

New Report Finds Systemic Racial and Ethnic Inequity Deeply Ingrained in Structure and Delivery of Colorado Victim Services

CCJRC's survey of Colorado victim services organizations found substantial underrepresentation of leaders of color at the organizations receiving 99% of state and federal funding; just 1% of funding is allocated to a grant program supporting more diverse organizations that target underserved populations

'We must do better': The report serves as a call to action and offers key recommendations to state legislators and program leaders

DENVER — Systemic racial and ethnic inequity is deeply ingrained in the structure and delivery of victim services in Colorado, according to a [new report](#) released Tuesday by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition. Authors of the report say the state “must do better,” and they offer several recommendations to state legislators and program leaders.

The new research builds on CCJRC's [2018 “Victims Speak” report](#), which revealed substantial shortfalls in crime victims' awareness of and access to services, especially among people of color, in the Denver metro area. It also found that three out of four crime victims — and 90% of African American victims — believe victims are treated differently based on their race or ethnicity. Those findings prompted CCJRC to take a closer look at the equitability of the distribution of state and federal resources for victim services in Colorado.

The new report, “Victim Services in Colorado Examined from an Equity Perspective,” examines victim services in the state, how they are funded, and their impact on underserved and marginalized people. It is based on survey data of victim services agencies across Colorado, collaboration with state agency administrators, and interviews with 15 victim services leaders of color from community-based organizations and law enforcement agencies.

The report concludes that a lack of diversity within Colorado victim services programs and the agencies that administrate state and federal victim services funds is contributing to inequitable outcomes for crime victims of color and marginalized communities. Most notably, it found that people of color are substantially underrepresented in both the leadership and the population of victims served at the organizations receiving 99% of state and federal victim services funds. In contrast, a grant program created in 2018 to fund community-based programs that focus on underserved victims is largely led by people of color and primarily serves victims of color, but only receives 1% of funds.

“[R]esearch indicates that providers who share and understand cultures of those they are serving may be best positioned to support victims in their healing processes,” according to the report’s executive summary. “Yet the [victim services] field continues to be overwhelmingly white at both the organizational level and in terms of victims served.

“As a state, this is the time to take actions that invest deeply in communities of color, recognizing that the well-being of communities of color is necessary and valuable to the well-being of the whole community.”

Key findings of the new report include:

- In fiscal year 2019, \$75 million in state and federal funds for victim services were allocated to three state agencies to administer three separate grant programs: the Colorado Department of Public Safety, Office for Victims Program (OVP), which administered about 95% of all victim services funding; the Colorado Department of Human Services, Domestic Violence Program (DVP), which administered about 4% of funding; and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Community Crime Victim Services Grant Program (CCVS), which administered about 1% of funding.
- The OVP and DVP collectively serviced over 141,000 victims in fiscal year 2019. Of the victims that were tracked, 57% identified as white, 25% Latin American or Hispanic, 8% Black or African American, 4% other, 3% multiracial/ethnic, 2% Native American, and 1% Asian.
- There is substantial underrepresentation of leaders of color in the victim services field in Colorado, particularly among African Americans, who hold less than 4% of all leadership positions. Fewer than 15% of organizations funded by OVP and DVP have an executive director of color. Three-fourths of the senior staff at OVP and 78% of the executive and senior staff at OVP-funded organizations identify as white, while 100% of the staff at the DVP and 71% of executive and senior staff at DVP-funded organizations identify as white. Also, 82% of the boards of directors at funded organizations and 85% of the Crime Services Advisory Board identify as white.
- The CCVS, which is only allocated 1% of victim services funding, is largely led by people of color. One hundred percent of the executive and senior staff at CCVS-funded organizations and 80% of the boards of directors of CCVS-funded organizations identify as people of color. Despite this broader representation, only 8% of all executive and senior staff identify as African American.
- All victim services leaders of color who were surveyed expressed how critical it is to have staff that looks like the population served, which is necessary to create culturally relevant outreach strategies and programs. None of the interviewees were surprised by the data showing that most of staff, board members, and the victims served at state agencies and funded organizations are predominantly white. They also noted that it was problematic that victim services agencies were not independent of the criminal legal system (e.g. law enforcement and district attorney offices), given the mistrust for this system among communities of color.

CCJRC offers state lawmakers and victim services program leaders several substantive recommendations for addressing the inequities highlighted in the report. They are summarized in the executive summary of the report and outlined in detail on pages 18-24.

"Power and resources have historically been concentrated in victim service entities that lack diversity in leadership and in the populations they serve," said CCJRC Deputy Director Juston Cooper.

"Colorado must do better, and that means expanding its purview and doing something different. It is time to reexamine policies, procedures, and practices through an equity lens and establish new equity standards and accountability measures that will ensure real progress is made toward reducing the racial and ethnic gaps in victim services.

"We hope the recommendations in this report will not only deepen the conversation, but also inspire the action needed to ensure the system is reaching all victims and meeting their needs."

View and download the new report: <https://bit.ly/CCJRC-victim-services-report-2021>

View and download the 2018 "Victims Speak" report: <https://bit.ly/CCJRC-Victims-Speak-2018>