Past Year’s Trends Portend Challenge and Change in 2014

What will 2014 mean for crime victim compensation and assistance programs? What challenges, changes and trends may affect operations and effectiveness in the new year? And what strategies will states adopt to adapt to these new realities?

In 2013, a number of major issues and trends came to the fore.

A leveling off of claims. Many compensation programs’ claims statistics appear finally to be reflecting the long and dramatic drop in violent crime in the U.S. Violent crimes — not just crime rates, which are tied to population — are down close to 40% since their peak in the early 90s, and now have reached a 40-year low. Yet compensation programs nearly doubled total payouts during the past two decades. While the recent easing of claim loads isn’t uniform across all states, the national payout total has been declining in each of the last 3 years. How will programs adjust their budgets, benefits and requirements, if there continue to be less people to serve?

A decline in revenue. Since most compensation programs rely on criminal fees and/or fines for revenue, the decline in crime automatically has resulted in a decrease in funding. In most states, the decline is modest, but it nevertheless is a new reality for programs. And lower payouts, because of fewer claims, automatically leads to a decline in federal grants, since each state’s grant is tied to state payout. States will be challenged further if they face spending larger federal grants from prior years at the same time that state-dollar awards are going down.

National health-care reform. The impact of the Affordable Care Act is still unknown. But 2014 will be the first year in which the ACA is almost fully in effect. Already, 6 million more Americans are newly covered through Medicaid or private insurance, and an additional 3 million young adults have gone onto their parent’s policies. Will this result in an even sharper decline in applications? Will compensation programs adjust by offering new types of benefits or expand eligibility?
As we end one year and begin another, I want to express my gratitude to all the members of our Association, whose active participation keeps our organization strong. Each of you is busy operating your own program, yet you take the time to provide information and assistance to your colleagues in other states, and help us all find solutions to the issues and problems facing all of us. Through interstate communication that the Association helps facilitate, you are ensuring that our members gain fresh perspectives and new ideas that will enable them to meet their programs’ objectives. While our programs and our laws may be different in certain ways, we share the same goal of providing excellent service to victims. We hope the Association can continue to be a vital part of the improvement of compensation programs nationwide, and we depend on you to help us accomplish that.

In this issue, we have a chance to learn a little more about our Board members, the people whom we call on regularly to provide advice and information. As you can see in the brief profiles in the following pages, our Board members exhibit great diversity in their backgrounds and interests. They come to us from small programs and large ones, from Alaska to Arizona and from Florida to Maine, and we truly appreciate the efforts they make on our behalf.

Many others of you have served on our Board in the past, and we are grateful for your contributions, too.

It will be an interesting year for all of us, as we continue to manage our programs through this time of change at the national level and in our own states. I know you will be doing everything you can to make your programs the best they can be, and on behalf of the Association, we pledge to help you in any way we can to make your programs as effective as possible.
Budget Agreement May Help Congress to Raise VOCA Cap

Potential Exists for Earlier Grant Release in 2014

With Congressional Appropriations Committees already having acted to raise the VOCA cap from its current $730 million, a new Budget Agreement reached by the full Congress may clear the way for swifter final action on the cap — which should mean a quicker opening of the grant application process in 2014.

Either the House Committee proposal of $745 million, or the Senate Committee’s $765 million offer — or some number in between — could end up being the VOCA cap. Last year, Congress acted in March to raise the cap from $705 million to the current $730 million. But then it took Congress until mid-summer to approve the OJP “spend plan” for allocating grant management and administrative costs among OVC and other bureaus. This step is necessary to determine what the final amounts available for VOCA grants will be, since the M&A costs reduce the amount that can be distributed. Once OVC knows what the amount is that can be distributed, it can calculate compensation grants and assistance grants, and open the grant-application process.

Whatever the VOCA allocation amount will be, it won’t change the 60%-of-state-payout grant that each compensation program will receive, since that limit is written into the VOCA distribution formula. However, VOCA assistance programs stand to gain substantially, if the cap goes up.

Proposal To Create New Federal Funding Source for Trafficking Victims

A bipartisan proposal before Congress would create a special fund to support programs for victims of human trafficking and child pornography, funded through a special $5,000 fine against persons convicted of federal offenses related to trafficking, pornography, child prostitution, and sexual exploitation. The new fine would be in addition to, and collected after, other fines and assessments have been satisfied, so it should not affect amounts flowing into the VOCA Crime Victims Fund. The VOCA fund is financed entirely by the deposit of federal fines, plus a small special assessment.

The “Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act” was introduced in the Senate as S. 1738 by Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) and Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), and in the House as H.R. 3530 by Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX) and Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY).

The bill would create a block grant to help states and local governments develop and implement comprehensive programs to train law enforcement to rescue victims, to aid in the prosecution of human traffickers, and to restore the lives of victims.

In addition to the special fine to finance a “Domestic Trafficking Victims Fund,” the bill calls for all property involved in human trafficking offenses to be forfeited to the government. This would help in providing restitution to victims.

A Thank You . . .

To all the state and local Board Members and Commissioners who give of their time and their effort to make decisions on applications. Many of these individuals volunteer to serve on their state and local boards, or work for little or no compensation. They’re entrusted with reviewing and determining claims involving a wide range of difficult questions. They bring their experience and sensitivity to this important work, relying on the help of the management and staff of their programs. We thank them for their devoted service.

National Crime Victims Rights Week: April 6—12, 2014
30 Years: Restoring the Balance of Justice
Meet the Board

The Association’s Board Members exhibit a wide diversity, both in their personal histories and interests, and in the programs they represent. We’re providing these profiles of our current Board to give you a better sense of the people who help guide our Association and play such an important role in guiding our organization and in providing advice to our membership.

We asked each of our officers and Board Members to tell us a little about themselves, including their proudest accomplishments as compensation program managers. As you can see, their backgrounds are varied, but they share a common commitment toward improving their programs and helping the Association.

Ann Meola, Director, Victim Compensation and Assistance Division, Office of the Attorney General, Massachusetts

Ann has been with the A.G.’s Victim Compensation and Assistance Division since 2008, and served four years as deputy director before becoming director in November 2012. Her background is in crisis intervention and elder protective services. “I enjoyed direct service work as well as training and programmatic auditing in this field prior to attending law school.”

Her proudest accomplishment as a program manager has been “the passage of statutory changes to the governing compensation law, including debt-collection protection for eligible claimants.” She adds that sometimes “surviving seems to be a major accomplishment!”

She likes to read, knit, volunteer in church activities; and “I now enjoy being the parent of two college-aged students.”

Nicole Jenkins, Director, Victim Services Division, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, Georgia

Nicole started with the Georgia compensation program in 2006 as a program director and was promoted to her current position as Victim Services Division director in September 2012. She’s also served as director of the Office of Victim Advocacy for the Prosecuting Attorneys Council of Georgia; as a health educator consultant for the Violence Against Women’s Program in the Public Health Division of the Georgia Department of Human Resources; and as director of a Victim Impact Awareness Program in the Georgia Dept. of Corrections.

Nicole counts as her proudest accomplishment the development of strategies with her staff to cut processing times in half. She also values her program’s partnership with other state agencies to coordinate the statewide kickoff for National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. “Last year, we hosted over 300 participants.”

Nicole especially enjoys traveling with family. “We start in Germany and pick a new destination every 1 to 2 years. We may hopscotch across Europe or choose another favorite destination.”

Virginia Woodward, Executive Director, Kentucky Crime Victims Compensation Board and Board of Claims

Virginia was appointed to her position as executive director by Kentucky Governor Stephen Beshear in 2009. Prior to her appointment, she was executive director of the governor’s Office of Boards and Commissions and executive director of the Kentucky Commission on Women. She has been a dental hygienist for 40 years. Throughout her life, she has advocated for women and vulnerable populations, including children, the disabled, and the elderly.

Virginia created the first policy and procedures manual for the agency; conducted the agency’s first statewide conference for victim service providers; helped implement and train at the first statewide victim assistance training academy; and is actively working to replace or upgrade the 11-year-old agency database.

She holds leadership positions at her church and in various political and civic organizations, and she “loves reading, gardening, and shopping, particularly with my granddaughter!”
**Board Members serve as an advisory panel in responding to questions from our membership**

Susan Sudduth, *Program Manager, Crime Victims’ Compensation Program, Missouri Department of Public Safety*

Susan started with the compensation program in 1994 and was promoted to program manager in 2000. She says she finds great reward and fulfillment in helping people, and her vision is to “keep the program as victim friendly as possible.” She credits the energy and team-spirit mentality of her staff in helping achieve program goals: “Having a staff that wants to be able to help victims is a big plus for me.”

In her spare time, she loves making jewelry and reading a good book. “But my time is often occupied by our loveable pet boxers, Kaira and Sasha.”

Suzanne Breedlove, *Director of Victims Services, Oklahoma District Attorneys Council*

Suzanne marks 31 years with her agency on January 6, 2014, with 29 of those years in victims’ compensation. She’s proud that she’s managed the compensation fund from zero in reserve to its current balance of $10 million. She also counts as a major accomplishment the implementation of the current tribal demonstration program, which uses OVC discretionary grant funds to make use of a staff liaison with Native Americans.

Suanne’s tenure has included several stints on the Association’s Board of Directors, as well as on the board of the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators. (She supervises both compensation and VOCA assistance for her state.) In her spare time, she’s a musician and song writer, and she also enjoys knitting, fishing and reading.

Kate Hudson, *Administrator, Violent Crimes Compensation Board, Alaska Department of Administration*

Kate started with the program in 2009. She was formerly a construction attorney in the United Kingdom, but she’s also been a bartender, a check-out girl, and a dishwasher for a summer at a wedding reception center, “which was one of the most strangely enjoyable jobs I’ve had.”

Her proudest accomplishment with her agency is instituting paperless claims management. She values most highly the thank you notes she receives from “claimants who have been overwhelmed by the assistance provided.”

Kate’s hobbies include playing piano, hiking, and reading novels, and she says she’s recently taken up archery.

Larry Grubbs, *Program Manager, Crime Victims Services, Arizona Criminal Justice Commission*

Larry started with Victims Services at the Arizona commission in 2005, and was named program manager in 2009. After graduating from the University of Arizona with a degree in theater, he acted in a theater company specializing in performances for young audiences and families. “We toured Arizona, California, and Nevada performing everywhere from school cafeterias to 1,000-seat performing arts centers.”

In 2011 and 2012, Larry directed a major effort to identify and make some meaningful changes to compensation program rules. He sought input from a wide range of interested parties, and engaged the services of an academician to analyze and write a report on the program. Larry says that this resulted in “impactful changes” which, “if not ground-breaking, were appreciated by claimants as well as the larger victim services community in Arizona.”

Larry and his wife enjoy raising four children on their modest kid ranch in the desert suburbs of metro Phoenix.

Michelle Crum, *Program Administrator, Bureau of Victim Compensation, Office of the Attorney General, Florida*

Michelle worked her way through college as a manager for a large retail chain, but upon graduating made a “life-changing decision” to fulfill her desire to help victims by volunteering as an advocate at the State Attorney’s Office. She came to the A.G.’s Bureau of Victim Compensation as a temporary claims analyst in 2005, was promoted to program administrator in 2007, and became bureau chief in 2012.

Under her supervision, the bureau has made programmatic changes to streamline claim processing procedures, implemented innovative strategies for achieving greater fiscal accountability, and instituted additional benefits to an under-served category of victims.
Michelle volunteers with the Early Social Interaction Project at Florida State University, and also contributes time to local autism programs. On weekends, she can be found playing games with her school-aged son or riding motorcycles with her husband.

Cassie Jones, Executive Director, Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission

Cassie became the executive director of the ACVCC in August 2007. Previously, she was a state police officer, a corrections officer, and assistant to the president of a college.

Cassie counts as one of her proudest accomplishments the branding of the commission with a new logo, and the development of new documents for the agency. As the top professional employee of an autonomous agency, Cassie must supervise an administrative division, an IT division, a claims division, and an accounting division, as well as manage and coordinate the work of a three-person commission.

Cassie says she enjoys running, shopping, and shooting, but “not necessarily in that order!”

Anne Thomas (Kaercher), Crime Victim Compensation Administrator, Crime Victim Assistance Division, Attorney General’s Office, Iowa

Anne has worked in the Crime Victim Assistance Division for the past 13 years. Her time there includes six years as a compensation specialist, five years as a community specialist in the Victim Services Support Program, and two years as the compensation administrator.

Her proudest accomplishment as a compensation administrator so far has been expanding program policies so that victims are not automatically deemed ineligible when they have been unable to report to law enforcement. “This has been especially helpful in certain instances of sexual assault and domestic violence,” Anne says.

Anne loves traveling, reading, running, NFL football, good coffee, and being on the water in Spirit Lake, Iowa. “I enjoy these things the most when experiencing them with my family: my husband, two kids (ages 14 and 6) and two cats.”

Jeff Wagaman, Executive Director, Crime Victim Compensation Board, Office of the Attorney General, Kansas

Jeff began work as the executive director of the Kansas program on October 1, 2012, which, he adds, “was the first day of the Association’s annual conference, which I attended and loved!” He has served nearly 30 years in state government, beginning as a corrections officer on the midnight shift in a maximum security prison. He served as the assistant secretary of the Kansas Department of Administration for four years and the assistant state treasurer of Kansas for six years.

Jeff says one of the program’s most valuable achievements during his tenure is screening 100% of the victims to see if they want or can benefit from counseling or advocacy services. “The goal is to refer as many victims as possible and serve them in an empathetic, efficient manner.”

When Jeff isn’t watching his high-school daughter play soccer or tennis, he can be found playing “competitive tennis, bad golf, or riding a Harley Davidson with friends on good weather days.”

Deb Rice, Director, Crime Victims’ Compensation Program, Office of the Attorney General, Maine

Deb started with the Maine Victims’ Compensation Board in 1995, about 18 months after the program began. “We were late bloomers here in Maine and benefitted from all the good work done by other states in developing successful programs,” she says. Previously, she was a Legal Services attorney, often representing victims of domestic abuse, and she was a co-drafter of Maine’s first protection-from-abuse laws.

She’s proud that she’s been about to balance the program’s funding sources over the years, and has paid close attention to database development to maintain the health of the program. Deb served as President of the Association for two years, working her way up the ladder through other officer positions.

She enjoys running, “which is always available, even in the ice and snow, and dancing, which is not available nearly often enough.”

Note: We’ll hear from Board Member Janice Carmichael and all our Officers in the next issue of the Quarterly.

They also help plan the National Conference agenda, and help guide the Association’s direction on national issues

Board members’ prior jobs: Actor, dishwasher, police officer, attorney, advocate, corrections officer, dental hygienist, assistant state treasurer, consultant
Training Calendar 2014

National Training Conference
August 18-21, 2014*
Boston*

*This is the tentative date and city for our 2014 National Training Conference. More information will be provided when details are finalized. The conference is open to all victim compensation program managers, staff and board members.

NACVCB Regional Conferences
We’ll be announcing our Spring 2014 Regional Conferences soon. Information will be sent to all member programs.