

FOR RELEASE
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Government of Yukon announces development of Sexualized Assault Response Team

Resources are being provided to develop a Sexualized Assault Response Team (SART). The team will provide coordinated, victim-centered, low-barrier services to victims of sexualized assault as of spring 2018.

The SART will improve coordination so that victims receive the services they need, when they need them and on their own terms. Victims will have access to comprehensive care and support as they navigate social, medical, and legal systems. This includes emotional support, health care and evidence collection, as well as assistance with reporting assaults to the RCMP if desired.

Plans for the development of SART include a new coordinator to orient multi-agency medical services and victim supports towards a victim-centered delivery model, working with partners to expand training for medical professionals, and public education about the new services. An after-hours response line will also be available, offering 24/7 support to victims.

The service will initially be available in Whitehorse, with expansion planned to other communities. Existing support services remain in effect. Once in place, the SART will enhance the delivery of all services to ensure wrap-around support for victims.

Quotes

"Given the high rates of sexualized violence against women and girls in Yukon, particularly among Indigenous women and girls, we see this as a critical next step to ensure that victims have wrap-around support. No matter where they enter the system, they will receive victim-focused support."

–Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate Jeanie Dendys

"This team will provide important support to victims of sexualized assault, regardless of their gender identity or expression. It is essential that victims can easily access the services they need, when they need them. The SART and the 24/7 crisis line will greatly improve access."

–Minister of Health and Social Services Pauline Frost

"The Government of Yukon is committed to improving services and supports for victims of violence and sexualized violence in Yukon. The SART will ensure the victim's needs and choices come first, and that they are supported when engaging with and navigating Yukon's social, medical and legal systems."

–Minister of Justice Tracy-Anne McPhee

Quick facts

- Yukon has one of the highest rates of sexualized violence in the country. The majority of assaults are not reported.
- Women and girls between 15 and 25 years of age are at the highest risk for sexualized assault.
- The Sexualized Assault Response Team is the initiative of the interagency Sexualized Assault Response Committee, which works to improve direct services and supports to victims of sexualized assault.
- The Sexualized Assault Response Team is being established in phases. Due to population size, SART will begin in Whitehorse and then expand to rural communities.

See backgrounder.

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Backgrounder:

Current services for victims of sexualized violence include:

- **Victim Services**, which provides a confidential and voluntary service for victims of all crimes, whether or not a charge has been laid. Victim Services has offices in Whitehorse, Dawson City and Watson Lake and all Yukon communities have a Victim Services worker assigned to their community. Services include:
 - safety planning and crisis support;
 - information about the criminal justice system, the role of the victim in the criminal justice system, victims' rights and opportunities to participate in the criminal justice processes;
 - assistance during the court process, including information about the status of court proceedings and support in preparing victim impact statements;
 - assistance in applying for protective orders, such as peace bonds under the Criminal Code, and emergency intervention orders under the *Family Violence Prevention Act*;
 - emotional support regarding the impact of victimization and referrals to other agencies as needed;
 - practical support, such as the Victims of Crime Emergency Fund to provide emergency and immediate assistance for victims (such as emergency transportation, emergency medical assistance or home repairs such as changing locks) and the emergency cell phone initiative;
 - information, support, counselling, safety planning and referrals for victims of crime who have not reported the crime to police, or where the incident did not result in charges; and
 - information and support for victims whose partners are involved with the Domestic Violence Treatment Option Court or the Community Wellness Court.
- **'Kits on Ice' program**, where victims of sexualized violence can access a Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit anonymously and have it kept in storage until such time that they want to report to RCMP.
- **Third Party Reporting program**, operated by the Yukon Women's Transition Home Society, allows victims to anonymously report incidents of sexualized violence which will be kept on file until such time that they want to report to RCMP or the information can support future investigations.
- **Project Lynx**, a multi-disciplinary team of justice professionals supporting child and youth victims and witnesses of crime, including sexualized violence, and their families. Project Lynx's intent is to reduce the emotional and mental harm to a child involved in the justice system while improving the quality of evidence brought forward in trials.
- **Specialized Response Unit** within the "M" Division of the RCMP, which takes the lead on complex sexualized assault investigations and provides expert advice and follows up with other officers in the field who are carrying out investigations in sexualized assault.
- **Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services** receives referrals of victims of sexual assault from the hospital and other partners. Trauma informed counselling services are provided to clients on an urgent basis.
- **Regional Services** offers support to victims of sexual assaults based on the age of the victim and what needs to occur. Community Health Nurses are primary care providers and may provide follow-up support to victims.

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