

Dept. of Justice: AG Kaul announces best practice recommendations for sexual assault response teams

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MADISON, Wis. – Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul today is announcing that the Wisconsin Department of Justice Office of Crime Victim Services and the Attorney General’s Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) has released a [compilation of best practice recommendations](#) for SARTs.

“Sexual assault is difficult to talk about, but ignoring it won’t stop it. Survivors must feel confident that, regardless of the outcome, they were heard, empowered, respected, and supported,” said Attorney General Josh Kaul. “With collaboration from experts around the state and consideration of existing national resources, the Attorney General’s Sexual Assault Response Team and Wisconsin Department of Justice compiled best practice recommendations for sexual assault response teams. These recommendations provide a roadmap to ensure a consistent victim-centered response to sexual assault.”

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, one in five women in the United States is victimized during a completed or attempted sexual assault during their lifetime; one in three for the first time between the ages of 11 and 17. Amongst male victims of a completed or attempted sexual assault, one in four were also first victimized between the ages of 11 and 17. [National Sexual Violence Resource Center. *Statistics*. Retrieved January 4, 2022, from <https://www.nsvrc.org/statistics>]

Statewide data is equally concerning. According to the Uniform Crime Reporting program, published by the Wisconsin Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Information and Analysis, there were 5,215 sex offenses reported to Wisconsin law

enforcement in 2022. With the latest report from the National Crime Victimization Survey indicating that only 21.5% of sexual assaults were reported to law enforcement, the number of assaults around the state is believed to be much higher. [U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance. *Criminal Victimization, 2021*. Alexandra Thompson and Susannah N. Tapp. Revised July 2023. [Criminal Victimization, 2021 \(ojp.gov\)](https://www.ojp.gov/criminal-justice/publications/criminal-victimization-2021)]

While valuable, data and statistics cannot show is the impact on a survivor following a sexual assault, which can be emotional, mental, or physical. A SART can minimize the potential for re-traumatization to a survivor when engaging with the criminal justice system by initiating a victim-centered, collaborative response to provide advocacy, support, information, options, and resources.

Victim-centered SARTs maintain continuous training and discussion on cultural diversity and how discrimination impacts the lives of victims and creates unique barriers to reporting and prosecuting sexual assault crimes. The new compilation of best practice recommendations provides guidance on how teams can prioritize the safety, privacy, self-determination, and wellbeing of every victim. It also recognizes that there may be a difference between obtaining a criminal conviction and what the victim defines as having achieved justice.

Survivors are encouraged to call their local sexual assault service provider for supportive advocacy resources. Resources and information for survivors of sexual assault can also be found online at <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/ocvs/find-local-crime-victim-resources> or <https://www.wcasa.org/survivors/service-providers/>.

The compilation of best practice recommendations for Sexual Assault Response Teams, which was funded by a grant awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice, can be found online at <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/ocvs/vawa/sexual-assault-response-teams-sart>

View this press release on the Wisconsin DOJ website [here](#).