



Dallas County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)

Biennial Report 2021-2023

Per the requirement of the Texas Government Code 351.257, the Dallas County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) submits this biennial report. Per the code provision, the SART is required to submit a biennial report that:

- *Lists the response team members able to participate quarterly,*
- *Includes a written copy of the protocols developed under Texas Government Code 351.256 and*
- *Provides an explanation statement regarding the data that Texas Government Code 351.257 asks to be collected.*

List of Member Agencies Represented

- Dallas Police Department
Sgt. Christopher Adams
- Garland Police Department
- Richardson Police Department
- Dallas County District Attorney's Office
Amy Derrick
Trey Stock
Leighton D'Antoni
Mackenzie Kile
- The SANE Initiative
Courtney Underwood
- Parkland Health System
Brittany Pahl
- Texas Health Dallas
Sonia Sims
- Methodist Dallas Medical Center
Janaki Subramanian

- Baylor Scott & White Medical Center of Dallas
 - Dr. Lauren Fine*
 - Heather Joshua*
- Courtney's Safe Place
 - Amy Chennault*
- Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center
 - Amy Jones*
- A21
 - Carly Brown*
- The Turning Point
 - Wendy Hanna*
- Parkland VIP
 - Brittany Pahl*
- Dallas Children's Advocacy Center
 - Mark Bradford*
- Southwestern Institute of Forensic Sciences
 - Dr. Timothy Sliter*
 - Dr. Stacy McDonald*
- Texas Department of Public Safety Crime Lab
 - Rebecca Vieh*

2. Investigative Protocols are attached.

3. Statement on compliance with Texas Local Government Code § 351.252 is attached.

Dallas County Sexual Assault Response Team

Community Cooperative Working Agreement and Investigative Protocols

Mission:

The Dallas County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) is a multidisciplinary team whose mission is to facilitate and support a collaborative, trauma informed, victim-centered approach to the prevention of and response to sexual violence.

The Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)—The SART-- consists of representatives from the following agencies: Dallas County District Attorney's Office, Dallas County Crisis Support for Sexual Assault Survivors including Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center and The Turning Point, Dallas County SANE programs and support (Parkland Health Systems, Texas Health Dallas, Methodist Health Systems, Baylor Scott & White Medical Center of Dallas, Courtney's Safe Place, The SANE Initiative), Southwestern Institute of Forensic Sciences, Texas Department of Public Safety Crime Lab, participating law enforcement agencies including the Dallas County Sheriff, Dallas Police Department, any other law enforcement agency that investigates reports of sexual assault cases within Dallas County.

WE, the undersigned Agencies, by and through our designated representatives, agree to support the stated mission of the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT).

WE further hereby agree:

To minimize the revictimization of alleged sexual assault victims through the investigation, assessment, intervention, and prosecution processes.

To maintain a cooperative team approach to facilitate fair outcomes in the criminal justice systems through shared fact-finding and strong, collaborative case development.

To provide immediate and comprehensive case coordination, follow-up intervention, counseling, and advocacy services.

To provide for the extensive and continued training and education of those professionals working within the SART, and for those outside professionals in the community who work with victims of sexual assault.

To serve as a local and regional resource for information and education on sexual assault issues.

That this document should be reviewed and modified as deemed necessary by the MDT to ensure compliance with all state and federal laws as well as recognized best practices within the field, or upon a change of authorized partners.

That all State and Federal confidentiality laws will be followed in connection with this agreement.

Values:

I. VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACH

A. This approach is defined as the systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate and sensitive delivery of services in a nonjudgmental manner. In a victim-centered approach, the victim's wishes, safety, and well-being take priority in all matters and procedures.

B. A victim-centered approach seeks to minimize re-traumatization associated with the criminal justice process by providing the support of advocates and service providers, empowering victims as engaged participants in the criminal justice process and providing victims an opportunity to play a role in seeing justice served.

C. This approach is one of the most important aspects of the collaboration that arises from SARTs: the knowledge that we gain from a collaborative response to sexual assault in our community promotes trust among partners and seeks to keep victims at the center of our justice process.

II. TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

A. An understanding of trauma and its effects, as well as the principles of being trauma-informed, are key for service providers and criminal justice system professionals. We must understand trauma and its manifestations and approach all interactions through a trauma-informed lens.

B. Trauma-informed approach is a strengths-based framework that is responsive to the impact of trauma, emphasizing physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both SART responders and victims; and creates opportunities for victims to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. The approach:

1. Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery.
2. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in victims, families, staff, and others involved with the system.
3. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
4. Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.

III. REDUCE VICTIM-BLAMING

A. Victim blaming refers to attitudes or beliefs that hold victims partially or completely responsible for being sexually assaulted. Victim blaming typically utilizes the argument that if the victim had not made a particular choice, engaged in a particular activity, or acted in a particular way, this person would not have been assaulted. Victims usually engage in this type of second guessing and hearing any variation of this theme from others adds to the trauma already being experienced.

B. Through collaborative response and cross-agency training, the SART seeks to ensure that the blame for the crime remains set on those who perpetrated the crime.

IV. TEAM BUILDING BETWEEN AGENCIES

The relationships that we build with each other as members of the SART are essential to achieve positive outcomes in sexual assault cases. Collaborative response provides a systematic response that allows victims to feel supported, informed and involved. It is essential that this team make time to build and strengthen relationships and address issues that arise through a multi-disciplinary approach of its members, with the best interest of victims in mind. We must also search for ways to increase collaboration between the partners.

V. STANDARDS AND TRAINING

A. The MDT will ensure the policies and effort it puts forth promote best practices and effective intervention to address sexual assault in the county. To do this, SART Committee members will meet regularly to:

B. Members of the MDT will commit to attending and providing cross training opportunities between all partner agencies annually. Members also commit to respond to requests for cross training.

C. This Protocol will be reviewed and updated as needed by the MDT. As part of the implementation process, there is a commitment by all partners to provide training to their agencies on the Protocol and all updates thereafter.

D. The MDT will plan and implement effective prevention strategies and collaborate with other agencies, including educational institutions, to address sexual assault in the County. Areas of focus may include sexual assault perpetrated by strangers or persons known to the victim, predatory date rape, and drug-facilitated sexual assault.

MDT Agency Commitments:

1. The role of the **Dallas County District Attorney's Office (DA's office)** is to file appropriate criminal charges and to seek justice. Charging decisions shall be based upon the professional judgment of the District Attorney's Office.

The DA's Office makes the following commitments:

- i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the MDT.

- ii. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
 - iii. Maintain communication and contact with the MDT and establish a method for the follow-up of disposition of cases.
 - iv. Provide reasonable notification of upcoming trial(s) to all MDT participants.
 - v. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.
 - vi. Collaborate with advocacy to meet client needs regarding crime victim's rights, compensation and advocacy throughout investigation and prosecution.
 - vii. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.
- a. The roles of the **Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center (DARCC)** and **The Turning Point** are to provide immediate advocacy support to primary and secondary survivors of sexual assault through hotline response and in-person medical accompaniment during the forensic examination process with identified partner hospitals and to provide these same survivors follow up and ongoing counseling and criminal justice advocacy.
- DARCC and The Turning Point make the following commitments:
- i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART.
 - ii. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
 - iii. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.
 - iv. Collaborate with other members of the MDT to meet client needs regarding crime victim's rights, advocacy, and support throughout the criminal justice process.
 - v. Provide a simple call system with minimal phone calls that will facilitate rapid response to victim's needs.
 - vi. Demonstrate a 60-minute response time from the time of call received to time advocate arrives to the emergency department if advocate is not already present at facility.
 - vii. Provide hotline sexual assault victims with appropriate healthcare facility choices for medical assessment and medical forensic examination when requested.
 - viii. Provide information, emotional support and crisis intervention for sexual assault victims and their family members, and/or friends at the hospital.
 - ix. Provide appropriate referrals and follow-up care.
 - x. Provide follow-up intervention, counseling and advocacy services for victims and family members as requested.
 - xi. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.

2. The roles of the **Dallas County SANE programs** at: Parkland Health, Texas Health Dallas, Methodist Health Systems, Baylor Scott & White Medical Center of Dallas, and Courtney's Safe Place are to provide specialized medical evaluation and treatment services to victims of sexual assault. Medical evaluations are provided with expertise in sexual assault forensic examinations and specimen collection.

The SANE programs make the following commitments:

- i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART.
- ii. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
- iii. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.
- iv. Collaborate with advocacy throughout the medical evaluation.
- v. Staff will gain initial SANE Certification through an Office of the Attorney General of Texas (OAG)-approved SANE program within time allotted by the OAG *or* SANE-A/P certification through the International Association of Forensic Nurses within (IAFN) the time allotted by the IAFN.
- vi. Ensure all nurses will remain current with licensure requirements for their RN license.
- vii. Attend current topics for forensics, specific to Adult and Pediatric Sexual Assault examinations.
- viii. Ensure when their nurses are on call, demonstrate a one-hour response from time of call received to time SANE arrives at the facility if medical forensic examiner is not already present at facility.
- ix. Ensure their SANE(s) provide a process for the victim and/or family to receive information regarding crime victim's rights, compensation, and the right to advocacy.
- x. Provide a process for notification of law enforcement when sexual assault patient presents to their facility and wishes to make a law enforcement report (or if patient is incapacitated, makes such notifications as are needed to maintain the patient/legal representative's right to make a report if they wish to do so).
- xi. Ensure the SANE(s) provide the patient with the opportunity to be supported by an approved advocate during their medical/forensic experience.
- xii. Ensure their team provides consistency in the sexual assault examinations of patients.
- xiii. Ensure all nurses follow established guidelines for maintaining chain of custody for evidence collected.
- xiv. Assist with interpretation of data and improvement processes.
- xv. Ensure all nurses maintain a high level of competency through ongoing education and case reviews that will apply to their certification renewal.
- xvi. Provide SANE education and precepting of SANE candidates.

- xvii. Allow their nurses to meet with the District Attorney’s office to review cases prior to judicial proceedings.
 - xviii. Ensure nurses maintain contact with the District Attorney’s office when a case is pending or in process.
 - xix. Agree to meet with their team to discuss quality of care, peer, and procedural review.
 - xx. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.
3. The role of **Participating Law Enforcement Agencies** is, in their respective jurisdictions, to investigate reports of sexual assault. The decisions concerning the arrest of a perpetrator shall be based upon law and current department policy. Participating Law Enforcement Agencies make the following commitments:
- i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART.
 - ii. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
 - iii. Receive forensic evidence that has been collected from the patient and/or suspect for approved medical forensic exams and ensure timely submission to the laboratory for forensic testing.
 - iv. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.
 - v. Collaborate with advocacy to meet client needs regarding crime victim’s rights, compensation and advocacy throughout investigation and prosecution.
 - vi. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.
4. The roles of **Southwestern Institute of Forensic Sciences (SWIFS)** and the **Texas Department of Public Safety Crime Lab (DPS)** are to perform accurate, reliable, and impartial forensic testing in a timely manner. SWIFS and DPS make the following commitments:
- i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART.
 - ii. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
 - iii. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.
 - iv. Collaborate with members of the MDT to meet forensic needs throughout investigation and prosecution, including but not limited to reporting back to the SANE coordinators any suggestions concerning evidence collection, documentation, or packaging.
 - iv. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.

All parties enter into this collaborative working agreement voluntarily to better serve the needs of sexual assault victims in the community. The Agreement is not legally binding and may be amended at any time in writing and by mutual consent of the parties. Cancellation of any clause within the Agreement does not result in cancellation of any other clause in the Agreement. Any party to the Agreement may withdraw from the Agreement upon thirty (30)

days written notice; however, the withdrawal of any party will not result in the nullification of the Agreement nor of any part of the agreement.

This working agreement is recognized as a cooperative, collaborative commitment between each agency listed below, and is proof of commitment upon acceptance by each agency's representative.

Statement on compliance with Texas Government Code § 351.252

Dallas County is comprised of over 40 law enforcement agencies. Only three of those agencies regularly participate in SART. None of these three agencies or the non-participating agencies are under the jurisdiction of the Dallas County Commissioner's Court and have not provided data to the SART. The various members of the SART do not have independent access to this data. The Dallas County SART is unable to provide any data regarding indictments due to a lack of personnel and technological capabilities. The Dallas County SART does not value the collection of insufficient or erroneous data that could be misinterpreted by members of the public and as a result, is submitting this statement in compliance with Texas Government Code § 351.252.

This report was prepared as a collaborative effort between the following agencies:

Dallas Police Department

The SANE Initiative

Parkland Health System

Texas Health Dallas

Methodist Dallas Medical Center

Baylor Scott & White Medical Center of Dallas

Dallas County District Attorney's Office

Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center

Southwestern Institute of Forensic Sciences