



**Collaborative Commission  
on Domestic Violence**

**2020:**  
First Year  
Report

# Summary

In July 2019, a special order by Local Administrative District Court Judge Peter Sakai created the first-of-its-kind **Commission on Collaborative Strategies to Prevent, Combat, and Respond to Domestic Violence** through a partnership between the City of San Antonio (COSA) and Bexar County. The Collaborative Commission on Domestic Violence (CCDV), co-chaired by Assistant City Manager Dr. Colleen Bridger and 150th District Court Judge Monique Diaz, the Commission Committee Chairs represents leaders in fields, including Healthcare, Judiciary, Nonprofit, Prosecution, Policy, and Law Enforcement (*Attachment A: CCDV Organizational Structure*).

With the City of San Antonio **Comprehensive Domestic Violence Prevention Plan** (*Attachment B*) as a framework, Committees selected multi-year strategies to implement. Committees that completed Year 1 strategies are selecting Year 2 strategies to continue preventing and responding to domestic violence in Bexar County. This report includes narrative updates on the status of each committee. A data report on Bexar County Domestic Violence will be provided separately.



## Collaborative Commission on Domestic Violence

# Strategy Summary

All CCDV committees made significant progress on their selected strategies, and some are broadening their scope. For example, the Law Enforcement committee collaborated with the Bexar County Family Justice Center to secure a pilot for a Domestic Violence High-Risk team. The table below provides a summary of the strategies identified in Year 1 and Year 2.

## CCDV STRATEGY SUMMARY

| Committee              | Year 1   | Year 2  |
|------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Data</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify indicators for shared reporting.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce quarterly data reports.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Healthcare</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop referral process for individuals seeking domestic violence assistance.</li> <li>Develop and disseminate communications campaign.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot referral line with BCSO and STRAC.</li> <li>Implement a targeted communications strategy.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Judiciary</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a program to enforce existing laws prohibiting firearm possession with a protective order or conviction of domestic violence.</li> <li>Expand the capacity for legal services, including non-attorney legal advocates.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to enforce existing laws prohibiting firearm possession with a protective order or conviction of domestic violence.</li> <li>Expand support to families experiencing domestic violence in civil court.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Law Enforcement</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot High-Risk Domestic Violence Program.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand high-risk victim identification pilot beyond the BCFJC to include SAPD CRT and BCSO.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Non-Profit</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate school district adoption of evidence-based violence prevention curriculum for implementation in schools.</li> <li>Identify and develop additional sources of pro-bono legal representation for protective orders.</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue facilitating the adoption of an evidence-based violence prevention curriculum for implementation in local schools.</li> <li>Expand the pro-bono protective order project to serve more survivors.</li> </ul>      |
| <b>Prosecution</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement system assessment using an evidence-based tool.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Host community-based events to educate the public on domestic and family violence prosecutions and survivor services</li> </ul>  |



# CCDV Year 1 Community Events



*I believe that victims are unable to reach out for assistance because they are being kept from doing so by abuser.*

— Domestic Violence Service Provider

The CCDV and the City of San Antonio hosted six virtual townhalls on local television stations from April to October 2020. In total, CCDV events reached 63,812 individuals.

| Date                       | Event   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>November 8, 2019</b>    | CCDV Community Listening Session, Bazan Branch Library                |
| <b>January 7, 2020</b>     | Judiciary Facebook Live Event   |
| <b>February 13, 2020</b>   | Non-Profit Facebook Live Event  |
| <b>February 26, 2020</b>   | CCDV Community Listening Session, Rape Crisis Center                  |
| <b>April 16, 2020</b>      | Univision Domestic Violence Townhall                                  |
| <b>May 4, 2020</b>         | CCDV/COSA Domestic Violence Awareness Virtual Roundtable              |
| <b>June 12, 2020</b>       | Univision Virtual Townhall  |
| <b>June 26, 2020</b>       | KSAT 12 Virtual Townhall  |
| <b>August 24, 2020</b>     | CCDV Community Townhall with Judge Wolff and Mayor Nirenberg          |
| <b>October 29-30, 2020</b> | CCDV Domestic Violence Awareness Symposium                            |
| <b>October 29, 2020</b>    | News 4 Domestic Violence Townhall with Congressmen Castro and Doggett |

## CCDV DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS SYMPOSIUM

Each committee identified topics to enhance collaboration and public engagement. The commission developed the CCDV Domestic Violence Awareness Symposium to facilitate community learning on domestic violence strategies. The Symposium offered three tracks: Community, Civil Law, and Criminal Law. The top three city council districts represented among the 869 pre-registered attendees were 1, 7, and 2. Most attendees (70%) were not active in a CCDV committee, and 20% identified as students. The remainder (less than 25%) were healthcare providers, judges, and allied professionals. In total, 3,641 individuals attended the 16 sessions. Sessions are archived on CCDV.org. The CCDV Symposium planning committee will convene in Spring 2021 to plan the 2nd annual symposium.



# COVID-19: The Shadow Pandemic



As COVID-19 strained safety net systems, people already at the highest risk of domestic violence faced increasingly dangerous circumstances. Mandated physical isolation, joblessness, lack of mobility, and housing instability, are all risk factors for increasing domestic violence. Isolation, a hallmark of abusive relationships, separates victims from support sources that may enable survivors to report or leave abusive relationships.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, guns in a household significantly increase domestic violence-related homicides, though it is not associated with increases in other forms of homicides.<sup>2</sup> More guns were sold since the onset of the pandemic than during any previous period for which we have data.<sup>3</sup> The vital steps taken to protect the community from COVID-19 have also increased risks for people living in violent homes.

The COVID-19 Domestic Violence Agency survey (see *Attachment D*) took place April 20–30, 2020. Nearly 40 agencies responded, mostly reporting a decrease in demand for services. However, they unanimously expressed concern that people experiencing violence were trapped at home, unable to reach out. Providers also identified high needs as financial support, housing, and support to convert services to remote.

## COVID-19 COMMUNITY ACTION GROUPS

Judge Monique Diaz and Jenny Hixon, COSA Metro Health, represented the CCDV on the COVID-19 Community Action Groups commission by San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg and Bexar County Commissioner Nelson Wolff. The Community Action Groups recommended spending federal CARES dollars to address community needs arising from COVID-19. The recommendations are available in Appendix XX.

<sup>1</sup> More information is available [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Article available [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Article available [here](#).



# Individual Workgroup Reports

## HEALTHCARE COMMITTEE

*George Hernandez (University Health System) and Jelynn Burley (Center for Healthcare Services), Co-Chairs*

The Healthcare Committee's first year focus was the referral process and communications campaign. The gap analysis identified inconsistencies in referral processes. Some hospital systems have well-developed training and referral process, while many do not.

### **Accomplishments and Successes**

The media campaign produced bilingual PSAs that ran on TV, radio, and online. Additionally, bilingual fact sheets addressed domestic violence during pregnancy. Additionally, the committee secured funding to develop a domestic violence referral line from the University Health. Southwest Texas Regional Advisory Council (STRAC) was engaged in providing the referral line.

### **Challenges and Changes**

Launching a referral line and training targeted at healthcare providers was difficult given the pandemic's burden. In the second year of the CCDV, additional staff support will enhance the committee's work with additional representation from STRAC and the injury prevention community.



## POLICY COMMITTEE

*Jeff Coyle ( COSA) and Melissa Shannon (Bexar County), Co-Chairs*

### **Accomplishments and Successes**

The Policy Committee provided federal funding information and encouraged coordinated applications. Through the U.S. House Appropriations process, the City requested that Congress call for greater coordination between federal, state and local governments, and non-profit organizations on domestic violence data. This ensures state, and local non-profits focusing on domestic violence have access to quality data when applying federal grants. The measure also directs the CDC to implement the necessary mechanism for sharing data and provide technical assistance on data.

### **Challenges and Changes**

With the 2021 State Legislative Session, the Committee would benefit from a clear focus on domestic violence-related funding and policies. The CCDV should establish a pre-Session discussion about potential items members can rally around to be incorporated in the City's and County's legislative agendas. The Commission should also schedule regular updates on Legislative developments, including insights from various trade associations.



## JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

*Judge Mary Lou Alvarez and Judge Ron Rangel, Co-Chairs*

The Judicial Committee identified two key strategies to address in the first year in collaboration with the Law Enforcement and Nonprofit Committees.

### **Accomplishments and Successes**

The Committee created four subcommittees: 1) Firearms Transfer Subcommittee, 2) Expansion of Pro Bono Legal Services, 3) Domestic Violence Symposium, and 4) Funding. The subcommittees brought together leadership within the civil, criminal, and municipal judiciary; the state and federal prosecution, plaintiff and defense bars; the military bar; the non-profit bar; law enforcement; probation department; pretrial services; ATF; family violence advocates; healthcare providers and experts in family violence, firearm transfer processes, family violence courts, family violence education, and family violence funding. Uniting these partners helped develop a firearm transfer process that all members of our judiciary may avail of to ensure compliance with their orders of ineligibility to possess firearms or ammunition in family violence cases the law expressly prohibits such possession.

The committee also collaborated with the CCDV's Non-Profit Committee to submit a proposal for and successfully secure county funding for a Domestic Violence Fellow position to support the expansion of legal services for protective orders via a partnership between the Pro Bono Protective Project and San Antonio Legal Services Association (SALSA).

### **Challenges and Changes**

Challenges include securing funding initiatives, educating others on the need to implement selected strategies.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE

*Chief William McManus (COSA) and Sheriff Javier Salazar (Bexar County), Co-Chairs*

The committee piloted a Domestic Violence High-Risk Team program as the first year's core activity. The Domestic Violence High-Risk Team is an interdisciplinary team that identifies, engages, monitors, and provides treatment to offenders and victims at high risk of the most dangerous outcomes.

### **Accomplishments and Successes**

Implemented a high-risk victim identification process and supporting the pilot of a domestic violence high-risk team (DVHRT) in partnership with the Bexar County Family Justice Center through a grant with the Texas Council on Family Violence at the Family Justice Center. The DVHRT coordinator works with Metro Health, the Law Enforcement Committee, and the Prosecution Committees in developing a DVHRT program in Bexar County.

The City of San Antonio secured 25 more detectives positions for domestic violence work. CARES Act funding established SAPD civilian caseworkers within Metro Health's Violence Prevention section, expanding their role in providing services, training opportunities, and increased access to underutilized services.

### **Challenges and Changes**

Bridging the work of several committees could help reduce overlap for the Commission. An elevated level of collaboration for specific issues, could prevent negative impacts to other committee member organizations.

## NONPROFIT COMMITTEE

*Patricia Castillo (PEACE Initiative), Marta Pelaez (Family Violence Prevention Services), Julia Raney Rodriguez (Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid), Co-chairs*

In response to the community and survivor requests, the Nonprofit Committee has identified two strategies in the first year.

### **Accomplishments and Successes**

With a diverse group of members, a significant success involved meeting regularly and elevating community concerns to the Commission. The committee continued rolling out the pro bono protective order project; identifying needs of victims and survivors; elevating needs identified by victims and survivors, and participating in training opportunities and broader collaborations with Commission members

### **Challenges and Changes**

The biggest challenge is rooted in the diverse membership identifying many issues affecting victims and survivors. The committee seeks to continue working on these issues with other committees whose members can affect the necessary changes.

## PROSECUTION COMMITTEE

*Joe D. Gonzales (Bexar County Criminal District Attorney) and Joe Nino (Deputy City Attorney, Prosecution Division, City of San Antonio), Co-Chairs*

The Prosecution Committee's first year focus was the assessment of the various systems in the protective order process to look for ways to improve protective order assistance for survivors.

### **Accomplishments and Successes**

The Committee formed working groups with key stakeholders in the various systems that contribute to the protective order process including; BCSO, Bexar County District Clerk's Office, D.A.'s Office and SAPD. From issues identified in the workgroups, the Committee focused on enhancing these systems collaboratively in three primary areas: (1) executing service of process on Respondents with the BCSO; (2) streamlining documentation of service and data collection with the Bexar County District Clerk's Office; and (3) enforcing protective orders with law enforcement agencies.

The COVID-19 public health emergency accelerated the Committee's efforts in a fourth area - making protective order services more accessible to the community. The D.A.'s Office created a digital protective order application system that allows individuals seeking assistance with filing a civil protective order petition in District Court to complete the D.A.'s application from any device accessible to internet including desktops, laptops, tablets, or smartphones. BCFJC staff is available to assist individuals with completing the application if they do not have access to technology or are uncomfortable using it.

### **Challenges and Changes**

The need to focus efforts on navigating uncertainties caused by the pandemic along with keeping up with the volume and severity of cases, requires streamlining the work of several committees to save time by reducing the overlap of efforts and making system changes that negatively impact the work of key stakeholder.

In addition, to help counter extended isolation and other long-term impacts of COVID-19 on survivors of domestic violence, it is vital that the prosecution committee engage and educate the community on the prosecution process. Engaging in community-based prosecution will increase community understanding of what it takes to prosecute abusers successfully in the hope of seeing an increase in cooperation from survivors.



# Year 2 Strategies



## NEW COMMITTEES

In the Spring of 2020, the CCDV identified the importance of developing an education committee. The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), Alamo Community Colleges District (ACCDV), and Texas A&M University-San Antonio (TAMUSA) were identified as anchor institutions for this new committee. Representatives from the three institutions are finalizing a CCDV Education Committee to begin meeting in January 2021. Co-Chairs include Dr. Cynthia Teniente-Matson (TAMUSA), Dr. Mike Flores (ACCD), and LT Robinson (UTSA). The focus is on identifying services related to domestic violence currently available to students and determining gaps the committee can address.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations aim to address and remove the barriers and challenges previously identified and improve prevention, intervention, and outreach services provided by CCDV members and other organizations.

- **Building support for the long term, prevention approaches compete with immediate victims' needs, yet both are critical.** Transparent conversations between partners about funding priorities can prevent unintentional competition for funding strategies crucial in the continuum of prevention and response. Communities must invest in prevention today to stop the victims of tomorrow.
- **Data is critical to move the conversation from anecdote to action but difficult to access quickly.** Sharing data from many responding partners is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence. Transparent data, contextualized to provide more in-depth understanding, can help survivors, service providers, and community members understand trends.
- **The balance of staff and executive decision-makers for each committee is critical for success, as is a balance of elected officials and staff of organizations.** The most successful committees identified staff members from within the committee chairs organizations responsible for implementing the committee strategies.

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## Conclusion

The CCDV uses a solution-focused orientation, learning lessons from what isn't working and replicating what is proving successful. Real change requires trust between agencies and individuals that the work is worth continuing to build collaborative models even in the moments when it would be faster and easier to break apart. No one person, program, policy, or year will stop domestic violence in Bexar County; it takes the collective work of many people over many years, in hundreds of small and large moves, which add to significant change for our community. The challenge with long term solutions is that they require a long-term commitment and that leaders, stakeholders, and the community hold together through rocky times, as will always come.