

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



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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 is shaped by the amount of funding provided by provincial/territorial governments. In particular, the amount of core funding influences the capacity of SACs to provide sexual violence counselling services within their jurisdiction.

We set out to better understand the provision of core funding to SACs across Canada and how it influences access to sexual violence counselling.¹



What is core funding for sexual violence counselling services?

Funding for SACs can take different forms, including project-based funding and core funding. While project-based funding is time-limited and focuses on a particular initiative, core funding supports sustaining the organizational mandate of SACs including service delivery and all administrative functions over the longer term. Most often, core funding is provided by provincial ministries that are responsible for social or community services, justice, or women's issues.

The provision of adequate, flexible, stable, and long-term core funding is necessary for SACs to provide timely, sexual violence-specific counselling services that respond to the unique needs of the communities they serve.

Core funding: What do we know?

Most provincial/territorial governments do not provide clear budget lines for core funding given to SACs. This makes tracking the adequacy and impact of such funding difficult.

Core funding for SACs typically covers only a small portion of the cost of providing sexual violence counselling services within their jurisdiction. SACs often utilize community fundraisers, volunteer labour, and project-based funding to supplement inadequate core funding.

While core funding is often understood to be stable and flexible, it is in fact neither. SACs must reapply for core funding every 1-3 years and governments place restrictions on how the funds may be used. Time-consuming funding applications and inflexible funding take away from the important work of meeting the demand for sexual violence counselling services.

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



64% of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that they lacked sufficient funding

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

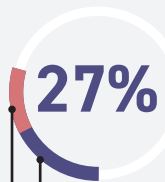


80% of respondents indicated that their organization has waitlists

for at least some of their SV services.



Wait times for counselling were also the longest:



27% 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 year

¹ Eight interviews (via zoom or through email) were conducted with 10 key informants from provinces in which governments provide funding for community-based specialized sexual violence counselling. Of the 10 key informants, 8 were representatives of sexual violence organizations and were representatives of a provincial government.

² Abji, Salina, Ashley Major, Stephanie Lanthier, Erin Whitmore. 2023. "Research Brief: Waitlists." Ending Violence Association of Canada. endingviolencecanada.org/reports-recommendations/

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Core funding: What do we know?

Inadequate core funding for SACs is a significant challenge for the sector across Canada. Unsurprisingly, inadequate core funding is associated with waitlists for sexual violence counselling services. In some jurisdictions, the wait for sexual violence counselling is reported to be 2.5 years long. Inadequate core funding has also been associated with fewer sexual violence counselling services that have been tailored to the needs of equity-seeking groups.

In jurisdictions where new sexual violence counselling services are offered demand typically grows over time as more survivors become aware of the services. Often however, core funding does not grow with this demand.

Core funding is often reported to not keep pace with inflation. Some SACs report that their core funding has not increased since the 1990s.

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 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 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.
- 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.