



For Immediate Release

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Avalon Unable to Accommodate New Counselling Requests

K'jipuktuk (Halifax, NS) - For the first time in the 23 years Avalon Sexual Assault Centre has offered counselling, the Centre is unable to receive new requests for this service.

The number of people seeking sexual assault trauma therapy has grown steadily, and in response, the Centre has pursued every means of addressing the growing need: strategic restructuring, changing service parameters, hiring more counsellors. However, the number of people seeking service has been growing faster than the Centre has been able to grow its ability to provide more service. There are people who have been waiting for counselling for over two years. Sexual assault centres across the country have been reporting the same dilemma. Recently the volume of new requests for Avalon's counselling has been such that the Centre can no longer provide accurate estimates of wait times.

"We're continuing to seek ways we can serve more people, but while we do that, we need to be able to assure those who've been waiting that they'll be seen. Currently that means we can't add people to the waitlist, and that we'll be directing all therapeutic counselling service to those already waiting," said Jackie Stevens, Executive Director.

The Centre's current caseload will be completed, then the needs of those on the waitlist assessed in order to estimate when new requests will be added to the waitlist. During this period, the Board of Directors and leadership of the Centre will continue to explore opportunities for support, collaboration, and re-imagining service delivery models.

"As a team of people dedicated to serving survivors of sexual assault and abuse, we recognize that many community-based, health, and mental health services are experiencing similar challenges and that this increasing need, seen across sexual assault centres in all jurisdictions of Canada for years now, is not a momentary event. It is an established and ongoing reality. Statistics Canada recently reported that there were more police-reported sexual assaults in 2017 than in any year since 1998," said Stevens.

"We realize that the increase in new clients shows that Avalon's therapeutic counselling model is successful and needed. It also shows that survivors are feeling heard and supported by service providers they disclose to. We are all making a difference. But we also see that we need to continue to work with funders and community partners to find longer term solutions, to ensure all survivors of sexualized violence and abuse have access to therapeutic counselling and other specialized services."

The Centre will continue to provide medical follow up and forensic evidence collection through the Avalon Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program. Professional training programs, community and school-based prevention and awareness programs, and public awareness campaigns will also continue. Avalon's Intake and Initial Response and Support Counsellor will continue to provide sexual assault information, support and referral.

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Statement from the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre Board of Directors

Avalon is temporarily closing its therapeutic counselling program to new clients in order to complete services for existing clients and address its waitlist for service. This was a very difficult decision for Avalon to make and we recognize that this decision impacts staff, clients and other service providers. We are hopeful that government and our communities can continue to come together at this important time to find solutions, to support survivors.

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre is a community leader in trauma-specific counselling services. The fact that more survivors are coming forward shows that they are feeling believed, supported, and validated. Trauma-informed first response, support, and referral services have increased and improved. Avalon Centre remains one of the few organizations in the Halifax region that provides trauma-specific counselling. Ultimately, the broader systemic and societal impacts of sexualized violence continue to drive an ever-increasing need for specialized sexual assault services.

The ongoing increase in requests for service highlights the value and importance of trauma-specific counselling services. We ask that the Province of Nova Scotia continue to work with us and our community partners to ensure increased and sustainable funding for existing sexual assault trauma therapeutic counselling services like the program provided by Avalon, as well as for the implementation of new counselling programs province wide.

Lee-Ann Conrod
Chair, Avalon Board of Directors

About Avalon Sexual Assault Centre

The Avalon Sexual Assault Centre is a feminist organization working to eliminate sexual assault/abuse, and to change the current socio-political culture that fosters sexism, social injustice and other forms of oppression.