



## **SAFESTAR: A Unique Model of Healthcare for American Indian/Alaska Native Communities**

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The Office on Violence Against Women, United States Department of Justice has partnered with the Southwest Center for Law and Policy and the International Association of Forensic Nurses to develop and implement SAFESTAR (Sexual Assault Forensic Examinations, Safety, Training, Access, and Resources). SAFESTAR is a unique model of care that draws upon the strength and resilience of Indigenous women to provide compassionate, holistic care for victims while working to end sexual violence in their communities. Specially selected and qualified American Indian/Alaska Native women participating in the SAFESTAR course learn the skills necessary to:

- Deliver emergency First Aid to sexual assault survivors
- Provide referrals for follow-up medical, traditional, and other care
- Educate communities on the harm caused by sexual violence and lead the way back to healthy, respectful ways of living
- Collect sexual assault forensic evidence ("rape kits") to promote accountability for perpetrators

### **What is a “SAFESTAR”?**

A SAFESTAR is a specially selected woman who has successfully completed the USDOJ approved, 40-hour, intensive SAFESTAR training course. She is trained and qualified to provide emergency first aid, health care referrals, ongoing support, and forensic healthcare examinations to sexual assault victims. SAFESTARs also take a stand against sexual violence in their communities and support all victims of sexual violence.

### **What does the SAFESTAR course cover?**

The 40-hour course covers emergency First Aid (utilizing the American Heart Association's curriculum); anatomy; an overview of the prevalence, dynamics and responses to sexual violence in American Indian/Alaska Native communities; forensic evidence collection (“rape kits”); health care referrals; confidentiality; federal and tribal sexual assault laws; service referrals; and community outreach and education.

## **How was SAFESTAR developed?**

SAFESTAR was developed by the [Southwest Center for Law and Policy](#) in collaboration with the International Association of Forensic Nurses, tribal and federal victim advocates, criminal justice professionals, and health care experts. The curriculum incorporates many of the same components of the [Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner \(SANE\)](#) certification course, but is designed for laypersons in American Indian/Alaska Native communities.

## **Is the SAFESTAR curriculum recognized or approved by any federal agencies?**

Funding for SAFESTAR is provided by the United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women. The SAFESTAR curriculum has been approved by the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Indian Health Service, and the United States Department of Justice.

## **Can SAFESTAR collected evidence be used in Tribal, state, and/or federal criminal prosecutions?**

Yes. The SAFESTAR forensic evidence collection kits have been approved by the FBI Crime Lab and may be analyzed by that crime lab or by state crime labs (depending upon your jurisdiction). Following the completion of the training, federal, Tribal (and, in some jurisdictions, state) criminal justice professionals meet with the SAFESTARS to develop specific protocols for transportation of evidence to the appropriate crime lab; to discuss discovery and mandatory reporting issues; and to otherwise ensure a seamless, collaborative implementation of the program.

SAFESTARS may testify as "fact witnesses," "eye witnesses," or "percipient witnesses" as to the evidence that they observed and collected. Utilizing a SAFESTAR may require prosecutors to put on the additional testimony of an "expert witness" to interpret any physical evidence that was collected by the SAFESTAR for the judge or jury.

## **Why bring SAFESTAR instead of a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner in to my community?**

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners [SANEs] are the "gold standard" for healthcare and forensic evidence collection. Ideally, every sexual assault victim in the United States should have access to a culturally competent SANE who is available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. However, at this time, most sexual assault victims in American Indian/Alaska Native communities lack any meaningful access to Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners. Until universal SANE access becomes the Indian Country norm, SAFESTAR can help mitigate the long-term, adverse health consequences of sexual violence while collecting and preserving forensic evidence that would otherwise be lost.

SAFESTARs serve victims who might not otherwise be served. They are an

“emergency stopgap measure” to ensure that American Indian/Alaska Native women have some access to emergency sexual assault First Aid, health care referrals, traditional medicine, service referrals, and collection/preservation of evidence that would otherwise be lost.

### **Are SANEs and SAFESTARs mutually exclusive?**

No. Use of a SAFESTAR and of a SANE is not mutually exclusive. SAFESTARs are trained to encourage those victims seeking access to criminal justice responses to seek a Sexual Assault Forensic Examination conducted by a SANE, if one is available. SAFESTARs can accompany a victim to an available SANE conducted forensic examination, educate the SANE on cultural norms and etiquette, and provide important post-examination support and referrals. Local SANEs can also be trained to refer victims back to their Tribal SAFESTAR program to access traditional healing modalities and resources.

### **Who can become a SAFESTAR?**

The successful candidate must be acknowledged as a respected person in her community and must not have any felony convictions or convictions for “crimes of moral turpitude” in the past 10 years (such as shoplifting, embezzlement, or theft). She may not be employed by law enforcement, prosecution, or the courts and must be a compassionate, trusted woman dedicated to improving safety, health care, support, and justice for sexual assault victims and their families. For a more detailed discussion of selection criteria, please contact the Southwest Center for Law and Policy at 520-623-8192 or by email at [obrien@swclap.org](mailto:obrien@swclap.org).

### **Who teaches the SAFESTAR course?**

SAFESTAR is taught by a team of committed, experienced women dedicated to eradicating sexual violence in American Indian/Alaska Native communities and to supporting victims, families, and communities. SAFESTAR instructors include Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs), lawyers, Native community health experts, victim advocates, traditional healers, and experts on tribal governance and community organizing.

### **Where is the SAFESTAR course taught?**

The SAFESTAR course is delivered on-site directly to American Indian / Alaska Native communities.

### **How much does it cost to bring the SAFESTAR course to my community?**

Qualified participants pay no cost to attend the SAFESTAR training. SAFESTAR is funded through the United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women and is free of charge to Alaska Native/American Indian communities that have

successfully completed the application process. American Indian/Alaska Native communities may also elect to self-fund the SAFESTAR course.

**How can I bring SAFESTAR in to my community?**

You may contact the Southwest Center for Law and Policy at 520-623-8192 and speak to Program Director Arlene O'Brien (*Tohono O'odham Nation*) to begin the SAFESTAR application process. Ms. O'Brien may also be reached via email at [obrien@swclap.org](mailto:obrien@swclap.org)