



What is the Witness Assistance Service?

The Witness Assistance Service (WAS) is a specialist service within the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) providing information and support to victims of crime and vulnerable witnesses in matters being prosecuted by the ODPP.

WAS Officers are qualified in areas such as social work, psychology and social sciences and are based at ODPP offices around NSW. WAS Officers understand both trauma and how the criminal justice system works. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander WAS Officers provide culturally appropriate support to victims who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.


The aim of the WAS is to provide information, court preparation and support to help reduce the trauma and stress associated with going through the criminal justice system. The WAS recognises that for many victims and vulnerable witnesses, the court process has the potential to exacerbate the trauma already experienced as a victim of crime.


WAS Officers provide support in sexual assault, domestic violence, homicide and driving death matters. Priority is given to children, people with disability and those experiencing mental health and/or severe trauma.

Getting in touch

Witness Assistance Service

The Witness Assistance Service can be contacted via the details below:

 **Sydney** (02) 9285 8606
Toll Free 1800 814 534

 **TTY** (02) 9285 8646
Telephone Interpreter Service 13 14 50

 odpp.nsw.gov.au

Please call about similar services in other States and Territories.

Other Useful Contacts

Homicide Victims Support Group

(02) 8833 8400
1800 191 777 (toll free 24hrs)

Victims Services

www.victimsservices.justice.nsw.gov.au

Victims Access Line (24hrs)

(02) 8688 5511
1800 633 063 (toll free)

Corrective Services

Victims Register

(02) 8688 6833

Visit NSW Health Sexual Assault Services for your nearest Sexual Assault Counselling Service

www.health.nsw.gov.au

What we do

Information and Referral

WAS Officers make early contact with victims to explain the court process and the role of the ODPP. They provide information on victims' rights/financial assistance that may be available, assess support in place and make referrals to counselling and other services as required. The WAS Officer works closely with the legal team and remains a point of contact from the early stages of the prosecution through to the matter being finalised, providing updates as the matter progresses through the court system.

Court preparation before a hearing or trial

A significant part of the WAS role is to provide information about going to court so victims and witnesses know what to expect. WAS Officers can assist in the following ways:

- Arranging meetings with the legal team to prepare for court
- Conducting a tour of the court and explaining the role of the judge/magistrate, jury, crown prosecutor, etc.
- Providing information about what to wear, when to arrive, what to bring, breaks at court and arrangements regarding safety
- Explaining the process of giving evidence
- Helping to organise court support and talking to the support person about their role
- Talking to the legal team about any special needs or concerns the victim or witness may have about giving evidence

Court updates and debriefing

An important role for WAS is liaising with the prosecution legal team to ensure victims are updated on the progress of their matter. WAS Officers will also meet with victims and vulnerable witnesses before major court dates and debrief afterwards. WAS Officers can help victims prepare for decisions the courts may make, such as a verdict of not guilty.

Victim Impact Statements

If an offender is convicted, victims harmed in crimes involving violence, sexual assault, death or injury, and family members of victims who died as the result of a crime, will usually have the opportunity to write a Victim Impact Statement (VIS). WAS Officers are experienced in assisting victims to write a Victim Impact Statement and can provide information about what to expect at the sentencing hearing.

Ongoing support

The WAS Officer's involvement finishes when a court matter ends, but referrals to ongoing community services can be made if further support is required. If the offender has been sentenced to gaol, the WAS Officer can make a referral to the Victims Register to ensure the victim is notified of significant changes to their custody arrangements including when they are eligible for release.

The emotional impact of crime

- Many victims and their families are emotionally affected by the crime. Although everyone reacts differently, some common impacts include:
- Increased concern for personal safety
- Issues with concentration
- Difficulty sleeping
- Depression or changes in mood/behaviours/coping skills
- Going over the events of the crime and thinking about what might have gone differently
- Experiencing a range of feelings that come and go, from anger to sadness, confusion and helplessness

All of these impacts are normal and may improve with time. Contact with support services and counsellors may help in managing the emotional impact of crime.