



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

Your Partner For A Stronger Arizona

Division of Aging and Adult Services

Adult Protective Services

State Fiscal Year 2021 Year in Review

July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021

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Adult Protective Services Year in Review

The State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021 Adult Protective Services (APS) Year In Review Report provides a summary of accomplishments throughout the year, including the response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic.

Statutory Authority

In 1980, the Arizona Legislature enacted the APS Act to protect vulnerable adults 18 years of age or older from abuse, neglect, and exploitation (Arizona Revised Statutes [A.R.S.] §§ 46-451 through 46-474). A vulnerable adult is defined as an individual age 18 and older, who is unable to protect themselves due to a physical or mental impairment (A.R.S. § 46-451[11]), or who a court has deemed incapacitated (A.R.S. § 14-5101[3]).

Guiding Values and Principles

APS Mission: Inspire hope with vulnerable adults by engaging and partnering with the individual, family, and community to ensure their self-determination, safety, independence, and highest quality of life.

APS Vision: Arizona's vulnerable adults thriving free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

The Arizona APS Program is a member of the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA), a national non-profit 501(c)(3) with members from all 50 states. NAPSA provides an opportunity for APS Programs to share information, solve problems, and improve vulnerable adult maltreatment response. As a component of their Code of Ethics,¹ NAPSA provides the guiding value of APS Programs, which states: "Every action taken by APS must balance the duty to protect the safety of the vulnerable adult with the adult's right to self-determination."

The Arizona APS Program aligns with additional components of NAPSA's Code of Ethics, including NAPSA's Principles and Practice Guidelines, and uses them to guide and inform its policies, procedures, and practices.

NAPSA's Principles:

- Adults have the right to be safe;
- Adults retain all their civil and constitutional rights, e.g. the right to live their lives as they wish, manage their own finances, enter into contracts, marry, etc. unless a court adjudicates otherwise;
- Adults have the right to make decisions that do not conform with societal norms as long as these decisions do not harm others; and
- Adults have the right to accept or refuse services.

Some Practice Guidelines for APS workers include, but are not limited to the following:

- Recognize that the interests of the adult are the first concern of any intervention;

¹ NAPSA (or APS) Code of Ethics - <https://www.napsa-now.org/about-napsa/code-of-ethics/>

- Focus on case planning that maximizes the vulnerable adult’s independence and choice to the extent possible based on the adult’s capacity;
- Avoid imposing personal values on others; and
- Use the least restrictive services first whenever possible - community-based services rather than institutionally based services.

APS Action Plan Accomplishments

In March of SFY 2020, an APS Action Plan² was released in response to recommendations from the Abuse and Neglect Prevention Task Force, the Arizona Executive Order 2019-03 issued by Governor Douglas A. Ducey relating to enhanced protections for individuals with disabilities, and feedback from a community stakeholder meeting hosted by APS and the Arizona Department of Health Services that included vulnerable individuals, their families, and the organizations that support them. The APS Action Plan outlines strategies and actions to strengthen the Arizona APS Program.

During SFY 2021, the APS Program continued efforts to implement strategies outlined in the APS Action Plan.

Develop a Social Services Rapid Response Team

In response to recommendations concerning the investigation of self-neglect reports, the APS Program was restructured to include units with investigators dedicated to responding to reports of self-neglect. APS provided specialized self-neglect training through NAPSA to APS investigators and supervisors in these units. In SFY 2021, 22 APS investigators and supervisors completed the NAPSA training curriculum. APS plans to introduce this material into the New Investigator Training curriculum in SFY 2022 to ensure that all new investigators receive this comprehensive training.

Cross-Training Between State Agencies

APS, in partnership with NAPSA, assembled a project team to develop and deliver training to individuals mandated to report vulnerable adult maltreatment. The project consisted of three primary deliverables: Computer-Based Training (CBT) for mandated reporters which is available to the [public](#), an APS Awareness Presentation, and enhancements to the current website that include comprehensive resources for mandated reporters and their employers.

A full-time Community Outreach Coordinator was hired in November of 2020 to provide presentations to community partners. Community outreach activities included sharing the presentation, “Arizona APS: Working Together to Protect Arizona’s Vulnerable Adults” to various groups across the State.

APS provided the presentation to the Arizona Peace Officers Standards and Training Board, to the Arizona Prosecuting Attorneys Advisory Council, and to the staff of the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), including 100 case management staff, 96 members of the leadership team, and to AHCCCS community partners via a town hall meeting.

² APS Action Plan - March 2020 <https://www.azdhs.gov/director/index.php#aps-stakeholders>

Twenty-eight presentations have been provided to the following:

- Area Agencies on Aging;
- Fire Departments;
- a variety of medical health professionals across the state; and
- The Arizona Department of Economic Security (ADES) Program staff in other areas who work with vulnerable adults.
 - Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD): 418 Support Coordinators; and
 - Division of Employment and Rehabilitation Services (DERS), Vocational Rehabilitation program: 86 Counselors.

Legislative Recommendations

Significant legislation to protect vulnerable adults went into effect during SFY 2021 with the enactment of Laws 2021, Chapter 350 on May 10, 2021. The bill expanded the types of professionals mandated to report abuse, neglect, and exploitation of a vulnerable adult by adding 'health professional,' as defined in A.R.S. § 32-3201. Among those added were health professionals licensed in Arizona, including chiropractors, dentists, behavioral health professionals, veterinarians, naturopathic physicians, physician assistants, physical therapists, athletic trainers, and massage therapists.

APS Recruitment and Retention

At the start of SFY 2020, APS deployed a number of retention strategies. Position descriptions, job announcements and qualification requirements were revised to attract new talent. A [recruitment video](#) was also created to allow potential applicants to visualize what the job entails. APS participated in nine hiring events and held open continuous recruitment for all APS vacancies in addition to establishing a more streamlined and efficient hiring process to bring on qualified individuals faster. As a result, APS added 25 new investigators over the course of the year and successfully piloted a case review team to improve quality of case management and supervisor retention.

APS also began designing an enhanced New Investigator Training and Onboarding (NITO) Program. This 12-week program includes training activities utilizing several learning methods including Computer-based training, virtual Google Classroom, Virtual Instructor-Led Training (VILT), and field training with seasoned investigators and supervisors. The program is enhanced by training material provided by NAPSA following established guidelines that bring Arizona in line with national best practices in APS. NITO will be deployed in SFY 2022.

Finally, APS piloted an internship program to allow college students to gain real-world experience and college credit for learning about and supporting APS. Two college students from Arizona State University participated in the pilot during the Spring 2021 semester and indicated the experience was valuable for both their education and future career opportunities. APS will be continuing to expand this program during SFY 2022, including working with additional colleges and universities throughout the state.

Outreach and Education/Community Engagement

As part of the APS Action Plan to increase awareness of vulnerable adult maltreatment and self-neglect, APS created a Community Outreach Coordinator position to provide presentations giving an overview of APS to community partners, providers, and stakeholders. Additionally, a specially-developed Arizona [APS Mandated Reporter Training CBT](#) was developed for the public. Among the governmental entities that participated in the pilot for the mandated reporter training were AHCCCS, the ADES Division of Benefits and Medical Eligibility, ADES DDD, ADES DERS, the ADES Office of Continuous Improvement, and the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council. Feedback from pilot participants was incorporated into the training. This CBT was added on the APS website at the start of SFY 2022.

During SFY 2021, the Community Outreach Coordinator provided the APS overview and mandated reporter presentations to various groups across the state, including Area Agencies on Aging, AHCCCS Leadership, Arizona Prosecuting Attorneys' Advisory Council, Financial Planners of Arizona, Southern Arizona Law Enforcement Training Center, Support Coordinators from DDD, fire department personnel, and medical professionals.

Data Dashboard/Data Sharing Opportunities

The APS Program launched and enhanced a public-facing dashboard to increase transparency and timely access to APS data. The [APS Dashboard](#) includes data on allegations, caseload, alleged perpetrators, demographics, communications and reporting sources, and is updated monthly.

COVID-19: Impact on the APS Program

The onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic required APS to modify its investigation practices while continuing its efforts to ensure the safety of vulnerable adults and staff. In adherence with federal and state pandemic guidelines, APS followed the policy and procedures for pandemic and emergent situations developed in SFY 2020, increased the availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to investigators, and made COVID-19 vaccines available to APS staff through the State Employee Vaccination Program that began in January 2021.

During SFY 2020 and into SFY 2021, APS utilized a virtual investigation model in which investigators observed and interviewed clients using either an electronic device such as a tablet or through a barrier, such as a window or glass door, whenever possible in non-emergency situations. The APS Investigator continued to use client assessment and safety assessment tools to evaluate the client's service needs and safety. When safety concerns could not be mitigated or needs could not be addressed through referrals, the APS Investigator, in consultation with the APS Supervisor, would make in-person contact with the client using COVID-19 safety protocols. When it was not reasonable or practical to interview the client virtually or to observe a client through a barrier, APS interviewed the client over the phone. APS also conducted virtual and telephonic interviews with individuals named as alleged perpetrators and others with information pertinent to the investigation. APS intends to evaluate the use of virtual and telephonic interviews in its post-pandemic protocol, where appropriate, as a way to continue to drive efficiency in investigations.

In May of 2020, APS received a grant for \$198,000 from the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission for first responders. While APS staff are not medical first responders, APS caseworkers are the first responders to reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older adults. Because older adults are at the highest risk of contracting COVID-19, those working in the APS field need to take special care with their clients - the majority of whom are over the age of 60. This funding allowed for the purchase of the tablets and internet services for virtual investigations as well as PPE, vehicle sanitation and other critical supplies to allow APS to continue its critical operations throughout the pandemic and to support the health and safety of clients and investigators.

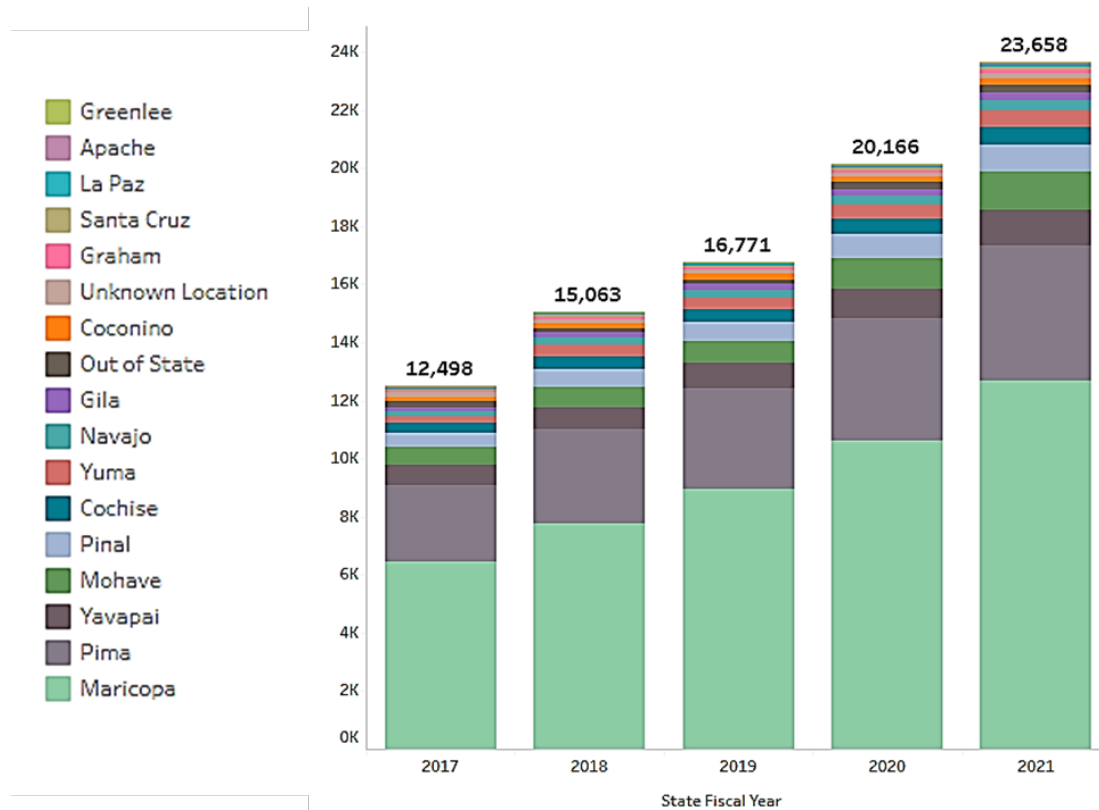
In SFY 2021, APS also received \$2 million of funding through the Coronavirus Response And Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021. This funding was allocated to support and enhance investigations through the pandemic and beyond. A portion of this funding was used to bring on additional investigators to address the increasing caseload throughout the course of the pandemic and additional vehicles were purchased to support investigations in remote areas. Since APS staff face increased exposure to COVID-19 in performing the daily duties of their jobs, a portion of these funds was allocated for hazard pay for those risking their health to serve vulnerable adults. Another portion of the funding is being used to launch a scam awareness campaign to alert individuals to the dangers of scams and how to report suspected scam victimization to APS. In addition, technology enhancements supported by this funding include routing software to enhance the efficiency of commuting between client homes and efax software to allow for faster and more secure transmission of critical documents.

Reports and Caseload

APS continues to experience Year over Year (YoY) growth in new reports of abuse, neglect and exploitation, with new report growth for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021 above 17 percent YoY and projected to be at or just above 15 percent in FY 2022 and 15.6 percent in FY 2023. This breaks down to a projected 27,251 new reports in SFY 2022 and 31,496 in SFY 2023, respectively. Continued growth is attributed to greater public awareness of the problem of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults and the Adult Protective Services program, legislative attention to the problem, legislative change to expand the list of mandated reporters, and the increase in the population of Arizona.

In SFY 2021, APS received 52,520 communications into its Central Intake Unit, resulting in 23,658 new reports of neglect, abuse, and exploitation. The average caseload in SFY 2021 was 36 cases per investigator. In accordance with the APS Action Plan, APS aims to reduce the caseload to 25 cases per investigator. Utilizing recruiting and retention techniques outlined above, APS continues to recruit investigators to reduce this caseload.

[New Reports of Neglect, Abuse and Exploitation by County - Demographics dashboard SFY Comparison 2017 to 2021](#) *



Administration for Community Living Grant Awards

ACL Grant - APS Data System Replacement

In SFY 2018, the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living (ACL) awarded APS with a grant to strengthen its use of data and technology. The data and technology grant was to replace the Arizona APS System, an outdated, web-based, internally-developed system that had been in use for more than ten years. WellSky was selected in March 2020 to provide a cloud-based solution. During SFY 2021, the focus was on configuring and testing the new system, myAPS, to ensure its integrity in preparation for its launch in SFY 2022. Once implemented, APS will have an operationally efficient system allowing better workflow, visibility, and reporting capabilities throughout the entire APS process.

ACL Grant for Enhanced Investigations

APS received an additional three-year grant from ACL in SFY 2020 to enhance APS investigator training and improve the capacity of the program to meet the needs of vulnerable adults. The three-year grant funds were allocated to improve the training and onboarding of new investigators and enroll current investigators in competency-based training offered by NAPSA. In partnership

with NAPSA, additional components of this grant initiative included conducting a supervisor training needs assessment which was used to prioritize the list of training topics to be developed and delivered for Arizona APS supervisors, and creating and offering an online mandated reporter training course.

- **NAPSA Certification**

NAPSA certification is a nationally recognized APS core curriculum training program developed by the NAPSA Education Committee and the APS Workforce Innovations at San Diego State University's Academy for Professional Excellence. The NAPSA APS core curriculum offers e-learning modules for each of the 23 core competencies identified by NAPSA as information necessary in the practice of APS.³ APS investigators complete the estimated 33 hours of e-learning modules within a structured program consisting of a set number of modules per week. In SFY 2021, APS contracted with NAPSA to offer investigators the opportunity to pursue certification through NAPSA in conjunction with this training.

Investigators who have two years of APS investigation experience are eligible to apply to NAPSA for their certification upon completing the core competency modules. Fifty-six investigators completed the training program and were in the process of being certified as of the end of SFY 2021. The remaining APS investigators will complete this training curriculum in cohorts through the remainder of the three-year grant cycle.

- **Supervisor Training**

APS, with input from NAPSA's Supervisory Curriculum Advisory Committee, reviewed the results from the Supervisor Needs Assessment, conducted May 2020, and prioritized core supervisor training courses to be developed by NAPSA. The *Supervising a Remote Workforce* training module was developed and delivered by NAPSA. The pilot took place in January 2021 with a group of ten participants. It will be deployed to all supervisors in SFY 2022.

Building Effective APS Teams and *Supervisor as Trainer* were two NAPSA Core Supervisor Training modules piloted to Arizona APS supervisors by NAPSA curriculum developers/trainers in July, 2021. Each training session was attended by 13 APS supervisors. Feedback from participants about the most valuable component of the training modules included learning new resources that can be utilized to train staff and how information on trauma-informed practice helped increase their awareness of what investigators experience in terms of trauma. These are scheduled to be deployed to all supervisors in SFY 2022.

During SFY 2021, NAPSA and the Arizona APS Program worked to develop four additional supervisor core training modules scheduled to pilot in SFY 2022:

- *Onboarding New Staff,*
- *Coaching and Mentoring for APS Professionals,*

³ NAPSA - NAPSA Certificate Program - The National APS Certificate Program
<https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.napsa-now.org/the-napsa-certificate-program/&sa=D&ust=1599849187609000&usq=AFQjCNFxBUX13Jh2rbEJKeyhmf2KnmC18Q>

- *Supervising Virtual investigations, and*
- *Supervising APS Investigations of Transnational Financial Fraud Crimes.*
- Supervisor Mentoring Program

The Supervisor Mentoring Program was launched in March 2021 and met once a month for eight sessions, ending in October 2021. The goals of the program were to:

- Develop a clear understanding of the benefits of using the NAPSA Field Guide for APS;
- Discuss coaching resources to assist in the development of core competencies; and
- Create an Arizona-specific Field Guide and Supervisor Answer Key.

The sessions were facilitated by NAPSA. A Train the Trainer (T4T) for the Supervisor Mentoring Program is under development with a pilot scheduled for SFY 2022. The T4T, which will be offered to APS supervisors, experienced investigators, leadership, and trainers, will allow for the sustainability of the supervisor mentoring training program within the Arizona APS Program.

- New Investigator Training and Onboarding

A NITO workgroup was established with the purpose of developing an enhanced statewide training and onboarding process for new investigators and providing resources for supervisors. The enhanced NITO Program currently in development incorporates on-the-job training activities including activities from the *Arizona Field Guide for Adult Protective Services*, Google Classroom self-directed activities, CBT, and VILT. Once deployed in SFY 2022, new investigator training will increase from 2 weeks to 12 weeks, providing a more robust and comprehensive training experience for new investigators, who will then have the foundation to carry a larger caseload sooner than they otherwise would have.

More Information

More information can be found on the APS website at: <https://des.az.gov/services/basic-needs/adult-protective-services>.