

Breaking the Silence

A Coordinated Response to
Sexual Violence in Nova Scotia

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Message from the Minister

I am pleased to present Nova Scotia's first coordinated response to sexual violence.

Over the years, a number of groups and organizations have put a lot of time and energy into building our understanding of this complex and devastating social issue.

They have cleared a space for us to build a new, strong foundation for action. This strategy includes important first steps to build the partnerships and processes needed to deliver care in a new way, and to focus on preventing sexual violence from happening in the first place.

Sexual assault and sexual violence can happen to anyone. This is a terrible fact and occurs far too often. Through this plan, government is demonstrating its commitment to working with communities to address this situation.

I want to thank all of you who have helped us get to this place by sharing your skills, ideas, or experiences. We will need your continued participation as we move this plan forward together.

Across the province, frontline staff, volunteers, and advocates are providing compassionate care and support to victims and survivors. But we must do even more.

Through full, coordinated community engagement we can increase and improve help and support to victims and survivors of sexual violence. We can reduce sexual violence in our communities.

Joanne Bernard
Minister of Community Services

Introduction

Sexual violence is one of the most traumatic and pervasive of all human rights violations. It is a complex social problem that requires many approaches. Given this complexity and the devastating impact this issue has on our communities, we know government cannot do this work alone. It will take the combined efforts and energy of government, support and service organizations, and victims and their families to create meaningful change.

This is Nova Scotia's first strategy to address sexual violence. The actions described below will improve the availability of supports and resources for victims and their families. But the ultimate goal of this work is to prevent sexual violence from occurring in the first place.

Over the next two years we will develop the policies to support better delivery of prevention and support services. We will increase education with a goal to support and promote healthy behaviors and relationships. We will increase and improve the services and supports needed by victims and survivors. And we will do it all under the guidance of victims, survivors, and their supporters.

At the end of these two years, we will have the coordination, supports, and policies required to address sexual violence. Community networks will work together and have access to improved resources. Nurses, counsellors, volunteers, and others will have the education and tools they need to support victims and survivors. Government will do a better job at coordinating their work and at ensuring service providers all have access to the right resources to do their jobs well.

And that is just the beginning. Because we know that deep societal change takes time. In future years, service providers, victims, and survivors will drive future plans to shape and deliver services on an ongoing basis.



What is sexual violence?

Our work is guided by the definition adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO): “sexual violence is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting.”

Sexual violence is entrenched and normalized in our society to the point that actions and even the harms associated with it have become tolerated and accepted.

A person’s identity and social location—determined by their gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, age, race, ability, sexual orientation, and employment status or income—can leave some people more vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence than others.

Our Principles

Our discussions with Nova Scotians over the past year have identified the following principles that guide our way forward.

The strategy is about people. The interests of victims and survivors and others impacted by sexual violence need to be at the core of our work. The needs and experiences of marginalized and vulnerable groups must be taken into account. Our work must be inclusive, culturally competent, and trauma informed.

We have to work together with a unified voice. An approach to prevent sexual violence must promote conditions in which meaningful cooperation between citizens, communities, and governments can occur to make the best use of resources and expertise.

We can do it. We can prevent sexual violence from occurring in our communities. We can break the silence and stigma that make too many Nova Scotians feel they are alone in dealing with this problem.

Our Approach: Community Engagement

A community-engagement approach to addressing sexual violence is needed to bring a clear, coordinated, strong, united voice to this issue.

Community engagement means planning and working with community to begin widespread change based on common goals. This approach recognizes that both community and government have essential resources, roles, and responsibilities that are needed to develop a successful coordinated response to this complex issue.

Community engagement calls for all stakeholders, including government, service delivery organizations, and victims to directly influence the work and participate in shared action. This form of engagement is an effective and measured approach, and it takes time to do well.

Many provincial and community-based groups and organizations have worked hard to advance our understanding of sexual violence. Across the province, frontline staff and advocates are providing crucial support and possess unique skills and knowledge to be shared.

The Current Situation

Sexual violence is a serious health, social, and public safety issue that is difficult to measure because it is so often under-reported. It is estimated that only 10 per cent of all sexual assault victims report to the police.

In 2013 there were 647 sexual assaults reported to police in Nova Scotia. While the provincial rate of sexual assault decreased by three per cent from the previous year, the Nova Scotia rate remains above the national rate.

Sexual violence is an issue that impacts children and youth. Youth and children make up 20 per cent of the population of Canada, yet they accounted for 55 per cent of all victims of police-reported sexual offences. While less often discussed, victims of sexual violence also include men and boys, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer persons.

The statistics do not give us a full understanding of how sexual violence affects people, especially those from diverse and under-represented communities. While we heard that our work must be mindful of the known data, we must understand people's experiences. That is why we conducted engagement sessions across the province in 2014 to expand our understanding of the Nova Scotia experience and need for support. This engagement must continue.





What We Heard

During 2014 all Nova Scotians were given an opportunity to help shape the province's response to sexual violence. We met with over 60 representatives from over 40 community groups and organizations to gain their insights and guidance. We also heard from over 800 Nova Scotians through an online public survey. We also had conversations with over 100 youth from across the province to gain their unique input.

A central theme that emerged from our engagement efforts was that services need to be more accessible and visible. Many people didn't know where to turn for help or what was available in their own communities. Consistent public awareness and education are needed.

We heard that services were not coordinated, and in some cases even support providers were not aware of what other services were available from other providers. A radical new approach to delivering service is needed.

We heard that access was not inclusive and that support depends on age, gender, ability, income, and where you live. We heard of the need for increased supports for men and boys, and the LGBTQ community, and that our work needs to be culturally competent. At the same time, we heard that we must continue to address the disproportionately high number of women and girls affected by sexual violence. Perception varied widely on what consent means, why it is needed, the influence of drugs and alcohol on consent, and the legal implications for those under 18 years of age.

While our engagement efforts identified many concerns and barriers to accessing services, they also helped to identify what support and service organizations, victims, and survivors need to see in the province's response to sexual violence.

Areas of Action

All Nova Scotians should expect to live safely, free from sexual violence, and should have services available to them when needed. A provincial strategy will help coordinate services to better respond to the needs of victims and survivors and will place a strong focus on prevention.

Actions have been identified under the following three categories:



SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

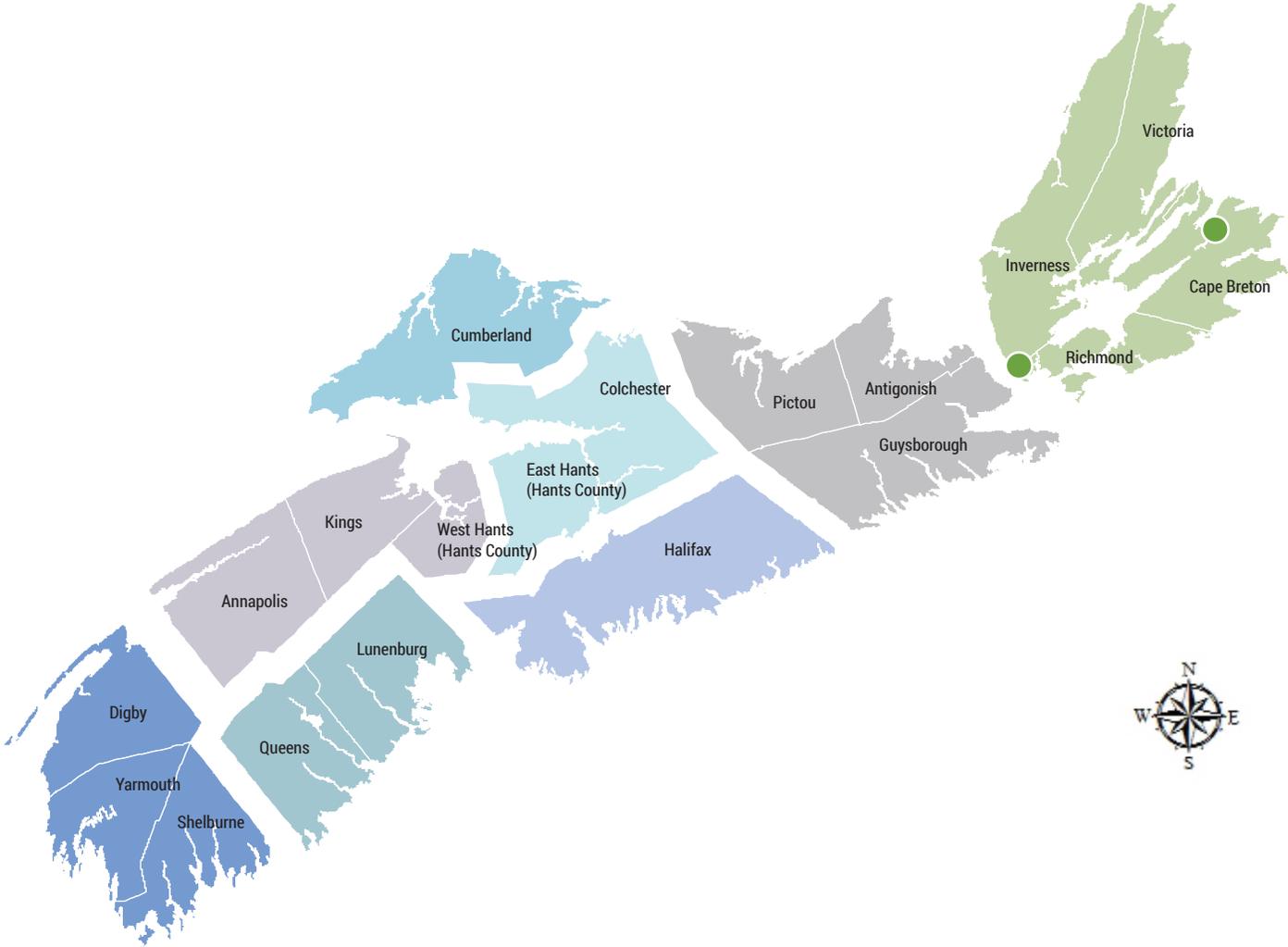
Sexual violence impacts every victim and survivor in a different way. Therefore, the services and supports we offer must be flexible, responsive, and timely. Better coordination is essential to make sure the best possible services are being provided when and where they are needed.

WE WILL

- ✓ **Help people get urgent help faster**
 - Offer specialized training to existing support lines to ensure that there are options for a 24/7 crisis line for victims
 - Apply new technology to provide immediate and anonymous support to victims
- ✓ **Build on existing community support networks**
 - Enhance community-based response in nine areas across the province by coordinating counselling and support, visibility of services, navigation support, safe spaces, and nonjudgmental services
 - Create an asset and resource map of community-based services
- ✓ **Expand the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program**
 - Expand SANE to Sydney and Western Nova Scotia in 2015–2016 with a \$700,000 investment by Health and Wellness
- ✓ **Develop a funding framework for existing Sexual Assault Centres**
 - Set up multi-year funding for three Sexual Assault Centres to enable better planning and service delivery



Nine Community Support Network Locations



PUBLIC EDUCATION, AWARENESS, AND PREVENTION

Sexual violence is preventable. Our work will focus on developing approaches that stop sexual violence from occurring in the first place. However, when support is needed, people must know where to turn to get better early intervention and long-term support.

WE WILL

- ✓ **Establish a provincial committee on public awareness**
 - Develop resources that are community based and culturally appropriate
 - Create a public education media campaign
- ✓ **Establish a provincial committee on training**
 - Develop training materials on sexual violence across sectors
 - Lay the foundation for a provincial training network
- ✓ **Establish a Prevention Innovation Fund**
 - Invest to support expansion of best practices, better research and evaluation, and better use of technology
 - Assist groups that may not be part of the network of sexual violence organizations, such as student unions and youth groups, to reach out to their peers in creative ways
 - Support marginalized populations including African Nova Scotians, First Nations, and the LGBTQ community

APPROACH AND ACCOUNTABILITY

We heard through our engagement sessions that partnership and collaboration are key to successfully addressing the issue of sexual violence in Nova Scotia. Education and public awareness alone are not enough to create change; they must be supported by good public policy and legislation.

WE WILL

- ✓ **Establish an interdepartmental committee**
 - Develop an inventory of all policies and processes relevant to sexual violence
 - Align policies and processes as necessary to support prevention and support services
- ✓ **Review current policies and funding**
 - Improve access to support across gender, age, ability, income, and geographic location through a more equitable funding formula and asset and resources maps that will be produced by the Community Support Networks
- ✓ **Hire a provincial specialist**
 - The provincial specialist will support engagement activities and implement the work of provincial committees
- ✓ **Produce annual reports**
 - Measure and communicate progress in meeting outcomes



Next Steps

This strategy is just the beginning. It builds upon the work of many dedicated organizations and individuals. It sets the strategic direction for the next two years. It calls on all of us—all Nova Scotians—to play a role.

Change is not easy. It means breaking down silos, challenging deep-rooted social norms, and embracing new ways of working together. To do that, we need to develop a shared understanding of the problems and solutions, we need to sustain commitment to our actions, and we need to support public discussion of about what we value most as a society.

Nova Scotia's response to sexual violence will evolve with the continued support and participation of staff, volunteers, advocates, victims, and survivors.

We will continue to move forward with the shared vision of a Nova Scotia free from sexual violence.

Actions

IMPROVING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

	Help people get urgent help faster
	Offer specialized training to existing support lines to ensure that there are options for a 24/7 crisis line for victims
	Apply new technology to provide immediate and anonymous support to victims
	Build on existing Community Support Networks
	Enhance community-based response in nine areas across the province by coordinating counselling and support, visibility of services, navigation support, safe spaces, and nonjudgmental services
	Create an asset and resource map of community-based services
	Expand the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program
	Expand SANE to Sydney and Western Nova Scotia in 2015-2016 with a \$700,000 investment by Health and Wellness
	Develop funding framework for current Sexual Assault Centres
	Set up multi-year funding for three Sexual Assault Centres to enable better planning and service delivery

PUBLIC EDUCATION, AWARENESS, AND PREVENTION

	Establish a provincial committee on public awareness
	Develop resources that are community-based and culturally appropriate
	Create a public education media campaign
	Establish a provincial committee on training
	Develop training materials for service providers
	Lay the foundation for a provincial training network
	Establish a Prevention Innovation Fund
	Invest to support expansion of best practices, better research and evaluation, and better use of technology
	Assist groups that may not be part of the network of sexual violence organizations, such as student unions and youth groups, to reach out to their peers in creative ways
	Support marginalized populations including African Nova Scotians, First Nations, and the LGBTQ community

APPROACH AND ACCOUNTABILITY

	Establish an interdepartmental committee
	Develop an inventory of all policies and processes relevant to sexual violence and align these policies and processes as necessary to support prevention and support services
	Review current policies and funding
	Improve access to support across gender, age, ability, income and geographic location
	Establish a provincial specialist position
	Hire a provincial specialist to support engagement activities and implement the work of the provincial committees
	Produce annual reports and monitor progress of the strategy

