



# Northeastern

## ***Vicarious Trauma Toolkit (VTT): Evidence-Based Support for Victim Assistance Professionals, Law Enforcement Officers and Other First Responders***

**Statement of the Problem:** Professionals working in the fields of victim assistance, law enforcement, emergency medical services, and other first responders, are regularly exposed to violent traumatic events. These events can include both mass casualty events and the ongoing, everyday responses to individual victims and survivors of sexual assaults, intimate partner violence, shootings, homicides and other violent events. Research has shown that these first responders frequently experience traumatic stress symptoms, a phenomenon referred to as secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, or compassion fatigue. It can be characterized by preoccupation with intrusive imagery from clients' experiences, numbing or avoidance, hyper vigilance, anxiety, irritability, angry outbursts, and by reduced capacity to be empathetic and/or effective with those they serve. Raising awareness and preventing and treating symptoms are all extremely important to the health and wellbeing of these first responders, how they interact with their families, friends, and colleagues, and how to ensure the health of their organizations and the quality of the services they provide.

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**Goals and Objectives:** The primary goal of this project is to develop and test the effectiveness of a state-of-the-field training and technical assistance toolkit to support agencies' responses to vicarious trauma. The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit (VTT) will be created for the following targeted end users: victim service providers, law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical personnel and other first responders to situations where people are victimized by violence. It will have information applicable for those responding to mass casualty events, and for those chronically exposed to trauma when interacting with individual crime victims. While targeted at these specific populations, the expectation is that it will be relevant to other professional disciplines as well. The VTT project has the following specific objectives:

- 1. Review the literature and survey the field to assess existing policies, practices, procedures, and protocols and identify both evidence-based and promising practices**
- 2. Conduct a gap analysis to determine what is lacking in current processes to identify, prevent, and treat the effects of vicarious trauma**

3. ***Develop training and technical assistance toolkit resources to guide organizations' selection and implementation of the evidence-based and promising practices identified***
4. ***Conduct a national-scope, multi-site pilot test of implementation of the VTT. Pilot sites will be geographically and demographically diverse and require collaboration among first responder end users***
5. ***Evaluate and refine the VTT for OVC review and dissemination to the field***

**Lead Team:** Northeastern University's Institute on Urban Health Research and Practice (IUHRP), the grantee for this project, includes a highly experienced, multidisciplinary Lead Team:

- **Beth E. Molnar, ScD**, Principal Investigator, Associate Professor, and Associate Director of the IUHRP
- **John Auerbach, MBA**, Distinguished Professor, IUHRP Director
- **Janet E. Fine, MS**, Project Director
- **Karen Kalergis, MA**, Product Coordinator
- **Katherine Manners, MEd, LMFT** Resource Coordinator (at BIDMC)
- **Lisa Tieszen, MA**, Resource Coordinator (at BIDMC)
- **Aviva Kurash, MSW**, Oversight – IACP (at IACP)
- **Gina Scaramella, MSW**, Clinical Coordinator (at BARCC)

**National and Local Partners:** An exciting collaboration of national and local agencies is working together with the Lead Team to provide advice, promote participation in resource gathering and pilot testing by their large networks of professionals, and contribute experience and expertise in decisions made about policies/practices/procedures/protocols to include in the VTT.

**Project partners include:**

- **Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Center for Violence Prevention & Recovery**
- **Boston Area Rape Crisis Center**
- **International Association of Chiefs of Police**
- **International Association of Fire Chiefs**
- **International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies**
- **National Association of State EMS Officials**
- **National Center for Victims of Crime**
- **National Children's Advocacy Center**

**Project Timeline:** This project is supported by two years of grant funding from the Office for Victims of Crime, Department of Justice, beginning in January 2014 and concluding at the end of December 2015.