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Talking Points: 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey

On Wednesday, Dec. 14, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS). This is an ongoing, nationally representative survey that assesses experiences of sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence among adult women and men in the United States. This large-scale ongoing study confirms many realities that advocates and educators already know about sexual violence, intimate partner violence and stalking: These forms of violence continue to be pervasive and deserve more attention and funding. It also sheds new light on the scope and context of these forms of violence.

The CDC has prepared an extensive toolkit that describes the survey methodology, best ways to interpret and use the data, tips for working with media and answers to frequently-asked questions. Some key findings pertaining to sexual violence are highlighted below.

- **Sexual violence continues to be a serious public health issue.** The survey data show that nearly 1 in 2 women (44.6%) and 1 in 5 men (22.2%) experience sexual violence other than rape throughout their lifetime. This may include behaviors such as sexual coercion, unwanted sexual touch and non-contact forms of sexual violence. In contrast, *rape* represents times when the victim, herself or himself, was sexually penetrated or there was an attempt to do so. The survey results show that 1 in 5 women have been raped in their lifetime. Additionally, approximately 1.3 million women reported being raped in the 12 months prior to taking the survey.
- **The study confirms that most victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence know the perpetrator.** This study categorized possible relationships as family members, person of authority, current or former intimate partner, acquaintance or stranger. NISVS reports that 51.1 percent of female survivors identified the perpetrator as a former or current intimate partner; and 40.8 percent of female survivors reported being raped by an acquaintance. Victims often feel too conflicted, scared, guilty or embarrassed to report it, yet will suffer the physical and emotional consequences. While non-stranger violence is the most prevalent, it is also the least reported.
- **Rape is often first experienced in youth, making it essential to prevent sexual violence in the first place.** The NISVS data shows that a majority of female survivors are raped before age 25, and more than one-fourth of male survivors were first raped at or before age 10. The impact of child sexual abuse left untreated can impact victims into adulthood. We know from other research (such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study) that exposure to sexual violence can result in serious long-term physical and mental health problems including depression, self-destructive behavior, anxiety, feelings of isolation and stigma, shame, poor self-esteem, difficulty in trusting others, a tendency toward re-victimization, substance abuse, and sexual maladjustment current health problems.
- **As advocates and educators, we believe that violence can be prevented and its impact can be reduced.** NISVS provides a compelling reason to support primary prevention initiatives to reduce sexual violence in our communities. The data from NISVS will help inform areas such as prevention & intervention efforts, strategic planning, policy and program development. Currently, the federal budget crisis has resulted in a 40 percent reduction to Rape Prevention Education awards, which has undermined critical efforts in California to prevent sexual assault throughout the state. Additionally, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is up for reauthorization for the first time since 2005. VAWA is integral to the success of primary prevention programs, as well as the ability to create a more cohesive, coordinated response for survivors of sexual assault. Rape crisis centers need the financial and policy support in order to address a change in social norms that contribute to violence. Primary prevention provides a proactive paradigm in which communities can identify how to nurture future generations to be healthier and less violent.

View the complete report and toolkit online at www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs, and additional supporting resources at calcasa.org/nisvs.

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