

A new initiative will now provide victims of sexual assault with two options to report the incident to police.

The preferred NSW Police option is for a victim to 'formally' report an incident of sexual assault to police, however for those victims that do not wish to formally report, there is now an alternative option.

This alternate option, known as the Sexual Assault Reporting Option or 'SARO', is a questionnaire that enables a victim to provide information on a sexual assault to police without proceeding to a 'formal' investigation.

SARO is **NOT** for victims that wish to proceed with a formal complaint of sexual assault. Rather, it has been designed to encourage those that would not ordinarily report the matter, to do so. SARO will enable police to obtain vital information and patterns of behaviour that may assist in reducing the rate of sexual offending.

The questionnaire has been designed to illicit important details of the assault that will be recorded in COPS. All completed SARO questionnaires will be forwarded to the Sex Crimes Squad, State Crime Command to be uploaded and the data analysed. The forms will be stored securely in the Sex Crimes Squad office.

SARO is only suitable for adult victims or victims of historical sexual assault. Any incidence of sexual assault of children or children identified as being at risk of significant harm will still be dealt with under the current process. As NSW Police are mandatory reporters under Section 27 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act, NSW Police must notify Community Services through the Child Protection hotline.

If a person contacts police to report an incident of sexual assault or police are contacted via a local sexual assault service or health service regarding a sexual assault, police should commence an investigation. **Victims should not be discouraged from making an official report to police in lieu of the SARO program.** If the victim declines to have the matter dealt with formally by police, the victim can be provided information on the SARO questionnaire.

If a victim has contacted Police to report any sexual offence, under no circumstances should Police;

- a) Complete a SARO on behalf of a victim or
- b) Send a victim away to complete a SARO

It is the responsibility of Police, as per Adult Sexual Assault Policy and Standard Operating Procedures, to take a report and create a COPS Event. If the victim does not want the matter investigated, this and the reasons why, should be recorded in the COPS event narrative. If a victim telephones police for advice on a sexual assault and does not wish to meet with Police to report

the matter, it is appropriate that SARO is suggested as an alternate reporting option.

All SARO's are forwarded to the Sex Crimes Squad, once received it is the responsibility of the Sex Crimes Squad only to create the relevant COPS event.

There are many reasons why victims may not officially report crimes of sexual assault. SARO provides them with an alternate avenue to inform police of the incident and provide circumstances of their assault without progressing to a judicial process and with the option of remaining anonymous. However, should the victim elect to proceed with a complaint at a later time, the information provided in the SARO questionnaire may be beneficial in a future prosecution.

At all times, the wishes of the victim should be paramount. The occurrence of such an incident upon a person can cause a great deal of stress and trauma, both physical and mental. Some victims may require time to decide what they wish to do.

The questionnaire can be located on the NSW Police Force internet page from Friday January 13th, 2012 at;
www.police.nsw.gov.au/community_issues/adult_sexual_assault