

LETHALITY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The **Lethality Assessment Program (LAP)** is a nationally recognized, **evidence-based** program with **demonstrated success** in **strengthening partnerships** between law enforcement and domestic violence service providers, **connecting victims of intimate partner violence with life-saving services**, and thereby **reducing domestic violence fatalities**.

THE PROBLEM

Domestic violence victims are being killed at staggering rates

- In the United States, 987 women and 272 men were killed by an intimate partner in a heterosexual relationship.¹
- In Pennsylvania, at least 697 domestic violence victims died by a former or intimate partner between 2013 and 2023². 575 females, 82% killed by a current or former intimate partner³ and 122 males, 18% killed by a current or former intimate partner.⁴
- In the ten years between January 2013 and December 2023, Pennsylvania lost at least 1,725 people as a result of domestic violence—mostly abused women but also children, law enforcement officers, relatives, friends, coworkers, passersby, and perpetrators who killed themselves or were killed by others.⁵

Too few abuse victims are connecting with the domestic violence program and services that may save lives

- Only 4 percent of abused victims had used a domestic violence hotline or shelter within the year prior to being killed by an intimate partner.⁶
- However, women who went to shelter were significantly less likely to experience re-assault than those who did not go to shelter.⁷

Law enforcement struggles with responding to repeat calls in an escalating pattern of abuse

- In the year prior to the homicide, more than 44 percent of abusers were arrested for a crime, and almost one-third of victims contacted police.⁸
- However, prior arrest for domestic violence actually decreased the risk for homicide.⁹
- Therefore, connecting high-risk victims with life-saving services and arresting domestic violence perpetrators will prevent domestic violence homicides.

Moving Toward a Solution: Pennsylvania's Lethality Assessment Program

LAP promotes an innovated partnership between domestic violence programs and law enforcement agencies. By setting up a routine practice of communication, collaboration, and cooperation, LAP provides effective lifesaving services for victims at high risk of being killed.

LAP was initially developed by a team of researchers working with the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, and is now being implemented throughout the U.S. The fundamental goals of LAP are to reduce the occurrence of domestic violence related fatalities and enhance the safety of victims and their children, law enforcement, and communities. Extensive research has identified several risks factors indicating heightened risk of homicide by an intimate partner. That research led to the development of the Lethality Assessment; a screening tool used to identify the level of danger a victim has of being killed by their intimate partner.

- LAP is a partnership between law enforcement officers and domestic violence advocates that assesses victims of being killed and then connecting them with services.
- LAP trains officers responding to a domestic violence call to ask brief screening questions to identify lethality risk factors. Officers at the scene immediately connect high-risk victims with the local domestic violence hotline. The hotline worker creates a safety-plan with the victim and urges the victim to come to the program for services.
- LAP was field-tested to determine whether users found it user-friendly. 84 percent of officers and 95 percent of advocates said that LAP screening and referral was "very" or "fairly" easy to do.¹⁰

LAP Saves Lives

- While LAP is a fairly new initiative in Pennsylvania, at least 500 law enforcement agencies and 80 domestic violence service providers in 37 states have successfully implemented LAP.
- In Maryland, where LAP originated and is currently implemented in every law enforcement agency and all 20 domestic violence programs, the progress toward the goal of reducing domestic violence deaths has been phenomenal: the incidence of domestic violence homicides has declined by an average of 25 percent over the past six years, a result directly attributable to use of LAP.¹¹

How LAP Works: Lethality Screen and Protocol

- Officers and advocates are thoroughly trained prior to implementation.
- Extensive follow-up technical assistance is offered through PCADV.
- Officers and advocates are equipped with the screening tool (questions).
- An officer uses certain criteria to determine whether to use the screening tool with a victim.
- An officer asks the victim questions from the screening tool.
- An officer scores the responses to determine if the screening tool indicates a high risk of danger.
- If high danger is indicated, the officer makes a referral per the protocol:

- Phone call to local domestic violence program's hotline
- Officer and hotline advocate encourage the victim to seek services and support
- Data collection and reporting requirements are minimal.

LAP In Pennsylvania

PCADV began implementing LAP in Pennsylvania in 2012 with 12 pilot sites. The pilot sites included 12 counties, 12 domestic violence programs and 19 law enforcement agencies. To date, LAP encompasses 51 counties, 48 domestic violence programs and 467 law enforcement agencies. This expansion has established a firm foundation for the expansion of LAP statewide.

LAP is reaching younger adults of dating violence by expanding LAP on college campuses. LAP educates dating violence victims about unhealthy relationship behaviors and how some of those behaviors can be lethal. LAP has been implemented on 26 college campuses.

THE LETHALITY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM IN PA

Reporting Period	Number of Screens	# (%) High-Danger	# (%) Not High-Danger	# (%) Did Not Answer/Could Not Administer	# (%) HD Spoke to Hotline	# (%) HD Accessed Program Services*
Oct - Dec 2012	187	135 (72%)	49 (26%)	3 (2%)	105 (79%)	65 (62%)
Jan - Dec 2013	797	557 (70%)	229 (29%)	11 (1%)	422 (76%)	241 (57%)
Jan - Dec 2014	2841	1997 (70%)	621 (22%)	223 (8%)	1383 (69%)	930 (67%)
Jan - Dec 2015	3353	2318 (69%)	706 (21%)	329 (10%)	1528 (66%)	997 (65%)
Jan - Dec 2016	3754	2506 (67%)	908 (24%)	340 (9%)	1462 (58%)	859 (59%)
Jan - Dec 2017	4450	3009 (68%)	952 (21%)	489 (11%)	1718 (57%)	1038 (60%)
Jan - Dec 2018	4845	3214 (66%)	1115 (23%)	516 (11%)	1738 (54%)	1136 (67%)
Jan - Dec 2019	4973	3348 (67%)	1111 (22%)	514 (10%)	1675 (50%)	1101 (66%)
Jan - Dec 2020	4152	2764 (67%)	866 (21%)	522 (12%)	1217 (44%)	805 (66%)
Jan - Dec 2021	4720	3215 (68%)	880 (19%)	625 (13%)	1367 (43%)	850 (62%)
Jan - Dec 2022	4918	3458 (70%)	938 (19%)	522 (10%)	1435 (42%)	940 (66%)
Jan - Dec 2023	4334	3037 (70%)	917 (21%)	380 (8%)	1295 (43%)	785 (61%)
Jan - Dec 2024	3580	2383 (67%)	826 (23%)	371 (10%)	918 (39%)	586 (64%)
Jan - March 2025	787	545 (69%)	169 (21%)	73 (9%)	211 (39%)	144 (68%)
TOTAL	47,691	32486 (68%)	10287 (22%)	4918 (10%)	16473 (51%)	10476 (64%)

*Number of High-Danger victims who spoke to a hotline advocate and then decided to access program services.

An additional **10,172** victims who screened in as not high danger, did not answer the questions, officer could not administer the screen or did not speak with a hotline advocate, accessed program services. From 2012 to 2025, a total of **20,504** victims sought domestic violence program services.

Conclusion

- Officers will not administer as many screens as they anticipate; nor will the LAP protocol take too much time or be too difficult to use.
- Screening for high danger allows for an intensive focus of efforts on those victims most at risk of being killed by their abuser.
- While working relationships between law enforcement and domestic violence programs are not new, LAP is an unprecedented on-scene, direct service partnerships that enhances the services of both the officer and the domestic violence program.

For More Information, Please Contact

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¹ Crim. Justice Info. Servs. Div., U.S. Dep't of Justice, Crime in the United States 2019: Expanded Homicide Data Table 10 (2019) The number of homicides does not include same-sex partners. Found at: [FBI — Expanded Homicide Data Table 10](#)

² PCADV, Domestic Violence Fatalities In Pennsylvania (2010 through 2020). Fatality Reports found at: <http://www.pcadv.org/Learn-More/Domestic-Violence-Topics/Fatalities/>

³ Intimate partner includes same-sex partners.

⁴ Intimate partner includes same-sex partners.

⁵ PCADV, Domestic Violence Fatalities In Pennsylvania 2011 through 2020). Fatality Reports found at: <http://www.pcadv.org/Learn-More/Domestic-Violence-Topics/Fatalities/>

⁶ Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV), LAP national newsletter, October 2014. Found at: <http://mnadv.org/mnadvWeb/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/LAP-Link-October-2014-Final.pdf>

⁷ Id.

⁸ Phyllis W. Sharps, Ph. D., R.N., et. al., Health Care Providers' Missed Opportunities for Preventing Femicide, Preventive Medicine 33, 373-380, 377 (2001)

⁹ Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results From A Multisite Case Control Study, Am J Public Health 1092 (2003)

¹⁰ Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV), LAP Pilot Final Report (2004).

¹¹ National Lethality Assessment Program Overview PowerPoint (May 2014).