

The Role of Elected Officials: Addressing Sexualized Violence

Elected officials (municipal, provincial, and federal) can create a safer society for the people they represent. They hear from citizens about many issues, including sexualized violence/abuse, and represent the interests of those they serve. The cost of sexualized violence/abuse is high to victims and to government. Government plays a role in reducing the systemic, social, health and financial toll of sexualized violence/abuse.

- The annual cost to survivors in Canada is:
 - \$75.9 million: mental health services
 - \$2.6 million: health-care costs
 - \$23.9 million: productivity losses

- The annual cost to society in Canada is:
 - \$161.3 million: police
 - \$21.3 million: courts
 - \$172.4 million: social services
 - \$1.3 million: employers

(The Gap in the Gender Gap: Violence Against Women in Canada, Kate McInturff, 2013)

Important Legislative Changes in Nova Scotia

- Under Stephen McNeil, the governing Liberals introduced a Sexual Violence Strategy in 2015. It is a step forward but it, combined with a rash of high-profile sexual assault stories in the news, has created increased demand on sexual assault centres and services across the province and has created a need for more resources.
- The Limitation of Actions Act was changed in 2015 to extend the timeframe within which a person may make a legal claim to remedy an injury, loss or damage that occurred as a result of an act or omission. This means there is no time limitation for adult victims of childhood sexual abuse or historical sexual assault to sue their perpetrator. Provincial government leaders from all parties, victims/survivors, sexual assault centres and other advocates collaborated to make this important change happen.

- As part of the 2015 Sexual Violence Strategy, the province is investing \$700,000 to expand sexual assault nurse examiner services in Cape Breton, southwestern Nova Scotia, the Annapolis Valley, and the South Shore.

Sexual Assault Services in Nova Scotia

- Currently there are only three organizations formally mandated to provide sexual assault services in Nova Scotia. – Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association, Avalon Sexual Assault Centre and the Colchester Sexual Assault Centre. In other areas of the province, women’s centres and transition houses, etc. have developed formal programs and services to respond to/address sexualized violence in their communities above and beyond their existing mandates.

Why the Need for a Province Wide Sexualized Violence Awareness, Prevention, Intervention, and Education Program

- Risk and prevention has long been primarily addressed by focusing on individual behaviours. This has not been effective in producing safer communities in Nova Scotia. More recently, prevention planning among concerned organizations has focused on social factors and conceptualizes sexualized violence primarily as a community problem, rather than an individual or clinical problem. Leading agencies have begun to adopt this approach, using concepts from population health approaches and from anthropological analysis of rape-prone societies, such as those currently used by the Center for Disease Control.
 - For example, Participants in the 2008 N.S. Sexual Assault Needs Assessment were asked to identify what would prevent sexualized violence in their communities. Public, professional, and school-based education was the nearly universal response.
 - Under the Provincial Sexual Violence Strategy, the Provincial Public Awareness Committee and the Prevention Innovation Grants are a first step towards a longer term, multi-faceted sexual assault awareness and prevention initiative. Elected officials play an important role in ensuring this work continues.

Why It’s Important:

Why a Provincial trauma-informed, therapeutic sexual assault counselling model is needed

- It is important that victims/survivors of sexualized violence receive counselling services which are trauma-informed. Trauma-informed programs and services are based on an understanding of the vulnerabilities or

triggers of trauma survivors that traditional service delivery approaches may aggravate, so that these services and programs can be more supportive and avoid re-traumatization.

- **Re-traumatization** is a conscious or unconscious reminder of past trauma that results in a re-experiencing of the initial trauma event. It can be triggered by a situation, an attitude or expression, or by certain environments that replicate the emotions of the original trauma.
- Currently, there are only two SANE programs in N.S. – one at Avalon in Halifax and one at the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre & Sexual Assault Services Association.
 - The Sexual Violence Strategy initiated the expansion of SANE services into the western region of N.S. and in Cape Breton.
 - Regions isolated from these services have trouble accessing the health and medical supports they require.
 - A community clinic would create space for people who are unable/unwilling to access the programs operated in hospitals.
 - In the rest of Canada SANE programs also respond to intimate partner violence. To meet the needs of clients, N.S. needs to implement this element of the program as well.

Elected officials can...

- **Be a role model** - You can support programs and policies that promote nonviolent relationships and reduce sexualized violence in families, relationships, and communities. By participating in anti-sexualized violence campaigns, you legitimize the issue and demonstrate to your peers and to the public that sexualized violence is a criminal offence not to be taken lightly.
- **Educate and reform** - As a community leader, you have a prominent voice and can raise public awareness of sexualized violence.
- **Take action** – You can take action by working with all levels of government, victim support agencies, and both community based and institution based organizations to formalize sexual assault services in your local communities and throughout Nova Scotia.
- **Be proactive** - By ensuring funding for prevention, and services for both victims and offenders as well as those who are at risk, you can help prevent future violence and create safer, more respectful communities. By funding and working with community based organizations and antiviolence advocates you demonstrate your commitment to ending violence in all its forms.
- **Influence policy** - Ensure your party has a political platform that includes sexualized violence. You can work for the adoption and enforcement of creative and effective laws and policies that prevent sexualized violence. Monitor

those policies and consult with community service providers as well as law enforcement and legal professionals to ensure they continue to be effective.

- **Be informed** – Make a point of being aware of sexualized violence in your community. Understanding the effects and impacts of sexualized violence on society as well as on individual victims will enable you to make informed and proactive governmental decisions.
- **Be a political advocate** - Strive to ensure that your political allies and opponents keep sexualized violence and women's issues as a priority on the political agenda.

You Will Know You Have Made a Difference When...

- Candidates mention sexualized violence in their platforms.
- Elected officials know more about sexualized violence
- Sexualized violence training for professionals, and education and awareness programs for schools are required and funded.
- Citizens contact their elected officials about sexualized violence more often.
- Sexual assault legislation and support for sexualized violence organizations that provide services and advocacy for victims/survivors are government priorities.
- There are increased reports to police and more requests for support services from victims/survivors.
- There are noticeable changes in legislation and the criminal justice system that decrease barriers for victims/survivors.

A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.

– Greek Proverb