

IT'S NEVER OKAY: AN ACTION PLAN TO STOP SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

PROGRESS UPDATE 2016-2017

In March 2015, Ontario launched *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment* (SVHAP). This three-year, \$41-million plan includes concrete actions to help change attitudes, provide more support for survivors and make workplaces and campuses safer and more responsive to complaints of sexual violence and harassment.

Significant and important progress was made in the plan's first year – including the launch of the award-winning *#WhoWillYouHelp* campaign, which received more than 85 million views worldwide, raised awareness and shifted attitudes. In addition, an updated Health and Physical Education curriculum was implemented in all publically funded schools; stabilized and increased funding was provided to community-based sexual assault centres and additional investments were made in hospital-based Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centres. Work continued in the second year on these important initiatives:

1. RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

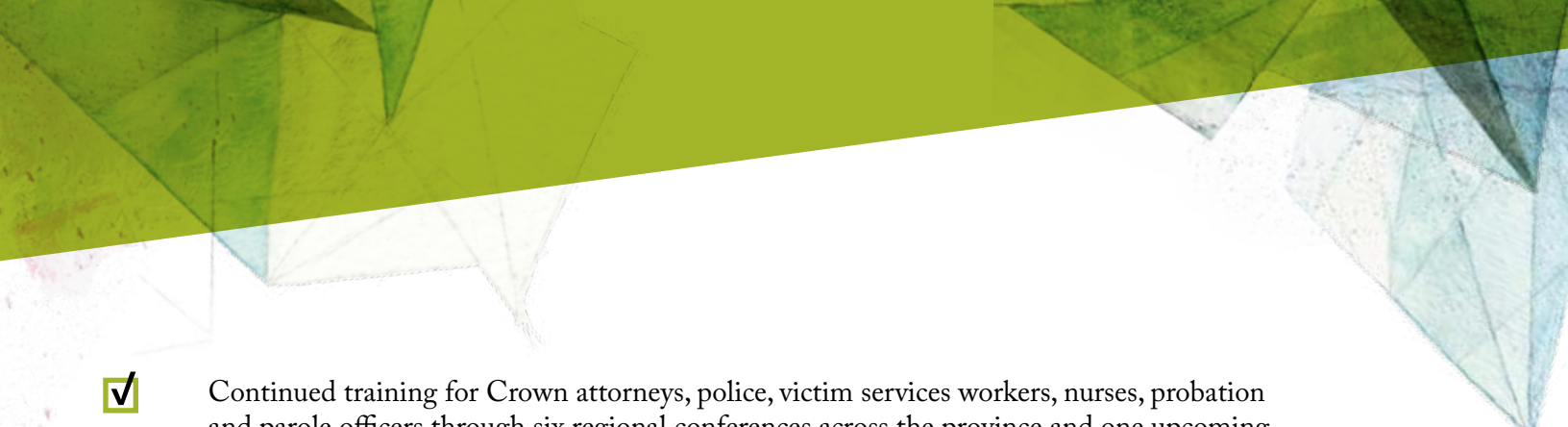


Funded 11 Creative Engagement Fund partnerships between arts and not-for-profit community organizations, professional artists and sexual violence experts. The aim of these projects was to stimulate conversation, shape people's perspectives and opinions, and provide them with new tools to name and take action on sexual violence and misogyny in their communities.

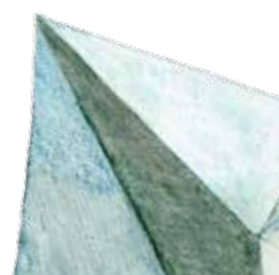
2. MORE TRAINING FOR PROFESSIONALS




Invested \$1.7 million in training projects for frontline workers in the hospitality, health, education, and community services sectors to help recognize and respond to sexual violence and harassment.

- 
- ✓ Continued training for Crown attorneys, police, victim services workers, nurses, probation and parole officers through six regional conferences across the province and one upcoming provincial conference to enhance their overall knowledge of the issues that arise in sexual violence cases. This includes content on:
 - The neurobiology of trauma in relation to credibility assessments
 - The unique experiences of Indigenous women who are survivors of sexual violence
 - Consent and capacity to consent
 - Victims with intellectual disabilities
 - The role of sexual assault nurse examiners and experts from the Centre of Forensic Science (toxicology and DNA sections) in addressing issues pertaining to survivors who are under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.
 - ✓ Basic Constable Training at the Ontario Police College now includes new survivor-focused and sensitivity components. For more specialized training, the Ontario Police College has also increased the content related to officer response in sexual violence cases as part of the Sexual Assault Investigation course.
 - ✓ Implemented an annual SVHAP Community of Practice conference, led by the Ontario Police College. This conference brings together police, Crown attorneys, subject matter experts and practitioners who provide health, social and psychological support to survivors of sexual violence.

3. MORE CHOICES AND BETTER SUPPORTS FOR SURVIVORS


- ✓ Launched a new pilot program giving survivors of sexual assault access to free legal advice, regardless of how much time has passed since the incident. The program is currently being piloted in the cities of Toronto, Ottawa and the District of Thunder Bay. Since June 2016, more than 100 survivors across the three pilot areas have accessed the program.
 - ✓ Seven unique projects to support survivors of sexual violence and harassment were funded through the Innovation Fund. Each project is responsive to key geographic issues and targets “at-risk” populations who experience a statistically higher incidence of sexual violence and harassment, and those who are under-served.
 - ✓ Funded nine independent academic research projects that identify key issues related to the reporting of sexual assault and harassment. These projects also include best practices related to police investigations and responses to survivors of sexual violence.
- 


- 
- ✓ Provided almost \$1.8 million in funding to police services for 15 two-year pilot projects that take a survivor-centred approach to police response. These projects involve partnerships between police and community partners and fall into two categories: new, innovative practices that better support survivors; and changes to investigative practices to help police build stronger cases and improve justice system outcomes.
 - ✓ Launched a review of provincially funded counselling services and helplines to better respond to survivors' needs. The objective of the review is to examine how efficiently and effectively provincially funded counselling and helpline services are meeting the needs of, and improving overall outcomes for survivors of sexual violence and harassment. The review is survivor-focused, provincial in scope, and considers diverse populations.
 - ✓ The Special Priority Policy (SPP) under the *Housing Services Act* provides survivors of domestic violence with priority access to social housing over regular chronological applicants. In September 2016, the province launched the Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Pilot program in 22 communities across Ontario. The two-year program will provide survivors of domestic violence the option to receive a portable housing benefit, so they can immediately find housing in their community instead of waiting for a social housing unit to become available.

4. SAFER WORKPLACES, CAMPUSES AND COMMUNITIES

In March 2016 Ontario passed legislation which strengthens provisions related to sexual violence and harassment in the workplace, on campus, in housing and through the civil claims process.

The *Sexual Violence and Harassment Plan Act*, 2016:

- ✓ Removed the limitation period for civil proceedings based on sexual assault – and, in certain cases, sexual misconduct or assault – so that survivors can bring their civil claims forward whenever they choose to do so.
 - ✓ Eliminated the limitation period for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence to make a compensation application to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.
 - ✓ Amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act* came into effect in September 2016. Survivors fleeing domestic or sexual violence can now end their tenancies early with 28 days' notice.
- 



✓ Amendments to *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) came into effect in September 2016, requiring the employers to investigate incidents and complaints to address workplace harassment, including sexual harassment. The Ministry of Labour hired a team of inspectors and provided specialized training to support enforcement for employers' compliance under the OHSA and address workplace harassment complaints, including sexual harassment.

✓ As of January 1, 2017, all publicly assisted postsecondary institutions and private career colleges must have a stand-alone sexual violence policy which is reviewed every three years with student involvement.

Ontario's permanent Roundtable on Violence Against Women continues to provide advice to government on gender-based violence issues and initiatives, such as the development of the Creative Engagement and Innovation Fund and the *Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act*, 2016. The government thanks the Roundtable for its significant and ongoing contributions on initiatives to end violence against women.

THE YEAR AHEAD

In addition to our work under *It's Never Okay*, we continue to address violence against women by implementing Ontario's Strategy to End Human Trafficking and *Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women*.

We also acknowledge that economic insecurity and financial abuse can impact physical and mental well-being and contribute to situations of physical and sexual violence. Economic independence is the main predictor of women entering, remaining in, or leaving abusive partners, which is one of the reasons we will continue to support the advancement of women and equal access to economic opportunities.

While the government has made important progress towards ending sexual violence and harassment in Ontario, more work remains to be done to create a province where everyone is treated equally and lives free from the threat of violence. Raising awareness, challenging attitudes, educating and intervening — we all have a role to play. All Ontarians must stand together against sexual violence and harassment whenever we see it and wherever it occurs. It's never okay.