SUMMARY

A diverse group of experts met on July 24, 2014, with a single shared goal: improve on the services provided to crime victims using technology. Participants in the RAND Corporation’s Technology Summit for Victim Service Providers represented victim service providers (VSPs), victims’ advocates, funders, technologists, and researchers.

While crime victims have a variety of resources at their disposal—safety services, emotional support, professional therapy, criminal justice advocacy—there is no central list, website, or mobile application that catalogs services for all types of crime victims, so resources can be difficult to find. In fact, fewer than one in ten victims of serious violent crime—rape or other sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault—receive assistance from a victim service agency, and fewer than half even report their experiences to the authorities.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Summit participants identified a set of challenges and generated a number of solutions as well as a list of questions and gray areas that will require further research. But in general it is clear that a tech-forward approach including secure electronic recordkeeping and a central database of services will help resolve many of the issues faced by crime victims and the organizations that serve them. The discussions were organized around five areas:

• **Ease of access:** The main challenge is that there is no central list or website of resources for VSPs where victims can turn for help. Though the Internet and social media are not universally accessible or embraced, a comprehensive online database of resources is the obvious place to start. Online message boards, instant messaging, and similar platforms could also provide peer-to-peer support groups.

• **Building efficiencies:** Many VSPs are overwhelmed and are duplicating each other’s efforts. Moving from the paper recordkeeping that many VSPs still use to electronic case management could not only make internal processes more efficient but also allow providers to share records more easily. In the long term, the implementation of a broader victim services technology ecosystem would allow providers to share information and access information technology tools to improve their effectiveness.

• **Interagency operability:** The challenges here are helping victims find the right services and improving how cases are handed off from one agency to another. Providers could also benefit from developing a
common vocabulary and creating a shared technology platform that facilitates coordination among a network of agencies.

- **Ensuring privacy:** As recordkeeping is digitized, it is important to have strong mechanisms in place to keep client records confidential, and there are commercial solutions already in existence for transferring information securely. However, privacy laws vary from state to state, and whether a federal statute is necessary is a question for future research.
- **Measuring outcomes:** Funders want evidence that programs are making an impact, which can be difficult for VSPs due to their often anonymous and brief interactions with clients. Toward this end, VSPs should partner with the research community to determine appropriate outcomes and methodologies for data collection.

**Two Overarching Issues—and Ways Forward**

Participants agreed that the most innovative solutions in the world will go nowhere until stakeholders answer two overarching questions:

1. How can clients’ privacy be safeguarded?
2. Who will finance the technology ecosystem?

First, when it comes to privacy, the health care industry faces many of the same issues with electronic health records that victim services would face. Medical providers are already addressing the challenges surrounding patient confidentiality in a digital environment with multiple care providers. VSPs can learn from their best practices.

Second, funding for a VSP technology ecosystem already exists, if Congress can be persuaded to release it. More than $11 billion has been accumulated since Congress capped spending for the federal Crime Victims Fund in the year 2000. While spending is capped at $730 million annually, the fund took in nearly $2.8 billion in 2012 alone.

VSPs and victim advocates must look to the health care industry and develop a set of best practices for protecting victims’ privacy, and they must demonstrate the technology ecosystem’s value in a way that will persuade policymakers to make funding available. Focusing on these two most challenging issues is vital to improving how quickly and how thoroughly crime victims recover.

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**Watch Video from the Summit**

Available at www.rand.org/jie/victimservices
INTRODUCTION

A diverse group of experts met on July 24, 2014, with a single shared goal: use technology to improve the services provided to crime victims. Participants in the Technology Summit for Victim Service Providers represented every corner of that space—victim service providers (VSPs), victims’ advocates, funders, technologists, and researchers (see Table 1). (We constructed a purposive sample of potential attendees that was intended to draw representatives from a range of perspectives. Fortunately, most invitees accepted our invitation.)

The RAND Corporation hosted this group of participants at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California, to put their expertise to work on leveraging technology to help crime victims quickly and effectively identify the services that are locally available and to reduce the barriers to delivering services to victims more effectively. While crime victims have a variety of resources at their disposal—including safety services, emotional support, professional therapy, criminal justice advocacy—there is no central list, website, or app that catalogs services for all types of crime victims, so local resources can be difficult to find.

The group sought to identify requirements, capabilities, and strategies to create a mutually reinforcing technological ecosystem for crime victims. The day’s discussions were structured around five areas:

- Ease of access
- Building efficiencies
- Interagency operability
- Ensuring privacy
- Measuring outcomes

Participants discussed the challenges faced by victims, service providers, and funders; broke into small groups to brainstorm solutions; then presented their ideas to the full assembly. This summary document does not record the entire discussion but highlights important themes.

Table 1. Technology Summit for Victim Service Providers Attendees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter Austin</td>
<td>Palantir</td>
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<td>Scott Berkowitz</td>
<td>Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINNN)</td>
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<td>Andrea Casanova</td>
<td>ALLY Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jennifer Di Nicola</td>
<td>National Runaway Safeline</td>
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<td>Chris Diehl</td>
<td>The Data Guild</td>
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<td>Tim Dierks</td>
<td>Laura and John Arnold Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joye E. Frost</td>
<td>Office for Victims of Crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah Michal Greathouse</td>
<td>RAND Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Smith Howley</td>
<td>National Center for Victims of Crime</td>
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<td>Brian Jackson</td>
<td>RAND Corporation</td>
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<td>Teresa Ko</td>
<td>Google</td>
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<td>Janxin Leu</td>
<td>Hopelab</td>
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<td>William Santana Li</td>
<td>Knightscope</td>
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<td>Nelson Lim</td>
<td>RAND Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paula Lucas</td>
<td>Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center</td>
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<td>Jennifer Marsh</td>
<td>RAINNN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herman Millholland</td>
<td>End Violence Against Women International</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ravi Mishra</td>
<td>Reliable Coders</td>
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<td>Bill New</td>
<td>Reliable Coders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Pinero</td>
<td>National Domestic Violence Hotline</td>
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<td>Cheryl Porro</td>
<td>salesforce.com Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sami Rayes</td>
<td>Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center</td>
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<td>Krishnan (Krish) Sastry</td>
<td>Appriss Inc.</td>
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<td>Thomas Seigle</td>
<td>Appriss Inc.</td>
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<td>Steve Siegel</td>
<td>Special Programs Unit</td>
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<td>Jacob Solomon</td>
<td>Code for America</td>
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<td>Steven Stiles</td>
<td>ALLY Foundation</td>
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<td>Wade Treichler</td>
<td>National Domestic Violence Hotline</td>
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<td>Gordon J. Vance</td>
<td>National Runaway Safeline</td>
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<td>Douglas Yeung</td>
<td>RAND Corporation</td>
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<td>Alex Yule</td>
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THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

There were more than 26 million victimizations in 2012, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), a Bureau of Justice Statistics survey that collects information on crime victimization from a nationally representative U.S. sample.¹ This figure captures incidents of simple and aggravated assault, robbery, rape/sexual assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and theft. The total number of victimizations per year is undoubtedly higher, as individuals can be victimized through a wide range of other crimes, including child physical and/or sexual abuse, elder abuse, human trafficking, stalking, crashes involving drunk driving, fraud, and identity theft.

To address the needs of crime victims, numerous and diverse VSPs exist, offering a wide variety of assistance to victims and their families: safety services, emotional support/listening, professional therapy, criminal justice advocacy, and other services specific to individuals’ needs. However, VSPs operate largely in silos, with varying levels of technical sophistication. As a result, many victims cannot easily determine where to go to receive help.

A fundamental challenge for VSPs is how few victims receive help from the organizations seeking to provide it. Fewer than 1 in 10 victims of reported serious violent crime—rape or other sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault—receive assistance from a victim service agency.² In addition, fewer than half of crime victims report their experiences to law enforcement,³ meaning that fewer than 1 in 20 violent crime victims receive help.

A variety of factors contribute to this problem. The low rate of reporting of crimes may stem from a lack of awareness: Victims may not know that what happened to them was a crime, they may not feel that reporting the crime will help, or they may not know that help is available.

But even victims who want to seek help may not know whom to call, or whom to call first. One reason for the confusion is that VSPs are often separated according to the type of service they provide (for example, crisis hotlines, criminal justice support, direct clinical services) and according to the type of victim they focus on helping (for example, victims of sexual assault or child runaways), so there is no one place to go for help. This extends even to service providers: Many service organizations don’t know which other groups could provide other types of help to their clients, therefore missing an opportunity to better serve their needs.

A fundamental challenge for VSPs is how few victims receive help from the organizations seeking to provide it.

Lack of coordination among providers can be a particular problem in cases of polyvictimization—that is, when an individual has been the victim of multiple crimes, or a crime that falls into multiple categories. The stovepiped nature of the system makes it ill-equipped to deal with such cases. Additionally, the need to safeguard victims’ confidentiality can make it difficult for one provider to refer a client to another or to share information between providers. As a result, individuals being helped by multiple providers must repeat their story again and again to each provider.

Victims who do seek help may still not receive it for an entirely different reason: Many VSPs are simply overwhelmed. For example, hotline centers can’t always answer every call, shelters are often full, and many providers have waiting lists. Some providers have had to limit the services they offer or the number of clients that they will accept. Without additional solutions in place, VSPs could become even more overwhelmed if there is an increase in victims seeking help.

This is largely a funding problem. The funding environment for victim services is complex and evolving, but providers are fundamentally competing for a limited amount of resources. There has been an effort by some members of Congress to increase federal funding for victim services, but all types of funders—federal, state, and local government, as well as private organizations—are increasingly seeking evidence that the programs they fund are effective. VSPs often have a difficult time demonstrating their effectiveness, in part because of their emphasis on the confidentiality of client information and in part because they lack the right technology to quickly and easily collect, analyze, and report their data.

Despite these challenges, the victim services field appears to recognize the importance of technological capacity in reaching and serving victims of crime. In Vision 21: Building Capacity, an Office of Victims of Crime (OVC)—sponsored project designed to examine the challenges and solutions to building
One way technology can help victims more quickly and effectively obtain help is through mobile applications. Some providers are already reaching out to victims through the major app stores, but the capabilities of most apps are somewhat narrow.

We conducted an informal search* and identified 72 apps offering some services or information to crime victims (we don’t claim that figure is comprehensive), and here is what we found:

1. More than half of the identified apps are targeted toward a specific type or types of victims, mostly involving sexual assault, domestic violence, and/or stalking. The remaining victim-specific apps target victims of human trafficking, bullying, child abuse, or hate crimes.

2. Most offer one or two specific services. Many act as emergency signals that alert contacts, agents, and/or authorities when a user feels in danger. A handful allow users to report crimes as they happen and/or allow law enforcement agencies to push alerts to users. A few create support networks for victims for specific types of crime or provide information about crimes or resources in a certain geographic area.

3. Less than half of the identified apps appeared to be available on both Apple and Android smartphones. The remaining apps were mostly available on only one of the two platforms or through a website.

* We identified victim service apps using a “snowball” approach. We started the search with the apps from Apps Against Abuse Technology Challenge, a contest sponsored by the Office of the Vice President and the White House. We then searched for similar apps listed on the iTunes and Android app stores. Once those options were exhausted, we searched the app stores using a few additional terms, such as “victim services,” “victims of crime,” and “crime victims.”
the capacity of crime victim services, OVC recognized that victim services must come into the digital age. In the report, OVC articulated a vision that

As the 21st century progresses, the victim services field will integrate innovative technologies into its operations, fostering accountability and operational efficiency and ensuring that victims of crime will have streamlined access to services regardless of location, socioeconomic status, and other traditional barriers.5

**USING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE VICTIM SERVICES**

The purpose of the 2014 Technology Summit for Victim Service Providers was to discuss how technology might be used to address the challenges faced by VSPs. To help structure the discussion, summit attendees approached the topic from five different but related angles:

- ease of access
- building efficiencies
- interagency operability
- ensuring privacy
- measuring outcomes.

They talked about the difficulties in each category, suggested solutions, and identified questions and gray areas that require further research.

**Ease of Access**

Summit participants focused on how technology can be leveraged to help victims (or family members or friends acting on their behalf) easily gain access to services or assistance.

**Challenges**

As mentioned previously, the main challenge in this area is that there is no central list, website, or app that catalogs services for all types of crime victims, so local resources can be difficult for victims to find. Summit attendees acknowledged that the Internet and social media could make such information available—and more easily findable—but they noted that victims might have limited or no online access. In addition, participants voiced concern about how to pay for new technology and platforms. Funders typically prefer their dollars go directly toward delivering services, attendees said, and the technology tools that do get developed tend to be “one-off” creations, with attention rarely paid to how the tool might be leveraged across organizations.

**Solutions**

Participants agreed that one of the most promising approaches to raising awareness about victim services is creating a comprehensive resource database that victims can use to determine what resources are available in their area. This could be coupled with a public outreach/education campaign to raise awareness of the database and other potential first points of contact for people seeking victim services.

In the long term, this comprehensive resource database could become the centerpiece of a much broader victim services technology ecosystem, in which providers can share information and access information technology tools to improve their effectiveness.

While the initial infrastructure would require funding, the technology ecosystem could become financially self-sustaining in the long run. To start, a cloud services company would be contracted to host the victim services platform. (A majority of VSP attendees at the summit report that they are already using a form of cloud computing.) As part of the contract, the company would maintain the necessary equipment and update the software as needed. As envisioned (see Figure 1), this ecosystem would work as follows:

1. **Victim service providers** would register to join the platform, creating a database of different services available to crime victims. Using a registry system, VSPs would join and use the platform to locate the additional services. For example, today a VSP staffer might telephone several shelters before locating a vacancy for a victim of domestic violence; with the technology ecosystem, shelters could update that information daily on the technology platform and make vacancies easier to find.

   Further, as quality assurance, clients and other VSPs would be allowed to add ratings and comments about the VSPs that are part of the network. VSPs could also contribute client data (age, ethnicity, background, self-assessment of mental health, etc.) to the platform, which researchers could use later to assess the effectiveness of the VSP services and the platform itself. Because the data are stored in the cloud, VSPs would only need tablets or inexpensive netbook computers with preloaded forms they would use to collect and then upload client information.

2. **Victims and clients** would use the database to find the services they need. In cases of polyvictimization, which require the services of more than one provider, clients could give a VSP permission to share their information with another provider, facilitating a multidisciplinary approach to providing needed services to the victim. VSPs could also note whether a client has consented to participate in future research projects.
3. **Government agencies, funders, and research organizations** could use the platform’s data to determine the effectiveness of victim services or conduct related studies. Funders would be able to use the database to assess whether they are getting adequate bang for their buck, and researchers seeking data or hoping to recruit crime victims for studies could pay for those services and thereby support the platform financially.

The technology ecosystem would not only increase ease of access to victim services, but it also would help solve challenges in other categories, particularly interaction among agencies, building efficiencies, and measuring outcomes.

We are unaware of any similar ecosystems in other domains, such as health services, from which we could draw lessons. In the case of health services, a main difference from victim services is that health services are organized around a primary care provider who assesses the patient’s needs and makes referrals to appropriate specialists. Victim services are not organized around a central provider. The level of and mechanisms for funding health services are also different from those for victim services.

Another option for increasing access to VSPs is the use of platforms such as online message boards and instant messaging to connect victims with agencies, counselors, and peer-to-peer support groups. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) already offers the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline, which allows victims of sexual violence to communicate directly with trained volunteers via an instant messaging–type format and hosts web-based support groups.

Summit participants noted that comments in online forums can be hurtful or damaging, so the forums should be moderated. RAINN’s forums are open in scheduled two-hour windows and are moderated by a clinical psychologist and a reviewer who can reject user messages that violate the forum’s rules (no abusive language, do not provide any identifying information, etc.).
Participants also noted a few other factors to consider:

- **The timing of when victims seek help**: Some might seek help in the immediate aftermath of a crime, whereas others might seek help much later (for example, if they are coping with a long-term injury or trauma).
- **Reaching out to victims**: VSPs tend to operate on a model in which victims come to them, rather than one in which providers reach out to victims.
- **Rapidly evolving platforms**: Providers need to keep up with which communication platforms are most popular (SMS, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.).
- **Content is king**: Offering a lot of content allows people to educate themselves and become familiar with a provider in a way that may be less intimidating than contacting the provider directly. For example, the Loveisrespect website (www.loveisrespect.org), the result of a partnership between Break the Cycle and the National Domestic Violence Hotline, has a blog with lots of content on healthy dating attitudes and relationships and information on where people affected by domestic violence can get help.

**Questions and Areas for Future Research**

- What would the standard for inclusion in the comprehensive resource database be? How can we identify likely organizations that are good places to refer victims? Is there a way for providers to rank each other/vouch for each other’s quality?
- How do people search for victim services? What keywords do people associate with different types of victim services?
- What is currently the popular perception of victim services?

**Building Efficiencies**

Many VSPs are overwhelmed with work. How can we leverage technology to increase their efficiency and prevent duplication of effort? Could sufficient efficiency be built to improve the capacity of the system to serve the many current victims who do not report to police, or who do not seek assistance after they do report?

**Challenges**

A central issue is that many VSPs still use paper-based record-keeping systems. Two major challenges in moving toward electronic case management are the legal restrictions on sharing client information and providers’ traditional reluctance to do so, irrespective of the legal details. The laws and traditions that restrict sharing such information are founded on valid concerns. One is that the information collected by VSPs could be used against the victim in court. In cases of rape or assault, for example, the details of a victim’s physical condition or what they said to providers about the incident could become subject to intense scrutiny in the courtroom. (For further discussion of information-sharing challenges, see the section on ensuring privacy.)

Another obstacle to electronic case management (as with most of the technology solutions discussed at the summit) is limited funding.

**Solutions**

**Electronic case management** would not only make providers’ internal processes more efficient but would also act as a foundation for the broader technology ecosystem.

Providers of social services/human services are much further along than VSPs in adopting electronic case management. While the issues that the two communities face are not exactly the same, VSPs could draw lessons from social service/human service providers’ experiences with electronic case management.

To get providers thinking more about how to use technology to make their operations more efficient and effective, summit participants agreed that funders should require funding applicants to describe how technology will be used in their
requests for proposals (RFPs). This will get providers thinking about technology early on in the proposal process.

Funders could also **incentivize the sharing of technology tools and resources** among providers. For example, the National Domestic Violence Hotline’s Loveisrespect website provides information on how young victims of domestic violence can get help; other websites can link to Loveisrespect’s online forums. To encourage these endeavors, VSPs and funders will need to determine methods to pay for sharing of technology tools.

In the longer term, electronic case management and the development of a victim services technology ecosystem could help to make more funding available: These technology tools would facilitate data collection, which is needed to demonstrate providers’ effectiveness to funders.

**Questions and Areas for Future Research**

- How can technology tools help focus services on those who need it most? Electronic case management might help to adjudicate when victims with more urgent problems could “jump the line,” and information sharing among providers might make it possible to refer such victims to other providers who have a lower demand at that moment.

**Interagency Operability**

How can we leverage technology so that victims reach the correct agency or agencies? How can we use technology to improve the handoff of victims from one agency to another? Again, participants identified electronic case management as a vital first step that would also benefit from a broader technology ecosystem.

**Challenges**

Participants acknowledged that coordination and communication between agencies can be difficult, for a variety of reasons.

- Providers do not always use the same vocabulary to describe victims and their needs, and transferring a victim from one service to the next involves complicated logistics and information sharing.
- When it comes to the broader technology ecosystem, setting standards is another issue. Who should decide which providers become part of the network, and what should this decision be based on so that victims are not referred/transferred to a poor-quality provider?

- In addition, how do providers know if a facility is already at capacity? Providing real-time data on provider capacity would require funding.
- Who coordinates care for a given victim? With many providers participating, who is responsible for the victim?

The sharing of client information between providers would of course be a core part of coordination, and as discussed previously, it would have to be done in a controlled, secure way.

**Solutions**

In support of standardized electronic case management—and even in its absence—providers should work to **develop a common language** to describe the victim, his or her needs, and the transfer of the victim from one service to the next. This could be done in incremental steps, and it could get under way immediately.

To help providers and victims discover and navigate services across the network, the technology platform should include information on not just which services exist in the network, but **which services are currently available**.

A registry/certification system could be used to determine which providers are part of the network. This could be either a formal accreditation process or a peer-validated one (i.e., providers vouching for one another). This could ultimately lead to a national registry of VSPs.

In terms of who is responsible for the victim as he or she moves across providers, VSPs might look to health care’s **patient advocate model**.

Alternatively, Denver is currently serving as a model for programs around the country that are seeking to improve coordination among VSPs. Denver was selected as the urban demonstration site for OVC’s VS2000 project, intended to develop models of collaborative care for victims. As part of this initiative, Denver leveraged technology to improve coordinated efforts between agencies. For example, to address reported problems with efficiently providing accurate referrals, the initiative created an online resource directory of more than 800 records that could be accessed by all participating service providers. Denver’s program provides examples of the ways that technology can be leveraged to improve coordinated, efficient care to victims of crime. The successes of Denver’s program have been used by professionals in the field developing their own programs.6
Questions and Areas for Future Research

• What would the standard for inclusion in the network be? Is there a way for providers to rank each other/vouch for each other’s quality?
• Is there a model of care that is agreed on by the victim services community?
• How can we foster trust between providers, especially in an environment where there is competition among providers for scarce resources?

Ensuring Privacy

As providers move toward electronic recordkeeping, it will become increasingly vital have strong mechanisms in place for ensuring that client records are kept confidential. What can be done with technology to ensure victim privacy?

Challenges

A key challenge in this area is the legal issues involved: There is a great deal of confusion about how various statutes should be applied (e.g., the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, known as HIPAA), what information can be collected, and how the information can be used. For example, one specific issue is informed consent. There might be restrictions on what people in certain situations can reliably consent to, especially with regard the future use of data.

While the law restricts the sharing of personal information in many cases, it also mandates it in others. For example, if a victim under the age of 18 shares information about a sexual relationship with an adult, statutory rape laws require providers to file a report with Child Protective Services. Courts may also require that information given in confidence be disclosed in some situations. Though such requirements have been put in place with the goal of protecting victims of ongoing violence or abuse, they create barriers to open communication between victim and provider.

A broader challenge is simply how to ensure that privacy safeguards will be effective, since their failure could result in victim harm, and certainly loss of trust in providers. A specific challenge here is the use of anonymous data—for example, data on a given provider’s effectiveness would be shown to funders with all personally identifying data removed. If not done properly, there is the possibility of re-identification of anonymous data.

Victims should retain control over to whom they disclose and share their stories.

Solutions

Fortunately, VSPs are not alone in struggling with how to keep personal information confidential in the digital realm. We can look to other types of institutions to determine best practices. In addition, there are commercially available solutions for securely transferring information, though implementing these will require both education and funding.

A key concept is individual data control for victims: They should retain control over to whom they disclose and share their stories. Laws should ensure that this control extends across state lines. Summit participants suggested that VSPs might add to this the concept of “information escrow,” in which a victim can set conditions on when their information may be used. For example, a sexual assault victim might dictate that their story be disclosed only if other victims come forward.

Questions and Areas for Future Research

• There are a variety of state laws governing privacy issues. Can they be made consistent, or is a federal law needed?
• How can providers and legislation deal with the possibility of victims’ confidential information being disclosed? Could there be a VSP privilege to make such data immune from subpoena?
• Are there technology solutions—e.g., linking victims’ files to identities or credentials they hold—that could ensure victims’ control over when and with whom their information was shared?

Measuring Outcomes

Funders in a wide variety of fields are increasingly favoring programs that use evidence-based practices. In other words, funders want to see evidence that what programs are doing is making an impact. How can we leverage technology so that providers have data on the services most in demand and on the effectiveness of their efforts?
Challenges
Measuring the outcomes of victim services is difficult for a variety of reasons. Some services don’t have sustained contact with those they help. Even in more sustained systems, people might suddenly quit the system. Some providers interact with their clients on an anonymous basis, making it impossible to contact them to obtain follow-up information. Partly because of the traumatic nature of their experiences, victims who are contacted later may have a spotty recollection of their experiences with providers (i.e., not remembering specifically who helped them or how).

Moreover, providers are only just beginning to collect this type of data. There is a lack of consensus on the goals of doing so, what outcomes to measure, and how to measure them. There is also a concern that funders may not understand which outcomes are appropriate to base decisions on and may want to see outcomes that are beyond providers’ control.

Solutions
VSPs should partner with the research community to determine appropriate outcomes and methodologies for collection data. Researchers could use focus groups, interviews, and surveys to contact many victims. Where possible, the outcomes experienced by victims who received services should be compared against those who did not.

In determining appropriate outcomes, the five outcomes measured by the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) could be a good starting point. Researchers could also ask victims what they want or expect from a given type of service.

As discussed in previous sections, moving toward electronic case management and implementing mechanisms for making victim data available on an anonymous basis to researchers will greatly facilitate outcome measurement.

Questions and Areas for Future Research
- How can providers show not just positive or negative outcomes, but also return on investment?

CONCLUSION
A tech-forward approach that includes electronic records and a technology platform based on a database of services will help resolve many of the challenges faced by crime victims and the organizations that serve them. As described above, the Technology Summit for Victim Service Providers generated a number of solutions in the five topic areas, as well as a list of questions and gray areas that will require further research.

As VSPs adopt new technologies, it will be important to assess their impact on victims and to minimize unintended consequences. Where possible, new technologies and processes should be accompanied by a rigorously designed evaluation plan that includes validated measures of impact and a carefully constructed control group of victims for benchmarking purposes.

Two Overarching Issues—and Ways Forward
Participants agreed that the most innovative solutions in the world will go nowhere until stakeholders answer two overarching questions:
1. How can clients’ privacy be safeguarded?
2. Who will finance the initial infrastructure for the technology ecosystem?

The good news is that both questions are eminently solvable.

First, when it comes to privacy, health care providers face many of the same issues that victim services do, and medical providers are already addressing the challenges surrounding patient confidentiality in a digital environment with multiple care providers. Electronic health records will become the industry standard, if that is not already the case, and technology is quickly changing the way medical providers do business.

Second, initial funding for the technology ecosystem we have described already exists. More than $11 billion has been accumulated since 2000, when Congress capped spending for the federal Crime Victims Fund. Created 30 years ago by the Victims of Crime Act, the fund receives no tax dollars; instead its revenue comes from sources such as court fines and penalties, forfeited bail, proceeds from confiscated property, and

Initial funding for the technology ecosystem we have described already exists.
special court assessments. These funds are disbursed to VSPs. While spending is capped at $730 million annually, the fund took in nearly $2.8 billion in 2012 alone. Because this spending cap has been in place for more than a decade, with no cost-of-living adjustments, VSPs have seen their federal funding decline in real dollars over time. To persuade Congress to release funds for technology-oriented improvements for victim services, VSPs will need to demonstrate the promise of these technologies’ value.

VSPs and victim advocates must look to the health care industry and develop a set of best practices for protecting victims’ privacy, and they must demonstrate the technology ecosystem’s value in a way that will persuade policymakers to make funding available. Focusing on these two most challenging issues is vital to improving how quickly and how thoroughly crime victims recover.


About This Report

On July 24, 2014, the RAND Corporation hosted a national summit on leveraging technology to enable victims of crime to more quickly and effectively obtain the help they need. The summit brought together technical experts, victim service providers, and other key stakeholders to identify requirements, capabilities, and strategies to create a mutually reinforcing technological ecosystem for victims of crime. This document summarizes discussions and observations made by the summit attendees. The document also highlights challenges, research questions, and possible solutions to use technology to improve various aspects of victim services.

About the RAND Safety and Justice Program

The research reported here was conducted in the RAND Safety and Justice Program, which addresses all aspects of public safety and the criminal justice system, including violence, policing, corrections, courts and criminal law, substance abuse, occupational safety, and public integrity. Program research is supported by government agencies, foundations, and the private sector.

This program is part of RAND Justice, Infrastructure, and Environment, a division of the RAND Corporation dedicated to improving policy and decisionmaking in a wide range of policy domains, including civil and criminal justice, infrastructure protection and homeland security, transportation and energy policy, and environmental and natural resource policy.

Questions or comments about this report should be sent to the project leader, Nelson Lim (Nelson_Lim@rand.org). For more information about the RAND Safety and Justice Program, see http://www.rand.org/safety-justice or contact the director at sj@rand.org.

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