

Understanding core
funding for specialized,
sexual violence
counselling in Canada:
**An exploratory
research project.**

OCTOBER 2023



**Ending
Violence**
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EVA Canada wishes to express its gratitude to the individuals and organizations who participated in the interviews and working group discussions that have informed this research.

Ending Violence Association of British Columbia

Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre

Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services

Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan

Survivors' Hope Crisis Centre

Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres

Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel

End Sexual Violence Newfoundland

Sexual Violence New Brunswick

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre

Prince Edward Island Rape and Sexual Assault Centre

Yukon Status of Women Council

The Ending Violence Association of Canada (EVA Canada) is a national non-profit organization based in Ottawa, Ontario that works to amplify the collective voice of those who believe it is possible to end sexual and gender-based violence. Through research, policy-change and advocacy, EVA Canada works collaboratively with gender-based violence organizations from coast to coast to coast, and serves as an umbrella organization for provincial/territorial sexual violence networks, as well as other community-based organizations committed to ending sexual violence.

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Suggested citation:

Lanthier, S. (2023). Understanding core funding for specialized, sexual violence counselling in Canada: An exploratory research project. Ending Violence Association of Canada. <https://www.endingviolencecanada.org/reports-recommendations/>



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Canada

Funding for this project was provided by the Canadian Women's Foundation and Women and Gender Equality Canada.

Community-based sexual assault centres (SACs) provide vital support to survivors of sexual violence in Canada through a variety of services and initiatives, including crisis and long-term specialized sexual violence counselling services. While SACs have long dealt with under-resourcing and accompanying difficulty in meeting demand, the #MeToo movement led to a further need for services that only continued to grow with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meeting the growth in demand was exacerbated by having to adapt sexual violence counselling programs to virtual delivery models during the height of the pandemic.

Despite increased demand for services (a trend that has continued in the post-pandemic period) and the need to adapt service delivery, there remains limited, long-term government investment in SACs. At the same time, advocates working on these issues have struggled to access current data that renders visible the significant funding challenges they are facing to meet the need for sexual violence counselling services.

The Ending Violence Association of Canada (EVA Canada) began the important work of collecting national data with our National Survey of Sexual Violence Organizations in Canada which collected data from 102 sexual violence organizations between June and November 2022. Building on funding data collected through our survey, this report focuses on better understanding the provision of core funding to SACs across Canada and how it influences access to sexual violence counselling.

Community-Based Sexual Assault Centres (SACs)

There are an estimated 100+ community-based sexual assault centres (SACs) across Canada that provide specialized sexual violence counselling to survivors, usually at no-cost.

The availability of these services varies across Canada and are largely shaped by the amount of funding provided by provincial/territorial governments.

The amount of core funding influences the capacity of SACs to provide needed sexual violence counselling services to survivors within their jurisdiction.



PURPOSE



The primary objectives of this exploratory research project were to:

- 1 develop a better understanding of core funding for SACs across Canada and
- 2 describe how core funding impacts sexual violence counselling services, including wait times for services and eligibility.

An intersectional, feminist approach to data collection was applied to better understand additional barriers for equity-seeking groups in accessing sexual violence counselling.

METHODS

To develop a better understanding of core funding EVA Canada gathered information from key informants, including executive level representatives of provincial sexual violence associations and select provincial government representatives. Where there was no provincial sexual violence association, we communicated with an executive level representative of an appropriate sexual violence organization who could speak to the funding and the provision sexual violence counselling in their province. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the key informants through EVA Canada's member organizations which include provincial and territorial networks or organizations representing SACs and/or which have a significant focus on addressing and responding to sexual violence in their work.

Eight interviews (via zoom or through email) were conducted with 10 key informants from jurisdictions in which governments provide funding for SACs. Of the 10 key informants, 8 were representatives of SACs and 2 were representatives of a provincial government.¹ For those conducted via zoom, the vast majority were recorded. We received verbal consent from each key informant to record the interview and took notes during each interview, followed by a rapid analysis of the interview data. In total we conducted interviews with key informants in 6 of 10 provinces (we were not able to connect with a representative in every province prior to the data collection deadline); we were however able to collect some information informally for those that did not participate in an interview. A summary of the interpreted data was presented to EVA Canada's National Sexual Violence Working Group for review. The working group consists of 15 members from all the provinces and territories except for Northwest Territories and Nunavut. The group was asked if there was anything they would like to change or add. After gathering responses, the modified/new data was incorporated into the findings.

¹ The Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon do not have any stand-alone community-based sexual assault centres like those in the provinces. Reasons for this are complex and outside the scope of this report; however, the lack of such centres and/or the viability of this type of response must be considered in the context of the distinct realities of the Territories. Specialized sexual violence counselling is provided to some extent through other community-based and systems-based responses, such as the Yukon's Sexual Assault Response Team, Victim Services, and some domestic violence shelters; however, it is clear that further research to document funding to sexual violence services in the Territories is needed.

Core Funding for SACs: What is it?

SACs may receive funds from a range of sources including various levels of government, community fundraising, private or charitable foundations and membership fees among others. EVA Canada's National Survey found however that among all funding sources, provincial/territorial governments were the most frequent contributor of funds to SACs. 97% of respondents reported that they receive some funding from their provincial/territorial government. In comparison, 80% of respondents indicated receiving funding from community fundraising and 55% from the federal government.²

Provincial government funding for SACs is typically provided through ministries that are responsible for social or community services, justice, or women's issues. In a small minority of provinces, funding is also provided through health ministries. The funding can take different forms, including project-based funding and core funding. Project-based funding is time-limited, and focuses only on a particular initiative (e.g., developing an education program); it only covers costs that are directly related to that project and cannot be used to support the delivery of core services and programs. Core funding on the other hand supports sustaining the organizational mandate of SACs including service delivery and all administrative functions over the longer-term.

For SACs, sexual violence counselling for survivors is a core service. Therefore, the provision of adequate, flexible, and stable core funding to SACs is necessary to provide sexual violence counselling services that both meet the demand for services and respond to the unique needs of the communities they serve.

Core funding for SACs: What do we know?

There is currently limited accessible information about the amount of core funding provided to SACs by provincial/territorial governments across Canada. We found that while some governments provide access to more general funding amounts that include a wide range of sexual violence related services (e.g., policing, victim services, SACs), most do not provide access to clear budget lines for the core funding of SACs. In at least one jurisdiction, a provincial association approached their government to request a scan of core funding for SACs but have been unsuccessful in securing it. Based on the limited accessible information and numbers gleaned from our interviews, our best estimate is that core funding for SACs across the provinces and territories currently ranges from \$0 to roughly 17 million dollars. The variability in the funding amounts suggests that sexual violence counselling is likely not equally accessible to survivors across the country.

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² Abji, Salina, Ashley Major, Stephanie Lanthier, Erin Whitmore. 2023. National Survey of Sexual Violence Organizations & Services. Ending Violence Association of Canada. Available at: endingviolencecanada.org/reports-recommendations/

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Core Funding for SACs: What is it?

Core funding is typically reported by key informants to cover only a portion of the cost of providing sexual violence counselling services within their jurisdiction. This leaves SACs to utilize project-based funding, community fundraiser and volunteer labour to supplement core funding. Even with supplementing core funding, there is often still not enough to meet current demand. In addition, key informants suggest that in many jurisdictions core funding has not kept pace with inflation. Some SACs report that their core funding has not increased since the 1990s. In addition, core funding is often (mis)understood to denote stable, long-term funding. Key informants indicate however that as with project funding, SACs must reapply for core funding every 1-3 years. In addition, governments often place restrictions on how the funding may be used. Time-consuming funding applications take away from the important work of meeting the demand for sexual violence counselling services. Unsurprisingly, inadequate and inflexible core funding has negative impacts on the provision of sexual violence counselling services including:

Longer Waitlists.

Key informants report that inadequate levels of core funding are associated with waitlists. In some jurisdictions, the wait for sexual violence counselling is reported to be 2.5 years long. When additional and/or increased funding for sexual violence counselling is provided, organizations are able to hire more staff, thereby reducing or eliminating waitlists. In jurisdictions where new sexual violence counselling services are offered key informants report that demand typically grows over time as more survivors become aware of the services. Often however, core funding does not grow with this demand and many survivors are left waiting for access to sexual violence counselling services.

There is currently a gap in the collection and compilation of provincial waitlist data. Many individual SACs collect or track data related to waitlists for counselling services to a varying degree depending on their capacity. Provincial wait list data, where available, typically consists of compiling and analyzing data from individual SACs. Currently, only a small minority of provinces have provincial waitlist data. While many provincial, territorial, and community-based organizations have identified a need for such data, capacity to do so is limited in most provinces.

Snapshot of findings from EVA Canada's National Survey of Sexual Violence Organizations



of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that they lacked sufficient funding

for their core operations and/or for their programs and services.

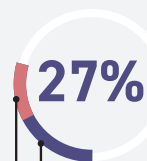


of respondents indicated that their organization has waitlists

for at least some of their SV services.



Wait times for counselling were also the longest:



of SVOs reported having wait times of 6 months or longer

for individual counselling.

of those...

16% were between 6 months and 1 year

11% were more than one year³

³ Abji, Salina, Ashley Major, Stephanie Lanthier, Erin Whitmore. 2023. National Survey of Sexual Violence Organizations & Services. Ending Violence Association of Canada. Available at: endingviolencecanada.org/reports-recommendations/

More difficulty recruiting and retaining staff.

Key informants suggested that inadequate core funding levels impacts the ability to recruit and retain staff as they result in low wages, contract work and precarity. Staff are leaving for jobs outside the 'non-profit' sector where they can engage in less stressful work and receive higher wages. Issues with low wages and contract work which have negatively impacted the ability of SACs to attract and retain staff have been exacerbated in the post pandemic period due to low unemployment rates across the country. The ability to attract and retain staff in rural and or northern regions was noted to be particularly difficult due to high costs of living.

Fewer specialized sexual violence counselling service for equity seeking groups.

Inadequate core funding is associated with fewer sexual violence counselling services that have been tailored to the needs of equity-seeking groups (e.g., Indigenous people, immigrants and refugees). Key informants note that the survivors who access SACs have often been white, cis-gendered, heterosexual and able-bodied. When funding is inadequate to serve even this demographic, survivors of equity-seeking groups suffer disproportionately. As one key informant noted, the limited funding provided to SACs goes toward serving the 'majority' at the expense of the 'minority'.⁴

Less collaboration and innovation:

Key informants suggest that applying for funding is not only time-consuming and difficult - taking away from the important work of supporting survivors - but also sets up competition between organizations for limited resources. This 'competitive' environment may also be a contributor to discrepancies in and difficulty securing funding for smaller, newer, or more rural/northern organizations relative to larger, more well-established or urban organizations. Key informants noted that newer organizations or those who do not have long-established relationships with provincial government funders may not have access to core funding at all or are the first to lose it if there are government cuts.



⁴ For more information about the needs and experiences of equity-seeking groups accessing sexual assault services, see Abji, Salina, Ashley Major, Stephanie Lanthier, Erin Whitmore. 2023. "Brief #6: Social Identity." National Survey of Sexual Violence Organizations & Services. Ending Violence Association of Canada. Available at: endingviolencecanada.org/reports-recommendations/

This exploratory research project set out to better understand the provision of core funding to SACs across Canada and how this funding influences access to sexual violence counselling. The lack of easily accessible data from provincial governments makes tracking the adequacy of core funding difficult. Key informants however, report that both the amount of core funding provided by their provincial governments and the parameters of the funding are inadequate for meeting the (increasing) demand for sexual violence counselling in jurisdictions across Canada. Key informants are clear that what they need to provide sexual violence counselling services to all survivors is adequate, stable and unrestricted core funding. To make evidence-informed policy decisions regarding core funding, investment in data collection and tracking related to SACs and sexual violence counselling services is necessary.

While this study is unique in its focus on the impacts of core funding for SACs and the provision of sexual violence counselling services, it does have limitations. First, our focus on gathering information from representatives of provincial associations meant that other knowledge-holders were likely missed. Future research could include in-depth consultations with multiple stakeholders in each province/territory. Second, there were differing levels of knowledge about core funding for SACs depending on the jurisdiction (e.g., newer staff members, type of working relationship with the funder). Finally, we did not engage with territorial representatives as they do not have any stand-alone community-based sexual assault centres like those in the provinces. As noted, reasons for this are outside the scope of this report; however, future research should consider the lack of such centres and/or the viability of this type of response in the territories, as well as better understanding how current funding gender-based violence funding supports the needs of sexual violence survivors in the Territories.⁵ Despite these limitations, we gained valuable information on core funding for SACs, as well as data gaps. Below, we lay out some key data gaps, as well as provide recommendations based on our findings.

What are the key data gaps and how can these be filled?

- There is not currently enough available data in most provinces/territories to build a full 'national picture' understanding of the provision of core funding for SACs.
- For the most part, individual SACs lack the resources and capacity to collect and track data.
- The lack of data at the community-level seems to translate to both the provincial/territorial and federal levels. There is an absence of readily accessible, publicly available government data about funding provided to SACs. Because of this absence, it remains unclear how governments make decisions about core funding for SACs.
- Inconsistent definitions of core funding and/or lack of clarity in the role of core funding for SACs and the provision of sexual violence counselling services further complicates efforts to track and monitor this funding.

⁵ For further information about the need to address gaps in data for rural, remote and northern GBV advocates see the Yukon Status of Women's Council Data Advocacy Toolkit: <https://www.datatoolkit.yswc.ca/>

- 1 Further research is needed to understand the provision of core funding for SACs.** To make evidence-informed policy decisions, investment in data collection and tracking related to SACs and specialized counselling services is necessary.
- 2 Provincial/territorial governments should include a clear budget line** that specifies the amount of core funding provided to SACs.
- 3 Capacity-building and resources to support SACs in collecting and tracking data related to core funding is necessary.** This data should be compiled at the provincial and national level to provide a comparative analysis and meet the need for consistent core funding.
- 4** As the federal government rolls out its National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence through bi-lateral agreements with the province/territories, **specific tracking of funding for SACs across the country should be undertaken.** Any evidence of funding inconsistencies across the provinces/territories should be addressed in subsequent years of the bi-lateral agreements.
- 5 In provinces/territories where core funding for SACs has been recently introduced, data should be collected and used to forecast future demand for services.** Funding must be available in future years that will be adequate to meet the anticipated increase in demand for sexual violence counselling that comes with establishing SACs.
- 6 An increase in core, and unrestricted, funding to support SACs is necessary to shorten and/or eliminate waitlists** for sexual violence counselling in many jurisdictions and provide for the needs of equity-seeking groups. In the awarding of core funding, local SACs should be consulted and involved in the identification of such funding.