



Montana Victim Services Needs Assessment: Service Providers and Allied Partners

2025

State Victim Liaison Project
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"We need more resources and support to effectively reach and assist victims in our communities. The barriers we face are not just logistical; they are deeply rooted in the lack of funding and training."

— Participant from the Montana Victim Services Needs Assessment

Introduction

The "Montana Victim Services Needs Assessment" report presents the findings of a statewide needs assessment, methodically developed and deployed to gauge the challenges faced by victim service providers across Montana's diverse counties and reservations. Structured through collaborative roundtable discussions with providers and allied partners, this assessment aims to pinpoint gaps and barriers hindering effective support for survivors.

Driven by the recognition that victims of crime require comprehensive and accessible services to navigate the complex aftermath of their experiences, the assessment identifies key gaps in resources, training, and funding. It also illuminates the geographical and cultural barriers that hinder service accessibility, particularly in rural communities.

By providing insights into the current state of victim services in Montana, this report aims to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and community organizations about the pressing needs of victim service providers. It serves as a call to action for collaboration, increased funding, and the implementation of trauma-informed practices that prioritize the well-being of victims. Ultimately, this assessment seeks to foster a more resilient and responsive support system that empowers victims and enhances their recovery journey.

Background

In response to recent decreases in VOCA funding, the Montana Board of Crime Control (MBCC) sought to enhance support for victim services by employing a State Victim Liaison. Recognizing the absence of a comprehensive statewide understanding of victim service needs, particularly within Montana's tribal communities, MBCC revived the Victim Services Stakeholder Group to identify key challenges. A primary goal was to create a unified Victim Services Network to connect providers statewide, facilitating communication and collaboration to maximize available resources during funding constraints and ensure accessibility for victims across Montana. The liaison worked to address barriers preventing service providers from accessing the various training and resources that exist throughout Montana, nurturing communication and collaboration throughout the state.

Methodology

The assessment employed a mixed-methods approach, including collaborative roundtable discussions with providers and allied partners, followed by a comprehensive needs assessment survey distributed statewide. Data was collected over 12 months and analyzed to identify key themes and trends related to service provision, gaps, and barriers.

Assessment Design

The needs assessment commenced with identifying victim service providers across Montana. The state victim liaison and the tribal victim liaison reached out to providers

receiving grant funding from the Montana Board of Crime Control (MBCC) to gather insights on their experiences and needs.

Participant Selection

Roundtable meetings were organized in various regions of the state, inviting all victim service providers and allied partners, regardless of their funding status, to foster collaboration and ensure a diverse range of perspectives were represented. The discussions at these roundtables aimed to identify common challenges and gaps in services, laying the groundwork for the subsequent development of a comprehensive needs assessment survey. Participants included victim service providers, law enforcement, county attorneys, courts, mental health and substance use providers, corrections personnel, and more.

Data Collection

A 41-question survey was developed in collaboration with victim service providers and tribal partners and distributed via email to all identified contacts. The survey included both contact and location information for participants and aimed to capture a wide range of insights regarding the needs and challenges faced by victim service providers.

Challenges

Several challenges were faced during the assessment process. One significant obstacle was obtaining contact information for tribal and American Indian partners, which was crucial for ensuring that the needs assessment was culturally sensitive and reflective of the Montana American Indian population. The tribal victim liaison played a key role in navigating these challenges. Following her departure, the victim services liaison has continued efforts to develop tribal partnerships, albeit with limited success. Additionally, challenges related to contact information and participant engagement were encountered throughout the process.

Findings

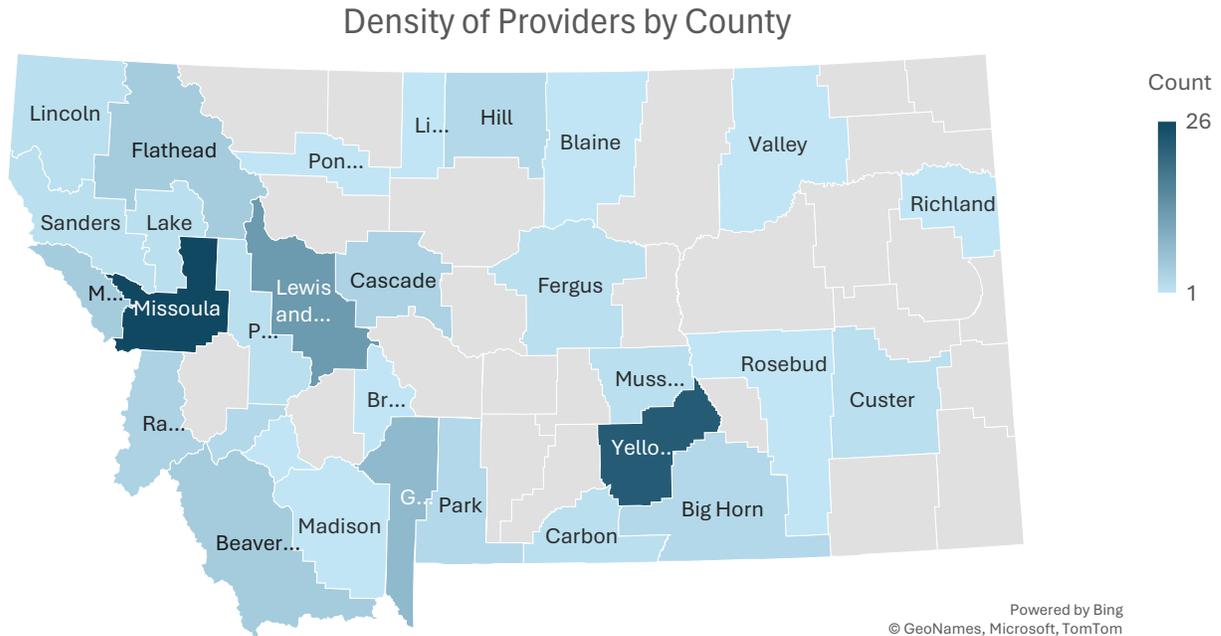
Demographics of Respondents

The survey included a diverse group of victim service providers and allied partners from five geographic regions of Montana. Participants represented a range of service types, including direct victim support services, law enforcement, legal aid, and community organizations.

Geographic Distribution

- Region 1 (Northwestern Region): Includes Lincoln, Flathead, Glacier, Sanders, Lake, Mineral, Missoula, and Ravalli County.
 - 35% of Respondents

- Region 2 (Southwester Region): Includes Lewis and Clark, Powell, Granite, Deer Lodge, Silver Bow, Beaverhead, Madison, Jefferson, Broadwater, Gallatin Meagher, and Park Counties.
 - 18% of Respondents.
- Region 3 (Northcentral Region): Includes Toole, Liberty, Hill, Blaine, Pondera, Chouteau, Teton, and Cascade Counties.
 - 18% of Respondents
- Region 4 (Southcentral Region): Includes Judith Basin, Fergus, Petroleum, Wheatland, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Sweet Grass, Stillwater, Yellowstone, Carbon, and Big Horn Counties.
 - 25% of Respondents.
- Region 5 (Eastern Region): Includes Philips, Valley, Daniels, Sheridan, Roosevelt, Garfield, McCone, Richland, Dawson, Prairie, Wibaux, Rosebud, Treasure, Custer, Fallon, Powder River, and Carter Counties.
 - 4% of Respondents.



Types of Organizations

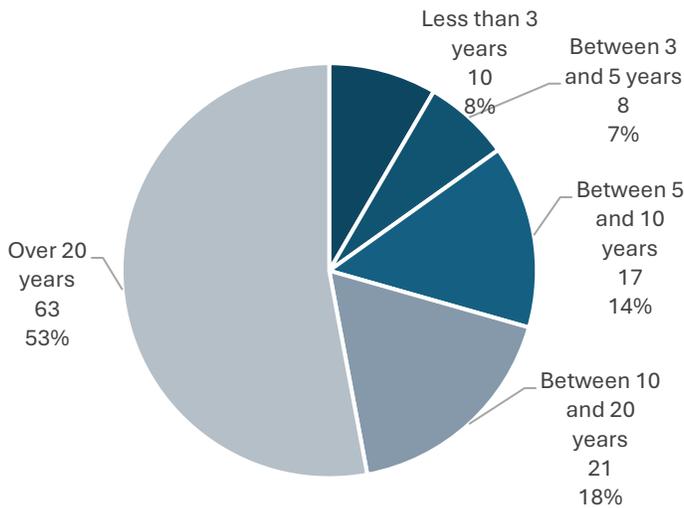
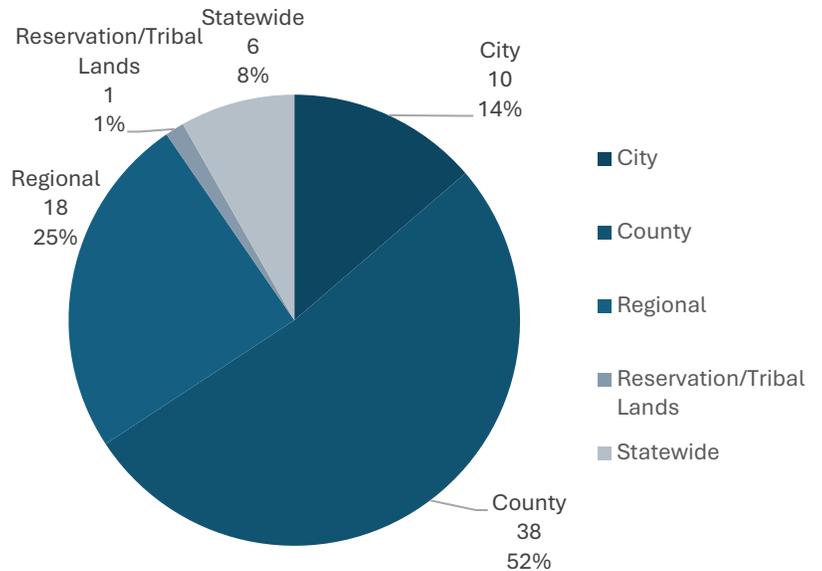
The survey captured responses from 130 individuals representing 73 distinct agencies, with respondents selecting all types that applied to their program. This indicates a diverse range of organizations involved in victim services across Montana. A significant portion of respondents identified as working within Victim Services – Prosecutors Office (21%) and Victim Services - Community Based/Grassroots (14%), reflecting the important roles of these organizations in providing direct support to victims.

Notably, several categories had very low representation and the low representation of these organizations suggests potential gaps in collaboration and integration with the victim services network.

Service Areas

73 organizations and programs were represented by the 130 individual respondents.

- 52% of these organizations provide coverage to the county in which their program resides.
- There is one program on tribal lands providing tribal-specific services.



Program Longevity

Of the 130 respondents, 53% indicated their program has been in operation for over 20 years.

- Less than 3 years: 8% (10 respondents)
- Between 3 and 5 years: 7% (8 respondents)
- Between 5 and 10 years: 14% (17 respondents)
- Between 10 and 20 years: 18% (21 respondents)

Service Gaps and Barriers

Many respondents identified significant gaps in services available to victims, particularly in rural areas. Lack of resources and funding constraints impact approximately 65% of providers, creating a significant barrier to offering comprehensive support. Access to transportation further hinders assistance, with over half of the respondents reporting this as an issue. Additionally, service providers expressed a need for stable funding and reduced turnover (65%). A notable 75% of respondents underscored the importance of

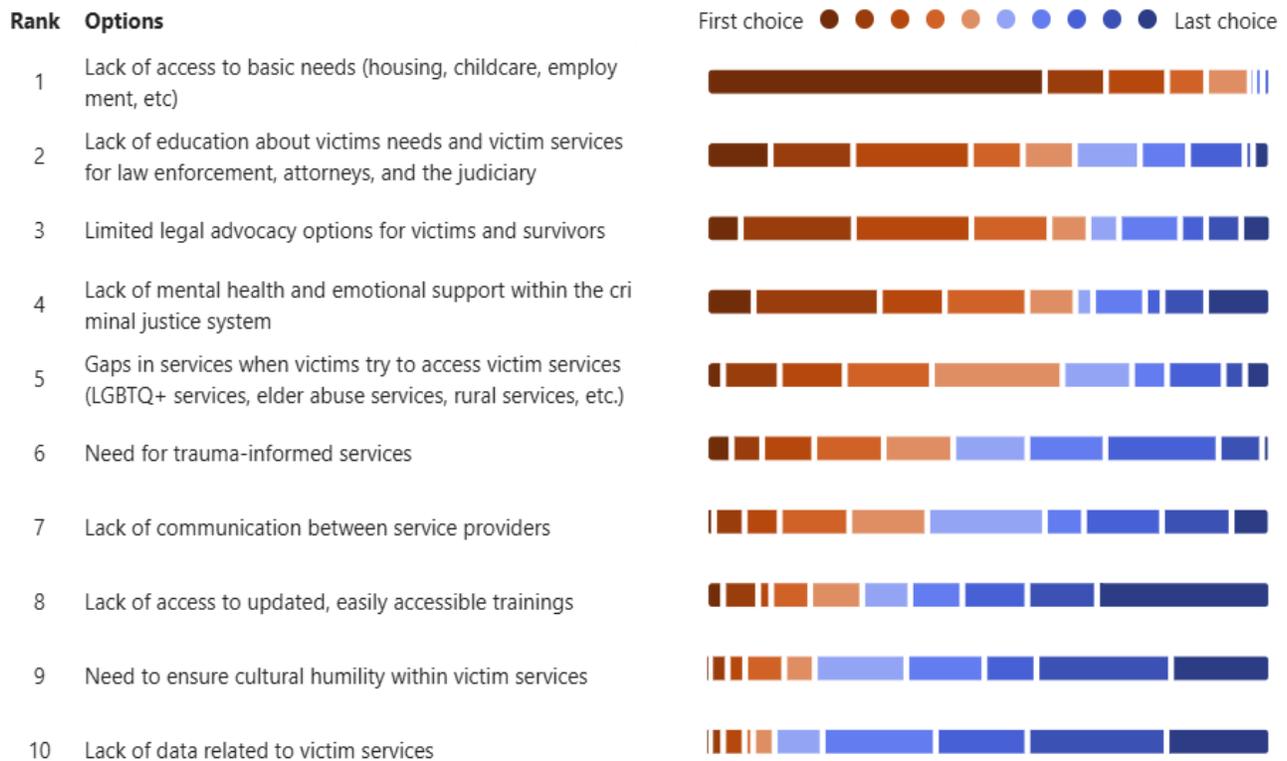
training in trauma-informed care and diversity, while 70% emphasized cultural sensitivity. Addressing this with training and resource efforts that cater to diverse communities, particularly the Montana American Indian population, is crucial. This ties to the needs of survivors and justice system concerns.

Over 80% identified housing, childcare, and mental health services as pressing needs for survivors, while 55% underscored the need for trauma-informed practices in the justice system. Better communication channels and partnerships are needed (60%), and 75% indicated professional development in trauma-informed care, legal issues, and best practices would improve service capabilities.

Prioritized Needs and Challenges

- Access to Services: 85% of respondents ranked this as the top priority.
- Cultural Competency: 70% highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive services.
- Funding and Resources: 65% indicated that inadequate funding is a significant barrier.

130 Responses



Trauma-Informed Services

Being trauma-informed means being aware of the ways in which the people you are serving have been traumatized and the ways that traumatization has shaped their life trajectory. Trauma-Informed Care seeks to prevent re-traumatization of the victim and the staff.

Policies, Tools, and Training

- 40% of respondents indicated that their agency has trainings in place to ensure services are trauma-informed.
- 24% indicated policies, and 20% indicated tools are in place to ensure trauma-informed services.

Barriers to Implementation

- Key barriers include a lack of resources (financial, staffing, time, training & knowledge), systemic and inter-agency barriers, geographic barriers (rural isolation), and internal agency challenges (secondary trauma/burnout, lack of supervisory support, agency culture/resistance to change).
- A few respondents indicated that they had "no barriers" or "none" to implementing trauma-informed practices. However, some of these responses were followed by suggestions for improvement, such as "but we would always like additional training/lens." This suggests that while they may not face significant obstacles, there's still room for enhancement.

Important Considerations:

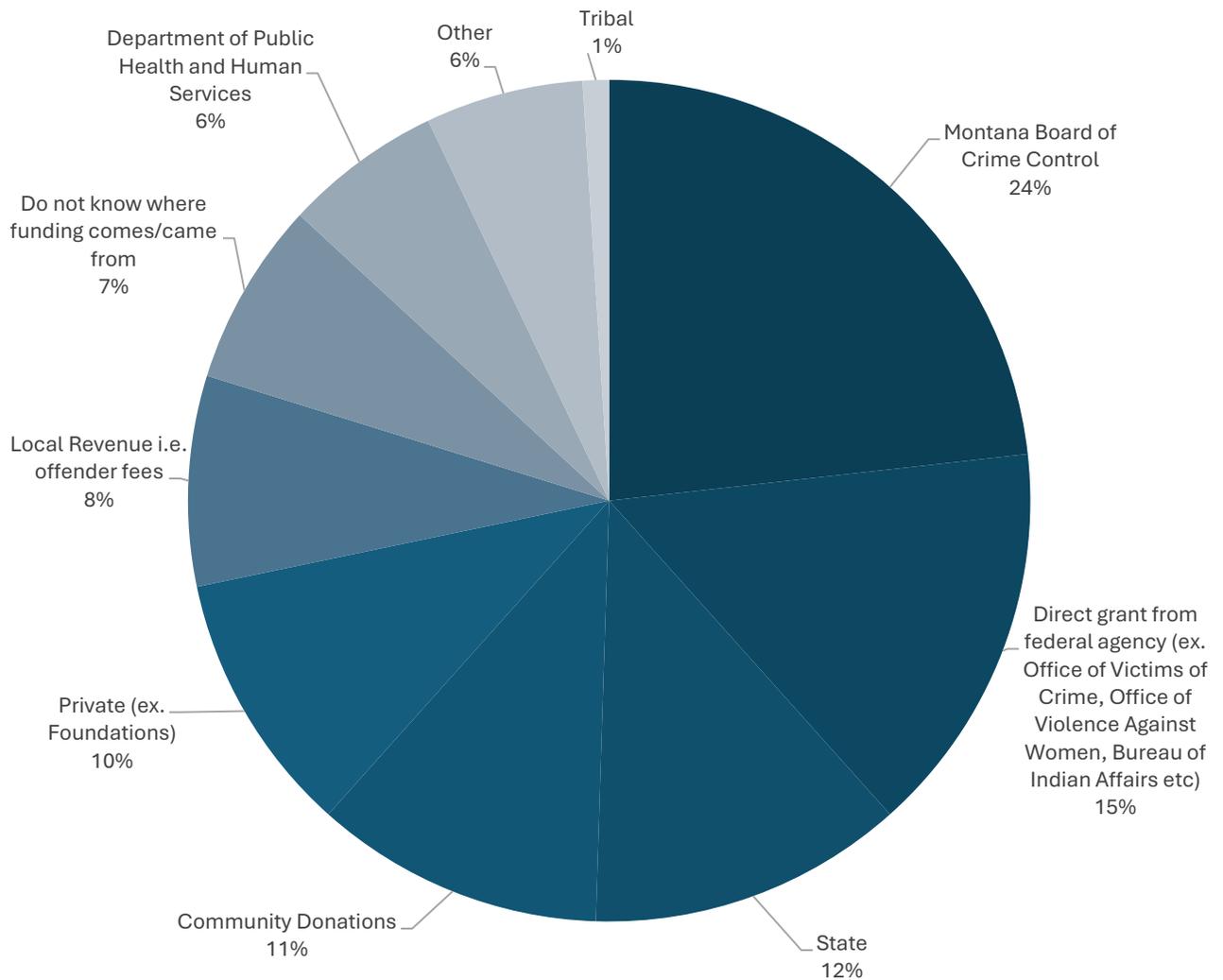
- **Emphasis on Training:** The need for more training is a recurring theme, highlighting the importance of educating service providers, law enforcement, and other professionals about trauma-informed care.
- **Systemic Change:** Addressing systemic barriers and fostering collaboration between agencies is crucial for creating a truly trauma-informed system.
- **Rural Focus:** Special attention needs to be given to the unique challenges of providing services in rural Montana, including limited resources and transportation issues

Funding Sources

The funding landscape for victim services organizations in Montana over the past five years reveals a mixed portfolio of support. The Montana Board of Crime Control (MBCC) emerges as the primary source, with 23% of respondents utilizing this avenue, indicating its central role as the state's pass-through agency. Direct federal grants contribute significantly at 15%, followed by state-level support at 12% and community donations at 11%, demonstrating the importance of both federal and local resources. Private foundations account for 10%, suggesting a reliance on philanthropic giving. Local revenue and the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) provide smaller percentages at

8% and 6% respectively, highlighting potential areas for diversification or increased investment. The reliance on a combination of funding streams illustrates both the commitment to victim services from various sources and the potential precarity if one source is significantly reduced.

Please note that DPHHS's FVPSA funding is now under the Montana Board of Crime Control.

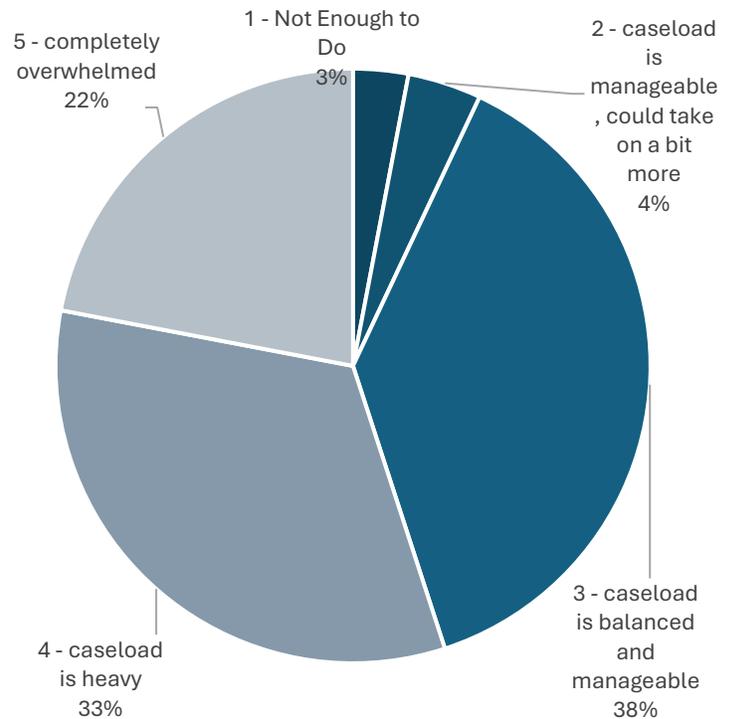


Caseload

Of 130 respondents representing 73 agencies or organizations, 62% indicated that they come in contact with or provide services to crime victims and survivors on a daily basis. 18% indicated they come in contact with or provide services a few times a week or weekly to crime victims and survivors. Of those who completed the survey, Over 80% have daily to weekly interactions with crime victims and survivors.

Caseload Manageability

Respondents rated their caseload manageability on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "I don't have enough to do" and 5 being "I am completely overwhelmed". The results were:



Unmet Client Needs

Common reasons for being unable to help clients included lack of financial resources (21%), resources unavailable in the community (25%), geography/isolation (13%), and staffing shortages (11%).

Obstacles/Barriers to Providing Appropriate Services

Top obstacles/barriers include limited affordable housing options for victims/survivors (104 respondents), limited money and resources for victims/survivors to live independently or access services/legal assistance (97 respondents), and victim fear, shame, or embarrassment (85 respondents).

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings in the Context of Montana

The data reveals significant regional disparities in service availability and access, particularly between urban and rural areas. The emphasis on cultural sensitivity, particularly for the Montana American Indian population, highlights the necessity for tailored services that respect and integrate diverse cultural contexts.

Implications for Victim Services and Support

There is a pressing need for increased funding and resources to bridge the service gaps identified. Enhanced financial support could empower service providers to expand outreach, improve accessibility, and offer comprehensive support services.

Recommendations

The recommendations emphasize a multi-faceted approach to strengthening victim services in Montana. A core theme focuses on enhancing service accessibility, particularly in rural and underserved areas, through targeted outreach efforts. Parallel to this is the emphasis on culturally tailored programs designed to meet the specific needs of the Montana American Indian population and other marginalized communities. The importance of enhanced collaboration among agencies and organizations is highlighted to streamline services and avoid duplication. Securing stable funding is seen as critical for program sustainability, necessitating the exploration of alternative funding sources beyond federal grants. The report stresses the need for training and education, including a statewide training initiative on trauma-informed care and cultural competency.

Furthermore, empowering communities through grassroots advocacy and tribal victim advocates is seen as integral. To further support service providers, a centralized resource-sharing platform and a Montana Victim Services Network are recommended. Improved communication is also a key goal, with a focus on developing clear protocols between victim service providers and law enforcement agencies. Finally, the report calls for consideration of a formal training program for victim advocates to enhance professionalism, consistency, and credibility, while addressing the challenges of cost and access, especially in rural areas.

Conclusion

The Montana Victim Services Needs Assessment provides critical insights into the state of victim services in Montana, highlighting significant gaps and barriers that must be addressed. This report emphasizes the importance of enhancing accessibility to services, increasing funding, and improving training for providers. Furthermore, it underscores the need for culturally sensitive approaches that honor the diverse backgrounds of victims in Montana. By working collaboratively to enhance victim services, increase funding, and implement effective training programs, Montana can ensure that all victims of crime receive the support and resources they need to heal and thrive.