



Pre-Budget Consultation Submission 2020

Assaulted Women's Helpline / Seniors Safety Line

Submitted to the Standing Committee on Finance
and Economic Affairs

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Assaulted Women's Helpline Background:

Assaulted Women's Helpline answered its first call on November 4, 1985, becoming the first telephone crisis service of its kind in Ontario. At that time, shelters and other community agencies were struggling to keep up with the demand; calls went unanswered; support was unavailable. We answered 5,000 calls that first year in Toronto alone.

In 2002, Premier Mike Harris's government saw the value in Assaulted Women's Helpline and helped us bring our services across the province to every woman in Ontario who was experiencing abuse.

Today, our trained counsellors provide services in over 200 languages, including First Nations and aboriginal languages and offer support to women experiencing abuse everywhere in Ontario. Last year, we answered nearly 50,000 on Assaulted Women's Helpline plus an additional nearly 8,000 calls on Seniors Safety Line.

Seniors Safety Line:

Since 2009, we have provided emotionally supportive counselling, safety planning and referrals to government services just for seniors. Relatives, friends and care-givers also call us to help them support the seniors in their lives. We offer a uniquely senior-friendly service; There is a real, live person answering their call 24/7 who can help seniors and caregivers navigate difficult systems. This is critical when dealing with a vulnerable and often isolated population.

Elder Abuse is complex; In 80% of cases, the abuse is recurring or ongoing, and the abuser is typically a relative or someone known to the senior. Seniors often feel ashamed or do not view what is happening as abuse.

The reasons for calling have been remarkably consistent over the years:

- 45% emotional abuse/being isolated/being controlled
- 30% financial abuse

Seniors Safety Line / Assaulted Women's Helpline – Pre-budget Submission 2020
“Strengthening Ontario Senior's Lifeline to Safety”

- 18% neglect
- 2% physical abuse
- 5% other (including everything from past trauma, mental health to locating dentures)

A pilot project was conducted with Ontario 211 in 2013 and 2014 to determine if 211 could triage calls and allow trained staff to deal with those requiring more comprehensive services. During the test SSL call volumes did not decline, in fact, ON211 served as an additional referral service and only reinforced the importance of the SSL to callers.

For the past eleven years, we have provided this service, and even without predictable funding, or any advertising beyond the Elder Abuse and Ontario Government websites, last year we answered nearly 8,000 calls. The government of Ontario has funded Seniors Safety Line for the last three years through fiscal funding. Our ability to continue delivering on our mandate: “to provide 24-hour information and referral services to at-risk seniors in Ontario.” is strengthened by stable, annualized funding.

Seniors Safety Line, run through the Assaulted Women's Helpline service provides incredible value for money, because of the infrastructure, training, staff and cross-promotion of Assaulted Women's Helpline, we are able to provide this service to Seniors Safety Line for a fraction of what a stand-alone line would cost.

Our Recommendation:

We are recommending that the Ontario government to recognize the value of Seniors Safety Line by annualizing funding of \$165,000 per year, so we can continue to improve service delivery, undertake new programs and promote Seniors Safety Line across the province.

Most importantly, we make this recommendation so we may continue to answer the call from every senior in Ontario who count on us every day to provide emotional support, safety planning and referrals.