

## Department of Defense Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program OVERVIEW

### Introduction

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, Section 584 required the Department of Defense (DoD) to establish a training and certification program for Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARC) and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Victim Advocates (VA). To meet this requirement, and to standardize sexual assault response to victims and professionalize victim advocacy roles, the Department established a certification program. This program consists of three prongs: a credentialing infrastructure for SARCs and SAPR VAs; a Competencies Framework; and the evaluation and oversight of SARC and SAPR VA training. Successful implementation of these three components enhances the quality of support victims receive and builds confidence in the Department's ability to respond to military sexual assault victims.

### Goals

The DoD Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program (D-SAACP) helps standardize sexual assault victim advocacy across the Department, professionalizes the roles of the SARCs and VAs who perform victim advocacy duties, and meets the certification requirements outlined in the FY12 NDAA. The D-SAACP accomplishes this by:

- 1. Improving the quality of response to sexual assault victims.** This certification program communicates to Service members and external stakeholders that the Department has a victim response approach consistent with national victim advocacy standards.
- 2. Recognizing how SARCs and SAPR VAs contribute to unit readiness by creating a climate of trust and mutual respect.** Certified SARCs and SAPR VAs address victim needs and may also mitigate sexual assaults negative effects on a unit.
- 3. Communicating to military leadership that victim advocacy is a specialized skill set.** By involving commanders in the selection of SARCs and SAPR VAs, commanders better understand the role and importance of the sexual assault advocacy function, and they gain confidence in the capabilities of their SARCs and SAPR VAs.
- 4. Demonstrating to Service members that victim advocacy leads to professional development.** Maintaining a certification requires SARCs and SAPR VAs to engage in continuing education and development that enhances teamwork and interpersonal skills, which in turn can increase their readiness to participate in a broader range of missions.

### Structure and Benefits

The National Organization for Victim Assistance administers the D-SAACP through a contract with the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office. This contract enables sexual assault responders to meet national standards and adds credibility to the Department's SAPR Program. The certification of SARCs and SAPR VAs is guided by a Competencies Framework, which identifies and organizes the core knowledge, skills, and attitudes for performing sexual assault victim advocacy. Finally, the Department enhanced the execution and oversight of training to ensure effectiveness and consistency with national standards. Together, the credentialing of SARCs and SAPR VAs, the Competencies Framework, and improved training standardizes the knowledge and skills required for effective sexual assault response and professionalizes the roles of SARCs and SAPR VAs.