

A Solid Place to Grow

Shrinking federal funding and surging community need are forcing child crime victims to wait longer for care. What can be done?



For more than four decades and in nearly 1,000 communities nationwide, Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) have provided evidence-based, child-centered care for children victimized by abuse and their families. Yet when funding cuts and increased care costs collide with a burgeoning youth mental health crisis, this critical community resource is no longer guaranteed. CACs are cutting services or even closing their doors. What can we do to help?

How CACs protect children, with our help

In 2023, National Children’s Alliance (NCA) member CACs served **more than 380,000 children**, offering more than 3 million hours of therapy each year, plus medical exams, courtroom preparation, victim advocacy, case management, and other services. But they don’t do it alone.

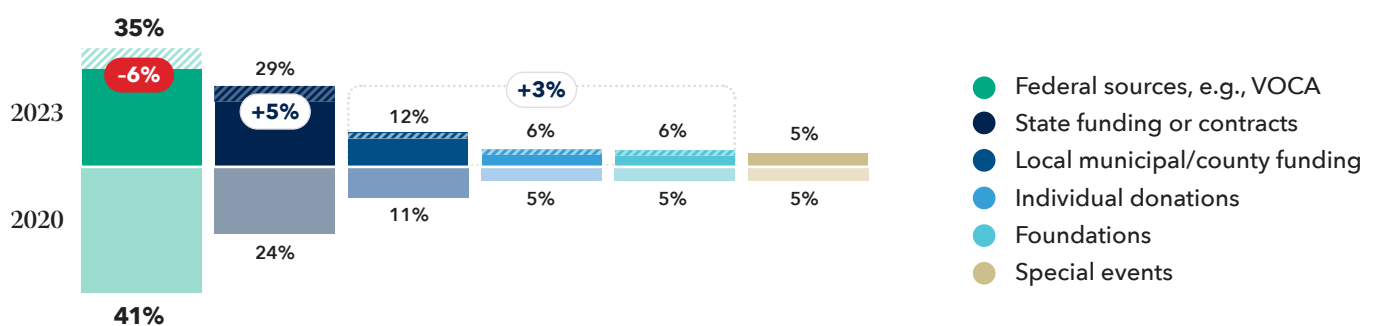
The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) provides funding for victim services through the Crime Victims Fund (CVF), and VOCA has become an important source of support for CACs across the country. In 2020, federal funding—largely from VOCA—accounted for 41% of all CACs’ funding nationally, according to NCA CAC Census data.

How the cuts are affecting kids

Unfortunately, CACs have witnessed a decline in support from federal funding, particularly VOCA. By 2023, federal funding made up just 35% of total CAC funding, a 16% overall national decline in federal support for the services children need.

CACs have worked hard to backfill the loss of federal funding with state and local funding and support from private donors. But many state and local government replacement funding sources are temporary, one-time appropriations. Other funding sources, like individual giving or special events, are unpredictable and often have high overhead costs for nonprofits. No other source offers the stability and scale that federal funding can provide for critical services to child crime victims.

Federal Funding Challenges for the Child Advocacy Field



Rising costs + growing need = longer waits

- **Inflation is affecting the cost of services.** The cost of providing children with evidence-based services at CACs has increased, from \$1,849 per child in 2019 to \$2,263 in 2023.
- **Youth are in a mental health crisis, and need is skyrocketing.** A troubling trend: 46% of psychiatrists reporting increases in teenage clients between 2020 and 2022. The federal government estimates that fully half the U.S. population currently lives in a mental health provider shortage area. Children often come to CACs experiencing mental health crises that began even before the abuse.
- **Children are waiting longer to get treatment, harming their recovery.** Almost 4-in-10 CACs report clients must wait a month or longer to get an initial mental health appointment. In 2020, monthlong waits were only half as common. This wait for services can harm the child’s chances at interrupting the development of PTSD. Research shows that delivering treatment as soon as possible after the abuse event or after disclosure can reduce the likelihood that a child who has experienced trauma will develop PTSD.

Average Wait Times for Mental Health Treatments in the Community (2023 CAC Member Census)

AVERAGE WAIT TIME IN COMMUNITY	PROPORTION OF CACS' REPORTING THIS WAIT TIME	
	2020	2023
14 or fewer days	52%	31%
15 to 31 days	24%	26%
31 to 60 days	11%	21%
61 to 90 days	4%	8%
More than 90 days	6%	9%

How you can help children heal and thrive

CACs need predictable federal funding that ensures their critical services continue to be available to children across the United States. Currently, the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have Crime Victims Fund Stabilization bills before them, which would temporarily provide additional deposits into the Crime Victims Fund and avoid additional catastrophic cuts to VOCA funds available to victims services. That won't end the funding crisis, but it will put CACs on a secure path toward stable funding that meets the level of need in nearly 1,000 American communities.

Please support child crime victims and their families. Stabilize VOCA funds for Children’s Advocacy Centers and put our kids on solid footing. Thank you for your support for kids!