



What We Heard

A Sexual Violence Strategy for Nova Scotia

Sexual violence is a serious health, social and public safety issue and we know that incidents of sexual violence are under-reported in our province. In April 2014, work began to develop Nova Scotia's first provincial Sexual Violence Strategy with implementation targeted for 2015. As we pass the mid-way point in our development work, we are taking this opportunity to share with you what we heard.

Shaping a Plan of Action Together

Nova Scotians have seized the opportunity to have their voices heard in developing a plan of action. All Nova Scotians should expect to live safely and to have services available to them when they need them. A provincial strategy will help us coordinate services to better respond to the needs of victims and survivors and focus on prevention.

Creative, innovative, and sustainable work comes from working together.

Expanding Our Understanding

A number of groups and organizations have put a great deal of time and energy into this issue over the years and have worked diligently to advance our understanding of the complexity of sexual violence. Across the province, frontline staff and volunteers are providing crucial support and care to victims and survivors of sexual violence. Professional staff and advocates from these organizations are supporting victims and survivors throughout the province and possess unique expertise and understanding.

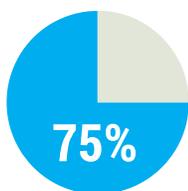
We met with over 60 representatives from more than 40 community groups and organizations to gain their insights and guidance.

Public Feedback

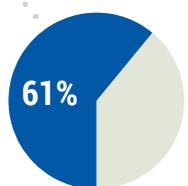
In the summer of 2014, a public online survey was launched. More than 800 Nova Scotians participated. Our questions touched on four key points: improving services for victims and survivors, preventing sexual violence, working together and immediate action we can take this year while developing the strategy. Each and every submission was reviewed and considered.



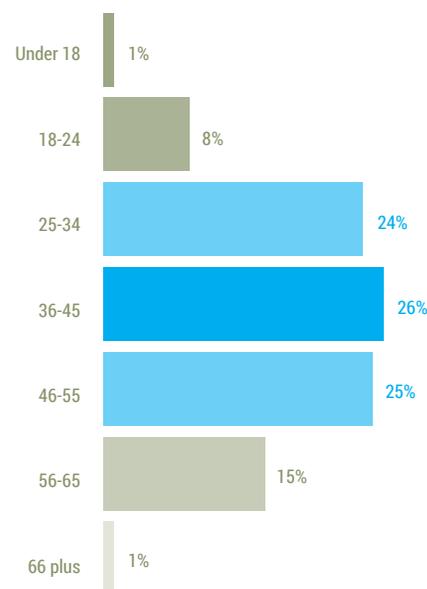
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Nova Scotians participated in our online survey



75% of those we heard from online were between the ages of 25-55, while the thoughts of Nova Scotia's seniors (those older than 55) and young adults and youth (those under 25) were not as well represented.



61% were from Halifax while 39% were from other parts of the province.



“Victims need validation and support, not blame and distrust”

Services are not accessible, visible or inclusive

A central theme that is emerging throughout our work is the need for accessible, visible and inclusive supports and resources. Currently, access to support is dependent on factors such as the gender, age, ability, income and geographic location of the victim or survivor. Support is centralized in specific pockets of the province. We heard there is a need for increased supports for men and boys and for the LGBT community. There is a need for our work to be culturally competent. Moreover, existing services are not always visible, and some service providers are not aware of the services provided by other service providers in the area.

Services are not coordinated

We need to change the way we work together. We need to develop models of collaboration that wrap around people, not organizations. We need an inclusive and equitable team approach that will build upon the collective intent, skills, and resources in our communities. Community engagement is key.

“We need to radicalize the way we work together”

Improving Service Delivery



Counselling and Support:

Victims require increased access to counseling options and services which are more immediate, inclusive culturally, competent and trauma informed.



Visibility:

Victims and survivors of sexual violence, along with their allies, need to be able to identify appropriate services and know where to connect for support. Support should be anonymous and available for those who do not choose to report to police.



Navigation Support:

Victims and survivors require support navigating systems and sectors and must have a clear path to follow. The path must be marked with shared standards, protocols, choices and clearly defined roles and responsibilities.



Safe Spaces & Nonjudgmental Services:

Victims and survivors require safe spaces – physical and emotional – to discuss their experiences. They require compassionate services across sectors, systems and agencies. Victims and survivors need to be believed.



SANE and Medical Services:

Victims and survivors need access to the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program and to appropriate medical services.

“Health and police are probably the scariest places to go. It’s extremely intimidating and you feel vulnerable. I don’t know how but there needs to be a way to make that less scary.”

Understanding the Impact of Trauma

Sexual violence is traumatic. Often, trauma survivors, such as victims of sexual violence, can be re-traumatized when they attempt to reach out and seek support in a variety of ways – justice, health, education or community settings. Being trauma-informed can help increase our understanding to better support victims and survivors. Trauma-informed approaches take into account an understanding of trauma in all aspects of service delivery. This approach recognizes the need for physical and emotional safety for victims, as well as supportive decision-making. This approach can help create a culture of collaboration and learning, avoid secondary wounding and can be used across sectors.

Prevention

Overwhelmingly, people have identified the critical importance of public awareness and education as components in a comprehensive prevention approach. People recognize the challenge in changing cultural beliefs and values embedded in the current public discourse surrounding this issue. Rarely is sexual violence spoken about in an open and honest way. This engenders silence on the issue and can perpetuate myths and victim-blaming.

We heard that the voice of youth must be heard clearly on this issue to understand social norms and focus on positive sexual health.

Understanding consent, preventing harmful use of alcohol, and the issue of hypersexualization were identified as key areas of concern that should be addressed in a comprehensive prevention approach.

Our prevention focus needs to include the development of policies and strategies that address the underlying factors known to contribute to sexual violence and that build healthy, safe and resilient communities.

Guiding Our Way Forward

The Strategy is about people.

Our work needs to be person-centred. The interests of victims and survivors, and others impacted by sexual violence, will be at the core of our work. The needs 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.

A plan to eradicate sexual violence must promote conditions in which meaningful cooperation between citizens, communities, and governments can occur to maximize the effective use of resources and expertise.

We can do it.

We can prevent sexual violence from occurring in our communities, and we can break the silence and stigma that hold too many Nova Scotians in isolation. We will use evidence-informed measures to support a preventative focus.

Continued Engagement

The Sexual Violence Strategy requires a number of approaches – more than a one-size-fits-all approach. We need a number of coordinated actions to address sexual violence. We need to foster conditions that support long term sustainable change. The safety of everyone is everyone’s responsibility.

Supporting Youth Leadership on Sexual Violence:

The Sexual Violence Strategy has partnered with HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development and Leaders Of Today to engage with youth throughout the province to determine what services youth need, what prevention efforts are working, and how we can best ensure that a strategy to improve service delivery and prevention will serve young Nova Scotians now and in the future.

Communicating and Connecting:

Our engagement efforts to date are initial steps in improving communication and making space for the voices of those concerned with this complex issue. We know we need to do more. Based on what we heard, we are working on ways to develop solutions together.