

## The National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence Must Address Service Gaps for Survivors of Sexual Violence

April 2024

The federal government's \$593 million investment into the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (NAP) along with provincial and territorial-level commitments and actions have the potential to initiate significant transformative and systemic change to respond to the epidemic of gender-based violence (GBV) in Canada. As a national organization working closely with our members across the country, the Ending Violence Association of Canada (EVA Canada) recognizes the complexity of implementing this ambitious plan and the achievements that have been made so far. As the first year of the NAP comes to a close, we believe that this is an important time to make the necessary adjustments so that Year 2 can better address service gaps, particularly for survivors of sexual violence.

Following a thorough analysis of the provincial and territorial [implementation plans](#) for the first year of the NAP (2023-2024), EVA Canada is greatly concerned that specialized sexual violence (SV) services, and specifically sexual assault centres (SACs), have been largely overlooked in the first iterations of the implementation plans. SACs represent core services within the sector and are an integral part of the response and prevention efforts to address GBV.

Below we outline our main areas of concern, and three opportunities for strengthening the NAP's ability to address service gaps for survivors of sexual violence in the upcoming years.

### Areas of concern

- 1. Specialized sexual violence services such as sexual assault centres appear to be mostly left out of the NAP, despite the increasing demand for their services and the long wait times survivors face to access them.**

As it stands, in most of the provincial and territorial (PT) agreements that form part of the National Action Plan (NAP), it is unclear whether funding will be allocated to sexual assault centres (SACs). While in some provinces such as Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador it is clear that existing SACs are not receiving NAP funding, other agreements use vague language such as "community-based GBV services" to indicate broad areas that will be funded, but this does not guarantee that SACs will be covered under this category.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Quebec and British Columbia where explicit commitments to SACs are made within their respective existing strategies, it appears that there is no funding being allocated *specifically* to community-based sexual assault centres across the country. For SV organizations who have been told that they would receive some level of funding, the allocated amounts remain insufficient compared to the needs. This is in spite of [months-long waitlists](#) for survivors to access the services of sexual assault centres, who are already overstretched and underfunded. It is also important to note that in some Northern, rural and remote areas including all three territories, there are no SACs, and limited

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<sup>1</sup> See EVA Canada's *Analysis Grid of Provincial / Territorial NAP Agreements through a Sexualized Violence Lens* for more detail.

sexual assault services. With the high prevalence rates of sexual violence that have shot up by a [dramatic 18% in 2021](#), and with some of the [highest rates being in the North](#), this is a major gap that needs urgent attention. There is a dire need to enhance access to specialized and community-based SV services in underserved regions and communities in Canada. With so little funding going to these essential services, we worry that we are not making headway towards the goal of all survivors having equal access to services across the country.

## **2. Insufficient engagement with community-based anti-violence advocates resulting in lack of transparency around the NAP decision-making process, including the selection of funding recipients and allocated amounts.**

Our discussions with advocates on the ground have revealed that PT governments appeared to be making rushed decisions with regards to funding allocations for the first year of the NAP. The lack of meaningful engagement throughout the process in a majority of PTs and the lack of available information is resulting in a great deal of confusion on the ground regarding where NAP funds will be allocated, when they will be disbursed, in what amounts, for how long, whether recipients' core funding will be affected, etc. This put many SV organizations, who are already precariously funded, in a position of continued uncertainty. At the national level it is practically impossible to gather solid data on funding recipients and amounts allocated. Overall, there appears to be a lack of recognition that specialized sexual violence services, including SACs, are distinct from other GBV organizations and services, as well as a lack of recognition of expertise held by advocates on the ground.

## **3. The NAP's priority of stabilizing the gender-based violence sector is going unmet.**

One of the three priorities of the NAP [as stated by Minister Ien](#) is stabilizing the GBV sector. This would appear to imply that existing feminist, community-based, survivor-serving organizations who represent core services within the sector, including sexual assault centres, would receive a baseline amount of funding which can sustain a minimum of basic infrastructure, administration costs, personnel, and counselling programs. But not only are baseline amounts seemingly off the table, the NAP's first year of funding appears to be largely time-limited and project-based, replicating the current patchwork of disparate initiatives across the country, rather than investing in core services and filling important service gaps for survivors. The administrative burden that comes with short-term project-based funding is not new for GBV organizations whose [women-majority workforce is systematically devalued and operates in a context of financial precarity](#). Yet SACs have been incredibly creative at juggling multiple priorities and offering much more than service delivery. They do prevention work, outreach, systems navigation, public education, advocacy, work with schools, universities, hospitals, sports organizations, etc. SACs constitute a key part of the puzzle in terms of responding to and preventing GBV, while serving some of the most marginalized communities – aligning with all three of the NAP's priorities. Historically, SACs have been on the frontlines of social change and have had a deep impact on lives and communities as holders of knowledge, for example challenging systemic issues and bringing foundational cases before the courts, yet their work is underfunded and unrecognized.

We are still hoping to see the NAP enable survivors to have equal access to sexual violence services across the country, but as it stands, we are unfortunately seeing SACs being left out of the plan, left out of the conversation, or provided with insufficient funding. We remain steadfast in our belief that survivors deserve to have timely access to quality services no matter where they live.

**Opportunities for strengthening the NAP's ability to address service gaps for survivors**

- 1. We ask that the federal government, together with advocates, identify funding and service gaps across the country in terms of sexual violence services and work with provinces and territories towards addressing these, in order to ensure that survivors have timely access to quality services wherever they live.**
- 2. We ask that the NAP annual report include a clear list of funding recipients and amounts in order to increase transparency around NAP processes and reporting.**
- 3. We ask that federal, provincial and territorial governments put sexual violence on the agenda and engage in ongoing, proactive and meaningful consultation with community-based organizations who represent sexual violence services in order to ensure that the most pressing needs on the ground are being met.**