



August 10, 2023

SASS responds to federal-provincial agreement on the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence

On Tuesday, July 25, 2023, the Hon. Marci Ien, Canada's Minister for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) and Youth, and the Hon. Laura Ross, Saskatchewan's Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women Office in Saskatchewan announced a historic bilateral agreement of \$20.3 million over four years to support the implementation of the *National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence (GBV)* in Saskatchewan.

Launched in November 2022, the National Action Plan is a 10-year plan that sets the strategic framework for action with the goal of supporting victims, survivors, and their families, no matter where they live. Over the last six months, the Provincial and Territorial Ministers responsible for the Status of Women have been in negotiations with WAGE Canada to establish bilateral agreements that reflect regional realities and priorities.

The National Action Plan represents a critical opportunity for renewed focus on the root causes of GBV, and advance strategic actions for sustainable structural and systemic change. This is critical given the alarming rates of GBV in Saskatchewan. Our province has the second highest rates of sexual violence victimization at the rate of 103.94 - for every 100,000 people in Saskatchewan there are 103.94 incidences of self-reported sexual assault, compared to the national rate of 57.91. Sexual violence is linked to many social and health conditions including mental illness, addictions, homelessness, exploitation, self-harm, suicide, and homicide. This dire situation is compounded by the lack of specialized sexual violence services in rural, remote and Northern Saskatchewan communities.

Central within the foundation of the National Action Plan is the need for coordination and engagement with the GBV sector. Robust and intentional consultation with sexual violence advocates and experts to ensure equitable implementation that includes the most underserved and at-risk communities. We are disappointed that our Province has not engaged with sexual violence advocates, and we are concerned by the lack of meaningful allocation of funding to address sexual violence as a distinct form of GBV. Many forms of sexual violence occur in the context of intimate partner and family violence; however, they are not identical forms of aggressions, and thus require distinct but parallel responses. More broadly, this demonstrates the province's lack of understanding of what GBV is, and the many distinct ways that GBV manifests.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus the disparities and ongoing systemic challenges faced by the GBV sector in Saskatchewan including inadequate and unstable funding, long waiting lists, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of intersectoral collaboration. The social and economic impact of the shadow pandemic was felt and continues to be felt disproportionately by those who already face intersecting forms of inequality and are at heightened risk for victimization. Contributing to Saskatchewan's high rates of GBV has been the ongoing exclusion of the GBV sector within critical policy tables that directly impact resource allocation for the most marginalized in Saskatchewan.

As the provincial government begins the implementation of the National Action Plan, SASS is hopeful that stakeholders and experts, such as our organization, our member agencies, and those with lived experiences are consulted on strategies and action that can best serve the needs of survivors of sexual violence across Saskatchewan.

Kerrie Isaac

Executive Director

Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan