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2022 Budget Submission: 2022-23 Pre-budget Consultations

To: The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy,
Minister of Finance, Ontario

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About Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres

The [Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres \(OCRCC\)](#) is an equity-seeking network of community-based rape crisis/sexual assault centres across Ontario, committed to leading social transformation that prevents and eliminates sexual violence. Our membership includes 31 community-based Anglophone sexual assault centres across Ontario (our Francophone sister Coalition is [Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes \(AOcVF\)](#)). Member centres have been supporting survivors of sexual violence and offering prevention education since 1977: services include counselling to survivors of recent and historical sexual violence, accompaniment to hospital, police and court, advocacy and crisis support. Comprehensive community awareness and prevention programming and education on sexual violence are offered by all member centers of our Coalition as part of their core services in Ontario communities. In one year alone, Ontario's sexual assault centres responded to over 50,000 crisis line calls¹ —up from 30,000 recorded in 2009.

About the need: Survivors of sexual violence are reaching out more than ever, and the pandemic context has meant a rise in vulnerability to sexual violence.

Awareness of sexual violence is increasing —a significant and positive achievement. More and more, survivors of violence are reaching out for support. Since 2014, sexual assault centres across Ontario have seen a significant influx of new referrals, crisis line calls and intake for counselling services. In September 2019, Statistics Canada released its findings of *Incident-based crime statistics*² in Canada. These statistics – aligning with our experiences – reveal that sexual assault in Ontario rose from 7,434 police-reported incidences in 2016 and 8,782 in 2017 to 10,634 in 2018 — a year over year increase

¹ Ministry of the Attorney General, 2016

² Statistics Canada. *Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, Canada, provinces, territories and Census Metropolitan Areas*. Data release - July 22, 2019. Online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510017701&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.16&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.16>



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of almost 19%. The *Incident-based crime statistics* draws on data³ on police reported crimes. As many sexual violence survivors choose not to engage the criminal justice system⁴, this means that the prevalence of sexual violence in Ontario is in fact far higher.

The pandemic has proven to worsen pre-existing social and economic vulnerabilities. Women and girls, for example, face risks, “including sexual exploitation and abuse, unequal access to assistance, discrimination in aid provision...and violence”⁵. The economic fallout from business closures, job loss and other impacts can also lead to increased household stress: this has proven to “(1) increase the risk for intimate partner violence, (2) lead to risky coping strategies including survival sex, early/forced marriage, and (3) increase the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse”⁶. More, racialized communities, impoverished families “and other groups that have traditionally been marginalized, tend to be harmed by a disaster more”⁷, and have less access to resources⁸. Ontario sexual assault centres see these realities reflected in support-seeker food insecurity, sexual exploitation, and increasingly complex survivor needs.

During the pandemic, support for survivors of sexual violence in Ontario communities continues.

Ontario sexual assault centres are operating, with some modifications to services that include the

³ The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS), in co-operation with the policing community, collects police-reported crime statistics through the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR). The UCR Survey was designed to measure the incidence of crime in Canadian society and its characteristics. See [this link](#) for more information on the data collected in the survey.

⁴ Patel, A. October 30, 2014. for Huffington Post Canada. 460,000 Sexual Assaults In Canada Every Year: YWCA Canada. Online: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/30/sexual-assault-canada_n_6074994.html

⁵ Global Protection Cluster GBV Protection and Response and Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Last updated: 6 April 2020. *Identifying & Mitigating Gender-based Violence Risks within the COVID-19 Response*. Online: <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Interagency-GBV-risk-mitigation-and-Covid-tipsheet.pdf>: 10.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 2015. Unseen, unheard: Gender-based violence in disasters. Online: https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201511/1297700_GBv_in_Disasters_EN_LR2.pdf: 16

⁸ Tasker, J.P. for CBC News. March 10, 2021. *More racially diverse areas reported much higher numbers of COVID-19 deaths: StatsCan: Black Canadians in particular have been far more likely to succumb to the virus than others*. Online: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/racial-minorities-covid-19-hard-hit-1.5943878>



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closure of physical offices where required, the implementation of distance/virtual services, and enhanced crisis and practical assistance to respond to the impacts of the pandemic. Today, our member centres are providing hybrid virtual and in-person services, yet with the same resources through which they had previously operated in-person services only.

Despite increased service demand over many years, no increased funding from provincial government again in 2021

In its 2021 budget, Ontario allocated some positive investments to address gender-based violence. The budget also saw some investment in victim services – 2.1 million over 3 years to improve victim and new sexual assault services in three underserved Ontario locations. Of these dollars, however, few found their way directly to survivors accessing Ontario's existing sexual assault centres. Two of the three new enhancements included in the 2021 Ontario budget were closely connected with criminal justice services.

Community-based services need intentional investment. Community agencies dedicated to gender-based violence response bring particular expertise about survivors in local communities: for example, when survivors express a need for safe housing, face local trends in targeted victimization, or increase calls to our crisis line, community-based sexual assault centres are the first to know this. Many survivors choose not to engage in the criminal justice system, or do not see positive outcomes when reporting sexual assault⁹. Given this, community organizations like shelters and sexual assault centres often work with hidden populations of victims that other organizations do not. These populations

⁹ According to Canadian research, just 33 out of every 1,000 sexual assault cases are reported to the police⁹, and just 29 are actually recorded as a crime See: Patel, A. October 30, 2014. for Huffington Post Canada. 460,000 Sexual Assaults In Canada Every Year: YWCA Canada. Online: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/30/sexual-assault-canada_n_6074994.html



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include racialized survivors of violence; survivors from the LGBTQS+ community; survivors with complex safety or confidentiality issues such as victims of human trafficking; and sexual assault survivors. While it is important that all survivors of crime have access to the legal system, they may also need access to alternative supports *not* connected to the criminal justice system. Indeed, the Ontario Ministry of the Status of Women and Shore Consulting report on the *Review of Sexual Violence and Harassment Counselling Services and Helplines* (2017) found community-based sexual assault centres to be a best practice service model. Community-based sexual violence support competencies identified in the report include (but are not limited to): believing survivors as a foundational approach to support; culturally safe services and trauma-informed services; applied anti-racist, anti-oppressive, intersectional approaches¹⁰; and the importance of agencies delivering dedicated sexual assault services, offering a continuum of support options¹¹.

Most existing Ontario sexual assault centres have been operating in Ontario since the 1990s. During this time, the number of survivors accessing crisis counselling and long term counselling or therapy programs has multiplied—in some regions by up to 4 times¹²; yet funding has simply not kept pace. Instead, Ontario sexual assault centres have seen cuts, (5% 1995) nominal increases (2004-2005, an annualized 5% increase to re-instate the previous government's cutback; 3% 2007-2008) and some small increases connected to provincial action plans (2011, 2015) that were not always continued. In 2018, the then-Ontario government announced an approximately 30% increase to the sexual violence sector in Ontario. This increase was intended to address significant increases in service access and service pressures following a number of high-profile sexual violence cases in

¹⁰ Ontario Ministry of the Status of Women and Shore Consulting. November 14, 2017. *FINAL REPORT: Review of Sexual Violence and Harassment Counselling Services and Helplines*: 6-7.

¹¹ Ibid, 10.

¹² Provided by Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services in December 2021.



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Ontario. The 2018 announcement would have realized a significant increase for Ontario's community-based sexual assault centres. At that time, the government -- and sexual violence support service providers alike -- lauded the plan, which aimed to help survivors of sexual violence "get the support they need, when they need it". Despite this commitment, under your current government, the [funding increase never became reality.](#)

Other arms of government have recognized the need for a better-resourced violence response. In December 2021, The Town of Bracebridge passed a resolution recognizing the need for increased community-based sexual assault centre funding, and encouraging the province to provide increased and sustainable funding for sexual assault services¹³. When will Ontario do the same?

Our recommendations

- 1. Provide stable, core funding for community-based sexual assault centres that meets the needs of survivors of sexual violence.**

Maintain core funding for community-based Ontario sexual assault centres. In addition, recognize that current allocations are not meeting the existing service demands in the province: each day, survivors of sexual violence face waiting lists for counselling services. It is our position that no survivor of violence should face a wait for services or to meet with a counsellor.

- 2. Invest in community-based primary prevention programs.**

¹³ Hartill, Mary Beth, for The Bracebridge Examiner/Toronto Star. January 7, 2022. *Say it in numbers: Bracebridge council backing victims of sexual assault A look at the numbers behind sexual assault services in Parry Sound-Muskoka*. Online: <https://www.thestar.com/local-bracebridge/news/council/2022/01/07/say-it-in-numbers-bracebridge-council-backing-victims-of-sexual-assault.html>



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If we want to end gender-based violence, we must prevent it from happening in the first place. While we've built up a sector to intervene early to provide immediate safety, the most efficient way is to ensure it stops before it even starts. Money invested in prevention is money saved in policing, health and social services. In one year alone, Ontario sexual assault centres took 48,226 crisis line calls and supported 16,550 survivors of sexual violence. We also provided 2,985 prevention education events¹⁴.

Conclusion

We believe that your government and OCRCC share many of the same concerns and priorities. Together, we are well aware that sexual violence takes a significant economic and human toll on everything —from our economy to our criminal justice sector, to our health care system, to the safety of those in our communities. We thank the provincial government for its investment in sexual assault support services. We look forward to continuing to work together to improve the lives of survivors of sexual violence in Ontario.

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¹⁴ This information was compiled by Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres in 2019, with data provided by 23 of our member centres.