

## **Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Assault Crisis and Prevention Centre's Budget Consultation Presentation**

**Presented By**

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Greetings, Minister Wiseman, and thank you for offering this opportunity to share and give essential input at this time. My name is Nicole Kieley, I am the Executive Director for the Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Assault Crisis and Prevention Centre.

As the fiscal year end draws nearer and as the budgetary consultation process continues, the Centre, wishes to focus the Department of Finances attention on a key strategic investment. As a crisis and prevention centre collaborating with government and community based organizations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, we are all too aware of the costs of violence on the lives of individuals and on communities. Last year, our province wide crisis line received over 1500 calls, 370 of which were directly supporting an individual in crisis. That is just over one crisis call per day. Of the 370 calls, most had experienced a form of sexual violence and had already utilized or were contemplating the use of government services through the Department of Justice and Public Safety and Regional Health Authorities. Additionally, the trauma they have experienced impacted all aspects of their lives including employment, education, and family life, as well as their physical and mental health.

Violence against women and our most vulnerable populations in Newfoundland and Labrador is an epidemic and a detriment to our communities' health, wellness, safety and economy. Violence against women remains the most prevalent form of violence in our province; meaning 1 in 2 of our province's girls and young women over the age of 16 have experienced some form physical and/or sexual violence (Women's Policy Office, Gov of NL). In addition to the prevalence of gender based violence, seniors, children, aboriginal, LGBTQ and disability communities are 3 to 4 times more likely to be at risk of violence compared to the overall population (Canadians Women Foundation). While national trends have seen slight declines in reported sexual assaults, according to Statistics Canada, our province has experienced an increase in rates and are

leading with the third highest rates per capita in all of Canada (Statistics Canada).

As you are aware, the epidemic of violence costs our health and judicial systems millions each year (Gov of Canada). The cost of violence on the lives of victims and their loved ones is immeasurable. A person's employment, schooling, mental health, family, housing, and children are all negatively impacted. The impact is normally long lasting and sometimes permanent. As our work and the work of our partners has demonstrated, and as national research continues to support, women's led and violence prevention organizations working with communities, women and vulnerable populations are the key mitigating factor in effectively supporting victims and preventing the social and economic costs of violence.

Investing in community-based crisis centres and violence prevention work is even more paramount as our province enters into a difficult economic period. Research demonstrates a difficult economy leads to job losses, more people living in poverty, an increase in housing issues, mental health issues, and a significant spike in violence prevalence and severity. In preparation for these trends and to prevent such a devastating ripple effect, one of government's priorities in this budget must be to ensure that our Centre , along with women's centres, regional coordinating committees, transition houses, and anti-violence groups are resourced and funded to effectively respond to crisis, support victims, and prevent violence in all its forms.

Now is the time to invest in the prevention and support work of our Centre and; this includes being given operational funding that ensures we can successfully meet our mandate. Currently our Centre is funded through the Violence Prevention Initiative of the Women's Policy Office and are receiving 110,000 dollars annually. With this investment we have been able to collaborate resourcefully and offer services and programs to all of the province. This year alone, we have completed over 300 outreach activities and have supported over 100 services providers in enhancing sexual violence prevention work and responses to sexual violence in communities. The Centre, through outreach and education, has assisted in reducing stigma and misconceptions; communities are now engaging us on key topics like consent, boundaries and healthy relationships. As communities connect with us on their needs and as we continue to serve and grow, as do our costs. Due to the implementation of quality control measures such as emergency call protocols to better support the increase of callers with

complex needs, our telecommunications expenses have increased by 330% as more people across the province are accessing our crisis line. Over the past two years, we have recruited, trained, and continue to manage over 40 crisis line volunteers. Our volunteers consist of experienced individuals, students and professionals from various social and health fields and whom, collectively, contribute a minimum of 215 hours to the line weekly. As expressed by our partners, volunteers and individuals who have accessed our line, the caliber of service, support and care derived from our Centre is exceptional. Adding to this are the Centre's peer support services, hospital/ police accompaniments with a survivor (at any point of the day or night) and support groups. All of our volunteers undergo 60+ hours of training including mandatory Crisis Intervention and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). We are widely known as one of the most comprehensive and sought after volunteer programs for individuals and students wishing to pursue employment in counselling, social work, policing and health. With our current budget allotment, however, we do not have the adequate space to run programs or to train our team. We do not have an accessible space to support a survivor with a disability nor are we able to welcome committed volunteers from the disability community. With small strategic investments to our Centre, we will ensure these essential and greatly resourceful programs can thrive. In the plainest of terms, with just a little more we can do quite a lot

Government Investments are key as underfunding or eliminating violence prevention will only ensure an increase in the economic, social and immeasurable costs of violence in communities. By strategically investing a small portion of the millions spent on post-invention and the aftermath of violence would not only confirm the government's commitment and leadership to eradicating violence but also ensure the health, safety and lives of countless women, girls and vulnerable populations of our province. Our Centre respectfully asks Minister Wiseman, the Department of Finance and our Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to consider increasing funds to our provincial Centre and to all community based crisis and violence prevention work as a strategic investment that will deter from the pervasive social and economic costs of violence in Newfoundland and Labrador.