

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Community Safety and Victim Services Branch

INFORMATION BULLETIN:
REFERRALS TO SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES AND SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRES
July 21, 2025

PURPOSE

Note about language: A number of terms may be used to describe people who have experienced sexual assault, including victim, survivor, and client. In this document, the term survivor is used.

This information bulletin provides guidance and direction to Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General (MPSSG) funded and supported victim service and counselling programs working with people who have experienced sexual assault.¹ Collaboration across sectors and between organizations is essential for survivors to get the help that they need in a timely way and in a location that is accessible to and appropriate for them.

This information bulletin supplements the January 2007 **Referral Policy for Victims of Power-based Crimes** in order to update MPSSG's direction regarding referrals for survivors of sexual assault. New programs have been established in some communities to enhance services and options available to survivors. **MPSSG recognizes the many contributions and ongoing commitment of both police-based and community-based victim services to support sexual assault survivors. In communities where Sexual Assault Services (SAS) do not exist, these programs continue to be the primary service provider for sexual assault survivors, particularly where police-based are the sole victim service provider.**

CONTEXT

In July 2023, MPSSG awarded new contracts for sexual assault programs following an open procurement process led by the Community Safety and Victim Services Branch of MPSSG. The contracts provide new, specialized services for sexual assault survivors and increase community capacity and expertise to support survivors of sexual assault. In addition, Child and Youth Advocacy Centres (CYAC) have been introduced in some communities since the implementation of the 2007 Referral Protocol. The **Victim Services and Violence Against Women Service Directory** provides more detailed service descriptions for each community in the province. The services focused on sexual assault are:

- Sexual Assault Services (SAS) - provide a range of supports for survivors and coordination with justice, health and social services. Some programs are Indigenous focused.
- Sexual Assault Centres (SAC) - located in Prince George, Kamloops, Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria. The SACs are intended to provide space for health care supports, Sexual Assault Forensic Examination, and police and other interviews in a trauma informed environment, and both coordination and counselling services. Victoria is long-established and operational while other Centres are in various stages of development.

¹ Police-based Victim Services, Community-based Victim Services, Stopping the Violence Programs, Outreach Services and Multicultural Outreach Services, Sexual Assault Services, Sexual Assault Centres.

In addition to these sexual assault services for survivors, supports are guided by **policing standards** for sexual assault investigations² and policy for the provision of Sexual Assault Forensic Examinations in hospital emergency departments which recognizes services may also be provided in community sites outside of hospitals.

REFERRAL DIRECTION

The **Referral Policy for Victims of Power-based Crimes** (2007)³ identifies two types of services: Police-based Victim Service Programs (PBVS) and Community-based Victim Service Programs (CBVS). With these additional and specialized services to support survivors of sexual assault, **Sexual Assault Services and Sexual Assault Centres are now included in this list of programs and considered the primary service providers for people who have experienced sexual assault in communities where they are available.**

Survivors of sexual assault should be referred to Sexual Assault Services and Sexual Assault Centres where available in a community.

² **Provincial policing standards - Province of British Columbia**

³ **Referral Policy for Victims of Power-based Crimes**

The following are updates to the section “Referral Directive” included in the 2007 Referral Policy:

Existing Directive page 2 of The Referral Policy for Victims of Power-based Crimes (2007)	Additional direction integrating Sexual Assault Services and Sexual Assault Centres ⁴
Community-based Victim Service Programs are the contracted primary service providers for victims/survivors of power-based crimes. Police and Police-based Victim Service Programs should refer all victims and survivors of power-based crimes to Community-based Victim Service Programs in an appropriate and timely manner.	Adult sexual assault survivors should be referred to a Sexual Assault Service or Sexual Assault Centre where available in a community. If there is a Child and Youth Advocacy Centre available, child/youth survivors may be referred there. Mature minors may be referred to adult services where appropriate.⁵ Where no specialized sexual assault services exist, survivors should be referred to a Community-based Victim Service Program where available. Community-based Victim Service Programs are the contracted primary service providers for victims/survivors of other power-based crimes.⁶
In cases where the Police-based Victim Service Program is the first point of contact with the victim (e.g., at the crime scene), the police-based program will refer the victim/survivor to the Community-based Victim Service Program as soon as practicable.	As above. If there is no Sexual Assault Service or Sexual Assault Centre in a community, survivors of sexual assault will be referred to a Community-based Victim Service Program.
If there is no Community-based Victim Service Program serving the community, police will refer victims/survivors to the Police-based Victim Service Program.	If there are no Sexual Assault Services, a Sexual Assault Centre, or Community-based Victim Service programs available, referral will be made to the Police-based Victim Service Program.⁷
Where there is no police-based or Community-based Victim Service Program, victims/survivors should be referred to VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808 or other local services.	Where there are no victim service programs of any type, survivors should be referred to VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808 or other local services.

⁴ These additional directions are an extension of the previous referral policy with the purpose of including new services.

⁵ **BC CYAC Practice Principles** provide some background on working with mature minors.

⁶ Victims of violence in relationships (adult, youth, or child), victims of sexual assault, victims of criminal harassment, victims of child abuse/assault (both physical and sexual), adult survivors of childhood abuse (both physical and sexual), and child witnesses of family violence.

⁷ This does not mean that the survivor must participate in creating a police report if they do not (yet or ever) wish to make a police report.

Existing Directive page 2 of The Referral Policy for Victims of Power-based Crimes (2007)	Additional direction integrating Sexual Assault Services and Sexual Assault Centres ⁸
Detachment Commanders must meet with the local agencies contracted by the Ministry to deliver police-based and community-based victim services to discuss policy obligations, ensure that referral protocols are in place, and ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly understood.	Detachment Commanders/Chief Constables (or their designate) also meet with Sexual Assault Services and Sexual Assault Centres to discuss policy obligations and ensure that referral protocols are in place and roles and responsibilities are clearly understood. For the same reasons, Sexual Assault Services and Sexual Assault Centres must meet with police in their area. To enable services for children and youth who experience violence, coordination with Child and Youth Advocacy Centres is also encouraged.

⁸ These additional directions are an extension of the previous referral policy with the purpose of including new services.

SERVICE EXPECTATIONS

All programs funded by the Community Safety and Victim Services branch of the MPSSG are intended to be survivor-centred, coordinated, culturally safe, and trauma-informed. Survivor service delivery should be guided by the survivor's needs and wishes. Survivors should be made aware of their options for support in their community.

Coordination - As stated in the *Referral Policy for Victims of Power-based Crimes*, “a coordinated, multi-sectorial (i.e., involving a number of organizations) response empowers survivors of sexual assault and gender-based violence and is most effective in keeping them safe” and supporting healing. **All service providers must familiarize themselves with the various sexual assault programs in their area** to enable coordination and referrals to Sexual Assault Services and Sexual Assault Centres. This could include developing working agreements between organizations to clarify roles and expectations, often called Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs).

Service providers will make every effort to ensure **referrals are seamless and timely**. This will include establishing local relationships and agreements so that options for survivors are clear and the people helping them communicate as effectively as possible to enable referrals. This will include establishing agreements for information sharing.

The Community Safety and Victim Services Branch of the MPSSG will support and monitor coordination and is available to consult about particular issues in communities.

Age of survivor - People of any age can experience sexualized violence. There should be coordination regarding how best to support survivors under 19 years of age.⁹ Considerations include the age and maturity of the child or youth and resources in the community. **Sexual Assault Services and Sexual Assault Centres should develop protocols for coordination and referrals with local Child and Youth Advocacy Centres.** If the survivor is a child or youth under 19 years of age and needs protection, there is a legal Duty to Report.¹⁰ Provincial Centralized Screening can be contacted at 1-800-663-9122 any time of the day or night.

Health care - **The survivor should be offered medical examination and treatment and assured that these services are available regardless of whether they report their assault to police.**¹¹ The survivor should be connected with this care as soon as possible to treat injuries and manage exposure to sexually transmitted infections and risk of pregnancy. A survivor may choose to have their injuries documented and samples stored in the event they choose later to engage the police. Survivors can access medical care and forensic examination through:

- Sexual Assault Centres, which are the preferred option; and
- Emergency Departments within publicly funded hospitals.

People who have experienced sexual assault may continue to have health and psycho-social needs as a result of their assault. Organizations should work with the survivor to determine how to best address their needs and make appropriate referrals.

⁹ For information on the location of Child and Youth Advocacy Centres please refer to <https://www.bccyac.ca/locations/>.

¹⁰ For more information on how to report please refer to *Handbook for Action on Childhood Abuse & Neglect for Service Providers*.

¹¹ For more details regarding medical care and forensic examination please refer to *Best Principles and Practices Guideline for Sexual Assault Response for Healthcare Professionals and Anti-Violence Workers*.

Appendix A: Responsibilities of victim services supports in British Columbia

	<i>Police-Based Victim Services</i>	<i>Community- Based Victim Services</i>	<i>Sexual Assault Services (SAS)</i>	<i>Sexual Assault Centres (SAC) ¹²</i>
<i>Crisis response</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Information and referrals</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Supports (for example criminal court updates and accompaniment)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Safety planning</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Service coordination</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Community coordination and engagement</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Third party reporting</i>		✓	✓	✓
<i>Individual and group counselling</i>			✓	✓
<i>Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (SAFE)</i>				✓
<i>Interview/reporting space</i>				✓

¹² Some of these facilities are in development – check with the centre directly.