

# Ending Sexual Violence in Alberta

## What is sexual violence?

**Sexual violence** is an act committed against someone's sexual integrity without that person's freely given consent. It can be physical and/or non-contact, affects all ages and genders, and the person committing the act may be known or a stranger. It is against the law. It includes, but is not limited to, sexual assault, harassment & exploitation.

**Sexual assault** is any unwanted act of a sexual nature that is imposed on another person without their consent. It can include forced or unwanted kissing, touching, vaginal penetration, anal penetration or oral sex.

**Sexual harassment** is unwanted or uninvited sexual remarks, gestures, sounds like leering or whistling, and actions that make a person feel unsafe, degraded or uncomfortable, even if the harasser claims to have been only joking. It includes any unwanted sexual behaviour that affects or prevents a person from getting or keeping a job, promotion or living accommodations.

**Sexual exploitation** happens when a person in a position of trust or authority uses that power to start or attempt sexual activity with another person. It can be through direct or indirect touching, violence, coercion or the use of threats.

## Who is hurt by sexual violence?

Even though anyone can experience sexual violence, most incidents occur against women and girls. In addition, statistics show that some groups are more likely to experience sexual violence:

- Indigenous women and girls
- Children and adolescents
- People with disabilities
- 2SLGBTQQIA+ persons

## Sexual Violence in Alberta

- As of 2019, approximately 43% of Albertans (1.8 million in total) have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup>
- As of 2019, two in three females and one in three males in Alberta have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup>
- Women are more likely than men to experience unwanted sexual behaviours in public, online and in the work place.<sup>2</sup>
- 95% of survivors do not report their assaults to the police, making sexual violence the most underreported crime in Canada.<sup>3</sup>

1. Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, 2020; 2. Statistics Canada, 2019; 3. Statistics Canada, 2016.

## What is consent?

**Consent** means giving permission for something to happen or agreement to do something. Consent is defined in Canada's *Criminal Code* as the voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity. The legal age of consent is 16 in Canada. Silence or passivity does not equal consent and consenting partners must be capable of revoking consent at any time. Therefore, consent cannot be given in advance and there is no implied consent in Canadian law.

The person initiating sexual activity needs to take reasonable steps to establish consent and seeking it actively during sexual activity. Consent is an ongoing process or conversation, not a one-time event. Consent should never be assumed or implied; the absence of "NO" does not mean "YES".

**You have the right to withdraw consent at any time during sexual activity.**

## Myths about sexual violence

**Myth: Sexual assault is most often committed by strangers.**

Fact: Of sexual assaults where a charge was laid by police, the majority (87%) of victims knew their assailant; most commonly as a casual acquaintance, a family member, or an intimate partner.

**Myth: It's not a big deal to have sex with someone while the person is drunk, stoned or passed out.**

Fact: If someone is unconscious or incapable of consenting due to the use of alcohol or drugs, they cannot legally give consent. Without consent, it is sexual assault.

**Myth: Survivors lie and make up stories about being sexually assaulted.**

Fact: The number of false reports for sexual assault is very low, consistent with the number of false reports for other crimes in Canada.

## What is government doing to prevent sexual violence and support survivors?

**Alberta has made a government-wide commitment to prevent sexual violence and improve support for survivors.**

The commitment includes actions in three key areas:

- **Shift the culture** by promoting a culture of consent and gender equality
- **Improve the response** by ensuring that the social, health, justice and education systems respond effectively to sexual violence
- **Support individuals** by funding community agencies that help survivors and run education and prevention programs

## Everyone can play a part in preventing and ending sexual violence

**Call 911 to help someone who is in immediate danger, or when you don't feel safe stepping in to help someone.**

### How you can intervene:

- Even as a bystander you can help stop sexual violence and harassment
- If it is safe to do so, speak up and come to a victim's defence if you witness sexual harassment and offer support
- Call the police if you witness sexual assault
- Tell the police if you see anyone adding something suspicious to another person's drink
- Check in with your friends and any vulnerable individuals to see that they get home safely
- Say "no" if anyone tries to share explicit texts or snapchats
- Refuse to join degrading conversations that keep sexism and sexual violence alive (and voice your disapproval)

### How to be an ally and support survivors:

- Never blame the survivor
- Talk to your children about consent and healthy relationships
- Participate in public awareness programs
- Get your organization to promote training programs for professionals
- Volunteer or donate to organizations that work to prevent sexual violence and support survivors
- Raise awareness about sexual violence in your community

## If you are a survivor of sexual violence and need help

**If you are in immediate danger, call 911.**

### Alberta's One Line for Sexual Violence

If you have experienced any form of sexual violence and need crisis support or if you need help finding sexual assault support services in Alberta. Available in 200+ languages.

Call or text: **1-866-403-8000** (toll-free, 9:00 am to 9:00 pm daily)

Online chat: [aasas.ca](https://aasas.ca)

### Local Sexual Assault Services

If you have experienced any form of sexual violence and need crisis support or counselling.

Website: [aasas.ca/get-help/](https://aasas.ca/get-help/)