

SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

A FEDERAL ELECTION ISSUE

2021

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS AN ELECTION ISSUE...

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to deepen existing inequalities within Canadian society, a second 'shadow pandemic' has been heightening risk and barriers for women and others affected by violence against women (VAW) and gender-based violence (GBV).

Sexual violence continues to disproportionately affect Indigenous women, women with disabilities, racialized women, members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, sex workers, youth, and others who are the most marginalized within our society. Faced with an increasing demand for services, complex needs, significant service gaps and underfunding, advocates have made calls for a feminist recovery to the pandemic.

While recognizing that many forms of GBV are interconnected, we are highlighting key priorities in addressing sexual violence specifically, which can be overlooked in more general discussions about GBV.

We build on the extensive consultations and recommendations already submitted to governments through which anti-violence advocates, survivors and others impacted by sexual violence from across the country have shared their insight and experience. We echo the call that any effort to address sexual violence and GBV must begin with the implementation of a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence (NAP). This work must be guided by expertise from a stable, resourced anti-violence sector, and be harmonized with the [2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People](#)

[National Action Plan](#). In particular, we acknowledge and champion the collaborative work and wealth of expertise offered in [A Report to Guide the Implementation of a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence](#). This report provides a clear roadmap for the development and implementation of a NAP, including 100 policy recommendations, a number of which we draw attention to here.

The priority areas we identify also reflect EVA Canada's own consultations, such as [Identifying Priorities for Addressing Sexual Violence](#) and [Pandemic Meets Pandemic: Understanding the Impacts of Covid-19 on Gender-Based Violence Services and Survivors in Canada](#), as well as the Calls for Justice from the [Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#).

Key Asks were chosen based on their relevance for the national context of the federal election, and their potential to create systemic change and reduce barriers for those who experience sexual violence at disproportionate rates and/or face intersecting layers of marginalization.

We encourage all candidates for the federal election to champion the issue of addressing GBV and sexual violence by committing to build on the work that has been accomplished so far, and by working collaboratively with survivors and advocates to make sure the voices of those most affected are not just heard, but centered.



PRIORITY AREAS

1 Ensuring
Services for
Survivors

2 Holding
Institutions
Accountable

3 Amplifying
Voices

4 Obtaining
Justice

5 Changing
Attitudes

6 Building Safe
Environments

ENSURING SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS

01.

Provide sustainable, flexible, operational funding to frontline independent sexual assault centres and services for survivors, and ensure their availability across the country.

02.

Adopt a public health approach to addressing sexual violence.¹

03.

Invest in sexual violence research and data collection to inform services for survivors.

For years sexual violence services have faced chronic underfunding, service gaps, long waitlists, while the demand for services continues to increase. In some provinces and territories there is an alarming dearth of options for survivors to turn to. Advocates have long recognized GBV as a public health crisis, requiring a proportional governmental response. Long-term operational funding of the anti-violence sector would ensure that survivors have access to free, timely, wrap-around, community-based, trauma- and violence-informed services, wherever they are in Canada. This funding should reflect the intersectional and complex needs of survivors, as well as include flexibility to explore alternative ways to reach underserved populations, such as through grassroots, culturally-appropriate initiatives and survivor-led, peer support models. The funding should also extend to adequately compensate those who provide these services and engage in advocacy and prevention work. More systematic and disaggregated data collection and research are needed to fully grasp the reality of sexual violence in all its forms across Canada, and to respond to it adequately.

¹Ending Violence Association of Canada (2021) [Building a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence: Identifying Priorities for Addressing Sexual Violence.](#)

HOLDING INSTITUTIONS ACCOUNTABLE

01.

Advance culture change and accountability in the Canadian Armed Forces to address sexual misconduct through external oversight and the ongoing involvement of survivors and anti-violence advocates.

02.

Uphold the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's commitment to accountability and ongoing involvement of anti-violence advocates in reviewing sexual violence cases, as set out in [The Way Forward: The RCMP's Sexual Assault Review and Victim Support Action Plan](#).

03.

Establish a Sexual Violence Ombudsperson for marginalized survivors to report harm within state institutions.²

Large, highly hierarchical state institutions, and especially male-dominated ones such as the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), tend to perpetuate harmful power dynamics and inequalities within their systems. Survivors made the headlines this past year, bravely speaking out about the sexual misconduct they experienced at the hands of peers and superiors who act with impunity. Survivors and advocates have called for independent civilian oversight mechanisms to be put in place to ensure that institutions are held accountable to survivors, their personnel, and Canadian civil society. Short of completely overhauling these institutions, it is clear that there is a need for meaningful culture change within, using decolonizing, trauma and violence-informed, culturally-responsive approaches. This is also true of other Canadian institutions, from the child welfare system to the carceral system.

²Ending Violence Association of Canada (2021) [Building a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence: Identifying Priorities for Addressing Sexual Violence](#).

AMPLIFYING VOICES

01.

Work collaboratively with Indigenous communities to fully implement the Calls for Justice from the [Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#).

02.

Prioritize closing gaps and reducing barriers to ensure women and girls with disabilities who experience sexual violence have full access to services, that their diverse needs are being met, and they are taken into account and included in policy development, as put forward in DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN) Canada's report: [Girls Without Barriers: an intersectional feminist analysis of girls and young women with disabilities in Canada](#).

03.

Take action to address violence against sex workers by decriminalizing sex work and implement legislative reform based on the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform's report: [Safety, Dignity, Equality: Recommendations for Sex Work Law Reform in Canada](#).

04.

Establish national standards to address sexual violence in post-secondary institutions based on Courage to Act's report: [Developing a National Draft Framework to Address and Prevent Gender-Based Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions in Canada](#).

In responding to sexual violence, it is important to adopt an intersectional approach that takes into account the distinct needs and overlapping forms of oppression faced by different populations that are disproportionately affected by sexual violence. In order to do this, it is crucial that the government expand the systematic use of gender-based analysis plus (GBA Plus) in their Covid-19 recovery efforts and beyond. Before the pandemic, [almost half](#) of Indigenous women experienced sexual violence within their lifetime, while women with disabilities [faced double the risk](#) of experiencing sexual violence compared to women without a disability. Other populations facing

heightened risks and barriers include Black and racialized women; women with a precarious immigration status, 2SLGBTQI+ people; sex workers; young women (15–25), seniors, and others marginalized by intersecting forms of inequality. We need to act intentionally so that services and supports reach under-served groups who are typically excluded from systems, and that tailored strategies are crafted in collaboration with these populations. This includes acting on and being guided by the substantial research and recommendations already put forward by these communities.

OBTAINING JUSTICE

01.

Pilot and fund survivor-centered alternative streams of justice rooted in community-based restorative and transformative justice models.

02.

Establish civilian oversight mechanisms within policing such as the Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review (VACR) model across the country.

03.

Address the overcriminalization of Indigenous and racialized women and girls, by reviewing and reforming the law about sexualized violence and intimate partner violence, utilizing the perspectives of feminist and Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.³

With only [5% of survivors](#) of sexual violence choosing to report to the police, it is clear that the existing justice system is not meeting survivors' needs. In fact, some survivors are further victimized and harmed in their interactions with the system. There needs to be a reimagining of ways to respond to sexual violence by developing alternative models, rooted in community-based restorative or transformative justice. To ensure that the processes and supports are survivor-centered, survivors need to be given choices and options within and outside of the justice system. Although it is heartening that [Bill C-3](#) will require sexual assault law training for federally-appointed judges, we also know

that training alone cannot solve systemic issues, such as the overcriminalization of Indigenous and racialized women and girls. Remedies are needed at all levels of the justice system, and civilian oversight and accountability mechanisms need to be put in place. The Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review (VACR) model is a promising practice where advocates review sexual assault cases that were cleared without charge, including those deemed 'unfounded' by the police and provide feedback to improve their response.

³National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) [Reclaiming Power and Place. The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#). Volume 1b, Call for Justice 5.3, p.183.

CHANGING ATTITUDES

01.

Incorporate healthy relationships and accountability in core education curriculum across the country, in addition to updating the curriculum in line with the [2019 Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education](#).

02.

Fund initiatives for male allyship work and violence prevention programming, beyond the existing funding for service delivery.

03.

Increase access to mental health and healing services for all, including male survivors, those affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and would-be perpetrators.

04.

Create a child sexual violence and abuse plan.⁴

For prevention efforts to be gender-transformative and address the root causes of sexual violence, they must challenge existing gender norms and patriarchal structures. This can be done at many different levels, from consent work with preschoolers, to sex education, healthy relationships and accountability work with youth, to anti-oppression training with institutional actors. Men and boys must be engaged as allies, not only by learning bystander intervention skills, but by promoting positive and healthy forms of masculinity that encourages self-reflection and challenges unhelpful thoughts and behaviours individually and amongst peers. This work must be carried out through an intersectional feminist lens, and include reflections on power and privilege, while going beyond addressing sexism, to include overlapping forms of oppression, such as racism, homophobia, ableism, etc. Without proper supports, cycles of violence within families can be passed on to the next generation. Prevention must prioritize ensuring that children grow up in safe and healthy environments by providing meaningful supports to children, their parents, and those who have experienced or witnessed abuse as children.

⁴Dale, A., Maki, K., & Nitia, R. (2021). [Expert Engagement to Address and Prevent Gender-Based Violence Final Report](#). Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada. Recommendation 39P, p.61.

BUILDING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

01.

Develop a cross-ministerial strategy to address VAW/GBV online and technology facilitated VAW/GBV.⁵

02.

Invest in social infrastructure across Canada, particularly in rural, northern and remote communities, including by: building a pan-Canadian safe, accessible, and affordable transportation system⁶; and implementing universal access Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to bridge the digital divide.⁷

03.

Set standards for resource-extraction sites to mitigate the risks and impacts on the safety of women, girls, 2SLGBTQI+ people and neighbouring communities⁸, drawing on the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society and the Yukon Status of Women's Council report [Never Until Now: Indigenous and Racialized Women's Experiences Working in Yukon & Northern British Columbia Mine Camps](#).

Building environments where everyone can lead safe and healthy lives, including those living in under-resourced and remote communities, will take major investments into social infrastructure and reconciliation efforts. Investments should include safe affordable housing, guaranteed livable income, safe drinking water, food security, affordable childcare, pharmacare, and access to: safe transportation, primary care including sexual and reproductive health, information and communications technology (ICT), mental health and addictions supports, culturally affirming healing options, services regardless of immigration status, etc. Bold legislation is also needed to address sexual harassment online and in workplaces. In rural, northern, fly-in and remote communities, there is a critical need for safe, affordable transportation options to ensure that women can flee to safety or access services. In addition, risks associated with the resource-extraction industry's work camps need to be studied and mitigated, specifically with regards to sexual violence towards women and girls in neighbouring Indigenous communities.

⁵, ⁶, ⁷ Dale, A., Maki, K., & Nitia, R. (2021). [Expert Engagement to Address and Prevent Gender-Based Violence Final Report](#). Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada. Recommendations 26L, p.92, 20E, p.3, 21E, p.32.

⁸Adapted from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) [Reclaiming Power and Place. The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#). Volume 1b, Calls for Justice 13.1-13.5, p.196.

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- 01** Will your pandemic recovery planning include an intersectional, gendered response?
- 02** How do you plan on moving forward with the implementation of a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence and a National Action Plan to End Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People?
- 03** How will you ensure survivors of sexual violence have access to the services they need no matter where they live in Canada?
- 04** How will you hold state institutions such as the Canadian Armed Forces accountable for the sexual violence taking place within them?
- 05** How will you ensure women with disabilities thrive within society and live free from violence?
- 06** How will you equip young people with the tools they need to form stable, healthy relationships?
- 07** How will you work towards making online environments safe for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people?
- 08** Canada has taken a leadership role on the world stage by joining the 'Feminist Movements and Leadership' Action Coalition of the United Nation's Generation Equality Forum. How will you apply this leadership at home?