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Free legal advice for survivors of sexual violence

A new pilot program will help sexual violence survivors know their rights and options as they seek healing and justice.

Status of Women is providing a \$700,000 grant to the Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton to design, deliver and evaluate a three-year pilot program that will give sexual violence survivors free, confidential legal advice.

Launching in November 2018, the program will be open to adult survivors of all genders who have experienced sexual violence in Alberta, regardless of how much time has passed since the incident.

“We want survivors of sexual violence to know they have power and rights, and that we stand with them. We are funding this free service to remove barriers for survivors who are considering coming forward. And we want to help them make informed decisions as they heal and pursue justice.”

- Stephanie McLean, Minister of Status of Women

Research shows that many survivors do not report sexual violence incidents because they fear they'll be dismissed or re-traumatized, or they don't know how to navigate the process.

The program will give survivors a better understanding of their legal options, such as accessing the criminal justice system, submitting a human rights complaint or pursuing a civil claim.

“Six years after I was sexually assaulted, I still have many unanswered questions about the justice system. Free, confidential legal advice all those years ago would have ensured that I made an informed decision about what kind of legal action I could take, and how to go about it.”

- Elizabeth Halprin

“Everyone has the right to understand the justice system, regardless of their economic or social status. This program will help to promote safety, human rights and empowerment to all sexual violence survivors.”

- Toni Sinclair, executive director, Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton

The pilot program will offer free legal advice in communities served by the Elizabeth Fry Society, including: Edmonton, Stony Plain, Morinville, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, Ponoka, Camrose, Wetaskiwin, Red Deer and some Indigenous communities.

In May, Premier Rachel Notley launched the government’s commitment to end sexual violence, and proclaimed May as Sexual Violence Awareness Month in Alberta. This pilot program is part of the government’s commitment to challenge attitudes, improve supports for survivors and make workplaces and communities safer and more responsive to addressing sexual violence.

To support the government’s commitment, the province has:

- Increased access to the legal system for survivors of sexual violence by removing the time limit to bring forward civil claims.
- Released a new best practice guide for police investigating sexual violence cases, so survivors can feel confident they will be treated with dignity and respect if they come forward.
- Announced new occupational health and safety rules to help prevent workplace bullying, sexual harassment and assault, while providing better support for victims.

Quick facts

- Sexual violence is the most under-reported crime in Canada: 95 per cent of survivors do not report their assaults to police.
- Sexual violence most often affects women and girls: 87 per cent of survivors are women and 94 per cent of perpetrators are men.
- In 2014, 83,000 Albertans reported sexual assaults.
- Sexual violence is a sexual act committed against someone without that person’s freely given consent. It can be physical and/or non-contact, and affects all ages and genders. It is against the law.

Listen to the news conference



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Media inquiries

è **Tina Faiz**

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Press Secretary, Status of Women

