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\$10M coming for community-based sexual assault response services in B.C.



Alyse Kotyk

Reporter, CTVNewsVancouver.ca

[@AlyseKotyk](#) | [Contact](#)

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VANCOUVER -- A new grant program for establishing community-based sexual assault response services is coming to B.C. as the province announced millions in funding.

The Ending Violence Association of B.C. will receive \$10 million to create the grant program for funds to be distributed to organizations throughout the province, Solicitor General Mike Farnworth announced Tuesday.

The grant program is expected to help organizations provide support and services to survivors by restoring and expanding emergency response services, like accompaniment to hospitals or police and emotional support. Approved organizations will get the funding for three years.

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"Sexual assault and other violent crimes can have devastating and long-lasting effects and the safety of women, children and all British Columbians is a priority for myself and this government," Farnworth said.

"I want to take a moment and acknowledge the current situation that we are facing not only in this province, but globally. There's no question that we're in challenging times right now and unfortunately, gender-based violence including assault is known to increase during these times."

During the novel coronavirus pandemic, sexual assault and domestic violence front-line workers have [raised concerns](#) about the spike in calls from people looking for support and information.

"For many, staying home is not safe and now they are even more afraid of violence and abuse," said Mitzi Dean, parliamentary secretary for gender equity Tuesday. "Sexual violence should never be tolerated. Not during this pandemic, not ever."

While no specific timeline was given for when applications will open for the grants, Farnworth said the province is working to implement the program as quickly as possible.

Tracy Porteous, executive director of Ending Violence Association of BC, said the funding is a "bold step towards breaking the silence on sexual violence."

Porteous said only an estimated five per cent of sexual assaults are reported to police and frontline workers are concerned there will be a "tsunami" of requests for help once the lockdown is fully lifted.

"In its wake sexual violence leaves terror and humiliation and panic and nightmares and distrust and depression," she said.

"Survivors across our province deserve nothing less than to be provided with trained and sophisticated networks and services designed with their needs in mind."

Last month, Battered Women's Support Services, [launched an online awareness campaign](#) last month to increase support for those quarantined with an abusive partner. Around the same time, the province promised it was working with BC Housing and other organizations to find support for women and children fleeing violence.

Watch an American Sign Language translation of the news conference on the [provincial government's YouTube page](#).

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