

## New Directions from the Field: *Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century*

### Recommendations for the Victim Assistance Community

The recommendations below, which appear in the May 1998 *New Directions* Report, have been reformatted for replication and distribution.

**As the victim assistance field has grown, so has its awareness of the complex needs of crime victims and the demand for coordinated multidisciplinary responses to meet their most salient needs. There is an increasing understanding that services must be tailored to meet the needs of both traditionally served victims as well as those victims newly identified as “underserved”—diverse cultural populations, victims with disabilities, victims of gang violence, and victims of white-collar crime and fraud, to name a few. Communities around the country are working toward the goal of integrated victim service delivery systems where quality services are available and accessible to all crime victims. To facilitate these goals, the following recommendations for the victim assistance community are set forth by the field:**

1. Victim assistance providers should encourage victim involvement in the development and implementation of all programs and services they provide, including public awareness, education, and violence prevention programs.
2. Victim assistance programs and services should be designed to reach diverse constituencies. All policymakers, program administrators, and staff should be knowledgeable and skilled in serving diverse cultural and ethnic groups.
3. Victim service providers should join criminal and juvenile justice and allied professionals to conduct needs assessments in their communities to identify underserved victim population groups and to determine the types of services that should be available for these groups.
4. Victim service providers should work with allied professionals, other victim service providers, and leaders in their community to ensure that a comprehensive network of services and support is available for crime victims.
5. Standards for victim assistance should be developed and instituted to guide those who serve victims in community-based programs as well as across all justice systems.
6. Victim assistance providers must receive basic training and annual continuing education on crime victims' rights and services.
7. A national commission should be established to develop certification and accreditation standards for victim advocacy and assistance.
8. Victim service providers should increase public awareness of their programs and services.
9. Evaluation studies should be conducted to determine if current methods of victim assistance are effective and to identify critical areas in which additional victim intervention and assistance services are needed.
10. There should be a clearly defined code of ethics to bind all victim service providers in the field to designated standards of behavior.
11. Victim assistance providers should expand current statewide networks to build a capacity for addressing communities in crisis. Each State should develop a crisis response team and interact with other disaster planning efforts.
12. Victim service providers should develop interagency response protocols for assisting all crime victims, including child victims, elder abuse victims, and victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.
13. A national hotline that provides 24-hour immediate crisis counseling, information, and referral services for all victims of crime should be established. In addition, every State should establish statewide, toll-free 800 numbers to provide information and referrals for victims of crime.
14. Victim assistance programs should integrate technological advancements into their programs to help better meet the needs of crime victims.

15. Victim assistance programs should comply fully with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure that victims with disabilities can access available services. More programs that focus on serving victims with disabilities must be established. Additional research should be conducted to determine the extent of victimization against people with disabilities and to guide strategies to increase reporting and prevent this type of victimization. Criminal justice professionals and the victim service community must receive additional training in providing outreach and assistance to victims with disabilities.
16. Victim service providers should be trained to assist crime victims who interact with members of the media.