

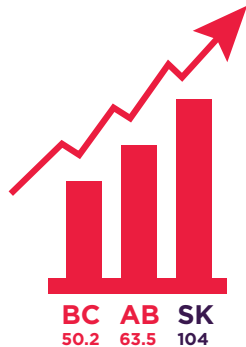
PUTTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON THE AGENDA

OUR POLICY PRIORITIES

DECEMBER 2024

SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES OF SASKATCHEWAN

SASKATCHEWAN HAS THE 2ND HIGHEST RATE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AMONG CANADIAN PROVINCES.



NATIONAL VICTIMIZATION RATES ARE 58 INCIDENTS PER 100,000 PERSONS.

Sexual violence is a significant drain on our economy and it is bad business to continue to ignore the issue.

Sexual violence contributes to costly social issues such as addictions, mental illness, poor physical health, houselessness, and family violence.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: A DISTINCT FORM OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) REQUIRING A UNIQUE RESPONSE

Sexual violence is a form of GBV and refers to actions and behaviours in which a person exerts their power and control over another person through unwanted or harmful sexual actions.

Child sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment, technology-facilitated sexual violence, coercive control, sexual exploitation and trafficking are all forms of sexual violence that occur in Saskatchewan communities.

WHY THE DIFFERENCE?

Other provinces have dedicated provincial policy agendas that address sexual violence as a distinct issue, separate from family violence and other interpersonal violence. For example, the Government of Alberta has a coordinated, cross-ministerial, province-wide response to sexual violence targeting 3 key areas: **shifting the culture, improving response, and supporting survivors.**

Saskatchewan's policy makers need to prioritize sexual violence through the opportunities afforded by the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

On July 25, 2023, the Government of Saskatchewan signed a \$20.3 million agreement with the federal government to help carry out Canada's first National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

The Saskatchewan government agreed to match this amount, a total of \$40.6 million investment in our province over four years. Even though Saskatchewan has the second-highest rate of sexual violence among provinces, less than \$5 million has been set aside specifically for addressing this issue.

In order to implement the National Action Plan effectively and equitably, there must be deliberate consultation with communities and sexual violence service providers to ensure strategies prioritize the most underserved and at-risk populations.

PRIORITIES

Priority 1: Trauma-Informed Sexual Violence Counselling Services should be available across Saskatchewan

Comprehensive and long-term mental health support is one of the most important services required by survivors of sexual violence. Survivors in Saskatchewan identified specialized sexual violence counsellors and services as being vital in their healing journey. Despite the enormity of the issue, large geographic areas of Saskatchewan continue to have limited and/or underfunded specialized sexual violence services. Access to culturally appropriate, age-appropriate, trauma and violence-informed counselling and healing services ensures that survivors can cope with the effects of trauma and live long, healthy, and productive lives.

Priority 2: Saskatchewan students need to learn how to recognize sexual abuse and how to ask for help

Healthy relationship education is multifaceted, and schools often rely on SASS member agencies to support them in delivering the mandated curriculum. Education on healthy relationships helps students recognize sexual abuse and learn how to ask for help. Strong partnerships between community agencies and local schools are vital in facilitating collaborative community approaches to violence prevention.

However, on August 22, 2023, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education removed the ability of our members and other community educators to provide healthy relationship education in public schools. This education is crucial for preventing sexual violence and creating safe spaces for students to report experiences of violence.

Without access to this education, students in unsafe situations are unable to identify sexual abuse, especially if it is happening in their own homes, and are unable to seek help. This is particularly concerning in rural and remote areas where resources for schools are even more limited.

Priority 3: Survivors need access to specialized medical care after an assault in their own rural and remote communities.

Sexual assault is an extreme form of personal violation and survivors often feel vulnerable and exposed. The healthcare system is often the first place survivors go after a recent sexual assault. They may need forensic examinations, medical care for immediate needs like preventing sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies, counselling referrals, and support from knowledgeable professionals.

Sadly, Saskatchewan does not have provincial care standards for sexual assault survivors presenting in emergency medical facilities across the province. Survivors from marginalized communities often face additional challenges when seeking medical help. Most rural hospitals have very limited social worker capacity to assist survivors, provide community referrals, work through safety issues prior to discharge, and conduct follow-up check-ins after a survivor leaves the hospital.

It is important that survivors receive appropriate, compassionate and culturally responsive care that addresses both their physical and emotional needs.

Priority 4: Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Mental Health and Addictions needs to include a Gender Analysis

We applaud the Government of Saskatchewan's focus on building capacity, improving the system of care and moving to a recovery-oriented system for treatment through the Action Plan for Mental Health and Addictions 2023-2028.

Research shows that survivors of sexual violence are at higher risk for mental health issues and often turn to substances as a coping mechanism, which can lead to severe addictions.

In addition, mental health issues and addictions heighten the risk of both experiencing and perpetrating sexual violence by impairing judgment and increasing vulnerability to harm.

The Action Plan needs to include a gendered analysis that addresses the specific needs of sexual violence survivors and tailors treatment approaches for different genders and populations.

Priority 5: Every worker is entitled to a workplace free from sexual harassment

Sexual harassment in the workplace has serious financial, mental, and physical impacts on workers and creates toxic environments for all. The psychological injuries from sexual violence are often invisible, making them difficult to recognize.

SASS's Enough Already program supports Saskatchewan workplaces in enhancing policies, and practices to prevent and address sexual harassment. By collaborating with diverse industry partners, SASS is fostering a shared understanding of psychological injuries from sexual harassment, identifying promising practices to reduce these harms, and improving educational resources to prevent workplace sexual harassment.



SUMMARY

We have an opportunity to change this reality. Sexual violence causes many social, health, and economic issues for our province. These costs will continue to rise for reactive care—including increased spending on addiction services, corrections, policing and child welfare—if we do not provide our communities with adequate resources to address the issue in a comprehensive manner.

Without a significant increase in the investment of resources for specialized sexual violence services, Saskatchewan will continue to see an increase in survivors coming forward only to be turned away with little or no supports.

Putting sexual violence on the policy agenda is the first step towards a Saskatchewan where everyone lives free from the threat, fear, or experience of sexual violence.

ABOUT SASS

Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan (SASS) is a provincial non-profit organization that works collectively with front-line agencies, community partners, and governments that provide support and advocacy for those affected by sexual violence in Saskatchewan.

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