

March 16, 2020

# OFFICIAL STATEMENT FROM THE WOMEN AND GENDER ADVOCACY CENTER

Regarding: COVID-19

**WGAC is committed to transparency and believes in empowered, informed and collaborative decision-making at all levels. With this in mind, core staff have been working with university officials to formulate a plan for our Center amidst the growing concerns surrounding COVID-19.**

Transparency also means we feel compelled to share some of the questions we've been grappling with while creating a plan (or more accurately, many plans) for the WGAC. As our mission statement indicates, we are committed to eradicating all forms of oppression in our communities. **As such, we are beholden to explore issues of equity and access as we navigate this crisis. Some of the things we are attempting to balance include:**

- How to deescalate panic without minimizing valid concerns about the virus
- How to expand virtual/online services knowing not all students have access to laptops, wifi and/or safe home environments for virtual advocacy sessions
- How to create accommodations under these current circumstances while also acknowledging how this sudden push for “creative solutions” lands on the disabled community who have been requesting similar accommodations for decades
- How to continue providing round-the-clock advocacy resources while also maintaining the health and well-being of our core staff, student staff, and volunteers
- How to use our expertise to educate campus about the intersections of COVID-19 response and interpersonal violence

**Effective crisis management includes community-specific responses** so what follows is what we have decided works best for the WGAC and the students we serve. It is likely that other units will have slightly different operating procedures, and that's ok. In a context filled with pressure and uncertainty, we trust that all units on campus are making student-centered decisions that best fit the populations they serve. **As always, please give us feedback if there is something we missed.**

## **CONFIDENTIAL VICTIM ADVOCACY:**

**The WGAC is committed to continuing our 24/7 advocacy services, even if the physical campus were to “close”.** The advocates in the office want you to know that if you are ill, immunocompromised or just not interested in meeting in person, our services are still available to you.

- **Until further notice, we will continue to provide advocacy in person, over the phone or via video conferencing during business hours** (Monday through Friday, 8am-5pm) in 112 Student Services
- **Our main office (112 Student Services Building) will remain open with limited staffing.** In the event that the main office is closed, we will forward phones to staff working remotely. **If possible, please call ahead to make sure we are staffed before dropping in** - (970) 491-6384
- **Survivors and their support people can call VAT at (970-492-4242) 24 hours a day, 365 days a year**
- Our **drop-in support group will be suspended** until further notice
- In addition to our personalized advocacy services listed above, our [We Believe You](#) podcast (created for survivors), is still available on itunes, stitcher, sound cloud and KCSUfm.com

## **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING:**

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In an effort to be mindful of the needs of individuals and communities related to COVID-19, we are **cancelling the in-person format of all our Spring events**. Our Programming Team is currently working on revising many of our Spring events to allow as much content as possible to be delivered in a virtual format. Please visit our [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and/or [website](#) for updated information related to our online offerings. We'll do our best to update all three with content and information as we have it.

## **CENTERS AND STAFF:**

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**The backbone of community care is self-care.** While we always encourage staff to stay home when they are sick, we know that economic constraints (coupled with identity-based expectations for what it means to be a “hard worker”) often impact a person’s willingness/ability to call in sick. **As such, we are doubling down on a commitment to self and community care with the following. Until further notice:**

- **Our physical location in the LSC will be closed**
- **Our main office (112 Student Services Building) will remain open with limited staffing.** In the event that the main office is closed, we will forward phones to staff working remotely. **If possible, please call ahead to make sure we are staffed before dropping in** - (970) 491-6384
- **Our VAT hotline - (970) 492-4242 will operate 24 hours a day, everyday of the year**
- Most of our core staff will work [remotely](#) for as long as necessary
- When sick, core staff are expected to use paid sick leave and will not come to work
- Student staff will have the option to work on projects from home if they are sick or unable to fulfill shifts in our physical locations

## **COVID-19 AND INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE:**

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Given our mission, it is our responsibility to educate campus about how COVID-19 (and the subsequent disruption to campus/community life) **impacts the lives of survivors**. Here are just a few examples:

- **Threats to secure employment** can increase a survivor’s reliance on unsafe housing/employment options
- **Social distancing increases isolation** with [violent partners](#) which will result in [more incidents](#) of violence. Distancing also subsequently reduces access to coping mechanisms (e.g. socializing, eating out, access to gyms/rec centers), social networks and support resources
- **Closure/cancellation of support resources** (e.g. counseling appointments, support groups, medical visits, etc.) can halt ongoing safety planning and healing processes for survivors. Additionally, survivors will face increased food insecurity, a reluctance to go to the hospital for SANE/Rape Kits, and a risk of exposure in shelters
- **Increase in racist/xenophobic incidents of bias** will have a disproportionate impact on [APIDA](#) (Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi American) survivors
- **Stress can exacerbate triggers** around addiction and self harm. Mental Health and PTSD can also impact a survivor's [immune system](#), particularly for folks with disabilities

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**A closing message to survivors: We believe you and are here for you.**



**In Solidarity,**  
The Staff of WGAC