

# Virginia's Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) Data Collection, January 2017–December 2022



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### Background

The Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) is an innovative approach used to help identify victims of domestic violence (DV) who are at the highest risk (high danger) of being seriously injured or killed by their intimate partners.

Based on evidence that victims who access domestic violence services reduce their risk for serious injury/homicide,<sup>1</sup> LAP provides an “immediate, consistent, and proportional response” through use of a two-stage protocol: (1) a standardized, evidence-based lethality assessment tool is used by trained law enforcement officers (LEOs) in response to an intimate partner domestic violence call to identify victims in high danger of serious injury or homicide, and (2) identified victims are immediately connected to a local domestic violence service program through a local domestic violence hotline. This protocol can also be expanded for use by other first responders such as health care professionals.

### Steps in the LAP protocol

- A law enforcement officer responding to an intimate partner domestic violence (IPDV) call believes the victim may be in danger.
- The officer asks the victim to answer 11 questions that make up the Lethality Screen for First Responders. The victim may decline, but if they agree, the officer proceeds with the questions.
- If the victim's responses to the questions indicate they are at high risk for homicide/serious injury (or if the officer believes the victim is at high risk), the officer continues to the referral stage.
- The officer states he/she is going to “place a phone call to the local 24-hour domestic violence hotline to seek advice” and encourages the victim to speak with the counselor/advocate. The victim may decline, but if they agree, the domestic violence hotline advocate will encourage the victim to seek services to increase their safety.

### LAP in Virginia

The nationally recognized LAP model was developed by the Maryland Network to End Domestic Violence in 2005 and has been used in Virginia since 2012 through collaboration between the Office of the Attorney General, the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), and the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance.

Since data collection began in January 2017, the number of participating LAPs in Virginia increased substantially. In the first reporting period (January–June 2017), there were nine participating DV agencies and 13 participating law enforcement agencies. Currently, 54 law enforcement agencies (LEAs) are partnering with 29 domestic violence agencies across the state to implement LAP in Virginia.

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<sup>1</sup> Messing, J. T., Campbell, J. C., Wilson, J. S., Brown, S., Patchell, B., & Shall, C. (2014). *Police departments' use of the Lethality Assessment Program: A quasi-experimental evaluation*. U.S. Department of Justice, Award No. 2008-WG-BX-0002

DCJS is collecting data from participating localities to inform program effectiveness, with the hope of decreasing intimate partner homicides and law enforcement injuries and fatalities, and an increase in victim safety. While reporting LAP data biannually to DCJS is not mandated, most LAP programs regularly report.

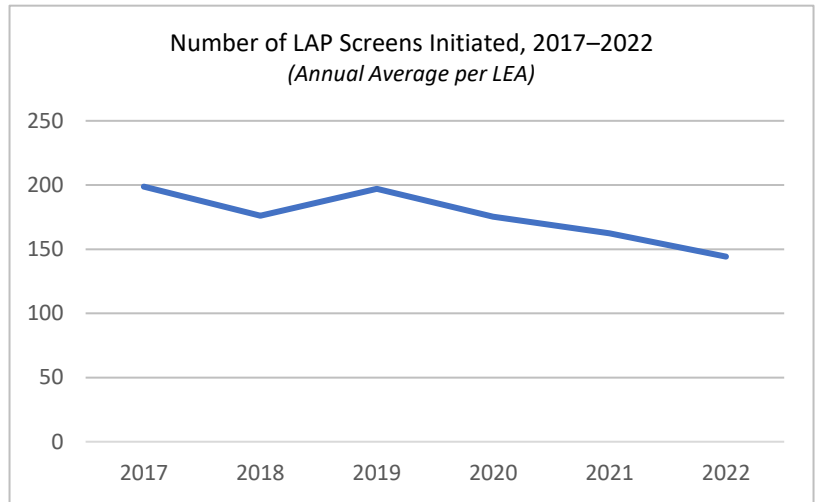
**Methodology used**

LAP programs voluntarily provide data on LAP screenings, lethality assessment questions, victims’ responses to seeking services, and law enforcement and victim homicide data. Most programs provide their data each six-month period. Collection of this information began on January 1, 2017.

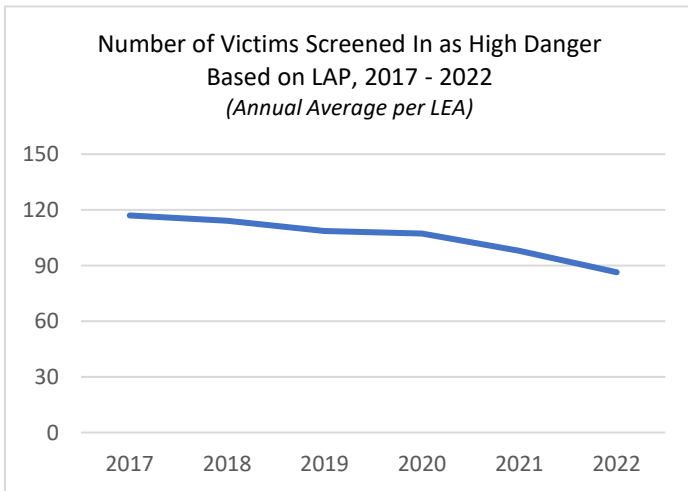
For each LAP data collection question, the monthly numbers reported by the programs are summed by year, annual averages of reporting law enforcement agencies or domestic violence agencies are calculated, and annual averages for responses to each question are shown graphically. Averages allow data to be compared over time using statewide rates. A summary of select data collected since 2017 follows.

**Lethality assessment screening**

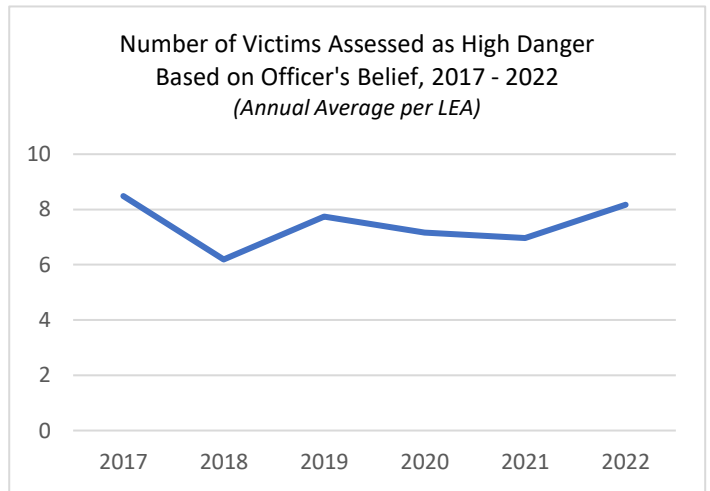
Law enforcement officers ask victims of intimate partner domestic violence whether they are willing to respond to a set of questions (lethality assessment screening questions) to assess their level of danger. Victims may decline or agree to answer the questions. When victims agree to respond to the screening questions, a LAP screen protocol is initiated. After the LAP screening questionnaire is completed, a victim’s level of danger is assessed based on their responses to the set of questions.



Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 34,691



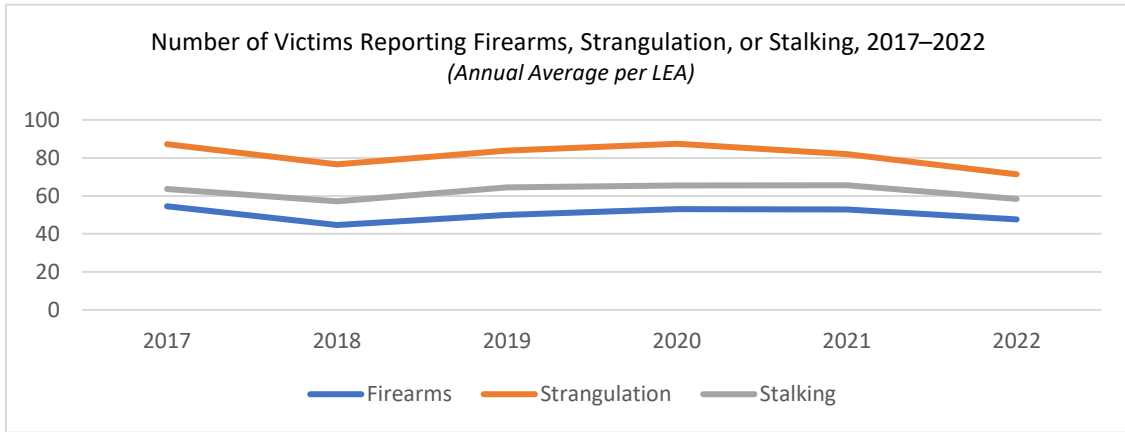
Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 20,657



Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 1,449

### Offender abuse history and access to firearms

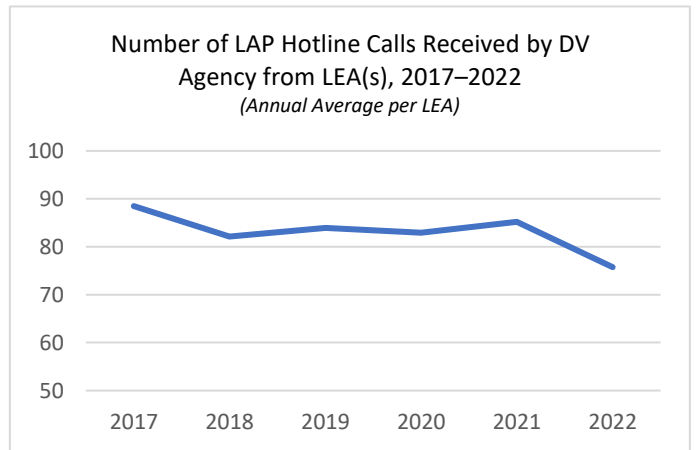
Among the 11 questions that make up the LAP, three provide information about the offender's abuse history and access to firearms.



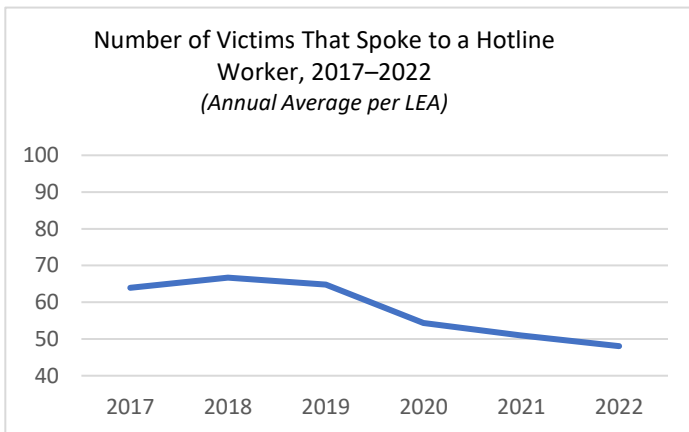
Firearm – Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 10,076  
 Strangulation – Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 15,997  
 Stalking – Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 12,476

### DV hotline calls and victim response to DV services

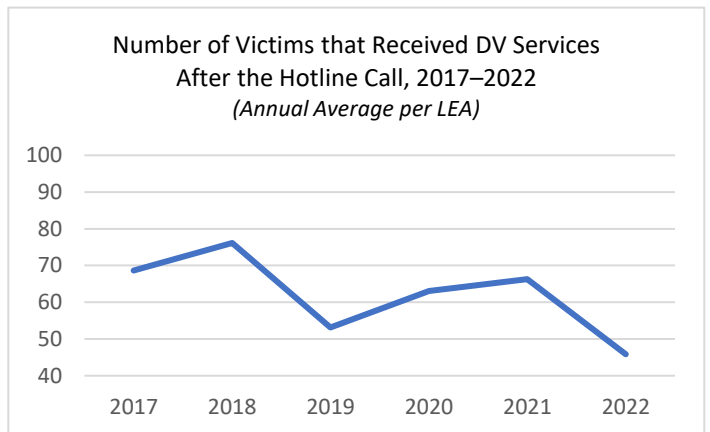
The LAP protocol states that a law enforcement officer should place a call to the partnering DV agency's hotline when a victim is identified as high danger. After the officer places the call to the DV hotline, the victim is given the opportunity to speak with the hotline counselor. The victim may agree or decline. The victims that agree to speak with a DV hotline counselor are informed of services available for victims of IPDV. Some victims decide to receive services; some decide not to. Research shows DV services increase victims' safety and decrease their risk of being killed by their abuser.



Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 15,400



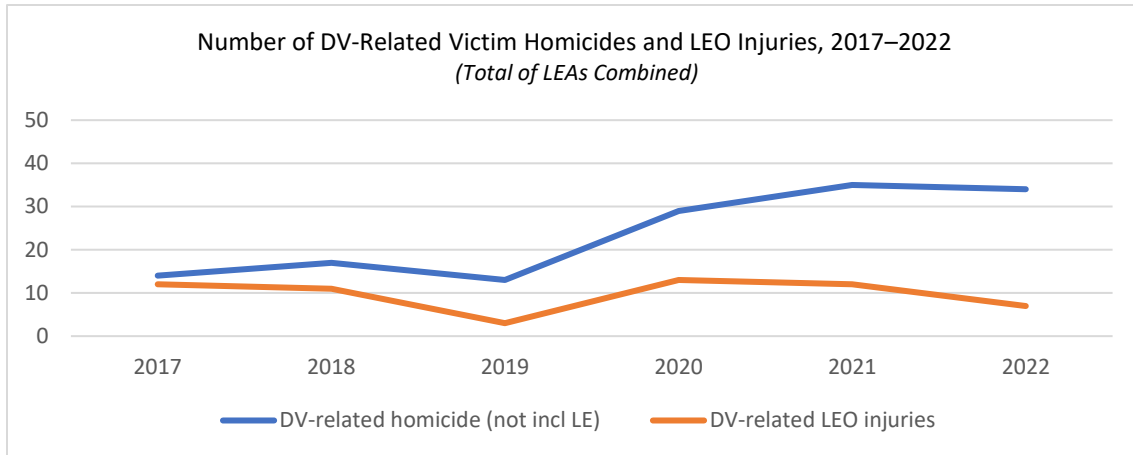
Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 11,431



Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 6,745

### DV-related homicide/law enforcement injury data

Data are collected on IPDV-related homicides and DV-related injuries to law enforcement from the program localities.



DV-related homicides (not including LE) – Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 142

LEOs injured while responding to a DV call – Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 58

LEO deaths while responding to a DV call – Total from all LAP programs 2017–2022: 0