

October 28, 2013

To: Interested Parties
From: Ben Tulchin and Corey O'Neil, Tulchin Research
Re: **New Statewide Poll on Californians' Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence – Strong Support for Treating Domestic Violence as a Health Issue**

Tulchin Research, on behalf of Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF), recently conducted a statewide survey of adults in California to better understand the public's perception of domestic violence and the ways in which it is addressed and prevented in our state. The survey found that Californians hold strong feelings about broadening our approach to dealing with domestic violence. Specifically, Californians believe more needs to be done by healthcare providers to screen and assess intimate partner abuse during routine exams.

BSCF is seeking ways to improve how California can prevent domestic violence from occurring and use research to gauge public opinion about what should be done to more effectively respond to incidents of domestic violence. As part of this effort, BSCF sought insights about where Californians currently seek help for domestic violence and the reasons that prevent them from getting the support they need before it gets out of hand. Furthermore, the Foundation wanted to explore how healthcare providers can play a role in addressing domestic violence, especially now that new healthcare policies will begin requiring healthcare providers to screen patients for domestic violence early next year.

There is growing evidence that family and community violence behaves like a disease and has a profound impact on personal and public health, and that domestic violence needs to be treated as more than a law enforcement and criminal issue. The survey tests the belief that doctors and nurses are uniquely positioned to identify the warning signs and stop violence before it starts.

Executive Summary

The survey finds that **an overwhelming number of adults believe domestic violence victims should seek outside help rather than keeping it a private matter, but agree victims may be just as afraid of police involvement in a dispute as they are about facing their abuser again.** Healthcare providers hold great promise as trusted sources for victims. Yet, a large majority of adults have never been asked by a doctor or nurse about threats they've received from a partner or spouse.

With this in mind, results show that the public wants **the healthcare community to become more engaged in dealing with domestic violence issues, including intervening sooner and directing victims to counseling and other services.** More than 8-in-10 of respondents approve of treating domestic violence as a public health issue and a similar number of adults favor training doctors and nurses to better screen patients for potential domestic abuse before it occurs.

Key findings from the survey are as follows:

- Adults in California strongly believe domestic violence victims should seek outside help or support (87 percent) as opposed to just 6 percent who view it as a private issue to be addressed within a family.
 - However, over 9-in-10 (91 percent) agree that domestic violence victims can be just as afraid of going to the police as they are of facing their abuser. This includes two-thirds (66 percent) of adults who *strongly* agree.
- Among types of people most-trusted to help with domestic abuse, domestic violence shelter workers (85 percent) and doctors (83 percent) are seen as most trustworthy.

Despite this finding:

 - Two-thirds of adults (67 percent) do not know where they would find a domestic violence shelter in their community; and
 - Three-quarters (75 percent) have never been asked by their healthcare provider about threats from their partner or spouse despite a strong majority of adults in California (60 percent) who report having a family doctor they would feel comfortable discussing personal domestic violence concerns with.
- Upon suggesting a different approach for dealing with domestic violence - one in which doctors and nurses screen patients for signs of abuse occurring in their home - more than four out of five Californians (81 percent) approve of this strategy.
- Respondents were also asked about including domestic violence screenings in regular medical checkups as a means of prevention. Over three quarters of adults (78 percent) favor expanding “women’s preventative health care services to include domestic violence screening and counseling, under new healthcare plans.”

Dealing with Domestic Violence - Challenging the Status Quo

One of the great challenges for victims of domestic violence is determining where and how to receive help. This is partly due to the consequences stepping forward might have for both the victim and their family, especially if law enforcement is involved. Despite these concerns, **Californians strongly believe domestic violence is an issue that victims should seek outside help and support for (87 percent)** as opposed to just 6 percent who feel it should be a private matter kept within a family.

Despite this strong perception that victims should seek help, Californians recognize that there are potential consequences for victims that step forward. Notably, **a similar number of respondents (91 percent) agree that “for various reasons, victims of domestic violence might be just as afraid about getting the police involved in their personal domestic violence dispute as they are about facing their abuser again.”** This includes two-thirds (66 percent) who *strongly* agree and just seven (7) percent who disagree, with three (3) percent undecided.

Domestic Violence Victims Fear of Police Involvement

Please tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: For various reasons, victims of domestic violence might be just as afraid about getting the police involved in their personal domestic violence dispute as they are about facing their abuser again?

Total Agree	91%
Strongly Agree	66%
Somewhat Agree	24%
Total Disagree	7%
Strongly Disagree	3%
Somewhat Disagree	4%
Undecided	3%
Agree – Disagree	+84

Further complicating matters is the fact that most adults in this state admit they are not sure how to find help for a victim of domestic violence. In fact, **two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) say they don't know how they would find a domestic violence shelter in their community.** Even more alarming, is that among those who self-reported as being a victim of domestic violence, a strong majority (54 percent) also don't know how to find a shelter in their community. This is particularly important given the fact that **Californians indicate they trust staff at domestic violence shelters the most when it comes to helping victims** (85 percent total trust, 56 percent trust a great deal).

Awareness of Domestic Violence Shelter in Community

If you needed one or needed to recommend one to someone, do you know where you would find a domestic violence shelter in your community?

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Domestic Violence Victim (Self)</u>	<u>Know DV Victim (Friend/Family)</u>
Yes	31%	45%	41%
No	67%	54%	58%
Undecided	1%	1%	1%
Yes - No	-36	-9	-17

Along similar lines, adults in California report a high degree of trust in healthcare professionals when it comes to helping victims, but have rarely been asked about domestic violence by their healthcare provider. Additionally, a strong majority of adults in California (60 percent) report having a personal family doctor they would feel comfortable discussing domestic violence concerns with. And while five out of six Californians (83 percent) trust doctors to be a source of assistance for victims of domestic violence, most adults (75 percent) report that they have never been asked by their doctor if they have been threatened or hurt by their partner or spouse.

Health Care Provider Asked About Domestic Violence

Have you ever been asked by your healthcare provider about whether you have been threatened or physically hurt by your partner or spouse?

Yes	24%
No	75%
Undecided	1%
Yes - No	-51

A New Approach to Domestic Violence

These results highlight the need to identify new access points and avenues for victims and potential victims to seek help sooner, before they face the difficult choice of involving law enforcement. In this context, the survey asked respondents their opinion about treating domestic violence more as a health issue, and thus enabling more early intervention and prevention through the healthcare system. **More than four out of five adults (81 percent) approve of health care professionals like doctors and nurses asking their patients about any troubles they may be having at home and to refer a victim or potential victim to counselors or other specialists to address the problem.** This also includes nearly half (46 percent) who *strongly* approve, and just 15 percent disapprove of approaching domestic violence in this way.

HealthCare Professional Screening for Domestic Violence

Some people have suggested that domestic violence should be treated more as a public health issue. Specifically, they believe healthcare professionals like doctors and nurses should look for signs of domestic violence among patients and, if necessary, ask the patient if they are experiencing problems at home. If they determine the patient is a victim of domestic violence, the victim could be referred for help. After hearing this, would you say you approve or disapprove of dealing with domestic violence in this way?

Total Approve	81%
Strongly Approve	46%
Somewhat Approve	36%
Total Disapprove	15%
Strongly Disapprove	8%
Somewhat Disapprove	8%
Undecided	3%
Approve – Disapprove	+66

This approach to preventing and treating cases or potential cases of domestic violence, with a more public-health oriented focus, is supported by over three quarters of respondents across nearly all key demographic groups. The table below illustrates the broad support across these groups:

**HealthCare Professional Screening for Domestic Violence
by Demographic Group**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Approve - Disapprove</u>
<i>Total</i>	81%	15%	+66
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	78%	18%	+60
Female	84%	13%	+71
<i>Party ID</i>			
Democrat	89%	9%	+80
Republican	73%	23%	+50
DTS/Other	83%	14%	+69
<i>Region</i>			
LA County	80%	15%	+65
LA Area	80%	18%	+62
Bay Area	88%	9%	+79
San Diego	90%	10%	+80
Sacramento/North	75%	24%	+51
Central Valley	76%	20%	+56
Inland Empire	79%	20%	+59
<i>Race</i>			
White	80%	17%	+63
Latino	84%	12%	+72
Black	83%	17%	+66
Asian	89%	9%	+80
<i>Age</i>			
18-49	84%	13%	+71
50+	78%	20%	+58
<i>Domestic Violence Victim (Self)</i>			
Yes	82%	15%	+67
No	81%	16%	+65

However, there are two potential challenges with this approach. Healthcare professionals may not have the proper training to effectively identify signs of domestic violence, and domestic violence screening and counseling has not always been covered under insurance plans. To solve this problem, a new policy aimed at expanding women's preventative healthcare services to include domestic violence screening and counseling is set to go into effect next year (in 2014). The survey asked respondents whether they favor or oppose this policy and the response was overwhelming in favor, with more than three-quarters (78 percent total favor, 48 percent strongly favor) in support of the policy.

Domestic Violence Screening Added to Preventative Care: Favor vs. Oppose

Currently, healthcare professionals receive little training on identifying signs of domestic violence and screening and counseling are not covered under most health insurance plans. A new policy will expand women’s preventative healthcare services to include domestic violence screening and counseling. Do you favor or oppose this new policy regarding how we screen victims of domestic violence?

Total Favor	78%
Strongly Favor	48%
Somewhat Favor	30%
Total Oppose	17%
Strongly Oppose	10%
Somewhat Oppose	7%
Undecided	4%
Favor – Oppose	+61

In sum, the survey found that the public views domestic violence as an issue that should be treated publicly in collaboration with the healthcare system. It also reveals that Californians are very supportive of new and expanded efforts by healthcare providers to provide early intervention, prevention, and screening to ensure victims get the services and support they need before problems in the home become more severe.

Survey Methodology: From October 8 – 15, 2013, Tulchin Research conducted a random-digital telephone survey among 800 adults in California of least 18 years of age or older using live, professional interviewers and conducting surveys in both English and Spanish and calling both landlines and cell phones. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3.46 percentage points.