



Creating A Culture of Care: A Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Adult Sexual Violence in Prince Edward Island

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Ministers' Message

Sexual violence is a pervasive crime that deeply affects the health, safety and well-being of all who are impacted. As a province, we must work collaboratively and in a coordinated fashion to not only reduce the incidence of crime but also to break the cycle of gender-based violence.

This ambitious goal cannot be achieved in isolation; however, together through individual actions, supported by the united efforts of government departments, and with the guidance and support of survivors of sexual violence, frontline support services and community organizations, the Province has developed Prince Edward Island's first Adult Sexual Violence Strategy – Creating a Culture of Care: Preventing and Responding to Adult Sexual Violence Strategy.

The new five-year strategy will ensure government actions and investments to address sexual violence in our province are focused on achieving a collective impact. Together, by increasing public education, supporting improved prevention, strengthening available resources for victims, and fostering coordinated, timely and trauma-informed care from all front-line services, we can effect change.

We will work tirelessly to prevent sexual violence in all its forms in Prince Edward Island.



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INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is one of the most complex and harmful challenges facing societies today. It includes a broad range of behaviours, some of which are crimes in the Canadian Criminal Code (e.g., sexual assault or harassment) and others which are normalized in our everyday interactions at work, school, and in our friend groups (e.g., attitudes, jokes, and comments). Anyone can be impacted by sexual violence. Sexual violence affects individuals physically, mentally, and emotionally. It can create lasting trauma and harm that reaches beyond survivors into families, communities, and future generations.

In recent years, these harmful impacts have been more widely recognized, and new approaches to address the effects of sexual violence are developing. As survivors¹ continue to speak up, there is increasing awareness of the need for stronger support. Globally, systems and services are being re-evaluated, and communities are calling on governments and institutions to shed outdated approaches to sexual violence prevention and response.

A PEI Governmental Task Force on a Coordinated Response to Adult Sexual Violence was established with a mandate to strengthen Prince Edward Island's approach to preventing and responding to adult sexual violence. Guided by feedback from survivors, community, and service providers, Prince Edward Island's first sexual violence prevention and response strategy for adults was created – *Creating A Culture of Care: A Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Adult Sexual Violence in Prince Edward Island*.

This 5-year strategy outlines a set of actions aimed to sharpen the focus of preventive measures and enhance collective response by:

- empowering frontline services with knowledge and skills;
- strengthening trauma-informed processes;
- increasing options for survivors and interventions for perpetrators; and
- coordinating our overall efforts to address sexual violence.

These actions will help to create a culture of care in which every member of our society understands their role in preventing sexual violence while ensuring that survivors, perpetrators and communities are met with a coordinated and trauma-informed system of support services that acknowledges their individual needs.

¹ Every person who experiences sexual violence has the right to identify in a way that fits for them. For the purpose of this document, we will be using the term survivor, but victim would also work here too.

What Brings Us Here?

Sexual violence is widely prevalent in our communities. In Canada, 30% of women and 8% of men aged 15 and older have reported being sexually assaulted. Sexual violence is a term that describes any sexual act committed against another person without their consent. It can be both physical and psychological in nature and includes sexual assault, rape, sexual coercion and sexual harassment. It is both created and perpetuated by other systems of violence, such as colonialism, racism, sexism, misogyny, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia. Exploring the relationship between sexual violence and other forms of violence not only helps us understand the scope of the issue but also who is most at risk of being harmed.

Sexual Assault

Any sexual contact made against a person without their consent. It can take different forms (e.g., intercourse, groping, putting your mouth on someone). It is a crime in the Criminal Code of Canada with three levels of severity.

Sexual Harassment

Refers to any unwelcome sexual comments or physical contact. It is behavior that creates a hostile environment, and behavior that inappropriately promises reward or punishment for complying with sexual acts.

Rape

A form of sexual assault that is defined as sexual penetration without consent. Not all sexual assault is rape.

Sexual Coercion

Unwanted sexual contact that happens when you are pressured, tricked, threatened, or forced in a nonphysical way.

Gender-based Violence

Violence that is committed against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.

Sexual violence is a form of gender-based violence. Although people of all genders, including men, experience sexual violence, it overwhelmingly impacts girls, women, transgender and non-binary people. In addition to gender, our risk and experience of sexual violence are shaped by our other social identities. Youth, Indigenous people, Black people, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, and people who use substances are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence in Canada. Research has shown that surviving childhood sexual abuse is also a risk factor for experiencing sexual violence in adulthood. Lastly, while people of all genders can perpetrate sexual violence, perpetrators are statistically more likely to be men known to their victims. Often, survivors then face the challenge of ongoing relationships or interactions with a person who caused them great harm.

One in three (32%) women and one in eight (13%) men report having experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in public spaces (Gender-based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2018: Initial findings from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces)

Experiencing sexual violence is traumatic. Trauma is a lasting emotional experience that occurs in the body after a distressing event. It is an experience that alters our nervous systems and impacts our sense of safety in the world. After an experience of sexual violence, the nervous system remains prepared for danger and relies on protective mechanisms from the oldest part of the brain to navigate everyday life. The effects of trauma can last months, and even years.

Although work to improve our sexual violence response systems is ongoing, individuals face many barriers to obtaining services and supports after an experience of sexual violence. From overcoming the fear of being blamed, to navigating further trauma inflicted by services meant to facilitate healing and justice, a survivor's journey toward healing can be an uphill climb.

Sexual assault has one of the lowest reporting rates of any major crime in Canada, with approximately one out of ten survivors reporting their assault to police. Compounding this, reports of sexual assault have often been mislabeled as "unfounded" by police, rarely leading to charges or, even rarer still, convictions. In the end, only an estimated one percent of sexual violence perpetrators are convicted and punished for their actions. Often, survivors and perpetrators return to their communities without support, accountability or reparation.

With increased recognition of sexual violence, and public oversight of our response systems and processes, we are starting to see early signs of change. In Prince Edward Island, the annual number of sexual assaults reported to police more than doubled from 97 in 2017 to 202 in 2021. The number of survivors of adult sexual violence seeking support from the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Center and PEI Victim Services also increased over the same time period. This increase in reporting and service utilization suggests that the landscape of sexual violence prevention and response is changing, and our systems and supports need to respond accordingly. This is what brings us here today.

More than six in ten (63%) Indigenous women have experienced physical or sexual assault in their lifetime. (Criminal victimization of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in Canada, 2018 to 2020)



BUILDING THE STRATEGY

The Task Force started its work by gathering knowledge and insights from its members and their respective departments and agencies on ways to improve PEI's prevention of, and response to, sexual violence. Additional information gathering included a jurisdictional scan, review of a previous community survey, literature review, inventory of existing programs and services, and a gap analysis of services available. Focus groups were also held to identify issues and potential solutions.

With a comprehensive information base and a clearer picture of the current situation, the work then shifted to engaging the public, especially survivors and those who are members of populations at risk of experiencing sexual violence. A total of 434 survivors of sexual violence responded to an online survey and provided insight into their use of services, including their perceptions of the helpfulness, barriers, and challenges to accessing said services, and offered ideas for improvement.

To explore the barriers facing survivors in accessing services, the issues facing service providers in delivering supports, and what could be done to meet these challenges, over thirty government and community service providers who work to support survivors were engaged. Their input was gathered through a survey, two workshops, a focus group with members of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Indigenous Working Group, and two individual interviews.

The Task Force also received presentations from local and national organizations and met with an eight-member expert panel from community organizations serving survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and/or representing populations that face increased risk of sexual violence, to gain further understanding and guidance.

The need for strengthened measures to both prevent and respond to sexual violence was widely acknowledged. The participants in these various engagement processes shaped the principles and provided valuable input on specific issues, which will be referenced in the following sections. The Task Force recognizes the courage and commitment shown by all the survivors and community members who took part in these processes; we recognize that it may have been difficult. The Task Force is deeply grateful for their contributions and thanks everyone for their participation.

Vision

The creation of a culture of care through the development and implementation of a comprehensive sexual violence prevention and response approach across Prince Edward Island.

Mission

Create a coordinated response to adult sexual violence prevention in Prince Edward Island.

Guiding Principles

Trauma-informed: The design and delivery of the strategy's systems and services are based on the core elements of a trauma-informed approach, including safety, trust based on transparency, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, voice and choice, and sensitivity to cultural, race and gender issues.

Prevention-focused: The strategy will focus on prevention: its elements will aim to prevent sexual violence from happening in the first place through upstream actions to reduce risk factors and build protective factors and – where sexual violence occurs—to contain its impacts and prevent further harms from taking place.

Intersectional: The strategy recognizes that the risks and impacts of sexual violence on individuals, and their capacity to access care and services, are influenced by a complex interplay of identity factors, which together shape individuals' positions within power structures and the social context. In response, the strategy will apply an intersectional approach to the design and delivery of actions.

Social Justice: The strategy recognizes the need for a fair division of resources, opportunities, and privileges in our society, and will strive to use this lens to address the prevention and response of sexual violence.

Shared Responsibility: Policies, programs and services under the strategy will avoid placing responsibility on survivors for the violence they have suffered and will recognize the communal responsibility that every member of society has to prevent all forms of sexual violence.

Priorities and Actions

All people should expect to live safely, free from sexual violence, and should have services available to them when needed. A provincial strategy will help coordinate services on Prince Edward Island to better respond to the needs of survivors and will place a strong focus on prevention. The strategy will view prevention and response as two sides of the same coin. The way in which we respond to sexual violence prevents further sexual violence and trauma. In the section below, three priority areas are identified:

- 1) preventing sexual violence**
- 2) responding to sexual violence**
- 3) coordinating responses**

Within each priority area are actions identified to help create a culture of care for survivors and provide helpful interventions and responses for perpetrators of sexual violence.

Preventing sexual violence means preventing all forms of violence that contribute to the dehumanization of our community members. Systemic change is needed to reach the roots of sexual violence (e.g. racism, misogyny, heterosexism, etc.). Therefore, this strategy is situated in a larger context of progress toward equity and social justice and works to align with strategies on child protection, intimate partner violence, poverty reduction, anti-racism, equity measures, and gender equality.

Preventing sexual violence must take place at multiple levels (e.g., individual, relationship, community and society) and involve every member of society taking collective responsibility and action. To achieve this, the World Health Organization (WHO) strongly recommends a public health approach. This approach seeks to understand survivors and perpetrators, what causes violence and how it varies in different contexts, and how this knowledge can be applied to reduce and eliminate violence. The current strategy highlights two focus areas from this approach: promoting positive social norms and creating protective environments.

“Prevention will be the most effective means at easing this crisis - and it is a crisis.”

- (Survivor Survey Respondent)

Promoting Positive Social Norms

Historical abuses of power and control have created cultural and social norms that allow and excuse sexual violence and blame survivors for being victimized. These social norms are adopted early in life, and as such, preventing sexual violence requires engaging our educational systems and society at large to promote positive social norms (e.g., consent, positive masculinities, healthy relationships and self-awareness) to counter an entrenched culture of sexual violence.

Social norms shape our institutions and social systems as well as individual and collective attitudes and behaviours. The current strategy will prioritize education and awareness to encourage a shift in social norms. Building awareness, knowledge and skills are central to strengthening individual resilience and empowerment. Sexual violence is not something that just affects “others.” The potential exists for every member of our society to experience, perpetrate or perpetuate sexual violence; as such, it is critical that all individuals see themselves in the public education and awareness initiatives of this strategy. In this context, population approaches can be used to build universal skills and knowledge, and individualized approaches can be used to promote healthy, non-violent relationships.

Actions to promote positive social norms include:

- **Implement an ongoing comprehensive public education and public awareness campaign that increases recognition and knowledge of the continuum of sexual harassment and violence, realities and myths, services and supports, and bystander interventions.**
- **Ensure K-12 education and resource supports for the whole school community on healthy relationships, sex education and promoting positive social norms are up-to-date, evidence-based and reflect current best practices (e.g., curriculum, services offered via Student Well-Being Teams).**

Creating Protective Environments

Opportunities exist to reduce risk factors and to increase protective factors at the community and societal levels for the prevention of sexual violence. These may include changes to our legislation and policies, institutions, and social and physical environments. By understanding that sexual violence is prevalent in both our public and private spaces and knowing that certain populations are at increased risk of victimization, we can work to identify environments where strengthening protection can serve to prevent sexual violence. Creating protective environments means ensuring that individuals are aware of mechanisms available for preventing, reporting and obtaining support for sexual violence.

Actions to create protective environments include:

- **Collaborate with post-secondary institutions to develop and implement a coordinated approach to prevention that addresses population risk factors.**
- **Enhance measures to prevent sexual violence against residents of long-term care facilities, community care facilities, and other residential facilities serving vulnerable adults.**
- **Support private, public, and volunteer organizations to establish and implement policies and protocols to prevent and respond to sexual violence.**
- **Collaborate with community organizations, government agencies, and businesses to advance social responsibility and enhance measures in licensed establishments to reduce the risk of sexual violence.**

“I definitely believe we need more education around what constitutes sexual violence, and also more awareness of the importance of enthusiastic consent.”

- (Survivor Survey Respondent)



A coordinated response to sexual violence will ensure that every door is the right door and that people are quickly guided to (and through) the appropriate helping systems. In recognizing the widespread impacts of sexual violence, it is important that our responses are trauma-informed to avoid or minimize further trauma arising from services and justice processes. Our response to sexual violence also needs to be driven by a social justice lens to ensure that services are available and accessible to all survivors, recognizing that intersecting identity factors influence our risk of experiencing sexual violence, the impacts of that violence, the capacity of individuals to deal with and overcome those impacts, and the barriers they face in doing so.

Responding to sexual violence requires coordinated, responsive, and accessible services and supports that meet the needs of survivors. Several measures have been put in place in recent years to enhance services and supports to survivors immediately following sexual violence. A need exists to ensure that these supports and services are known to survivors and service providers to ensure a consistent trauma-informed approach and to better connect them to each other. Responding to sexual violence also includes working with perpetrators, and those at risk of perpetrating, to address harmful behaviours. The following sub-sections focus on increasing options for survivors, empowering service providers with knowledge and skills, strengthening trauma-informed processes, and increasing interventions for perpetrators.

38% of Survivor Survey Respondents identified a limited awareness of what services are available as a challenge to accessing services.

Increasing Options for Survivors

What happens in the hours, days and weeks immediately following sexual violence have a major impact on the nature and extent of trauma for survivors and on their capacity to cope with their experiences. Measures that increase options for survivors are crucially important aspects of response as they serve to restore a sense of power and control that is often lost during an experience of sexual violence. Increasing options for survivors also recognizes that our services need to be as varied as our survivors themselves; as such, a combination of immediate and longer-term services that center the voices of survivors is needed.

Actions related to increasing options for survivors include:

- **Improve access to justice and supports for survivors through timely access to counselling, legal information, and navigation by continued investment and support of programs and services (e.g., creating short-term counselling supports in Victim Services).**
- **Review programs and policies with a view to increasing access to financial supports for survivors of sexual violence.**
- **Support community organizations to increase options for survivors. Examples could include exploring options to address the urgent needs of survivors through crisis line support at the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre; and piloting a grant fund for community projects that support sexual violence response and prevention efforts, with a focus on populations disproportionately affected by sexual violence (e.g., Black, Indigenous, people of colour, women, transgender people, gender-diverse people).**
- **Explore how restorative justice can play a role in some cases of sexual violence, taking into consideration what safeguards and supports are needed.**

Empowering Service Providers with Knowledge and Skills

Service providers are often the first point of contact within systems that respond to sexual violence. All service providers who may work with survivors and perpetrators require core training, and specialized providers require in-depth training in order to provide trauma-informed services and supports that are intersectional. Service providers in government, health and the community should be supported with the training and resources they need to meet the needs of survivors and perpetrators in an equitable, compassionate, and respectful way, and in a manner that maintains their own wellness.

Actions related to empowering service providers with knowledge and skills include:

- **Develop an integrated plan that will renew, enhance, and sustain training to ensure that all providers who may interact with survivors and perpetrators have core competencies in trauma-informed care, as well as monitor/evaluate the number of staff who have completed this training to inform the training plan.**

“It is so difficult to provide trauma informed services...everything relies on the survivor advocating, seeking, reaching out, attaining, becoming, healing.

The systems should at least not get in the way. Police and nurses, for instance, need more training on suspending judgment and treating everyone with respect.”

- (Survivor Survey Respondent)

Strengthening Trauma-informed Policies and Processes

Although training individual service providers is important, it is essential that the overall system of services and support is led by processes that are trauma-informed, respectful, and promote social justice. Strengthening the mechanisms used for reporting, obtaining medical care, and justice outcomes ensures that we better meet the needs of survivors and address the complexity of sexual violence in our communities. Establishing and implementing processes that reflect the current reality are necessary.

Actions related to strengthening trauma-informed processes include:

- **Develop and implement a sustainability plan for and enhancement to the Enhanced Emergency Sexual Assault Services program.**
- **Establish a Police Response to Sexual Violence Protocol. The protocol would set out the minimum training standards for responding to sexual assault complaints and carrying out sexual assault investigations, as well as best practice requirements in case management of sexual assault investigations.**
- **Ensure all police organizations responsible for carrying out sexual assault investigations have-and maintain- a collaborative case review process that includes victim services providers and advocates, as referenced in the Canadian Framework for Collaborative Police Response on Sexual Violence.**
- **Work with police and community organizations to develop an approach to third-party reporting through designated organizations in PEI and identify potential implementation options.**

“In the same decade when I was assaulted, other women had reported assaults (unrelated to mine) and they said publicly afterwards that they regretted reporting it because they were re-traumatized by the process they had to go through, and in the end the men were not convicted. This is the primary reason I did not report.”

- (Survivor Survey Respondent)

Increasing Interventions for Perpetrators

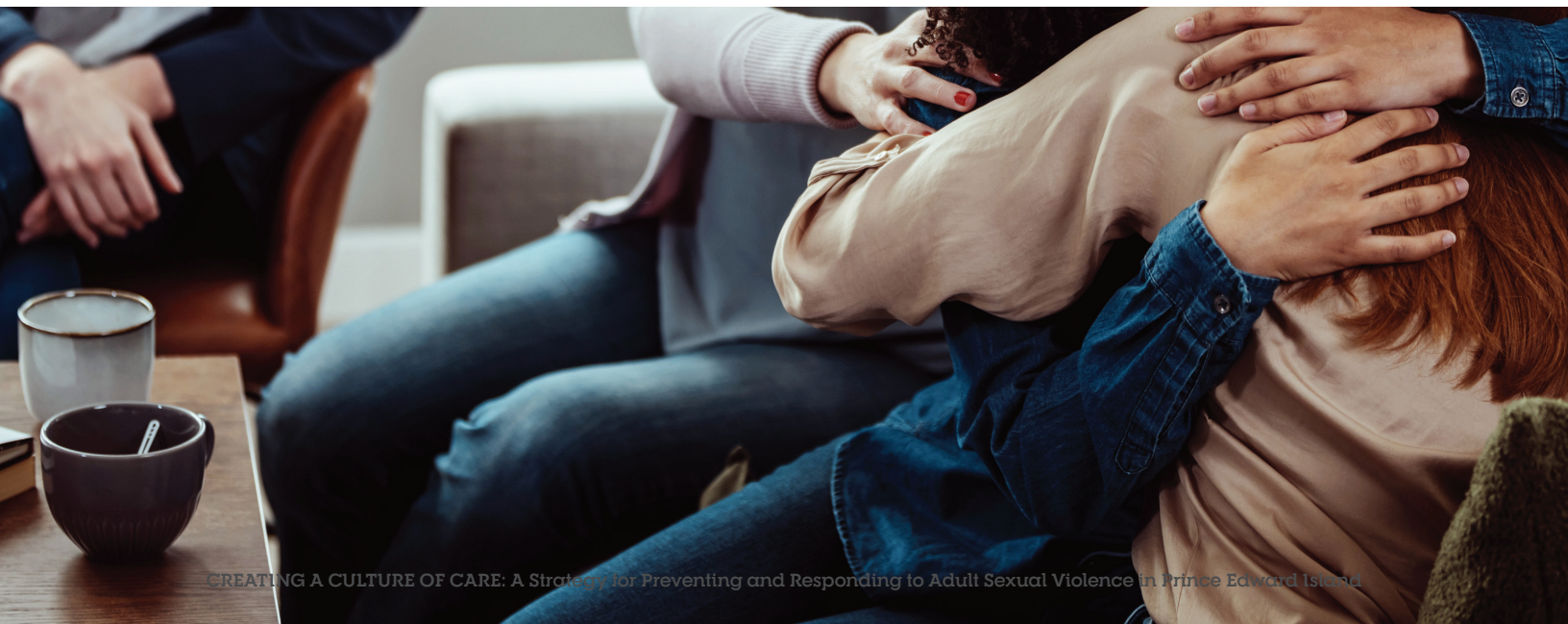
A comprehensive approach to addressing sexual violence prevention and response must include work with perpetrators. Perpetrators need to both be held accountable for their actions as well as receive services and supports to prevent them from harming others. Expansion of current services and increased availability of services for those who have committed sexual violence (and also for those who feel they are at risk of committing sexual violence) are needed.

Actions related to increasing interventions for perpetrators include:

- Increase adult clinical services capacity for assessment and treatment of a spectrum of sexual offenders for a range of needs, including expanding treatment and support options (e.g., low-intensity treatment, maintenance programming, and psycho-educational programming for family members of perpetrators).
- Increase youth-focused interventions to better support families at risk of experiencing victimization and perpetration of sexual violence and improve access to assessment and treatment.

“I believe many perpetrators have no understanding that what they are doing is harmful. Society has set them up to believe that coercion is the norm, that they are the protagonists, that their sexual conquests are the whole storyline in the movie of their lives. I believe many offenders are capable of learning how to do better, and this preventive element is virtually ignored by our systems.”

- (Survivor Survey Respondent)



Priority Area 3: Coordinating Responses

The previous priority areas of this strategy have identified measures to better prevent and respond to sexual violence, as well as opportunities to further strengthen and develop specific services and to improve access to services. While individual service improvements are needed and helpful, they are – in and of themselves – not enough to achieve the trauma-informed, coordinated, accessible system that is needed. Collaborative service delivery and improvement initiatives are vital to improving prevention and response actions. Coordinating responses will reduce the need for survivors to retell their stories, increase access to more timely processes, and will promote greater awareness of services available.

Actions related to coordinating responses include:

- **Establish a Provincial Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator position.**
- **Develop an Adult Sexual Violence Protocol similar to the Child Sexual Abuse Protocol.**
- **Enhance research and data collection to track, obtain feedback, and improve the role of systems and services in responding to adult sexual violence, including special consideration given to how data is collected from populations disproportionately impacted by sexual violence.**
- **Establish a supportive community of practice encompassing service providers in government, non-profit organizations and the private sector for knowledge-sharing opportunities and peer support.**

“I think the biggest challenge, though, is to coordinate all service providers so we complement each other. A strategy/protocol that included police, mental health, victim services, medical staff, Crown’s office, etc. (so everyone knew their role and the steps they were responsible for) would help to ensure that the process moved as smoothly as possible. We need a set of standards in place that provide clarification for everyone.”

- (Service Provider Survey Respondent)



GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The work to develop this strategy has been carried out by a multi-sectoral partnership. To reach the strategy's fullest potential, this partnership will continue to be an important element in the implementation phase of the work. We need to ensure linkages and connections to other provincial action plans and strategies, such as the Women and Gender Diverse People's Health Strategy and the PEI Poverty Reduction Action Plan. And it is vital that a Gender and Diversity lens is applied to the implementation of the strategy.

Moving forward, a cross-departmental implementation group will be established to design and implement a detailed plan to set out activities, targets and indicators; to promote it with their departments; and to manage and monitor its progress. In addition, a community advisory body will be established to provide input and diverse perspectives on the implementation process. Annual progress reports will be submitted to the Social Policy Deputy Ministers Committee, and a public report will be released every two years on implementation progress.

Conclusion: A Culture of Care

Sexual violence is both a symptom of and a contributor to the challenges we face as a society. The traumatic impacts of sexual violence cut deeply. For many individuals and families, the impacts can last a lifetime and beyond. In recent years, major changes have taken shape in the cultural norms and attitudes that perpetuate sexual violence. This has created public support for action and an increased potential for success in preventing and responding to sexual violence. In Prince Edward Island, these forces are reflected in a range of public, private and community measures taken over the past five years, which are already contributing to improved prevention and response. This strategy will work to refine and better integrate these measures, increase their collective impact, and further develop and improve future supports. The current strategy presents an opportunity for individuals on Prince Edward Island to join together to create a culture of care to prevent sexual violence before it happens, and to surround survivors and perpetrators with the services and support needed to restore individual and collective well-being.

