



# PUBLIC BENEFITS PROGRAMS AND DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE VICTIMS' ECONOMIC SECURITY

**NNEDV Economic Justice Summit 2018**

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# What are we going to do?

- Provide a brief background on intersections of domestic violence, sexual assault and economic instability
- Review findings from NRCDV report on public benefits programs
- Identify legislative and administrative threats and opportunities
- Provide an opportunity for peer-to-peer discussion of strategies to facilitate access for survivors, build partnerships, and engage in systems-level advocacy

# Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Economic Instability

- Particular challenges and barriers at the intersection of DV/SA and economic disadvantage
- Significant numbers of low-income women are abused or assaulted, and violence can make it nearly impossible to climb out of poverty
- Abuse can also result in victims who were not previously considered low-income falling into poverty
- Poverty and economic instability can also make it more difficult to cope with the physical, psychological, and financial impacts of DV/SA

# Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Economic Instability

- People of color experience disproportionate rates of poverty due to the accumulated effects of historical and ongoing structural inequalities and oppression
- Approximately 1 in 4 Native Americans live in poverty, nearly twice the overall national poverty rate
- LGBTQ communities experience higher rates of poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, housing instability, and economic vulnerability
- Immigrants, particularly immigrants without documentation, face significantly higher rates of poverty, hunger, and unstable and low-paying employment
- Disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty

# THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SURVIVING AND NOT SURVIVING

Public Benefits Programs and Domestic and Sexual Violence  
Victims' Economic Security



National Resource Center  
on Domestic Violence

**#TheDifference**

CENTER ON  
POVERTY and  
INEQUALITY  
GEORGETOWN LAW

ECONOMIC  
SECURITY and  
OPPORTUNITY  
INITIATIVE

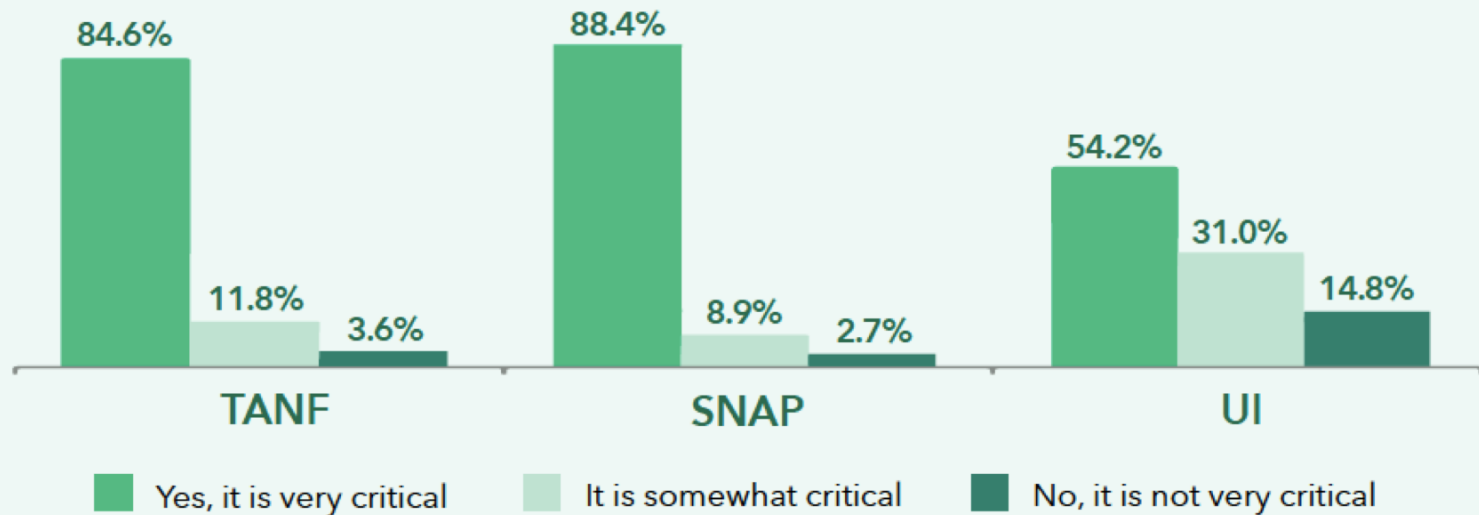
[Full Report:  
The Difference Between Surviving and Not Surviving](#)

# About the Survey

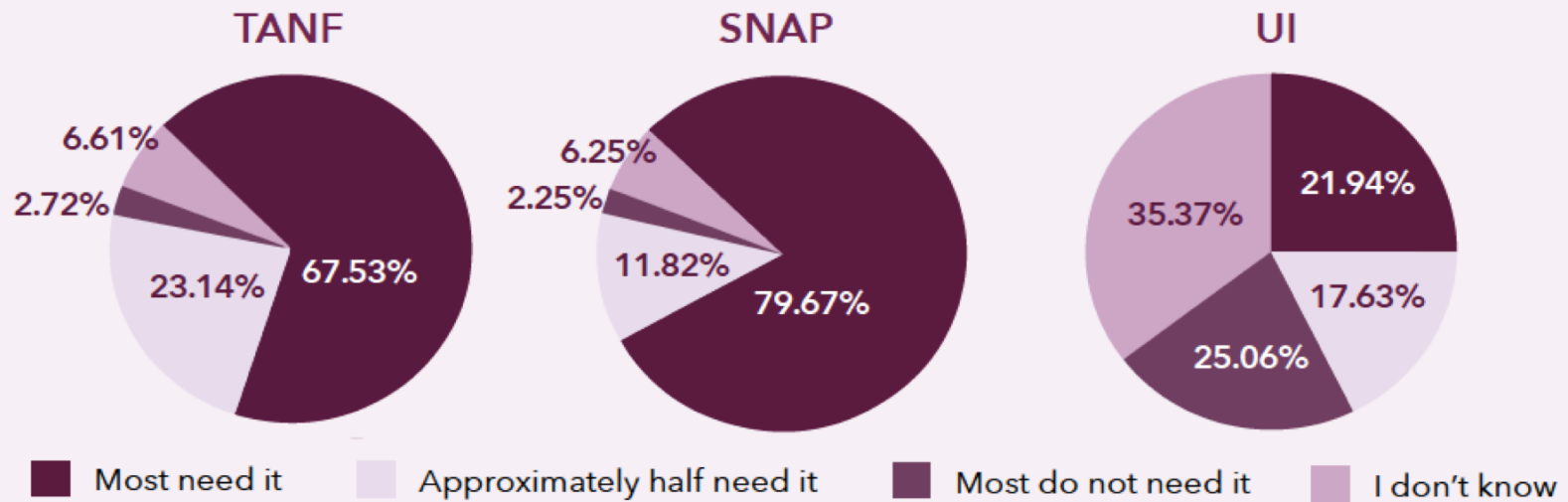
- 1,126 responses, including both quantitative and qualitative data
- A majority of respondents (86.8%) are advocates at DV/SA, dual DV/SA programs, but also include those working at legal services/legal aid, social services, anti-poverty, or housing/homelessness agencies
- 90% of survey respondents work at the local level, 25.9 % at the state or territory level, 6.1% at the national level, and 4.5% at the tribal level
- Respondents represent individuals from every state, the District of Columbia, and American Samoa

For domestic violence and sexual assault victims, the programs that support basic economic security are of critical importance.

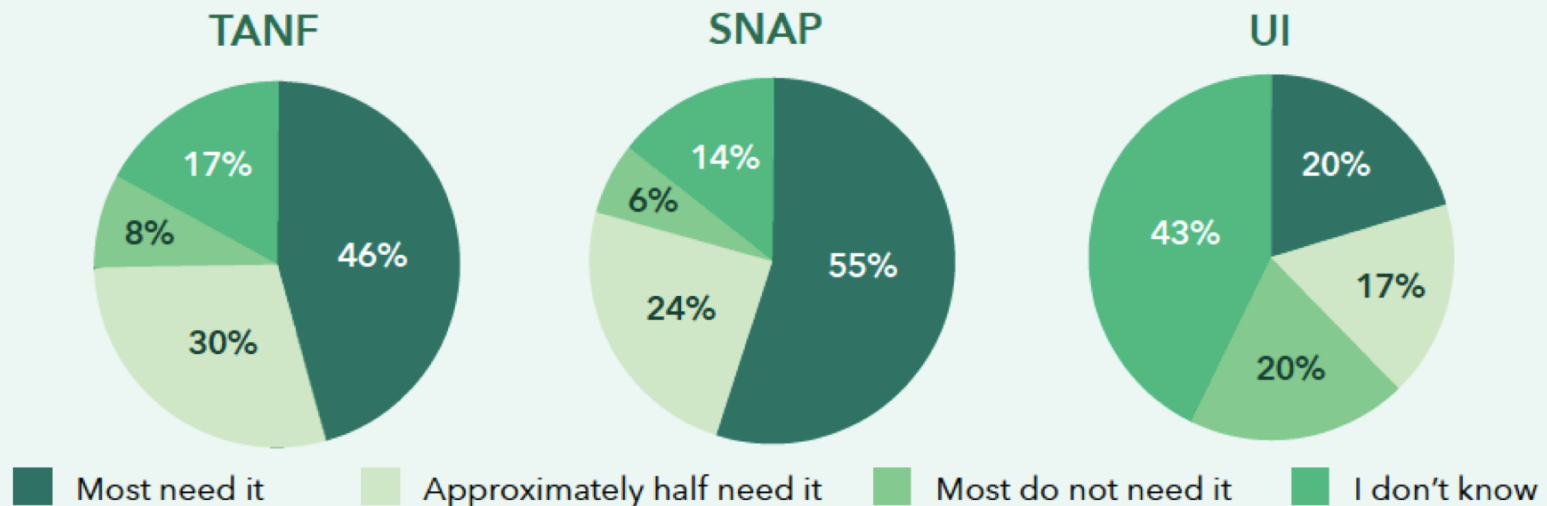
In your experience, is access to the following benefits programs a critical resource for a significant number of DV and/or SA victims?



Estimate the number of DV victims served by your agency who need the following benefits programs to help address basic needs and establish safety and stability.



Estimate the number of SA victims served by your agency who need the following benefits programs to help address basic needs and establish safety and stability.





# Voices from the Field

*“Benefits programs such as TANF, SNAP, and Unemployment Insurance constitute a vital safety net for victim-survivors who, trauma notwithstanding, already struggle to meet their basic needs and/or support their dependents and families.”*

*“Making it difficult to obtain benefits makes the decision to give up and go back to an abuser an easier choice.”*

*“For those that need these programs, it is the difference between surviving and not surviving.”*

# Voices from the Field

*“Access to benefits programs contributes substantially to victim-survivor empowerment and post-trauma healing because it enables victim-survivors to take steps toward addressing or remediating the trauma they have experienced while their basic needs are (at least partially) met by benefits programs.”*

*“The DV/SA victims we assist tell us that access to these programs has been a factor in planning how to afford to leave, and how to keep themselves and their children healthy, well, and housed.”*

**Despite these public benefits programs being so clearly identified as vital resources for victims, respondents describe varying levels of access.**

- Less than half of respondents report that most domestic violence survivors they work with are able to access TANF when they need it, and even fewer say that sexual assault survivors can access TANF.
- A majority of respondents say that most domestic violence and sexual assault victims they work with are able to access SNAP when they need it.
- About 20% reported that victims were not able to access UI when they need it.
- A majority of respondents say that most of the victims they work with need assistance from an advocate in order to access benefits.

# Voices from the Field

*“SNAP [helps my clients] because it is accessible. TANF could be a vital support but the barriers to accessing it are a real problem.”*

*“TANF fails most women with children because it is difficult to access and has too many hoops to jump through for a small amount of funding. This process is frustrating and intrusive for most and doesn't allow for real assistance with the reality faced by the cycle of poverty.”*

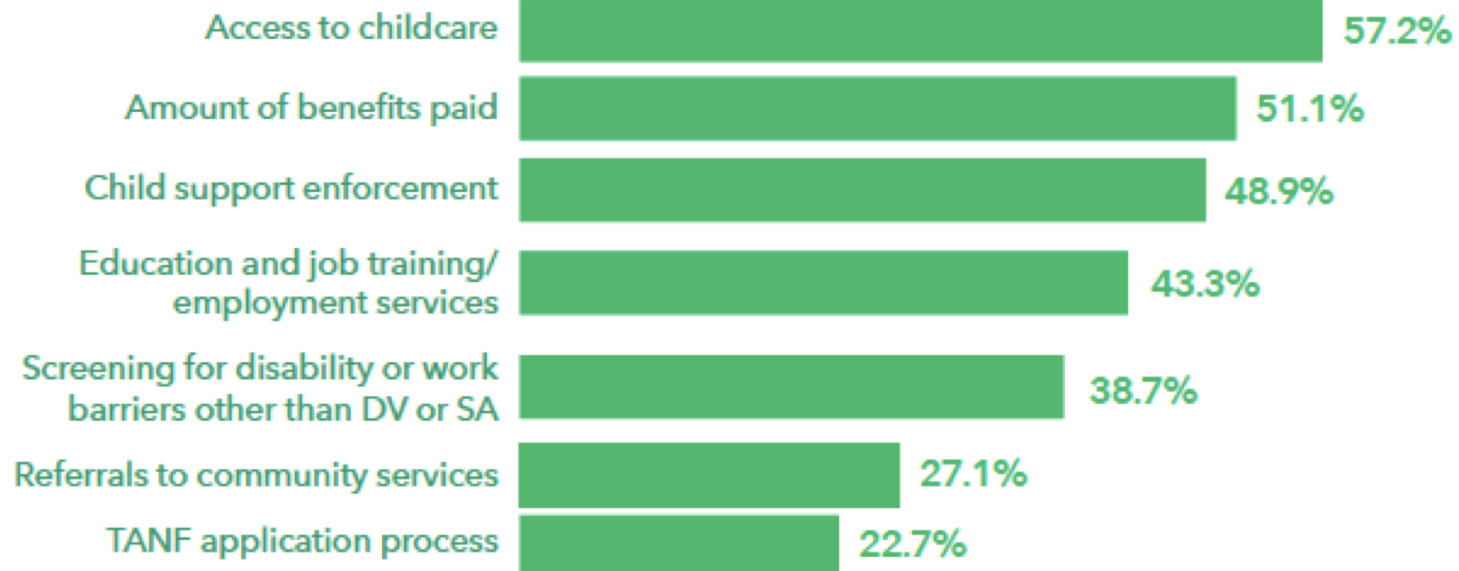
# Voices from the Field

*“Most victims may not think they are eligible for unemployment due to DV/SA.”*

*“Victims have experienced extensive trauma and therefore accessing these services can be an overwhelming and time-consuming ordeal for them in addition to the other circumstances they are navigating (finding safe shelter, obtaining medical care, obtaining temporary protective orders, attending therapy, ensuring the needs of their children are being met). We should strive to make these programs more user-friendly and streamlined.”*

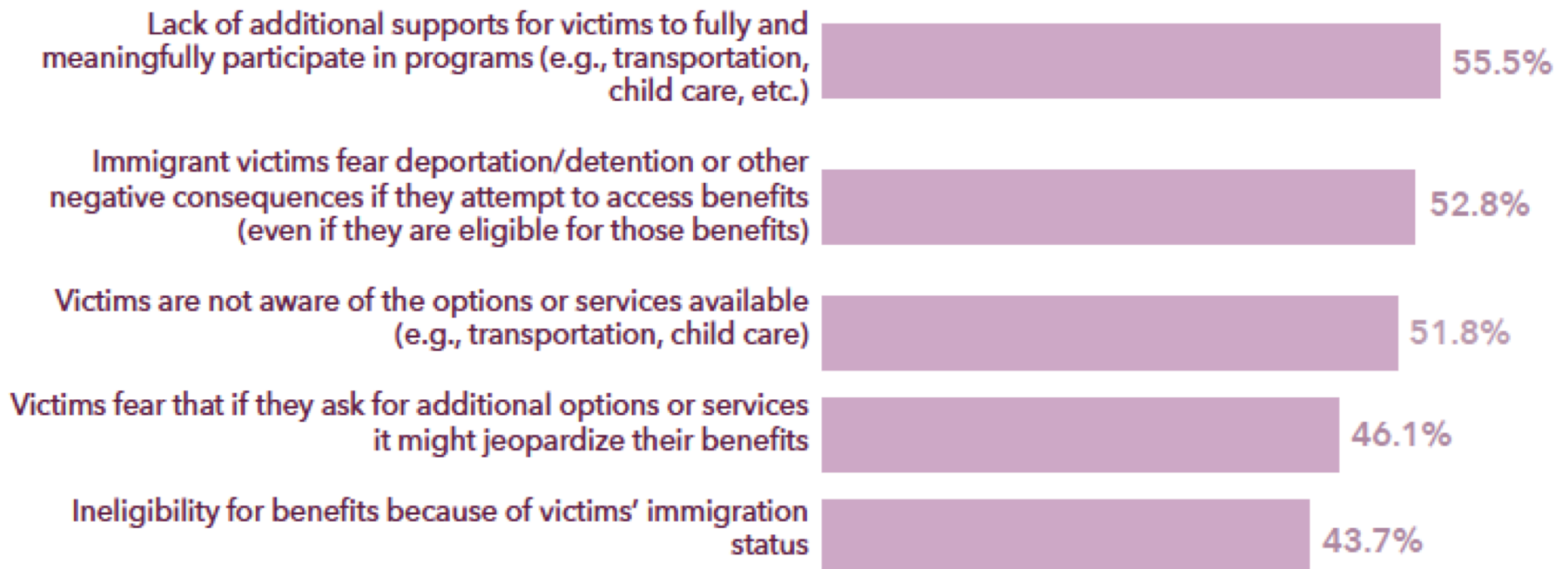
# Key barriers in the TANF System

Percentage of advocates responding that the following parts of the TANF system do not work well for victims.



Percentage of respondents indicating that the following is frequently a reason why victims do not access TANF, lose TANF, or do not get the full range of services that TANF might offer.

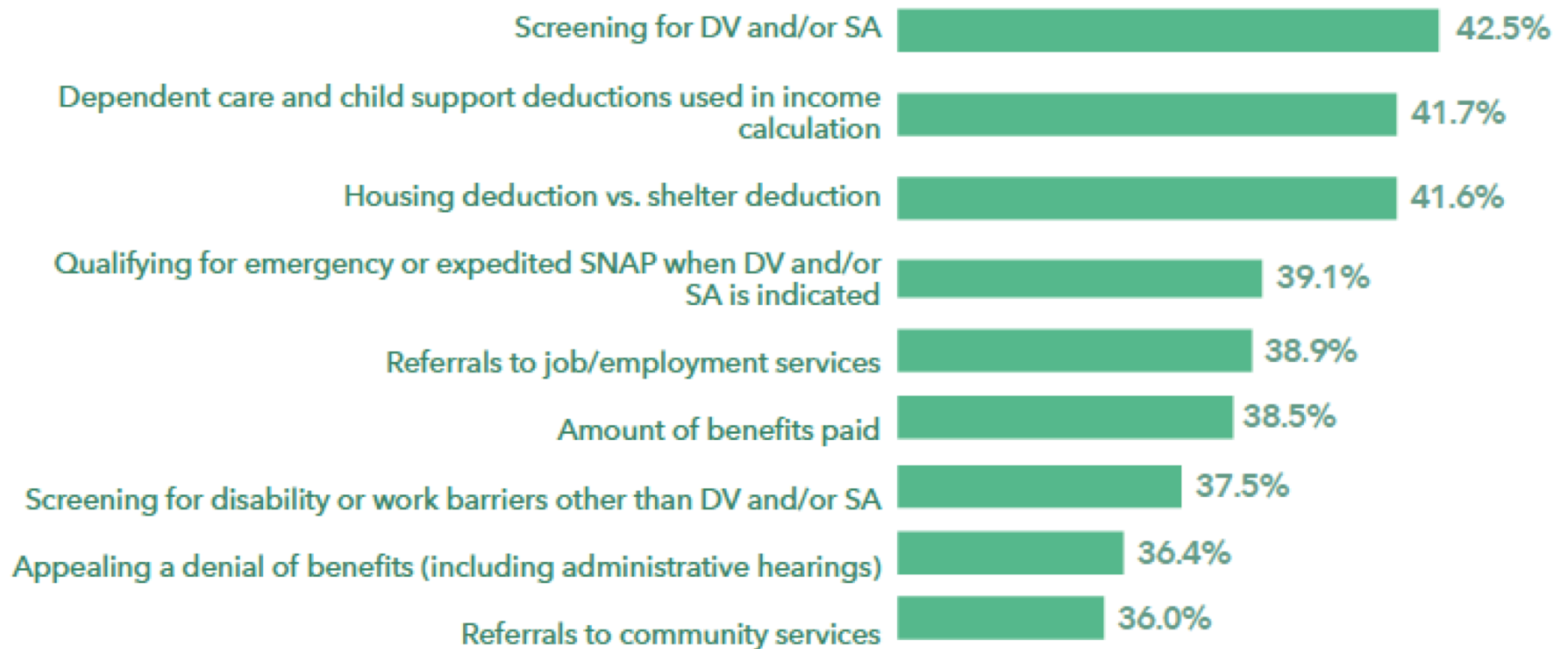
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*“[TANF] is pivotal to clients in crisis. If it was easier to obtain, and clients knew about the [Family Violence Option], it could really change lives.”*

# Key barriers in the SNAP System

Percentage of respondents indicating that the following parts of the SNAP system do not work well for victims.





Percentage of respondents indicating that the following is frequently a reason why victims do not access SNAP, lose SNAP, or do not get the full range of services that SNAP might offer.

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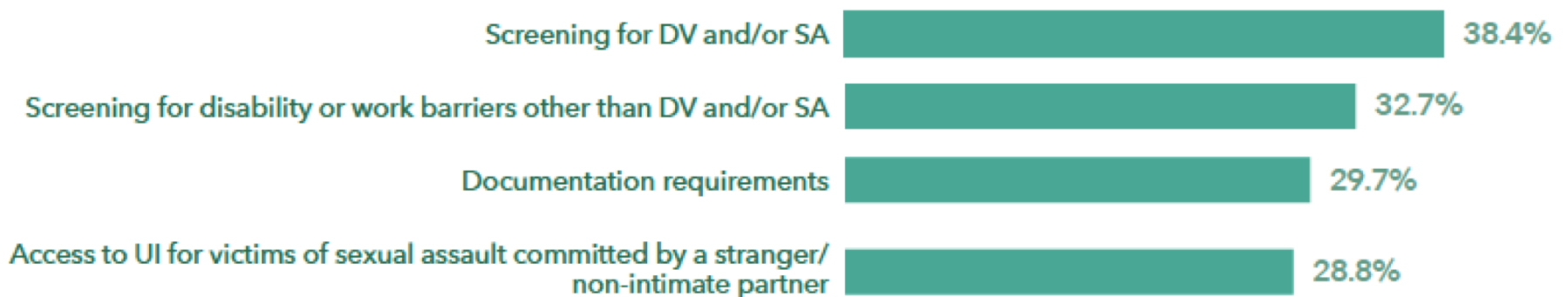


*“SNAP is extremely helpful and needed for survivors on their way to becoming self-sustaining after fleeing, and in planning to flee DV and SA situations. This is sometimes hindered because of [SNAP] policies.”*

# Barriers in the UI System

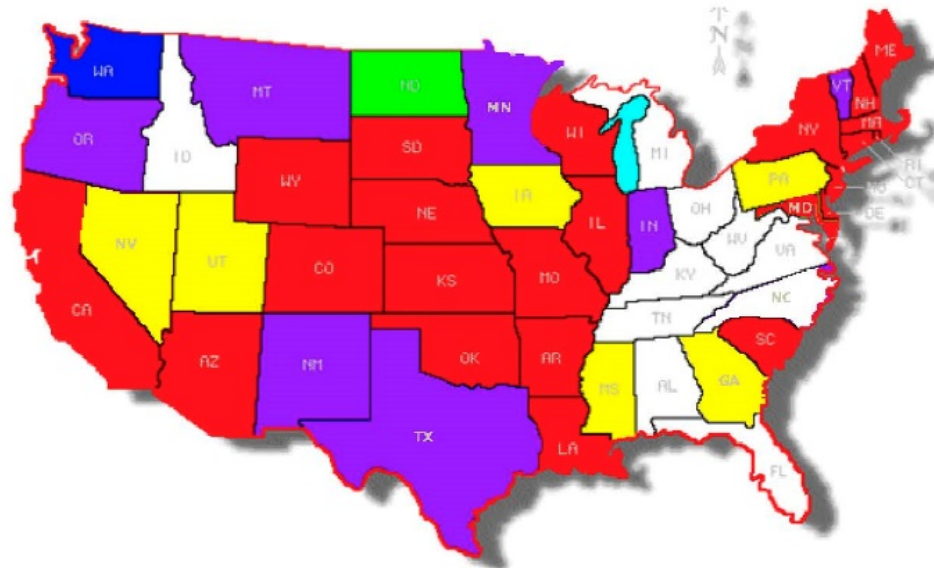
Percentage of respondents indicating that the following parts of the UI system do not work well for victims.

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*“Often my clients leave a job because they are scared because the abuser comes and harasses and stalks them at their job and tries to get them fired. Often the abuser succeeds in getting the victim fired, and so the victim has no income with which to support themselves or their children and often ends up going back to the abuser because of financial need. Unemployment insurance that is available to victims would help so much.”*

# Unemployment Insurance Eligibility for Domestic Violence, Stalking & Sexual Assault Victims



**Red:** Domestic Violence  
(includes DC & the US  
Virgin Islands)

**Purple:** Domestic  
Violence, Sexual Assault  
& Stalking

**Blue:** Domestic Violence  
& Stalking

**Green:** Domestic  
Violence & Sexual  
Assault

**Yellow:** Benefits may be  
available under state  
policy or practice (by  
agencies or court  
orders) even though it is  
not required by statute

# Legislative and Administrative Threats and Opportunities

- **At Administrative Level**

- *Agency Waivers – or other “state flexibility” approaches*

- **At Congressional Level**

- *Budget proposes SNAP Cuts/Restructuring*
- *Proposed 30% cut, or \$213 billion over the next ten years*
- *Welfare to Work Project – would allow states to merge funding from key safety net programs, incl. SNAP, housing, job training, childcare.*
- *Once merged the funds could be used for a variety of things, incl. other state spending.*
- *The proposal contains few protections for families needing assistance.*

# The Importance of Meaningful Partnerships

- Only a fifth of advocates working in domestic violence and/or sexual assault programs report that they regularly work with the offices in their area that administer TANF or SNAP, and only 5% regularly work with the UI office
- About half of domestic violence and sexual assault advocates report that they work with the TANF, SNAP, or UI offices on a case-specific basis only
- More than two-thirds of respondents said they had not received training on any key topics related to public benefits programs and access for survivors
- Respondents also identified key training needs for public benefits program staff, especially on the dynamics of DV/SA and trauma-informed service delivery

# *LET'S DISCUSS!*

- What has helped facilitate better access to public benefits programs for survivors and their families?
- What strategies have you used to to build and sustain partnerships with public benefits providers and others in your community who work on economic security?
- How are you engaging in systemic and policy advocacy on these issues?
- What challenges are you encountering in doing this work, and what would support your individual and systems-level advocacy?

# Contacts

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