the region.

HOUSTON AREA WOMEN’S CENTER (HAWC), HOUSTON

Sexual Assault Program Services Houston, Texas	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Adults Served	809	462
Hospital Accompaniment (survivors only)	343	337
Criminal Justice Accompaniment	1	4
Hotline Call and CHAT	6,436	3,571

Source: Houston Area Women’s Center

The Houston Area Women’s Center is a community-based nonprofit organization in the city of Houston and provides comprehensive services to survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and sex trafficking 24/7/365. Services to survivors of sexual violence range from crisis intervention to long-term healing and empowerment. Crisis intervention includes safety planning, hospital accompaniment, emergency housing, and access to resources and services that meet the safety needs of survivors on demand. Longer-term services include counseling, case management, legal advocacy, court and law enforcement accompaniment, and economic empowerment.

HAWC’s Sexual Assault Hotline serves as a gateway to our services and provides help and hope, 24- hours a day, 365-days a year . Survivors who seek assistance may or may not report the crime to law enforcement. This is consistent with the underreported rates of sexual assault. Hospital accompaniment staff are on-call 24-hours a day and provide crisis intervention and emotional support to survivors and their family and friends. HAWC staff frequently interact with medical and law enforcement partners to ensure survivors receive trauma informed services using a multi-disciplinary approach. HAWC staff provide information, referrals, and inform survivors of their legal rights and options including Crime Victims Compensation and Texas SAVNS/VINE.

In 2022, HAWC’s Sexual Assault Hotline received and responded to 6,436 callers and 3,571 callers from January 2023 through August 31, 2023. HAWC staff provided hospital accompaniment to 343 individuals in 2022 and 337 so far in 2023 as of August 31, 2023. The behavioral health program supported 809 survivors in 2022 and 462 survivors so far in 2023 through August 31, 2023, with individual and group counseling. Our legal advocacy team served many individuals, and provided law enforcement and/or court accompaniment to six survivors from 2022 through August 31, 2023.

BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

Sexual Assault Program Services Pasadena, Texas	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Adults Served	188	137
Hospital Accompaniment	72	73
Criminal Justice Accompaniment	0	5
Hotline Call	1491	1552

Source: Bridge Over Troubled Water

The Bridge’s services and programs are offered to help survivors heal mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. TBOTW’s philosophy focuses on empowering individuals and families to make healthy decisions that will lead to productive lifestyles. Clients participate in all services on a volunteer basis. Immediate crisis intervention and advocacy are available on a walk-in basis during our regular business hours (9 a.m. – 4 p.m.). The hotline is available 24 hours.

Designated direct service staff will respond to designated hospitals and TBOTW onsite clinic 24 hours/7 days a week for survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, teen dating violence and stalking on a rotational schedule of 24-hour shifts.

BAY AREA TURNING POINT

Sexual Assault Program Services Webster, Texas	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Adults Served	142	86
Hospital Accompaniment	7	9
Criminal Justice Accompaniment	1	1
Hotline Call	841	739

Source: Bay Area Turning Point

Bay Area Turning Point (BATP) is a community based nonprofit dual agency that provides immediate crisis intervention and wrap around services to individuals impacted directly or indirectly by domestic violence and/or sexual assault. BATP has service locations in Webster, Texas and a satellite location in Anahuac, Texas stretching services amongst four different counties to include Harris, Galveston, Chambers and Brazoria County.

We provide residential and non-residential services that include 24-hour crisis hotline help, counseling services, short- and medium-term housing, victim advocacy, support and outreach, education, and prevention. Collaborations help with bridging services for survivors. BATP works closely with Webster, League City, Nassau Bay City, Lakeview, Dickinson, Mount Belvieu Police Departments and Chambers County Sheriff Office. We also work with Houston Methodist, HCA Healthcare and Memorial Herman hospital facilities. Being on the outer limits of Harris County there are few hospitals available to support survivors needing specialized services as it relates to sexual assault. While hotline calls are on the rise for sexual assault survivors seeking services, there is a decline in law enforcement and hospital accompaniments. Having transparent conversations and diving deep within the Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team allows for sexual assault programs to identify gaps in collaborations and or victims feeling the safety of choosing to report.

FAMILY TIME CRISIS & COUNSELING CENTER

Sexual Assault Program Services Humble, Texas	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Adults Served	183	76
Hospital Accompaniment	3	0
Criminal Justice Accompaniment	0	1
Hotline Calls	78	70

Source: Family Time Crisis & Counseling Center

FamilyTime Crisis & Counseling Center has served in North Harris County and beyond for over 46 years by providing: emergency shelter to individuals and families, crisis intervention, a 24-hour crisis helpline, holistic case management, comprehensive mental health and wellness therapy, medical accompaniment, and community education to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and to the larger community. FamilyTime

FamilyTime has partnered with many organizations over the years to assist survivors in accessing supportive services. We know that sexual violence is underreported, and many individuals do not realize that they have experienced sexual assault and, as a result, do not seek supportive services or report to law enforcement. Often individuals are unaware of their rights as a victim of crime and have no knowledge of a SANE exam.

FamilyTime has experienced a decline in hospital accompaniment requests from hospitals located in our service areas of Northeast Harris County and Liberty County, as well as a decline in referrals from law enforcement. It is concerning because survivors are not notified of available services when reporting to law enforcement and are not being informed by hospital staff when seeking a SANE exam.

MEDICAL FORENSIC NURSE EXAMINERS

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) and physicians with specialized training serve a critical role in the response and care to victims of sexual assault. These healthcare providers understand how trauma impacts individuals and respect the value of empowerment and choice as vital to recovery in the aftermath of sexual assault.

Memorial Hermann Health System Forensic Nursing Service	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Number of survivors who received an exam	552	373

Source: Memorial Hermann Health System

Memorial Hermann Health System Forensic Nursing Services respond to victims of sexual violence within Harris County and are committed to providing high quality care and forensic evidence preservation while working with partner agencies to ensure the best interests of the victims.

Memorial Hermann Forensic Nursing Services provides holistic healthcare that addresses with dignity the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual needs of victims of interpersonal violence.

Memorial Hermann served 552 survivors with a medical forensic exam in 2022 and 373 through August 31, 2023. All survivors are offered an advocate by the sexual assault nurse examiner upon the SANE's arrival. One notable trend was the decrease in the number of advocates providing emotional support to survivors at the hospital primarily due to HIPPA requirements. This causes the survivor to wait and thus they may decline the offer.

Harris Health System	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Number of survivors who received SA exam w/kit	204	184
Number of survivors who received SA exam no kit	49	49
Number of survivors who declined SA exam	153	94

Source: Harris Health System

Harris Health System is a safety net hospital system in Harris County that provides medical services and medical forensic examinations (MFEs) to adult patients with a complaint of sexual assault. These services are available at Ben Taub Hospital and Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) Hospital 24 hours a day. In addition, services for the sexual assault patient can be provided at any of the 20+ health centers located in Harris County.

Texas Forensic Nurse Examiner	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Number of survivors who received an exam	409	259

Source: Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners

Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners™ (TXFNE™) gathers the region’s most qualified trauma nurses and is pioneering services to make the forensic exam accessible to victims in their geographic area. The demand for the forensic exam is at its peak with the population of patients to include sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, child maltreatment, and elder abuse victims. TXFNE™ partners with hospitals and clinics by providing qualified forensic nurses on-demand.

Methodist Hospital	2022	YTD 8.31.2023
Number of survivors who received an exam	251	198

Source: Methodist Hospital

Houston Methodist Forensic Nursing Services has specialty trained nurses at all Houston Methodist Emergency Departments to provide forensic medical exams to survivors of sexual abuse, interpersonal violence, sex and labor trafficking, as well as elder abuse. Houston Methodist strives to ensure that patients receive quality health care. The goal is to lessen the impact of violence by empowering survivors to find strength in taking control of their health and well-being following a traumatic act of violence and to provide a safety net system to Harris County encompassing trauma informed patient centered care to all victims of sexual and physical violence presenting at all Houston Methodist Hospitals. Between 2022 and August 31, 2023, 449 victims received a medical forensic exam. Methodist Hospital experienced an increase in the number of individuals who received an exam compared to previous year.

SART PROTOCOLS

The Harris County SART protocol is multidisciplinary, discipline specific, inclusive of all member voices, including survivor voices. This protocol is a living document and will be updated and amended based on the needs of Sexual Assault Response Team. It is intended to supplement individual agency policies and procedures. Pursuant to SB 476, the Harris County SART will update and review a minimum of once every 2 years. The protocols include roles, responsibilities, commitments, expectations and standards for each member's response and different points in time. The protocol identifies points of collaboration between disciplines. In developing this protocol, the SART members considered Chapter 56A, Code of Criminal Procedure; provided different procedures for use within a particular municipality or area of the county served by the response team; and prioritized the health and safety of survivors. The goal of the protocols is to identify and eliminate gaps and define and clarify roles. Each partner agency creates their own process for where they may interact with other members of the SART and how to make those interactions productive and supportive for the survivor.

MEMBER ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND COMMITMENT

ACCESS TO SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAM ADVOCATES

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR OF A RAPE CRISIS CENTER

Chapter 420.003, Government Code; Sexual Assault Prevention and Crisis Services promotes the development throughout the state of locally based and supported nonprofit programs for survivor sexual assault and to standardizes the quality of services provided. It defines a requirement to ensure survivors are offered access to sexual assault program advocates. Pursuit to *Tex. Code of Criminal Proc. 56A.351, 56A.3515*, survivors of sexual assault are required to be provided with a community-based advocate during the medical forensic exam regardless of whether that survivor reports to police, and during an investigative interview with law enforcement.

Confidentiality: Sexual Assault Programs are now subject to privilege on all written or oral communications with a survivor. Texas law (Texas Government Code Section 420.051 and 420.0715; Texas Health & Safety Code Section 44.051 and 44.071-44.075) states that sexual assault programs cannot share any information about a victim outside of the agency without specific written consent from that survivor. Additionally, any agency receiving funds from Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), or Family Violence Prevention Services Act (FVPSA) will have confidentiality restrictions and be forbidden from the use of blanket consent forms.

The following are protocols of Sexual Assault programs located in and serving survivors within Harris County and represent Houston, Pasadena, Webster, and Humble. Each sexual assault center provides services and often works with multiple law enforcement agencies within Harris County and surrounding counties.

Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC) (Houston, Texas)

Houston Area Women's Center is Houston's largest and most comprehensive service provider and advocate for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and sex trafficking. As an agency, HAWC envisions the day when intimate partners, families, communities, and social norms foster safe, healthy, and empowering relationships. HAWC provides immediate access to 24/7/365 crisis inter-

vention services, ongoing trauma-informed support programs, and violence prevention initiatives to survivors, their support networks, and communities.

Crisis Response:

- Survivors access crisis support by calling the 24/7 hotline, CHAT, walk into any HAWC location, police drop them off at a HAWC location, or they go to the hospital due to injury or assault.
- Trained advocates assess survivor's situation and may help connect to medical exam and provide transportation if needed.
- Once at the hospital, SANE gets consent from clients, contacts HAWC's Hospital Accompaniment Advocate who will go to the medical site and provide support for survivors.

Entry points for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Exam:

- Survivor calls hotline requesting information about next steps after a sexual assault.
- Forensic Nurse or hospital staff call hotline requesting hospital accompaniment.
- The survivor discloses at shelter that she needs an exam.
- If a survivor is incarcerated, the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) transports to hospital from jail.

On call advocates to respond to all sexual assault medical forensic exam requests in our service area 24 hours a day/7 day a week. Hospitals/clinics that we have partnerships with are listed below:

- Memorial Herman Hospital – Medical Center
- Memorial Herman Hospital-Greater Heights
- Memorial Herman Hospital-Southwest
- Memorial Herman Hospital-Memorial City
- Memorial Herman Hospital-Pearland
- Harris Health: Ben Taub
- Harris Health: LBJ
- Methodist-Medical Center
- Methodist-Willowbrook
- Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners (TXFNE)-HCA Locations & St. Luke's Hospital

Hospital Accompaniment/Crisis Response Advocates

HAWC's advocate will provide hospital accompaniment for medical forensic exams. Advocates may also interact and work collaboratively with the responding law enforcement agency at the medical facility. Services will be provided to adult survivors of sexual violence and their friends and family 24 hours/7 days a week in a hospital or community-based clinic setting. This is a formal process and advocate's role is to provide the survivor with:

- crisis intervention
- education
- emotional support
- advocacy

- safety planning
- legal advocacy including information on their legal rights, as well as options regarding reporting to police department and having a medical forensic exam.
- Information on and connection to area resources that can assist survivors with legal, medical and financial support.
- Follow up with survivor within 48 hours.

Emergency Safe Housing:

- Hotline staff will assess danger and safety plan. Hotline staff will connect survivors with emergency safe housing.
- If needed for survivors of sexual violence including sexual assault, attempted sexual assault and sex trafficking, emergency safe housing or short term housing will be provided .

Behavioral Health, Advocacy & Support Services:

- Survivor calls hotline requesting information about next steps after a sexual assault. An advocate will provide survivors with information about connecting to additional services.
- Survivor screened at intake for other services regarding sexual violence experiences, identified and referred to sexual assault counseling program or other support services including external resources.
- Survivor discloses at any other point of service delivery, for example, in sexual violence support group, that they are needing support related to an experience with sexual assault.
- Survivor will be offered an appointment to speak with an intake counselor who will assess for the client's needs, register for supportive services. These services can include counseling, housing, a legal advocacy appointment with Adult Legal Services, or economic empowerment services.
- Clients will be invited to participate in supportive group counseling sessions.
- Clients will be assessed for individual counseling sessions and staff will follow up with the client. Staff will work with internal and external partners for warm hand offs.

Legal Advocacy Services

- Referral is made to the legal advocacy services from internal and external referrals.
- Legal advocacy referral is received by legal advocate and client is assessed.
- Legal advocate completes proper referral forms with client and are sent to corresponding legal aid. Partner agencies can provide advice and/or representation based on clients' needs and eligibility requirements.
- After 30 days, a legal advocate follows up with the client to ensure legal aid has followed up with the survivor and assess whether additional legal advocacy services are needed

Accompaniment Procedures

- Staff from various departments within the agency refer clients requesting accompaniment (civil court/criminal court/law enforcement) to the legal advocacy department.
- Pre-accompaniment safety planning is provided to the client by a legal advocate 24 hours prior to date set.

- Accompaniment by a legal advocate is provided in person or virtually, this includes emotional support, crisis intervention, resources, advocacy, coping skills and other services as appropriate.
- Post-accompaniment follow up is provided within 24hrs by a legal advocate.

Commitment:

- Provide access to services 24/7 to survivors of sexual assault.
- Adhere to the HCSART protocol, evaluate, and identify opportunities for improvements to support survivors of sexual assault.
- Educate the public regarding sexual violence and resources available to support survivors.
- Commit to HCSART as a core member by attending meetings, providing necessary data, serving as subject matter expert, adhering to the protocols, and fully participating in meetings.
- Protect the confidentiality and privacy of survivors of sexual assault.
- Center the experiences and voices of survivors.

The Bridge Over Troubled Water (TBOTW), Pasadena, Texas

The Bridge’s services and programs are offered to help clients heal mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Our philosophy focuses on empowering individuals and families to make healthy decisions that will lead to productive lifestyles. Clients participate in all services on a volunteer basis. Immediate crisis intervention and advocacy are available on a walk-in basis during our regular business hours (9am-4pm). Call the 24-Hour Hotline at (713) 473-2801 for more information and/or to schedule an after-hours appointment.

POLICY

Designated direct service staff will respond to designated hospitals and TBOTW onsite clinic 24 hours/7 days a week for survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, teen dating violence and stalking on a rotational schedule of 24-hour shifts. The Advocacy Manager will send out the On Call Schedule and Contact List in advance to all direct service staff. Schedules will be posted on the Hotline and RA offices. Directors & Managers will act as back-up for staff who do not report to duty or staff who are in training. Designated direct service staff are responsible for covering their scheduled-on call week at all times

PURPOSE

To provide crisis intervention, education, legal advocacy, support, lethality and safety planning to survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, teen dating violence and stalking 24 hours/7 days a week in a hospital and or clinic setting.

DESIGNATED HOSPITALS

The following hospitals are being served by the TBOTW:

- **HCA Houston Healthcare Southeast** – (Formerly Bayshore) 4000 Spencer, Pasadena, TX at 713-359-1440
- **HCA Houston ER 24/7** – (Stand-alone ER)6002 Fairmont Pkwy, Pasadena, TX 77505 713-359-4949

- **LBJ Hospital**-5656 Kelley, Houston, TX at 713-566-5620
- **St. Luke's Health** – Patients Medical Center – 4600 East Sam Houston Pkwy S, Pasadena, TX 77505 [713-948-7000](tel:713-948-7000)
- **Memorial Hermann Southeast** -11800 Astoria Boulevard, Houston, TX at 281-929-6200- (Parking free).
- **Texas Women's Hospital**-7900 Fannin-Houston, Texas at 713-791-7100- (A charge for parking).
- **Houston Methodist Baytown** -4401 Garth Rd, Baytown, TX 77521- (No charge for parking).
- **Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners (TXFNE)** 281-306-6893, press 1 and request a forensic nurse. TXFNE also facilitates medical forensic exams at St. Luke's Health and the HCA Southeast locations.
- Any other hospital or clinic in our service area.

HOSPITAL PROCEDURE:

- In the event that a survivor seeks intervention services from the hospital due to domestic, family and or sexual violence; the hospital staff and/or Forensic Nurse Examiner will call the TBOTW Hotline and request an Advocate On Call. Hospital staff and/or a Forensic Nurse will inform Bridge Advocate/Hotline staff of room number, gender, age and if survivor is accompanied by friends and/or family members. Due to HIPPA laws, some hospital staff may not release names depending on hospital.

TBOTW PROCEDURES

- Hotline staff will call Advocate On Call with information provided by the hospital staff within 15 minutes of receiving the call from the hospital.
- The Advocate On Call will respond within 15 minutes of being called by the Hotline staff. In the event the Advocate On Call receives more than one call while on an accompaniment; please see heading MULTIPLE CALLS.
- Hotline staff will provide the Advocate On Call with the following information:
 - Room, gender and age of survivor
 - Domestic violence and or sexual assault survivor
 - Any family members accompanying the survivor
 - Name and contact number of personnel calling Hotline Staff (if available).
- Advocate On Call has 15 minutes to respond to Hotline staff. In the event that the Advocate On Call does not respond within 15 minutes, the Hotline staff will call the back-up Director or Manager on the calendar.
- Advocate On Call will call hospital personnel informing them they are on the way to the hospital. Advocate has one hour to arrive at hospital.
- Advocate On Call will carry the care kit bag that includes an assessment file, information and referral handbook, agency brochure, sexual assault pamphlet, domestic violence pamphlet, CVC application, toiletries, underwear, t-shirt, pants and socks. Items will be included depending on the availability and leave with client.
- Advocate On Call will approach emergency room window and inform hospital staff TBOTW is responding to a domestic and or sexual assault call.

- The hospital staff will escort Advocate On Call to survivor's room. The Advocate will introduce themselves to the survivor.
- If SANE is in progress; the Advocate On Call will wait until the exam is completed unless invited in by the SANE.
- The Advocate On Call will respond to family members, friends, etc. and educate on TBOTW services. No information regarding the survivor will be given to the family due to confidentiality.
- Advocate On Call will explain Consent for Services and Confidentiality/Client rights, Orientation to Bridge Services and have survivor sign appropriate forms. If the survivor has family members wanting information and/or education, the client must give/sign consent to release any information, however the Advocate On Call can provide supportive services to family and or friends of the survivor.
- Advocate On Call will explain Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Exam procedures and ask the survivor if she/he wants the advocate in the room during the medical forensic exam procedure. If the survivor chooses the Advocate to be in the room during the procedure, the survivor must be educated on the following:
 - Advocate On Call in the room during the sexual assault exam/medical forensic exam- In the interest of Best Practices, the Advocate On Call who responded may not be assigned to the survivor. This depends on the position the advocate has at the Bridge.
 - Advocate On Call may not be allowed in the room during the history portion of the sexual assault/medical forensic exam, this depends on the hospital.
- Advocate On Call will assess survivor's safety. In the event that the survivor needs emergency shelter, the Advocate will offer TBOTW as an option, The Advocate On Call will inform Hotline staff, the client will be coming to Bridge emergency shelter.
- Once assessed for safety, the Advocate On Call will make appropriate referrals and or arrangements for transportation if applicable. For safety reasons, an Advocate On Call will not drive a survivor to any other location other than TBOTW emergency shelter. If other transportation arrangements need to be made, i.e. taxi, Uber, please have the nurse page the social worker on duty to assist with arrangements. Please note vouchers are not always available depending on availability and hospital.
- Advocate On Call is free to leave once intervention is completed and the needs of the survivor are met.
- Advocate On Call providing intervention services will forward files to the Advocacy Manager the next business day on duty (24 business hours).
- The Advocacy Manager will make an initial follow up call and assign an Advocate for follow up services.
- The Advocate will follow-up within 48 hours of receiving notice of client assignment.
- After 3 attempts to contact the survivor, the assigned Advocate will close the non-residential file on the last day of that current month.
- Advocate will forward file to grant compliance clerk for data entry.

ONSITE: TEXAS FORENSIC NURSE EXAMINERS (TXFNE): TBOTW

TXFNE will provide medical forensic exams on site at TBOTW.

If the client initially contacts TXFNE, the TXFNE SANE will call the hotline and hotline staff will contact Advocate On Call. The Advocate On Call will follow aforementioned procedures.

In the event a client needs an exam during regular business hours, the On Call Advocate will call 281-306-6893, press 1 and request a forensic nurse.

In the event a client needs an exam after business hours, the Hotline Advocate will dispatch the On Call Advocate. The On Call Advocate will call 281-306-6893, press 1 and request a forensic nurse.

The Advocate will follow aforementioned procedures.

MULTIPLE CALLS

In the event that an Advocate receives multiple calls during an accompaniment, the Advocate will determine depending on emotional and or physical limitations to call back-up Director or Manager to respond to call.

DOCUMENTATION

Advocates are required to submit a Monthly Advocacy & Accompaniment Report to the Advocacy Manager by the last day of the month for data entry and reporting.

In the event the Advocate did not open a file, a call card will be completed and submitted to Hotline and Advocacy Managers within 24 business hours. In the event the Advocate spends 45 minutes or more advocating with a survivor on a sexual assault call, this can be counted as an accompaniment. This call will be documented in the Monthly Accompaniment Report.

RESPONDING TO CALL

Hotline staff will call the Advocate with information provided by the hospital staff within 15 minutes of receiving the call.

The Advocate On Call will respond within 15 minutes of being called by the Hotline staff.

In the event the Advocate On Call does not respond to the call, Hotline staff will call the Director or Manager on back-up to respond.

COVID-19 Safety Precautions

Always maintain social distancing; at least 6 feet between you and others.

Always wear a mask.

Always use hand sanitizer throughout the accompaniment.

Please use caution when approaching any new facility and abide by all safety protocols that the hospitals or clinics have in place.

COMMITMENT:

- Provide access to services 24/7 to survivors of sexual assault
- Adhere to the HCSART protocol, evaluate, and identify opportunities for improvements to support survivors of sexual assault
- Educate the public regarding sexual violence and resources available to support survivors
- Commit to HCSART as a core member by attending meetings, providing necessary data, serving as subject matter expert, adhering to the protocols and fully participating in meetings
- Protect the confidentiality and privacy of survivors of sexual assault
- Center the experiences and voices of survivors

Bay Area Turning Point (BATP), Webster, Texas

Bay Area Turning Point (BATP) is a community based nonprofit dual agency that provides immediate crisis intervention and wrap around services to individuals impacted directly or indirectly by domestic violence and/or sexual assault. BATP has service locations in Webster, Texas and a satellite location in Anahuac, Texas stretching services amongst four different counties to include Harris, Galveston, Chambers and Brazoria County. We provide residential and non-residential services that include 24-hour crisis hotline help, counseling services, short- and medium-term housing, victim advocacy and support and outreach, education, and prevention. Collaborations help with bridging services for survivors. BATP works closely with Webster, League City, Nassau Bay City, Lakeview, Dickinson Police Departments. Being on the outer limits of Harris County there are few hospitals available to support survivors needing specialized services as it relates to sexual assault.

Commitment:

- Provide access to services 24/7 to survivors of sexual assault
- Adhere to the HCSART protocol, evaluate, and identify opportunities for improvements in the to support survivors of sexual assault
- Educate the public regarding sexual violence and resources available to support survivors
- Commit to HCSART as a core member by attending meetings, providing necessary data, serving as subject matter expert, adhering to the protocols and fully participating in meetings
- Protect the confidentiality and privacy of survivors of sexual assault
- Center the experiences and voices of survivors

Entry Point	Initial Responder	Responders Role/ Responsibilities	Next Steps
<p>Survivor Calls the 24-hour Crisis Line.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Walks into BATP Crisis Intervention Center.</p>	<p>Trained Hotline Advocate</p>	<p>Hotline Advocate completes hotline form and obtains all pertinent information.</p> <p>Informs survivor of rights, resources, options, and how to receive a sexual assault exam.</p>	<p>If a survivor decides they would like to complete a SANE exam, they are connected to the on-call advocate.</p> <p>On-Call advocate connects with the survivor and provides resources to include providing information to access SAFE-Ready Facility locations and other viable resources to have a SANE exam completed.</p> <p>On-Call Advocate and survivor will meet at, or the survivor will be provided transportation to the chosen location to complete SANE Exam.</p>
<p>Survivor is a current client.</p>	<p>The current staff person that receives the initial notification. (Advocate, Case Manager, Counselor, etc.)</p>	<p>Informs survivor of rights, resources, options, and how to receive a sexual assault exam.</p>	<p>If a survivor decides they would like to complete a SANE exam, they are connected to the on-call advocate.</p> <p>On-Call advocate connects with the survivor and provides resources to include providing information to access SAFE-Ready Facility locations and other viable resources to have a SANE exam completed.</p> <p>On-Call Advocate and Survivor will meet at, or the survivor will be provided transportation to the chosen location to complete SANE Exam.</p>

<p>The Survivor is at the hospital/medical facility.</p>	<p>Medical Professional on-site Trained Hotline Advocate</p>	<p>Medical Professional makes initial contact with BATP via the 24-hour hotline. Hotline Advocate completes hotline form with Medical Professional (to include information needed for an on-call advocate to respond on-site.</p>	<p>On-Call advocate is dispatched by Hotline Advocate to the hospital/medical facility On-Call advocate will arrive within 45 minutes and follow up with the initial contact. On-Call advocate will meet with the survivors to discuss rights, resources, and options.</p>
<p>The Survivor is at the police station.</p>	<p>Law Enforcement Professional on-site Trained Hotline Advocate</p>	<p>Law Enforcement Professional makes initial contact with BATP via the 24-hour hotline. Hotline Advocate completes hotline form with Law Enforcement Professional (to include information needed for an on-call advocate to respond on-site</p>	<p>On-Call advocate is dispatched by Hotline Advocate. On-Call advocate will arrive within 45 minutes to dispatched police station and follow up with the initial contact. On-Call advocates will meet with the survivors to discuss rights, resources, and options. If a survivor decides to complete a SANE Exam On-Call advocate provides information to access SAFE-Ready Facility locations and other viable resources to have a SANE exam completed. On-Call Advocate and Survivor will meet at, or the survivor will be provided transportation to the chosen location to complete SANE Exam.</p>

FamilyTime Crisis & Counseling Center (Humble, TX)

FamilyTime Crisis & Counseling Center has served in North Harris County and beyond for over 46 years by providing: emergency shelter to individuals and families, crisis intervention, a 24-hour crisis helpline, holistic case management, comprehensive mental health and wellness therapy, medical accompaniment, and community education to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and to the larger community. Since June 2020, we have done so while being laser-focused on equity, fidelity, and integrity and being client centered, culturally competent, and trauma informed.

Services provided and how survivors can get connected to services:

Crisis Response:

- Survivors can access crisis support by calling the 24/7 hotline, walking into our Counseling Center location during business hours, having police drop them off at our shelter (if space is available) or Counseling Center location, or by going to the hospital due to injury or assault.
- Trained advocates assess survivor's situation and may help connect to medical exam. If the client does not have transportation, an advocate will connect the client to HAWC to assist with transportation.
- Once at the hospital, SANE contacts FamilyTime Crisis & Counseling Center and the advocate will meet the survivor at the hospital to provide support and information regarding the survivor's rights and resources.

Entry points for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Exam:

- Survivor calls hotline requesting information about next steps after a sexual assault.
- Forensic Nurse or hospital staff call hotline requesting hospital accompaniment.
- Survivor discloses at shelter that they need an exam.
- Humble PD or Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) transports the survivor to hospital from jail.
- Oliver J. Bell Unit transports survivor to hospital from the prison unit or FamilyTime advocate meets survivor on the unit.
- Joe Corley Processing Center transports the survivor to hospital from the prison unit or FamilyTime advocate meets survivor on the unit.

On call advocates to respond to all sexual assault medical forensic exam requests in our service area 24 hours a day/7 day a week. Hospitals/clinics that we have partnerships with are listed below:

- Memorial Hermann - Northeast - Humble
- HCA Houston ER (Fall Creek) - Humble
- HCA Houston Healthcare - Kingwood
- HCA Houston ER 24/7 - Cleveland,
- Texas Emergency Hospital System (Humble)
- Cleveland Emergency Hospital
- Texas Emergency Hospital (Cleveland)Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners (TXFNE)
- Oliver J. Bell Unit (Cleveland, TX)
- Joe Corley Processing Center (Conroe, TX)

Hospital Accompaniment/Crisis Response Advocates

FamilyTime Crisis & Counseling Center's trained advocates offer hospital accompaniment for medical forensic exams. Hospital accompaniment services are available to adult and child survivors of sexual violence 24 hours/7 days a week in a hospital or community-based clinic setting. Advocates are dispatched within 15 minutes of the time a hospital accompaniment request is received by FamilyTime. The advocate's role is to provide compassionate, confidential, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed services to support the survivor. Specific services provided to the survivor by the advocate include:

- crisis intervention
- education on legal rights, reporting, and the forensic exam process
- emotional support
- advocacy
- safety planning
- information on legal rights
- information regarding FamilyTime resources for the survivor and their friends and family including counseling, case management, shelter, and legal advocacy
- information regarding additional community resources including shelter, legal, medical and financial support
- follow-up services with the client 48 hours after accompaniment (with the client's consent and if safe to do so)

Emergency Shelter :

Hotline staff will assess danger and safety plan with the survivor. Hotline staff will accept client into Family Time's shelter if space is available or provide resources to other shelters using information provided by DV Beds to reduce the number or times survivor is asked to share their story.

Behavioral Health, Advocacy & Support Services:

- Survivor calls hotline requesting information about next steps after a sexual assault or discloses a sexual assault victimization during any other FamilyTime service (ex: domestic violence (DV) support group, counseling with signed ROI, shelter services for DV victimization, case management for DV victimization)
 - Hotline advocate provides danger assessment.
 - Survivor is informed of their legal rights.
 - Survivor is informed of FamilyTime's in-person and virtual counseling program which provides up to 20 free sessions for survivors of sexual assault and FamilyTime's free Sexual Assault support groups. FamilyTime is also informed of counseling services available to their friends and family.
 - Client is informed of Family Time's legal advocacy and case management services.
 - Client is provided with resources for other services if needed.
 - Survivor discloses at any other point of service delivery, ex. in domestic violence support group, that she is needing support related to her experience with sexual assault.

Intake/Assessment Appointment with Case Manager

Survivor will be offered an appointment to speak with a case manager who will assess the client's needs and assist the client with enrolling in supportive services such as counseling, support groups, housing, legal advocacy, and financial resources.

Legal Advocacy Services

- Referral is made to the legal advocacy department from internal and external referrals.
- Legal advocacy referral is received by legal advocate and client is informed of legal options.
- Legal advocate informs client he or she is available for accompaniment to law enforcement offices and court.
- Legal advocate completes proper legal aid referral forms with client and are sent to corresponding legal aid. Partner agencies can provide advice and/or representation based on client's needs and eligibility requirements.
- After 30 days, legal advocate follows up with the client to ensure legal aid has followed up with victim and assessed whether additional legal advocacy is needed.

Commitment:

- Provide access to 24/7 services for survivors of sexual assault
- Adhere to the HCSART protocol, evaluate, and identify opportunities for improvements in the to support survivors of sexual assault
- Educate the public regarding sexual violence and resources available to support survivors
- Commit to HCSART as a core member by attending meetings, providing necessary data, serving as subject matter expert, adhering to the protocols, and fully participating in meetings
- Protect the confidentiality and privacy of survivors of sexual assault
- Center the experiences and voices of survivors

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Harris County District Attorney's Office (HCDAO)

The District Attorney of Harris County, Texas represents the State of Texas in the Harris County Criminal Courts. To better serve survivors of sexual assault, the District Attorney has assigned the prosecution of certain felony Adult Sex Crimes to the specialized prosecutors in the Adult Sex Crimes Section of the Adult Sex Crimes & Trafficking Division.

- The Adult Sex Crimes Section prosecutes felony complaints that involve adult victims of sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, and some other sex-related offenses.
- The Adult Sex Crimes prosecutors are available 24/7 to speak with investigators, and regularly and do so.
- The investigative agency is required to bring the prosecutors all available evidence to review prior to any charging decision unless charges are being immediately accepted due to an imminent safety or flight risk concern.
- The Adult Sex Crimes prosecutors review all available evidence and work with the investigative agency to obtain any additional information or evidence needed for successful prosecution.
- Once all available evidence is received and reviewed, the prosecutors make a charging decision.

- Charging decisions are made at the sole discretion of the prosecutors.
- Legally and ethically, charging decisions are based on the evidence and whether or not the charge(s) can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.
- The investigative agency is the point of contact for the victim prior to any charging decision. In the case of any grand jury investigation or direct file, the prosecutors may communicate with the victim directly to prepare for grand jury.
- The investigative agency informs the victim of any charging decision. If charges are accepted, the prosecutors will reach out to the victim either through or along with our Victims Assistance Coordinators (VACs) and/or social workers to ensure the mandates of CCP Chapter 56A are met.
- The Adult Sex Crimes prosecutors educate the grand juries on the dynamics of sexual assault through grand jury orientation presentations and/or during presentations of cases to the grand jury.
- Decisions to decline, dismiss, or plea bargain charges are made with the input and approval of a chief prosecutor assigned to the Adult Sex Crimes Division.
- Adult Sex Crimes prosecutors are trained in how to read and assess lab & DNA reports.
- Victims are apprised of the case developments through proactive contact initiated by VACs, social workers, and the prosecutors.
- When victims initiate contact, prosecutors are available to meet and speak with them at a mutually agreed-upon time and place, including in-person, phone, and virtual meetings.
- When advocacy agencies or other dedicated professionals have a referral, it is first made to a law enforcement agency, who will then present the case to the Adult Sex Crimes prosecutors for consideration.
- Interpretation and transportation services are available for victims when meeting with the prosecutors or participating in trial through the HCDAO Victims Assistance Division and HCDAO investigators.

Commitment:

- HCDAO will provide trained, competent intake services to law enforcement agencies that partner with the Adult Sex Crimes Section to ensure offenders are charged appropriately.
- HCDAO will update appropriate Adult Sex Crimes partners on criminal court status as needed or requested.
- HCDAO will provide information about case status to team members as needed.
- HCDAO will attend TXFNE Center for Forensic Excellence MDT Team meetings and other case reviews whenever there is a case on the agenda in which they have involvement and/or jurisdictional authority.
- HCDAO will ensure the victim is aware of any proposed plea agreement and obtain feedback.
- HCDAO will explain to the victim the right of victim input regarding victim loss, trauma, or restitution for possible presentation of evidence at the time of the plea hearing and/or to provide a Victim Impact Statement.
- HCDAO will encourage and support the victim during this process through VACs and/or social workers and will inform the victim of their rights under Article 56A.051 of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure.
- HCDAO VACs and/or social workers will share what they learn about the victim's feelings/

concerns with the assigned prosecutors and will follow up on this information as needed.

- HCDAO VACs and/or social workers will arrange meetings with the assigned prosecutor and the victim, if needed, to discuss a potential plea agreement or case progress.
- HCDAO will protect the privacy and confidentiality of victims whenever possible in court documents and court filings.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Houston Police Department

The procedures to be used in investigating and prosecuting cases arising from a report of sexual assault.

- The Houston Police Department (HPD) has jurisdiction over sexual assault cases that occur within the City of Houston geographic areas. HPD sets forth procedural guidelines to ensure officers uphold the trauma-informed and victim-centered approach when responding to sexual assault investigations.
- The Adult Sex Crimes Unit investigates complaints that involve adult victims of sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, and other sex-related offenses.
- The Victim Services Division provides crisis intervention, emotional support, counseling, law enforcement advocacy, personal advocacy, information & referrals, case management, safety planning, and other services as needed to crime victims and witnesses.
- In most instances, patrol officers are responsible for taking the initial report. There may be instances where an investigator takes the initial report.
- When a police report is taken, victims are provided the following: (1) their case number and instructions on how to make contact with the investigative division, (2) information on how to obtain a Forensic Exam (Sexual Assault Kit/SAK), and (3) a Victim's Referral Card (Blue Card), which contains written notice of their legal rights, information regarding the criminal justice process, possible remedies, and the availability of social services and community resources.
- Because victims experience trauma in different ways, there may be varying times of "readiness" to proceed with the investigation. Victims have been provided information about where to call about their investigation (See Victims Referral Card above) and may do so when they are ready. Upon initial contact with patrol officers, victims are strongly encouraged to obtain a Forensic Exam as soon as possible. Victims are given several options where to obtain a Forensic Exam.
- Victim Services Division personnel receive cases that involve sexual violence and use the information in the report to contact those victims to provide resources.
- Once a victim agrees to proceed with the investigation, a victim interview will be scheduled at the victim's convenience.
- In accordance with HB 1172 (Sexual Assault Advocate Accompaniment), HPD uses community or system advocates depending on the needs or request of the victim during their interview.
- In most cases with a known suspect, HPD offers the suspect the opportunity to provide a statement in the case. The victim is notified at the beginning of the investigation, by the investigator, that the suspect will be given the opportunity to provide a statement.
- The below checklist from the HCDA's office includes most evidence that is required to be obtained in an investigation prior to the case being presented for charges:

- Offense Report, including any evidentiary supplements explaining the absence of items included in this checklist, if not completed in a separate SB111 document
- Any and All Extraneous/Case Related Report(s)
- All Video/Audio/Surveillance from all relevant locations with Business Records Affidavit (BRA)
- All Dash/Body Worn Camera (must ensure that BWC for any and all patrol officers connected to the case are attached and/or associate with the investigative incident number, for inclusion in the review and discovery pursuant to SB111 and Michael Morton Act).
- All dispatch/MDT records (with BRA)
- 911 calls (records and audio) with BRA
- All Photos (scene and medical, if available)
- Any EMT records with BRA
- Full hospital medical records with BRA
- Full SANE record with BRA
- Any Consent to Search forms for Buccal Swabs
- Buccal Search Warrants, if no consent
- All Lab reports (CODIS and confirmatory DNA reports)
- Any Social Media and/or Email returns with BRA
- Any Hotel Records with BRA
- Any Lease Agreement with BRA
- Any Cell Phone Subscriber and other Records w BRA for each cell number
- Any Cell Phone Forensics Report
- Any Computer Forensic Report
- Any Bank Records w BRA
- All Search Warrants (certified copies)
- All returns for all records and evidence gathered via Search Warrant
- All Defendant's Statement(s)
- Any Co-Defendant's Statement(s)
- All Witness Statements
- Any Juvenile Records w BRA
- Any School Records w BRA
- Any Therapy Records w BRA
- Medical Records w BRA
- Any Photo Array/Lineup
- Any Witness Admonishment Form
- Any Adult Forensic Interview (please indicate if one exists for your case here, and HCDAO will download)

- In addition to the previously mentioned items provided by patrol officers and Victims Services Division, a Pseudonym Form Sexual Assault form, in accordance with Article 58.102 of the Texas Criminal Code of Procedure (CCP) is provided to the victim to maintain confidentiality of the victim and the investigation with law enforcement, prosecution team, and victim advocates. Throughout the investigation, the victim maintains contact with the assigned investigator of the case.
- HPD has an automated process which notifies the Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC) whenever a Sexual Assault Kit is tagged into the HPD's Property Division. Upon notification, the HFSC will obtain the SAK and initiate testing.
- HPD investigators receive training from the HFSC about how to read and interpret forensic exam reports. Additionally, investigators are trained so that they may consult with the HFSC whenever further explanation is needed.

Confidentiality requirements for HPD

- HPD has written policy in place to protect confidentiality of sexual assault victims in accordance with Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Chapter 58, Subchapter C – Confidentiality of Identifying Information of Sex Offense Victims. HPD's policy not only protects the identity of the victims, but the confidentiality status extends to the details of the investigations.
- The Victim Services Division has a specific Code of Ethics to protect each victim's right to privacy and confidentiality except when agency guidelines state otherwise or when compliance with local, state, or federal laws is required. Victim advocates inform victims of the limits of confidentiality prior to the victim's disclosure.

Commitment:

- Continual training on trauma-informed responses
- Collaborate with partners to identify gaps in services to better support victims of sexual assault
- Educate the public regarding sexual violence and resources available to victims

Harris County Sheriff's Office

- The Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) has jurisdiction over sexual assault cases that occur within unincorporated Harris County. HCSO sets forth procedural guidelines to ensure officers uphold the trauma-informed and victim-centered approach when responding to sexual assault investigations.
- The Adult Sex Crimes Unit investigates complaints that involve adult victims of sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, and other sexual offenses.
- The Victim's Advocate Unit provides law enforcement advocacy, personal advocacy, information & referrals, and other services as needed to crime victims and in some cases witnesses of crimes.
- In most instances, patrol officers are responsible for taking the initial report. There may be instances where an investigator takes the initial report.
- When a police report is taken, victims are provided the following: (1) their case number and instructions on how to make contact with the investigative division, (2) information on how to obtain a Forensic Exam (Sexual Assault Kit/SAK), and (3) a Crime Victim's Referral Card (Blue Card), which contains written notice of their legal rights, information regarding the crim-

inal justice process, possible remedies, and the availability of social services and community resources.

- Because victims experience trauma in different ways, there may be varying times of “readiness” to proceed with the investigation. Victims have been provided information about where to call about their investigation (see Victims Referral Card above) and may do so when they are ready. Upon initial contact with patrol officers, victims are strongly encouraged to obtain a Forensic Exam as soon as possible. Victims are given several options of where to obtain a Forensic Exam.
- Once a victim agrees to proceed with the investigation, a forensic interview is scheduled and conducted by a licensed interviewer of TXFNE. The forensic interview will be scheduled at the victim’s convenience.
- In accordance with HB 1172 (Sexual Assault Advocate Accompaniment), HCSO uses community or HCSO advocates depending on the needs or request of the victim during their interview.
- A Pseudonym Form Sexual Assault form, in accordance with Article 58.102 of the Texas Criminal Code of Procedure (CCP) is provided to the victim to maintain confidentiality of the victim and the investigation with law enforcement, prosecution team, and victim advocates. Throughout the investigation, the victim maintains contact with the assigned investigator of the case.
- Evidence collected by investigators or patrolman is submitted to the Harris County Institute of Forensic Science (HCIFS) for testing.
- HCSO investigators receive training from the HCIFS about how to read and interpret forensic exam reports. Additionally, investigators are trained that they may consult with the HCIFS whenever further explanation is needed.

Commitment:

- Continual training on trauma-informed responses
- Collaborate with partners to identify gaps in services to better support victims of sexual assault
- Educate the public regarding sexual violence and resources available to victims

LOCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SEXUAL ASSAULT MEDICAL FORENSIC EXAMINATIONS

Memorial Hermann Health System Forensic Nursing Services

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) and physicians with specialized training serve a critical role in the response and care to victims of sexual assault. These healthcare providers understand how trauma impacts individuals and respect the value of empowerment and choice as vital to recovery in the aftermath of sexual assault. **Memorial Hermann Health System Forensic Nursing Services** respond to victims of sexual violence within Harris County and are committed to providing high quality care and forensic evidence preservation while working with partner agencies to ensure the best interests of the victims.

Memorial Hermann Forensic Nursing Services provides holistic healthcare that addresses with dignity the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual needs of victims of interpersonal violence.

Memorial Hermann Forensic Nursing Services commit to:

- Provide a trauma informed care response to adult sexual assault patients presenting at the SAFE ready designated Memorial Hermann Acute Care Hospitals:
 - Memorial Hermann Texas Medical Center Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann Southwest Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann Greater Heights Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann Pearland Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann Memorial City Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann Cypress Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann Northeast Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Hospital
 - Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital
- Provide 24/7 availability of SANEs to conduct medical/forensic assessments with evidence collection for sexual assault patients respecting all diverse and cultural needs.
- Prioritize the physical and psychological well-being of patients who have experienced sexual assault by providing a safe and non-judgmental environment with an ongoing opportunity for informed consent throughout the medical/forensic comprehensive assessment, detailed injury documentation, and evidence preservation.
- Encourage sexual assault patients to connect with available community advocates in a private space prior to conducting medical/forensic assessments while also respecting the patient's informed decision.
- Memorial Hermann Healthcare providers assess the sexual assault patient for STI prophylaxis, HIV prophylaxis and Emergency Contraception according to CDC recommendations.
- Educate on follow up, referral options, and complete a safe discharge plan for sexual assault patients to foster positive patient health outcomes.
- Inform patients of Crime Victims Compensation sexual assault benefits.
- Provide an exceptional individualized patient experience with evidence-based quality care to sexual assault patients.
- Ensure high reliability with the identification, collection, documentation and preservation of evidence integrity.
- Participate with the legal system by providing required trial testimony, adhering to institutional policy and procedures.
- Collaborate with Harris County SART stakeholders for a trauma informed, compassionate, and victim- centered approach supporting healthy and safe communities.

Harris Health System Forensic Nursing Program

Harris Health System is a safety net hospital system in Harris County that provides medical services and medical forensic examinations (MFEs) to adult patients with a complaint of sexual assault. These services are available at Ben Taub Hospital and Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) Hospital 24 hours a day. In addition, services for the sexual assault patient can be provided at any of the 20+ health centers located in Harris County. The hospital system employs a team of forensic nurses that provide the

following services:

- a comprehensive MFE including a detailed history, a head-to-toe physical examination, a detailed genital examination, and evidence collection including photographs;
- access to a sexual assault crisis advocate to the patient for accompaniment during the exam;
- sexually transmitted infection prophylaxis, HIV prevention medication (note: prescriptions are filled free of charge for patients without insurance), and for female patients of child-bearing age, emergency contraception for pregnancy prevention;
- baseline testing for STI's;
- billing to Crime Victims Compensation on behalf of the patients without insurance if their assault has been reported to law enforcement;
- after care instructions including assurance that the patient has adequate medical follow-up [note: if the patient does not have a primary care physician or adequate medical follow-up, the Volunteer Initiatives vs Violent Acts (VIVA) clinic will provide aftercare medical services]; and
- provision of information about services provided by the sexual assault crisis centers and encouragement to patients to seek counseling.

Commitment:

- Provide MFE's in a timely manner 24 hours a day/7 day a week by a trained forensic nurse
- Provide access to a sexual assault advocate
- Offer access to appropriate medications for the prevention of diseases and pregnancy
- Provide information for aftercare to promote well-being and healing
- Attend Harris County SART meetings and collaborate with community partners to improve care to sexual assault patients

Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners (TXFNE)

Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners™ (TXFNE™) gathers the region's most qualified trauma nurses and is pioneering services to make the forensic exam accessible to victims in their geographic area. The demand for the forensic exam is at its peak with the population of patients to include sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, child maltreatment, and elder abuse victims. TXFNE™ partners with hospitals and clinics by providing qualified forensic nurses on-demand.

TXFNE Commits to:

- Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART and MDT meetings.
- Provide medical forensic exams to victims that experience sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, and child and elder abuse.
- Collaborate with hospitals in Harris County to provide contracted forensic nursing services 24 hours a day, with an arrival time average of 90 minutes.
- Provide acute and non-acute exams of victims of sexual and physical violence (TXFNE protocol - 7 days).
- Acute exam - medical forensic exam completed, evidence is collected within 120 hours of the incident.
- Non-acute - medical forensic exam completed, evidence is not collected.
- Conduct evidence collection when appropriate and with best practice standards.

- Forensic photography will be conducted for all consenting patients that have a medical forensic exam and will be secured and stored in a HIPPA compliant manner.
- Provide testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and referral for chronic infections.
- Patients needing medical forensic exams will have their exam conducted in their preferred language and with culturally specific considerations.
- Patients will be identified utilizing their preferred pronouns and identities.
- Provide medical records to law enforcement and the District Attorney's Office within two weeks of subpoena request.
- Allow nurses to meet with the District Attorney's Office for pretrial conference meetings, ensure nurses maintain contact with the District Attorney's Office when a case is pending or in process for hearings or trial and notify the District Attorney's Office of address and/or telephone number changes of any of the nurses no longer working with TXFNE.
- Provide SANE education and precepting of SANE candidates and ensure all nurses maintain a high level of competency through ongoing education and case reviews that will apply to their certification renewal.
- Agree to meet with the nursing team to discuss quality of care, peer and procedural review and provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.
- Maintain the availability of an Adult SANE specialist to provide adult medical forensic assessments at the following locations 24/7 with an average response time of 90 minutes to the following locations:
 - TXFNE Clinic
 - CHI Springwood
 - CHI 24/7 Pasadena
 - CHI Holcombe
 - CHI St. Luke's Medical Center
 - CHI The VIntage
 - CHI Patient's Medical Center in Pasadena
 - CHI McNair
 - HCA Clear Lake
 - HCA North Cypress
 - HCA Cypress Fairbanks
 - HCA Northwest
 - HCA 24/7 ER Texas City
 - HCA Medical Center
 - HCA 24/7 Towne Lake
 - HCA Southeast
 - HCA North Channel
 - HCA Fairmont
 - HCA Tomball
 - HCA 24/7 Creekside
 - HCA West
 - The Woman's Hospital of Texas

- HCA 24/7 Barker Cypress
- HCA 24/7 Friendswood
- HCA 24/7 Fry Rd.
- HCA 24/7 Fallbrook
- HCA 24/7 TC Jester
- HCA 24/7 Memorial City
- HCA 24/7 Montrose
- HCA 24/7 Bellaire
- HCA 24/7 Atascocita
- HCA 24/7 Spring
- HCA 24/7 Cypress 1960
- HCA 24/7 Copperfield
- HCA 24/7 Westchase
- HCA 24/7 Mission Bend

Houston Methodist Forensic Nursing Services

Houston Methodist Forensic Nursing Services has specialty trained nurses at all Houston Methodist Emergency Departments to provide forensic medical exams to survivors of sexual abuse, interpersonal violence, sex, and labor trafficking, as well as elder abuse. Houston Methodist strives to ensure that patients receive quality health care. The goal is to lessen the impact of violence by empowering survivors to find strength in taking control of their health and well-being following a traumatic act of violence and to provide a safety net system to Harris County encompassing trauma informed patient centered care to all victims of sexual and physical violence presenting at all Houston Methodist Hospitals.

- Provide 24/7 availability of certified Forensic Nurses to conduct medical/forensic evaluations with evidence collection (if indicated) for sexual assault, interpersonal violence, strangulation, sex and labor trafficking, and elder abuse patients.
- Provide patients with a full medical head to toe assessment, and if indicated, psychiatric evaluation, by a board-certified Emergency Medical provider prior to conducting a medical/forensic exam.
- Respect all diverse and cultural needs of this special patient population, providing translation services by trauma informed licensed language specialists.
- Prioritize the physical and psychological well-being of patients who have experienced sexual and/or physical assault by providing a safe and non-judgmental environment with an ongoing opportunity for informed consent throughout the comprehensive medical/forensic assessment, detailed injury documentation, and evidence preservation.
- Houston Methodist Healthcare providers will assess the sexual assault patient for STI prophylaxis, HIV prophylaxis, Hepatitis status, and emergency contraception according to CDC guidelines. Perform any SDI testing that may be indicated. And provide appropriate medications.
- Provide an exceptional individualized patient experience with evidence-based trauma informed care to the sexual assault, interpersonal violence, sex and labor trafficking, and elder abuse

patients.

- Provide reliability with injury identification, evidence collection per Texas State Protocol, injury documentation, forensic photography, and preservation of evidence integrity through chain of custody.
- Educate patients on follow up medical care, referral options, and complete a safe discharge plan for sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and sex and labor trafficking patients to ensure positive patient health outcomes.

Collaboration with community partners:

- Provide access to a sexual assault crisis advocate in a safe and confidential manner prior to conducting a medical/forensic examination while also respecting the patient's informed decision for accompaniment during the exam.
- Inform patients of Crime Victims Compensation sexual assault benefits and advocacy resources to assist with securing these benefits. Aid with billing to Crime Victims Compensation on behalf of the patient without insurance if their assault has been reported to law enforcement.
- Join with law enforcement and the criminal justice system by ensuring fact and/or expert forensic nurse trial testimony through subpoena, adhering to institutional policy and procedures.
- Dedicate a representative from Houston Methodist to serve as a resource liaison for the Harris County SART committee. Collaborate with all Houston area SART participants for a trauma informed, compassionate, and victim-centered approach supporting healthy and safe communities for all.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES PROVIDER

Behavioral services are provided by several SART members including the sexual assault community-based programs. Services include crisis intervention, individual counseling, and support group counseling. Additionally, the SART includes availability of and access to additional mental and behavioral health services in Harris County.

Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD

The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD strives to provide high quality, efficient, and cost-effective services so that persons with mental disabilities may live with dignity as fully functioning, participating, and contributing members of our community, regardless of their ability to pay based on a sliding scale rate schedule.

- Ensure Harris County residents and visitors have access to 24/7 real time support for behavioral health needs through 24/7 Crisis Line and emotional support text line.
- Dispatch Mobile Crisis Outreach Team upon request from caller and/or community service partner 24/7.
- Provide access to trauma informed behavioral healthcare support via The Harris Center clinical care services array.
- Provide information and support on how to navigate the behavioral health system in Harris County.

- Provide information and support on how to connect with behavioral health systems in other Texas counties if needed.
- Provide Mental Health First Aid and Stress Management and Resiliency Training to community service partners.
- Attend Harris County SART meetings and collaborate with community partners to improve care to sexual assault survivors and their families.

OTHER MEMBERS

Houston Forensic Science Center

The Houston Forensic Science Center provides forensic testing services to the City of Houston that include testing in the following disciplines: Forensic Biology/DNA, Seized Drugs, Toxicology, Latent Prints, Digital Multimedia, Firearms, and Crime Scene Response. The majority of the testing that relates to sexual assault occurs in Forensic Biology/DNA, however any of our services can aid in the investigation of a sexual assault.

Commitment:

- Provide forensic testing as requested for sexual assault response within the City of Houston
- Update appropriate SART partners of our testing backlogs, turnaround times and issues the lab is currently facing that impact testing abilities. We will also bring forward opportunities that we see in our testing for improvement in the system.
- Provide information about testing status to team members as needed.
- HFSC representatives will attend Adult Sexual Abuse Review Team meetings and other case reviews unless the meeting or case review does not need input or updates from our representatives.

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences' Crime Laboratory

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences' Crime Laboratory performs analyses for the agency's Forensic Pathology Service and for law enforcement agencies in Harris County in the following five distinct forensic disciplines:

- Drug Chemistry
- Firearms Identification
- Forensic Genetics
- Forensic Toxicology
- Trace Evidence

Sexual Assault Evidence Tracking Program

The Sexual Assault Evidence Tracking Program was created by the Crime Laboratory Service after the 85th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 281, which added Section 420.034 to the Texas Government Code, requiring DPS to develop and implement a statewide electronic tracking system for evidence collected in cases involving sexual assault or other sex offenses. The bill requires the system to track the status and location of each item of evidence through various stages of the criminal justice process, allow entities involved in the handling of the evidence to update and track the status and location of evidence, and allow survivors to anonymously track or receive updates on

the status of evidence. Participation in the tracking system is required by any entity that collects evidence of sexual assaults or other sex offenses or investigates or prosecutes such offenses. HB 281 required DPS to implement the tracking system by September 1, 2019.

Access the tracking system here: [Texas Sexual Assault Evidence Tracking System](#). The Crime Laboratory released an important notice which impacted Sexual Assault Kit submissions beginning September 1, 2019.

Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (HCDVCC)

HCDVCC creates collaborations that maximize community resources, increase safety for victims of domestic violence and hold perpetrators of domestic violence accountable.

HCDVCC must provide victims with a reasonable expectation of confidentiality with respect to their conversations and exchanges. To release any information to other parties, HCDVCC advocates must first obtain written permission from victims prior to contacting or sharing information with any other service providers, including law enforcement and criminal justice agencies.

Commitment to HCSART:

- Support HCSART by providing expertise in Multidisciplinary Teams. HCDVCC currently facilitates several MDTs.
- Provide services when appropriate, to a sexual assault victim who is also a victim of domestic violence.
- Attend monthly HCSART meetings and participate in sub-committee meetings as necessary.
- Provide information to the HCSART when needed, if a written release by the victim has been signed.

Harris County Public Defender's Office (HCPDO)

The HCPDO is a member of the SART and an important partner. Their primary responsibility is to represent indigent persons charged in the misdemeanor, felony, and juvenile courts of Harris County. The clients receive zealous representation from the combined experience of lawyers, investigators, social workers, and administrative staff. The office provides comprehensive service to clients that goes beyond litigating criminal cases. This office may interact with victims of sexual assault.

Commitment:

- To listen, believe, empower, serve as a buffer, and honor the choices of the victim.
- To help the victims navigate the criminal legal system and their rights.
- To help provide access to an array of services.
- To develop a safety plan for the victims.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Diversity of perspectives, roles, and responsibilities are essential in multidisciplinary teams. The team is often addressing complex and multifaced issues. Conflict is inevitable and necessary for effective performance of the team. To meet this requirement, the Harris County SART adopted procedures, developed by the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault, for addressing conflicts within the SART team. The procedure includes maintaining the confidentiality of information shared among response team members as required by law.

Process Steps:

- Establish ground rules adopted by the team.
 - Commitment to participate.
 - Develop an agenda- includes statement of goals and expectations of each party.
 - Personal attacks are not tolerated.
 - Problem solving approach (not a win or lose)
- Select a facilitator- if the conflict does not involve the presiding officer or other SART leadership, they may facilitate the process.
- If necessary, consult with outside experts (attorneys, other leaders within disciplines). Fact check information.
- Generate options to solve the problem. Develop a list of 2-3 options and discuss the pros and cons of each.
- Reach agreement on an option.
- Plan next steps.

CASE REVIEW & EVALUATION

The Harris County SART formed a case review multi-disciplinary working group to ensure confidentiality and necessity of participation, while also not sharing the survivor's case with anyone who is not needed. We are in the process of selecting a case to review. The following are the case review procedures for selecting and reviewing the cases. The Harris County SART members did not submit a case for review. However, the team is committed to ensuring that a case is submitted for review.

Pursuant to SB476, the Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) shall conduct case reviews at least once on a biennial basis as a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of each partner's response and interagency protocols and systems using a multi-disciplinary approach. The Harris County SART is committed to strengthening the community's coordinated response to sexual assault, minimizing victim/survivor trauma, and enhancing health and judicial outcomes for adult survivors of sexual assault using a multi-disciplinary approach.

Goals

- Strengthen understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different professionals and agencies that respond to adult survivors of sexual assault within the community.
- Identify successful practices.
- Identify gaps and barriers.
- Build trust and rapport with team members.
- Seek opportunities to enhance sexual assault response policies and protocols.

Guidelines

- Any SART member can submit a proposal for case review to the Case Review Committee.
- Only cases that have been fully adjudicated will be reviewed unless all parties agree to make an exception.
- Case reviews must be scheduled in advance and all agencies/parties involved must be notified.
- If the Case Review Committee and all parties agree to review the case, a survivor notification plan (process of getting informed consent) will be developed.
- Advocacy centers will work in partnership to make contact with survivors to obtain consent in an effort to provide advocacy services, immediate support and referrals/resources, along with explanation on why reviewing the case is important for a bigger cause.
- Survivors will be fully informed about the voluntary nature of the process. Where an exception is made by the Case Review Committee for a pending investigation or charge to be reviewed, an additional consent form will be acquired from the survivor informing them of possible risks/negative impacts associated with reviewing a case that has not yet been fully adjudicated.

Case Review Committee Members

The Case Review Committee will be multi-disciplinary and facilitated by a designated SART member. Core members should include law enforcement, prosecution, and advocacy. Depending on individual case scenarios and facts, the case review may include but not limited to a SANE, laboratory personnel, probation/parole officers and other individuals with critical information about the case. Participation of additional members will be left to the discretion of the Case Review Committee and will need to be decided prior to receiving consent from the survivor.

Confidentiality and Consent

The Texas Local Government Code Sec. 351.258(f) requires that a response team only review a sexual assault case of an adult survivor with the signed, written consent of the survivor. The SART will develop and utilize a standardized consent form that includes instructions ensuring the survivor has informed consent prior to signing. That consent form does not substitute for those required by law for Rape Crisis Centers, VOCA/VAWA-funded agencies or Healthcare providers. If those entities wish to share information, they will need to obtain consents or court orders that are compliant with those requirements.

The consent form will specify the following:

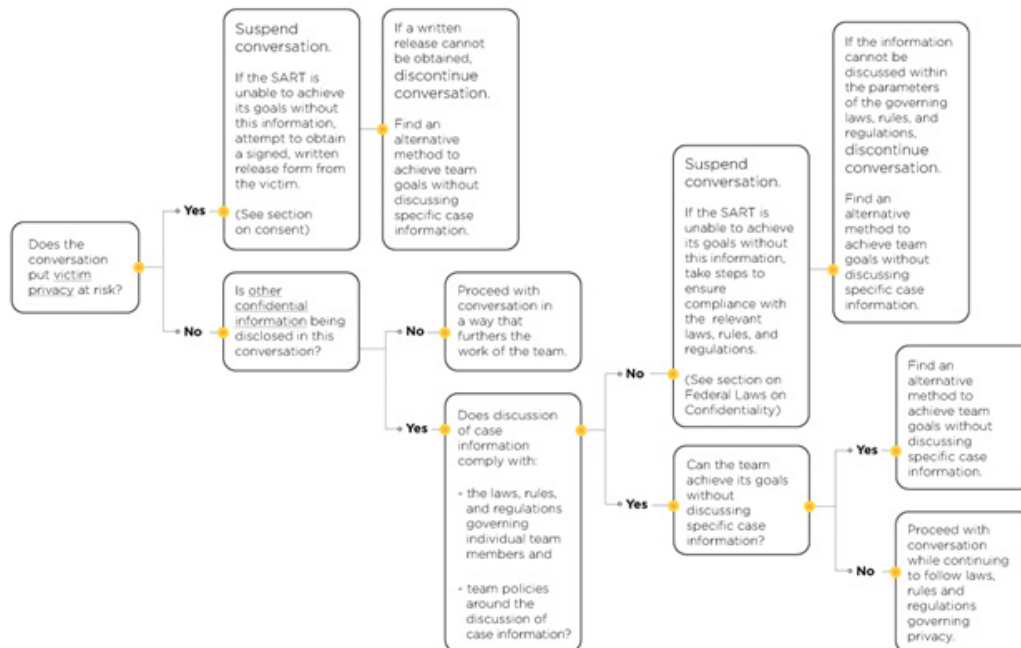
- The information or records covered by the release (Page 22) CCR-Toolkit.pdf
- The reason or purpose for the release
- The person/s or agency/s to which the information is to be released.
- The consent will be a time-limited release indicating the general timeframe in which the information will be released and date when the terms of the release expire.
- That their participation is absolutely voluntary, and that the case review consent form is not tied to their willingness or ability to participate in the criminal justice investigation, prosecution or receive services or support.
- That any information shared in the course of case review may be legally required to be disclosed to defense counsel pursuant to *Brady v. Maryland* and/or the Michael Morton Act.

To Submit a Case

- SART member completes the Initial Case Review Assessment and sent to the Case Review Committee ([Multidisciplinary-Sexual-Assault-Case-Review.pdf](#))
- Committee decides if case is eligible for review.
- Committee designates a facilitator and begins case review process.
- Case Review Summary and Post Case Review Summary must be completed for every case review conducted ([Multidisciplinary-Sexual-Assault-Case-Review.pdf](#)).

Discussing Case Information

A Flowchart for SARTs



<https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/inline-images/Discussing-Case-Information.png>
<https://www.nsvrc.org/sarts/toolkit/3-5>

SURVIVOR VOICES

The Harris County SART members are committed to ensuring survivor voices are included to enhance our survivor-centered framework. The Houston Area Women’s Center sexual assault team created an anonymous survey that assessed the feelings of victim/survivors on the accessibility of services, barriers encountered, and quality of care and treatment received by service providers and the criminal justice system. The survey was shared with the three other sexual assault programs to implement with the survivors served at their agencies. This anonymous survey was given to survivors receiving services from sexual assault community-based programs. The survey highlights the voices of survivors to help plan for and implement change and evaluate progress.

Responses received were from survivors who had reported sexual abuse from the years 2018-2023. Of the survey responses received, over 70% reported that services were easily accessible, but they faced barriers in obtaining the services. Barriers cited include: challenges with the quality of care and treatment provided to them, difficulties sharing the abuse with male officers, difficulty in detailing the incident due to trauma-related symptoms, language barriers when engaging with police, little communication from criminal justice on the progress of the case, being told services were at capacity, limited hours of operation for services (during day), and delays in receiving follow-up services. Some survivors responded favorably stating that the police response was quick, and their experience was favorable. Additionally, survivors stated that when interacting with advocates and medical forensic nurses, they were treated with respect. Survivors who utilized the survey shared that they want to utilize their voices to see the response to survivors of sexual assault improve.

Overall, the utilization of the SART survey was useful in highlighting the survivor’s experiences. This survey will continue to be utilized as a tool in assessing the needs of the community. The survey will continue to be carried out and results will be shared with HCSART at least quarterly. Centering survivor voices is necessary as it offers valuable feedback regarding obstacles victim/survivor’s face in accessing the services and navigating the criminal justice system.

LEGISLATION

The Harris County Sexual Assault Team members are committed to monitoring and adhering to changes in legislation as it relates to sexual assault survivors. The Harris County SART reviewed the following 88th legislative update prepared by the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault specifically for Sexual Assault Response Teams. The HCSART is committed to developing a plan to implement legislation that has not yet been implemented.

Mandatory Written Notice to Victims with Referral to Rape Crisis Services SB 806, Sen. Paxton/Rep. Manuel

Peace officers who respond to or investigate an incident involving sexual assault must provide to the victim a written notice that contains information about the rights of crime victims, information about Track-Kit, and a written referral to the nearest sexual assault program.

How does this affect SARTs:

- The local rape crisis center and the SART should consult with local law enforcement to develop this required written notice. The notice must be **in English and in Spanish** and must contain current contact information for the following community services: (1) a victim assistance coordinator, (2) a crime victim liaison, (3) the nearest sexual assault program, and (4) a healthcare facility that offers sexual assault forensic medical examinations.
- Additionally, as officers must offer to request a forensic medical exam on behalf of the victim, SART members should work together to coordinate a process to provide continuing care to the victims or to further investigate the offense. These should be incorporated in SART protocols.

SARTs should also ensure that this notification requirement is included in their protocols, as part of the investigative procedures.

Survivor-Centered Communications During Prosecution SB 409, Sen. Hinojosa/ Rep. Leach

Prosecutors are required to proactively update survivors about their case. Also, a victim, guardian of a victim, or a close relative of a deceased victim has the Constitutional right to assert and enforce their crime victims' rights either orally or in writing. Victims may assert their rights orally or in writing, either representing themselves or through an attorney during the criminal justice process. Additionally, prosecutors should be aware that they now must confer with the victim, or victim's chosen representative, about their views regarding the disposition of their case such as decisions not to file charges, the dismissal of charges, the use of a pretrial intervention program, or a plea bargain agreement.

How does this affect SARTs:

- This step should be included in SART protocols as part of their prosecution procedures. If advocacy is involved in providing support or coordinating any interactions between prosecution and survivors, that should also be integrated into SART protocols.

New CODIS Hit Notifications HB 4628, Rep. Goldman/ Sen. Huffman

Crime labs and law enforcement must now share information with one another in a timely manner after a rape kit is tested and DNA matches in the CODIS database occur. Crime labs have 60 business days to inform law enforcement of any DNA matches and law enforcement must then respond and notify the survivor within 5 business days. They must also attempt to collect and return to the lab DNA samples from identified suspects within 30 days, in order to establish a chain of custody for the suspect's DNA.

How does this affect SARTs?

- SARTs should ensure that these timelines are written into their protocols for rape kit analysis and testing, investigation procedures, and interagency information sharing.
- Law enforcement should include how they will share information with survivors, if there will be an advocate involved, etc.
- If an advocate will be there for support, law enforcement and the sexual assault program should include in their protocols how they obtain survivor consent and maintain confidentiality.

Access to Medical Forensic Exams and Crime Victims Compensation Reforms SB 1401, Sen. Zaffirini/ Rep. Ann Johnson

Survivors have an absolute right to a forensic medical exam within 120 hours of their assault, whether or not they choose to report.

For survivors choosing to report, healthcare providers seeking reimbursement for an exam no longer need to obtain an authorization form from law enforcement. This documentation served as a barrier to survivors wishing to access healthcare after an assault and as such is no longer required by law.

Minor survivors have an absolute right to an exam after an outcry, even in non-acute cases. **The OAG** reimbursement portal will be updated to allow documentation to be uploaded as an option but will not require it for purposes of reimbursement for exams done **on or after 9/1/2023**.

Additionally, healthcare providers may now seek reimbursement for reasonable costs of medical care offered to the survivor during the exam, up to a cap of \$25,000. Updates will be made to the OAG portal to reflect this change. Further, regarding this change, HHSC will be permitted to contract with a third-party vendor for prescription drugs. This law also allows survivors who are seeking crime victim compensation reimbursement to be automatically eligible for reimbursement if they receive a sexual assault forensic exam. This qualifies as “cooperation” with an investigation, thus making them eligible for CVC benefits.

Finally, survivors who opt for a non-report forensic medical exam should be informed when their kit is eligible for destruction. This is after the expiration of 5 years, and at that time, the survivor will be notified of this through Track-Kit system-generated emails or text communications.

How does it affect SARTs?

- SARTs should update their interagency communication protocols as necessary to reflect this change, deleting any reference to obtaining an authorization form from law enforcement. Multiple mandated members will need to update and critically evaluate how this will affect their interactions with their fellow members.
- If the form operated functionally as a communication tool between healthcare and law enforcement, SARTs should develop a new mode of communication making law enforcement aware that a kit is ready to be picked up.

- SARTs should connect with the hospital or the facility providing exams and address billing processes for medical expenses offered during the exam.
- SARTs should also consider adding to their protocols the requirement that law enforcement regularly check Track-Kit for alerts, as this system will automatically alert them when a kit has been entered and is ready for pick-up.

Increased Training Requirements
SB 1402, Sen. Zaffirini/ Rep. Howard

All peace officers, both new and current, are now required to receive an 8-hour training on trauma informed investigations of adult sexual assault and child sexual abuse. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement is mandated to create the course by January 1, 2024, in collaboration with the SASTF.

All health care facilities with an emergency department must provide all employees who offer patient admission or administration or direct patient care with a one-time 1-hour training on trauma informed care for sexual assault survivors as well as crime victim’s rights related to forensic exams and medical accompaniment advocacy. Also, emergency room nurses are required to have a 2-hour forensic training on applicable Texas law pertaining to the custody, transfer and tracking of forensic evidence that conforms to the evidence collection protocol developed by the Office of the Attorney General.

How does it affect SARTs?

- The implementation of this legislation can be supported by SARTs by incorporating some of these topics in their mandatory annual cross-agency training.
- Consider including SART membership to the relevant part of law enforcement and ER staff/nurse training.
- Evaluate SART protocols after training and update as needed.

CHALLENGES, ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sexual Assault is a public health crisis. As service providers, we know that when we commit to creating change and improvements in criminal justice and community services, we improve public safety, build trust with victim/survivors, promote healing, and hold offenders accountable. The Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team succeeded in developing protocols, strengthening relationships, and identifying challenges and opportunities for making improvements.

The Harris County SART team members represent a diverse group of government and non-governmental agencies with impressive strengths as well as limitations in the response to sexual assault. As the largest county in Texas and the third largest in the nation, Harris County’s strengths include existing resources available to victims of sexual assault, the long-standing relationships among its core members, specialized units within criminal justice, access 24/7 to dedicated community based sexual assault programs, and access to medical forensic services. The team understands that no one agency can effectively address all dynamics of a sexual assault alone. The long-standing relationships have facilitated communication, cooperation, and collaboration. The team identified opportunities

for additional interaction among its members and concluded that improvements in collaboration provide the most comprehensive model for responding to sexual violence.

The following recommendations will guide the team's efforts in implementing and expanding trauma-informed, victim and healing centered policies and practices that ensure alignment with our mission and national best practices.

Strengthen Framework for Collaboration

In reviewing the protocols, the team identified opportunities for strengthening existing partnerships. One of the key elements of a SART is to specifically respond to and interact with one another as adult survivors navigate the criminal justice system and gain access to services in the community. We noticed that core members missed opportunities for interaction that may impact a survivor's experience. A collaboration framework including how to use case review results, survivor survey results and by evaluating each member protocols to use as a diagnostic tool for evaluating our team's continued development and expansion.

Access to Community-Based Advocates

HB 1172 Trauma Informed Investigations. This law improves the reporting experience for adult survivors by addressing three areas of the initial reporting process: A ban on polygraphs, increased accessibility of forensic exams, and advocate accompaniment during law enforcement interviews. Community based advocates play a critical role in systems response to sexual assault as they can offer confidential services protected by privileged communication. This recommendation includes adherence to HB1172 and Chapter 420.003, Government Code.

Adopt a system's-based approach

Focus on making improvements in the structures that contribute to how systems work including policies, culture, resources, practices will lead to creating best practices.

Interagency Information Sharing within Criminal Justice Systems

Evaluate how to create systems where information can be shared and accessed between criminal justice agencies (law enforcement, district attorney) that can assist in holding offenders accountable.

Mission-Aligned Training.

Training that is both multidisciplinary and discipline specific and that aligns with the HCSART mission will result in better outcomes in the response to sexual assault. Multidisciplinary training encourages authentic collaboration. Discipline specific training is necessary and should be aligned with the mission of the HCSART to avoid siloes.

Improve Offender Accountability

Focusing on offender behavior ensures that the victim's actions and behavior do not become a diversion from holding the offender accountable. This promotes fairness, respect for victim/survivors and reduces victim-blaming.

Identify and add new members

Sexual assault is a public health crisis, and we must ensure that we engage all relevant partners that will help develop response and prevention strategies to sexual assault. This includes agencies that may directly or indirectly interact with sexual assault cases. It is recommended that the HCSART continue to use and improve the rubric created to add members at various levels.

Strengthen the inclusion of Survivor Voices

Implement a protocol that includes an avenue to include survivor voices. This may include adding an individual who identifies as a victim/survivor, the use of surveys to collect feedback.

Ensure compliance with Legislation

Seek assistance from TAASA to ensure compliance with current legislation.

Develop a Funding Plan

Plan should include funding for a SART Coordinator. Harris County is a large service area and a SART Coordinator will keep the team motivated and on track. Funding will help support training for team members, printed SART materials, develop a website.

Develop a SART Sustainability Plan

Create a strategic, sustainable plan.