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Commitment to end sexual violence

Alberta has made a government-wide commitment to prevent sexual violence and improve support for survivors.

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Our commitment

Our commitment to end sexual violence brings together community organizations and 10 government ministries to deliver a coordinated, provincewide response to sexual violence in Alberta. It was developed through extensive consultation with frontline providers, advocates and survivors.

Commitment statement

Every Albertan has the right to live free from violence. Perpetrators of sexual violence violate that right.

The Government of Alberta does not tolerate these abuses of power and control. Though anyone can experience sexual violence, we recognize it impacts women and girls most.

We stand firmly with survivors, advocates and community agencies to stop sexual violence in all its forms.

We commit to supporting survivors, improving our response, and shifting to a culture of consent by advancing gender equality.

We will work until all survivors are believed and supported, and this violence is eradicated from our communities.

Our guiding principles

The following principles guide our work:

- Sexual violence is a violation of the fundamental human right to safety and bodily autonomy.

- Sexual violence is often a form of gender-based violence and is rooted in systemic and structural inequality and social dynamics of power and oppression.
- Sexual violence is a public health issue that causes significant trauma and impacts the physical, mental, emotional and sexual health outcomes of individuals, communities and societies.
- Efforts to prevent and address sexual violence are based on the rights, needs and wishes of individuals who have experienced sexual violence.
- [Gender-based analysis plus](#) is applied to policies, programs and initiatives in order to respond to the different situations and experiences of those impacted by sexual violence.
- Every survivor has the right to be treated with dignity and respect and not be discriminated against based on gender identity or expression, age, race or ethnicity, ability, health status, citizenship status or any other characteristic or identity factor.



How we're helping

Our commitment includes actions in three key areas to stop and prevent sexual violence:

1. **Shift the culture** by championing a culture of consent and gender equality
2. **Improve the response** by ensuring that the social, health, justice and education systems respond effectively to sexual violence and harassment
3. **Support survivors** by funding community agencies that help survivors and run education and prevention programs

Shift the culture

We are shifting to a culture of consent and advancing gender equality by:

- funding awareness campaigns to promote a cultural shift towards supporting survivors, breaking the silence around sexual violence and providing education about consent, gender equality and healthy relationships
 - ["I Believe You" campaign](#)
 - [Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence](#)
- engaging men and boys to promote respectful relationships, positive gender roles and equality
 - ["I Am A Kind Man" program](#)
 - [WiseGuyz Project](#)
 - [Leading Change: Playing to Win](#)
- creating safe public spaces for women by partnering with the City of Edmonton on the [UN Women Safe Cities Initiative](#)

Improve the response

Every survivor deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.

We're working to ensure government, social service agencies, health care, law enforcement, schools and post-secondary institutions respond effectively to sexual violence and harassment by:

- [supporting sexual assault centres and agencies](#) with stable funding to increase access to counselling, cut wait times and provide crisis help in more communities
- providing training and resources to police through the [Sexual Violence Police Advisory Committee](#) to improve their response and investigations and to help survivors know their rights and support services available
- developing a [best practice guide for law enforcement investigations into sexual violence](#)
- funding [Sexual Assault Response Teams](#) of registered nurses who have specialized education in sexual assault care to work throughout the province
- increasing access to the legal system for survivors of family and sexual violence by removing the time limit to bring forward civil claims

Support survivors

Sexual violence is never okay. We stand firmly with survivors by:

- improving access to sexual assault services in rural and remote communities
- boosting funding for women's shelters by \$15 million to help ensure no woman fleeing violence is turned away
- providing funding to second-stage shelters for the first time to help women in need with longer term accommodation

- making it easier for survivors of family violence to leave dangerous situations by allowing them to break residential leases without financial penalty through a [Safer Spaces Certificate](#)
- working with [LGBTQ individuals](#) and ethno-cultural communities to develop strategies to address sexual violence
- supporting the [Action Coalition on Human Trafficking Alberta](#)
- providing new occupational health and safety rules to help [prevent workplace bullying, harassment and violence](#)
- piloting a project to provide [free legal advice to survivors of sexual violence](#)

I need help

Call 911 if you're in immediate danger.

Support is available if you've experienced sexual violence:

- [Sexual assault centres](#) - get help and information at one of 12 centres across Alberta
- [Women's shelters](#) - find a shelter near you or seek help fleeing domestic violence
- [Family Violence Information Line](#) - call 310-1818 for 24-hour advice and support
- [Emergency financial support](#) - get financial benefits to help you get to safety, set up a new household or start a new life
- [Safer Spaces Certificate](#) - end your tenant agreement without financial penalty

I want to help

Sexual violence, whether it's unwanted touching, inappropriate comments or the expectation of sex, is never okay. It's a human rights violation and it's illegal.

Everyone can play a part in preventing sexual harassment and assault.

Call 911 if you witness sexual violence or see someone who is in immediate danger.

How to be an ally and support survivors

- never blame the survivor, respond with ["I believe you"](#) to someone who discloses to you
- support anyone who tells you they've been sexually assaulted
- challenge sexism when possible at home, work or on social media
- stand with men and boys to promote positive masculinity, which includes being kind, caring and respectful
- educate your children about consent and healthy relationships
- participate in public awareness programs
- volunteer or donate to organizations that work to prevent sexual violence and support survivors
- raise awareness about sexual violence in your community

Reporting child abuse or sexual exploitation

Anyone who suspects a child or youth is being [abused or sexually exploited](#) has a legal responsibility to report it.

Call your local police department or the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-KIDS (5437).

Reporting elder abuse

Elder abuse is any action or inaction that jeopardizes the health or well-being of an older adult. It can take several forms, including financial, emotional, physical, sexual, neglect and medication. Often more than one type of abuse occurs at the same time.

[Learn the signs of elder abuse](#)



What is sexual violence

Sexual violence is an act committed against someone's sexual integrity without that person's freely given consent. It can be physical and/or non-contact, affects all ages and genders, and the person committing the act may be known or a stranger. It's against the law.

Sexual assault

Is a legal term used in Canada to explain any form of sexual contact without consent. It can include forced or unwanted kissing, touching, vaginal penetration, anal penetration or oral sex.

Sexual harassment

Unwanted or uninvited sexual remarks, gestures, sounds like leering or whistling, and actions that make a

person feel unsafe, degraded or uncomfortable, even if the harasser claims to have been only joking. Any unwanted sexual behaviour that affects or prevents a person from getting or keeping a job, promotion or living accommodations.

Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation happens when a person in a position of trust or authority uses that power to start or attempt sexual activity with another person. It can be through direct or indirect touching, violence, coercion or the use of threats.

Sexual consent

Consent is defined in Canada's Criminal Code as the voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity. The legal age of consent is 16 in Canada. Silence or passivity does not equal consent and consenting partners must be capable of revoking consent at any time. Therefore, consent cannot be given in advance and there is no implied consent in Canadian law.

Not everyone is capable of consent

- Children and youth under 16 (exemptions for peers close in age)
- Youth 16-17 when engaged in sexual activities with adults in positions of trust or authority (also known as sexual exploitation)
- Incapacitated individuals (for example, unconscious or severely intoxicated)

It is important to [know the law](#) and [understand sexual consent](#).

Who's affected

Sexual violence affects all Albertans – individuals, families and communities.

- 87% of survivors are women
- 94% of offenders are men
- 95% of survivors do not report assaults to police, making sexual violence the most underreported crime in Canada

Experiencing sexual violence can severely affect a survivor's physical and mental well-being, but there is hope for healing with time and supports.

Gender inequality is a root cause of all forms of violence against women. Statistics show that some groups are more likely to experience sexual violence:

- Indigenous women and girls
- Children
- Seniors
- People with disabilities
- LGBTQ
- New Canadians – immigrants and refugees

Offenders can be an acquaintance, friend, work colleague, intimate partner, family member or stranger.

Sexual Violence Awareness Month

May is Sexual Violence Awareness Month. It was first proclaimed on May 1, 2018 when government launched the commitment to end sexual violence.

Community organizations plan events across the province to raise awareness, challenge attitudes and promote a culture of consent.

News

- [More safety and transparency for patients](#) (Oct 30, 2018)
 - [Free legal advice for survivors of sexual violence](#) (June 15, 2018)
 - [Preventing gender-based violence through education](#) (June 2, 2018)
 - [New rules mean safer workplaces](#) (May 28, 2018)
 - [Stronger support for survivors of sexual violence](#) (May 25, 2018)
 - [Preventing sexual violence in the Banff region](#) (May 22, 2018)
 - [Premier proclaims Sexual Violence Awareness Month](#) (May 1, 2018)
 - [Albertans recognized for preventing sexual violence](#) (April 4, 2018)
 - [More supports for survivors of sexual violence](#) (Mar 7, 2018)
 - [New children's mental health supports](#) (Jan 29, 2018)
 - [Continuing the conversation about consent](#) (July 5, 2017)
 - [A concrete approach to sexual consent](#) (May 9, 2017)
 - [Connecting sexual violence survivors to supports](#) (May 9, 2017)
 - [Supporting survivors of sexual and domestic violence](#) (Mar 7, 2017)
 - [Vigil shines light on violence against women: Statement](#) (Dec 6, 2016)
 - [Recommendation to remove Justice Camp: Statement](#) (Nov 30, 2016)
 - [Breaking down barrier for survivors of domestic violence](#) (Aug 9, 2016)
 - [Government invests in community programs that support families and prevent violence](#) (Mar 24, 2016)
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