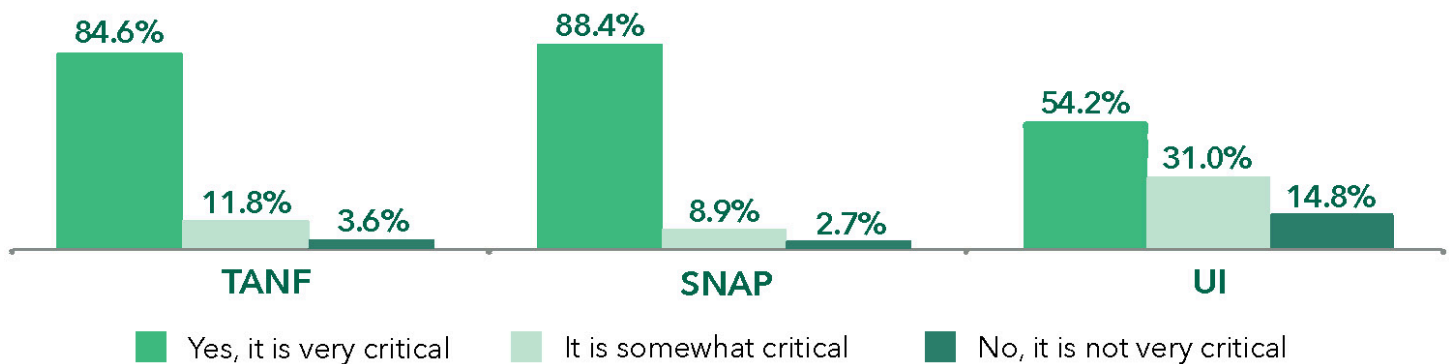


THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SURVIVING AND NOT SURVIVING

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

For domestic violence and sexual assault victims, the public benefits programs that support basic economic security are of critical importance. Access to programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) which provides direct financial assistance to families living in poverty, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP - formerly known as food stamps), unemployment insurance (UI), and other programs are critical in providing increased economic stability for survivors. These essential benefits help survivors afford the basics (like food, housing, and healthcare) and rebuild their lives after violence.

A majority of respondents said that TANF, SNAP, and UI are very critical resources for a significant number of domestic violence and sexual assault victims.



“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.”

Far too often, though, survivors face considerable challenges when trying to access these programs, including barriers stemming from both policies and their implementation.

Significant barriers to survivors' access to these critical programs include:

- Lack of transportation or affordable child care, which makes it difficult for victims to meet with caseworkers, obtain or keep a job, or otherwise meet the requirements of public benefits programs
- Rigid work and training requirements
- Fear of deportation or detention if immigrant victims try to access these programs (even for those who are eligible for the benefit)
- Inconsistent screening for domestic violence and sexual assault

- Application documentation requirements that compel victims to provide a protection order or proof of other legal action, or a letter demonstrating that the victim is receiving services from a counselor, doctor, or advocate
- Fear of child protective services (CPS) involvement
- Concerns about privacy or confidentiality of victims' information, including their location or address
- Fear that if they ask for additional options or services related to their victimization it might jeopardize their benefits

Strengthening these vital programs is necessary to help survivors and their families attain economic stability, safety, and well-being.

For many survivors, jobs, housing, and financial stability can be affected by abusive situations and relationships. Many survivors have the skills and ability to secure jobs, and secure housing, but TANF and SNAP can be invaluable in the interim between leaving an abuser and feeling stable and safe.

Key recommendations to reduce barriers for victims and their families and to improve practices, programs, and policies include:

- Provide ongoing training for domestic violence and sexual assault advocates on public benefits programs, and for public benefits caseworkers on the dynamics of domestic violence and sexual assault, and on providing trauma-informed services and responses.
- Develop and sustain meaningful, collaborative partnerships between domestic violence and sexual assault programs and public benefits programs, as well as with other service providers working with low-income families.
- Strengthen public benefits policies at the state and federal levels by increasing the level of benefits provided; reducing barriers and increasing access for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault; and providing additional resources and supports (such as transportation, childcare, and living wage work) that promote economic security for individual, families, and communities.

Programs like TANF and SNAP give victims a means to take care of themselves while they're building their lives back up, while trying to take care of their needs and their children's, and find safe housing and employment.

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