Federal Election 2025: Sexual Violence Impacts Us All

Ending Sexual Violence Association of Canada

April 2025

Ending Sexual Violence ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE Contre la violence sexuelle

Rates of sexual and gender-based violence in Canada are at epidemic levels, and we know that in times of economic stress, sexual violence increases. As Canada is facing an economic crisis, political uncertainty and increasing wealth disparity, it is tempting to focus solely on the economy. But the economy is made up of people. And when people face economic hardships, women and minorities experience the harshest impacts and barriers.

We have seen this trend with the recent elimination of the federal Minister for Women and Gender Equality as well as other Ministers representing equity-seeking groups. We learned from the Covid-19 pandemic that in times of crisis, *more* attention is needed towards gender equity and gender-based violence, not less. As Canadians we look to our leaders to embody our shared values and to work to lift everyone up. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to thrive and feel safe in their home and in their community.

ESVA CANADA CALLS ON ALL PARTIES TO:

1. **Commit to reinstate a stand-alone department and a cabinet Minister for Women and Gender Equality.**
2. **Commit to maintain and strengthen the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and the National Action Plan for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People.**
3. **Commit to invest in essential community-based services such as sexual assault centres to ensure that survivors have access to supports no matter what.**

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO TALK ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence operates in the shadows. It is a stigmatized subject that is rendered invisible through the silencing of survivors. Survivors are often disbelieved, blamed and made to feel shame for the violence that was committed against them. Sexual assault is widespread in Canada, with rates jumping by an alarming 18% during the pandemic[1], yet it remains the most underreported crime with only 6% of sexual assaults reported to the police[2]. While the vast majority of survivors do not engage with the legal system, they do turn to community-based supports such as sexual assault centres. However, the funding of community-based services is not sufficient to meet the needs. The Mass Casualty Commission clearly outlined the need for epidemic-level funding of community-based survivor-serving organizations.

Significant progress towards gender equality has been made over the last decades, with the establishment of federal agency to oversee gender equality in the 1970s, a cabinet Minister position for Women and Gender Equality in 2018, and the development of the first ever National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence in 2022. But the work is far from finished and we must continue to build on this momentum or risk reversing this progress. Survivors' access to supports is still uneven throughout the country and crucial service gaps remain in rural, remote and Northern areas. Continued leadership and coordination is needed from the federal government to ensure that no survivor is left without supports.

> *Funding directly impacts my workplace and the ability for our programs to respond to the increased need for services in my community. Funding would mean being able to hire more counselors and educators to reduce our waitlists and address the needs of our community. The emergency funding we got from our provincial government did not scratch the surface of our needs.*
>
> *– Survey respondent, ESVA Canada's National Questionnaire on the GBV Workforce*

ANOTHER WAY IS POSSIBLE

Sexual violence shares root causes with other types of gender-based violence and oppression. Sexual violence flourishes when there are power disparities that place women and equity-seeking groups in precarious socioeconomic situations (ie. poverty, unaffordable housing, underemployment, low wages, lack of childcare, unequal access to reproductive rights, etc.). When the safety and wellbeing of a sizeable proportion of the population is jeopardized, society suffers as a whole. Systemic problems require systemic solutions.

To prevent sexual violence, while building a healthier economy for all, we must work to remedy gender inequality and socioeconomic disparities. We must actively invest in key areas such as community-based services, affordable housing, mental health supports, childcare and a liveable basic income. To this end, we need a robust National Action Plan and a dedicated Minister for Women and Gender Equality to lead socioeconomic policies that make for a stronger, safer, healthier, and more equitable Canada.

References

[1] Statistics Canada. (2022). Victims of police-reported family and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2021. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/221019/dq221019c-eng.pdf?st=80MFGOyg

[2] Statistics Canada. (2021). Criminal victimization in Canada, 2019. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00014-eng.htm

[3] Mass Casualty Commission. (2023). Turning the Tide Together. https://masscasualtycommission.ca/final-report/

QUESTIONS TO ALL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES:

1. The United Nations as well as several municipalities across Canada have recognized gender-based violence (GBV) as an epidemic. Do you recognize GBV as an epidemic in Canada?
2. Do you support the reinstatement of a dedicated Minister for Women and Gender Equality?
3. How will you build on and strengthen the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and the National Action Plan for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People?
4. Knowing that survivors are more likely to turn to community-based services rather than to the police, would your party's response to sexual violence prioritize non-carceral approaches?
5. What would you say to a constituent who is a survivor and is on a waitlist for counseling services because their local sexual assault centre is at capacity?
6. How will your party address the specific needs of communities disproportionately effected by sexual violence, including women with disabilities, Indigenous women, racialized women, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, sex workers, youth and others have been marginalized in our society?

BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Pledge your support to gender justice initiatives that reduce economic disparities and ensure that everyone can thrive. ESVA Canada is a proud supporter of the **Demand Better Campaign**.

ABOUT ESVA CANADA

The Ending Sexual Violence Association of Canada is a national non-profit organization that works collaboratively with its member organizations and others to provide a unified, pan-Canadian voice on the issue of sexual violence. Through research, education, policy change, and advocacy, we identify and promote the solutions necessary to address the root causes of sexual violence.

Ending Sexual Violence ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE Contre la violence sexuelle