

SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

A PUBLIC HEALTH
CRISIS IN NEED OF
A PROPORTIONAL
RESPONSE

2021

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS A NATIONAL ISSUE...

While the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened existing inequalities within Canadian society, a second 'shadow pandemic' continues to heighten risks and barriers for women and others affected by violence against women (VAW) and gender-based violence (GBV).

Sexual violence disproportionately affects those who are the most marginalized within our society including Indigenous women, women with disabilities, racialized women, members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community and sex workers. In their efforts to respond, advocates are faced with increasing demands for services, complex needs, significant service gaps and underfunding, and are calling for sexual violence to be recognized as a public health crisis.

While recognizing that many forms of GBV are interconnected, The Ending Violence Association of Canada (EVA Canada) is highlighting 6 key priorities in addressing sexual violence, 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 2SLGBTQIA+](#)

[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 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 and their potential to create systemic change.

We encourage all elected officials 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.

KEY ASKS

1 Ensure Services for Survivors

2 Hold State Institutions Accountable

3 Center the Voices of those Affected

4 Reimagine Justice Models

5 Prevent Further Harm

6 Build Safe Environments

ENSURE SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS

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

For years sexual violence services have faced chronic underfunding, service gaps, and 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. 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.

HOLD STATE INSTITUTIONS ACCOUNTABLE

Establish civilian oversight mechanisms to advance culture change and accountability within policing, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and other state institutions

Large, highly hierarchical state institutions, and especially male-dominated ones such as police services, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), tend to perpetuate harmful power dynamics and

inequalities within their systems. 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. 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. Short of completely overhauling institutions, it is clear that there is a need for meaningful culture change within, using decolonizing, trauma and violence-informed, culturally-responsive approaches.

CENTER THE VOICES OF THOSE AFFECTED

Act intentionally so that services and supports reach under-served groups, and that tailored strategies are crafted in collaboration with these populations.

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 populations that are disproportionately affected. The government must systematically expand the use of gender-based analysis plus (GBA Plus) at all levels of policy development. For example, the specific risks posed to Indigenous women and girls by the resource-extraction industry's work camps must be studied and mitigated. This is in a context where [almost half](#) of Indigenous women experience sexual violence within their lifetime, while women with disabilities [face double the risk](#) 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. A first step in this work is to act on the recommendations already put forward by these groups, such as those included in DAWN Canada's [Girls Without Barriers: An Intersectional](#)

[Feminist Analysis of Girls and Women with Disabilities in Canada](#); the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society and the Yukon Status of Women Council's [Never Until Now: Indigenous and Racialized Women's Experiences Working in Yukon & Northern British Columbia Mine Camps](#); the Canadian Sex Work Law Reform's [Safety, Dignity, Equality: Recommendations for Sex Work Law Reform in Canada](#), and Courage to Act's [Developing a National Draft Framework to Address and Prevent GBV at Post-Secondary Institutions in Canada](#).

REIMAGINE JUSTICE MODELS

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

With only [5% of sexual assault survivors](#) 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 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.

PREVENT FURTHER HARM

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

For prevention efforts to be gender-transformative and address the root causes of sexual violence, they must challenge existing gender norms and patriarchal structures. Men and boys must also have options for healing, and become engaged as allies by promoting positive and healthy forms of masculinity. 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. Cycles of violence within families and communities can be passed on from one generation to the next without proper supports in place. Prevention must prioritize ensuring that children grow up in safe and healthy environments by providing meaningful supports to children, their parents/guardians, and those who have experienced or witnessed abuse as children. Much work has to be done to redesign the child welfare system for it to work for children and families, without punishing families for living in poverty, adding barriers, or causing further harm.

BUILD SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

Invest in social infrastructure in rural, northern and remote communities, by building a pan-Canadian safe, accessible, and affordable transportation system¹ and implementing universal access Information and Communications Technology (ICT)² to make sure every survivor can access safety and services

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. 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, and services regardless of immigration status. 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 survivors can access safety and services.

^{1, 2} 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 20E, p.31 and 21E, p.32.