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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

### **Enhanced support coming for British Columbians impacted by crime**

VICTORIA – To support British Columbians impacted by crime, government is adding services for survivors of sexual violence and violent crime, and updating the Crime Victim Assistance Act to properly address victims’ needs.

“Victims of crime, their immediate family members and witnesses are impacted by crime in different ways, and supporting them means that they can take the time they need to recover and heal,” said Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General. “We are expanding services for victims of gender-based violence, as well as those impacted by broader crimes so that more British Columbians have access to the services and supports they need to recover.”

People who are victims of crime, their family members, as well as witnesses, can receive services to support their recovery and help offset financial costs they may experience. However, the current legislation is restrictive in who may be eligible for these services, and many people can’t get the supports they need.

The Province is proposing changes to the act that, if passed, will make these critical services available to more people by:

- expanding access to benefits for grandparents and grandchildren by removing the requirement that they were financially dependent on the victim to be eligible for benefits;
- expanding the definition of witness by removing the requirement that a witness had a strong emotional attachment to a victim, which is a significant barrier to eligibility for those who witness violent crime in their communities; and
- extending the time limit for making an application for benefits from one year to two years, which will align with the time limit for civil claims in B.C.

Government is also restoring funding that was cut for sexual assault programs to support survivors of sexual assault. These centres, located in Vancouver, Victoria, Kamloops, Prince George and Surrey, will provide wraparound services to survivors of sexual assault during a time when support and compassion is needed most. These centres are in addition to the 70 newly expanded sexual-assault services that provide survivor-driven, trauma-informed services.

"The five centres being funded will provide trauma-informed, wraparound and culturally safe services at community-based organizations that have a proven track record with decades of knowledge and experience in supporting survivors of gender-based violence, and who are also part of strong, local co-ordinated networks," said Ninu Kang, executive director, Ending Violence Association of BC. "This is an exciting time in B.C. where we are building up the core

foundation and capacity needed to support survivors of sexual assault, let them know that they are not alone on their journey to healing, and that help is available.”

The centres in five large urban areas provide a trauma-informed space where survivors can access a range of services and supports, including counselling, emotional support and practical assistance. The centres will provide a supportive space for survivors to meet with police and have access to medical forensic examinations and other services as chosen by the survivor.

These centres are in addition to the 70 local sexual-assault programs providing co-ordinated community-based services for survivors.

“It is so important to reinforce that the impacts of sexual assault and gender-based violence have a devastating effect on survivors, and also their loved ones, family and communities,” said Kelli Paddon, Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity. “Wraparound support means making it easier for survivors who may need to work with several care providers and the justice system on the path to healing, which is also intended to empower people on this difficult path and ensure they have the best possible care.”

Better support for survivors of sexualized violence and crime is one component of a multi-year action plan to help end gender-based violence being developed by the Ministry of Finance's Gender Equity Office, and the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. This work is being guided by Indigenous partners and organizations, an advisory committee and many experts, advocates and leaders who have provided feedback and are helping to shape B.C.'s gender-based violence action plan.

#### **Quotes:**

##### **Ian Batey, executive director, Police Victim Services of BC –**

“The police victim services sector delivers compassionate, professional and consistent front-line services to all citizens victimized by tragedy, trauma and criminal activity across the province. We are proud to work closely with the Crime Victim Assistance Program, as we work together to provide services to victims of crime and their families across British Columbia. The range of financial assistance and benefits available for victims of crime, immediate family members and witnesses is beneficial in ensuring a positive supportive journey of recovery.”

##### **Lynnell Halikowski, executive director, Prince George Sexual Assault Centre –**

“The Prince George Sexual Assault Centre is honoured to be the recipients of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General’s sexual assault centre funding. This government has been dedicated to addressing gender-based and sexual violence in our province and we are thrilled to be partners in working towards a province that is safe for everyone. As the only sexual assault centre in the North, this funding will assist the Prince George Sexual Assault Centre in supporting survivors in the northern region of our province, in providing critical wraparound care and mitigating the impacts of sexual violence to provide a clear path of healing for survivors.”

#### **Quick Facts:**

- Since the program’s inception in 2002, CVAP has provided more than \$275 million in benefits to victims, immediate family members and witnesses.

- In 2022-23, CVAP received more than 4,700 applications from victims, immediate family members and witnesses and distributed \$16.9 million in benefits.
- The Province now provides more than \$54 million annually in stable funding for services and programs to support victims of crime, including more than 475 victim-service, violence-against-women and sexual-assault programs operating in communities throughout B.C.
  - This includes \$10 million annually, beginning in April 2023, to support the delivery of 70 sexual assault programs and five sexual assault centres.

### **Learn More:**

For more information about the Crime Victim Assistance Program and information about how to apply, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/bcs-criminal-justice-system/if-you-are-a-victim-of-a-crime/victim-of-crime/financial-assistance-benefits>

For more information about supports for people facing gender-based violence and B.C.'s Gender Based Violence Action Plan, see: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/gender-equity/ending-gender-based-violence>

For more information about VictimLinkBC, information and referral services to all victims of crime, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/victimlinkbc>

For contact information for service providers across B.C. that assist victims of crime and women and children impacted by violence, the Victim Services & Violence Against Women Program Directory can be found here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/bcs-criminal-justice-system/if-you-are-a-victim-of-a-crime/victim-of-crime/victim-services-directory>

For more information about the sexual assault centre organizations:

Vancouver – Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre: <https://www.salalsvsc.ca/>

Victoria – Victoria Sexual Assault Centre: <https://www.vsac.ca/>

Kamloops – Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre: <https://www.ksacc.ca/>

Prince George – Prince George Sexual Assault Centre: <https://www.pgsac.org/>

Surrey – Surrey Womens Centre: <https://surreywomenscentre.ca/>

For more information about B.C. legislation, visit: <https://workingforyou.gov.bc.ca/legislation>

### **Contact:**

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
Media Relations  
250 213-3602

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