

## **Core Components and Definitions of Sexualized Violence Services for all Nova Scotians**

**Submitted To:** Province of Nova Scotia

**Submitted By:** Sexual Assault Services Network of Nova Scotia (SASNS)

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### **About SASNS:**

The Sexual Assault Services Network of Nova Scotia (SASNS) was formed in January 2015. It is comprised of over 30 long established community based organizations from across NS including sexual assault centres, women centres, transition houses, and other equality seeking women's organizations, anti-violence groups, and organizations that provide services to racialized and marginalized populations. The network grew out of an identified need for a provincial approach to a coordinated, inclusive, community-based response to sexualized violence in Nova Scotia. The purpose of the network is as follows: "To establish a network that will improve access to sexual assault services through a provincial approach that supports and strengthens an inclusive, community-based, feminist, trauma-informed response to sexualized violence. The network will identify and build upon the unique experience, skills and knowledge of the many diverse interests and communities in Nova Scotia.

### **Full Spectrum Sexual Assault Services Province Wide:**

Some communities in Nova Scotia have established and formalized sexual assault services and community response initiatives to address sexualized violence and respond to victims/survivors. Many of these services are short term or are underfunded and therefore are not sustainable or consistent in service delivery and response. Initiatives under the Provincial Sexualized Violence Strategy and the Provincial SANE Program have resulted in the implementation of further sexual assault services in some areas of the Province. Many of these new programs have demonstrated as addressing service delivery gaps, however many are not sustainable once strategy funding is complete. Committed and sustained government funding would lead to consistent and sustainable services province wide. SASNS formally requests ongoing sustainable funding for full spectrum sexual assault services in the following communities:

- Sydney
- Port Hawkesbury
- Antigonish
- Truro
- South Shore
- Annapolis Valley
- Tri-County/Yarmouth
- Pictou County
- Cumberland County
- Halifax Regional Municipality

These communities are best situated to provide formalized full-spectrum sexual assault services because:

- They already have some sexual assault programs/service delivery
- They have community based organizations that are already established and provide specialized expertise that provides the capacity to provide sexual assault services
- They have established formalized interagency sexual assault response

### **Core Components of Sexual Assault Services:**

SASNS expanded upon the core components of Sexual Assault Services as identified in *Suffering in Silence* (Rubin, 2008), conducted by the Nova Scotia Sexual Assault Planning Group. SASNS has identified that services must be trauma-informed, culturally competent and available to all Nova Scotians: women, men, LGBTQ+ individuals, youth, seniors, Indigenous peoples, Acadian/Francophone individuals, African Nova Scotians, immigrants and refugees, people from culturally specific groups, and people with disabilities. Services provide equitable access to information and resources across diverse communities and organizations. They must recognize the intersections of all forms of oppression and address sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, agism, and ablism.

Feminist analysis asserts that sexualized violence exists because of power imbalances rooted in patriarchy, systemic racism, and gender inequality as well as other forms of oppression and systemic inequalities. SASNS recognizes that in addition to the ways in which women are targeted for male violence and oppression, that racialized, rural, indigenous, African Nova Scotia, male survivors, newcomers, and people with disabilities are also vulnerable and lack access to specialized and culturally specific services. SASNS believes that in order for systemic violence/oppression and male violence against women to be eradicated we need to work with all populations within our communities and province. We are committed to continuing to work with government, each other, and our communities to address all aspects of sexualized violence. Province wide sustainable, inclusive, full spectrum sexual assault services are core to our goal.

The Core Components of Sexual Assault Services include:

1. Trauma-informed support services;
2. Community-based SANE programs and SANE Response Lines;
3. Specialized sexualized violence trauma therapeutic counselling;
4. Legal information, support, advocacy, and accompaniment;
5. Transitional and emergency crisis housing;
6. Provincial sexual assault crisis line;
7. Indigenous cultural healing practices and ceremonies;
8. Professional education that is trauma-informed, culturally specific and relevant.

## Definitions of Core Components

### 1. Trauma-informed Support Services

Trauma-informed support services include the following:

- One-to-one problem solving and support;
- General information, system navigation and referral;
- Advocacy and accompaniment;
- Support groups;
- Family support services and connections.

One-to-one problem solving and support involves supportive counselling and problem solving with individuals seeking support. This includes helping individuals identify current coping strategies as it relates to current disruptions in their lives (e.g. sleeplessness, hyper vigilance, appetite disturbances); safety planning; working with them to explore new skills to address disruptions and to normalize their reaction to the trauma violence; and, working with them to develop healthy support networks as they develop personal strengths and resilience and find less need for professional services.

General information, system navigation and referral involves providing information and referrals to relevant supports and agencies, assisting individuals to navigate legal and medical systems, apprising individuals of their individual rights and entitlements, and working to ensure their rights are upheld within the systems they are navigating.

Advocacy and accompaniment involves accompanying individuals to meetings and appointments; for example, legal, medical and social assistance. It also includes debriefing and strategizing next steps, ensuring individuals understand expectations and outcomes. It can also involve providing advocacy through letter-writing, attending appeal processes, and meetings with agencies.

Support groups include providing education and support on various topics related to sexualized violence and this may vary depending on the needs of the particular group.

Family support services and connections involve provision of support to non-offending parents and partners, children, disclosure/reconciliation services for those who want to disclose/reconcile with family members. The focus of family support services varies depending on the agency providing the service.

### 2. Community-based SANE Programs and SANE Response Line

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) provide emergency response 24 hours a day, seven days a week for individuals who have experienced an immediate sexual assault. Two (2) SANEs are on-call 24/7. With the individual's consent, SANEs provide comprehensive medical, forensic, and emotional care with appropriate follow-up care. SANE services are administered through a community-based organization and services are delivered in partnership with local hospital emergency departments and other community-based health centres.

The SANE program is a trauma-informed, client-centred care model, where the victim directs all aspects of care. Services are provided in a safe, supportive, non-judgmental, and confidential environment. Specialized SANE services include:

- Support and crisis intervention;
- Discussion of medical, legal and follow-up options;
- A physical assessment; the option of a forensic examination; and, information about and links to community resources;
- A supportive follow-up phone call with the victim;
- Testimony if the case proceeds to a court of law.

Should individuals choose to have the forensic exam, they are given options to report to police or to freeze forensic evidence for six months and make a decision at a later date regarding reporting the sexual assault to police.

The SANE program provides a SANE Response Line 24/7. This provides individuals with information about their options after an immediate sexual assault as well as general information, support and referral to individuals, support persons, healthcare workers, police, and first responders.

### **3. Specialized Sexual Violence Trauma Therapeutic Counselling**

The current service delivery model as practised by Avalon Centre and AWRCSSA includes the delivery of individual and group therapy to those 16+ years of age who have experienced sexual trauma, sexual assault, and childhood sexual abuse. Services are also provided to individuals between 16 and 21 years of age who are identified as at risk. This counselling service focuses specifically on healing related to sexualized violence trauma. Each individual's path to health includes understanding and making meaning of ways their specific experiences of trauma impact their sense of pain and expose blocks to achieving wellness. Together the therapist and the individual experiencing trauma address the blocks so that individually identified goals are met through the therapeutic process. The trauma processing work includes:

- Assessing for safety;
- Building on techniques for self-care, strengthening grounding skills, and identifying thoughts, emotions and physical sensation as separate experiences;
- Empowering individuals to change and sustain affect states.

The therapy involves the following four stages which unfold in a cycle. Individuals who go through these stages are able to navigate self and other relationships within a present day context. The four stages are:

- Grounding,
- Processing,
- Being present, and
- Future planning/pacing.

- Within the provincial model of service delivery being developed by the Mental Health and Addictions Program, the Provincial Sexual Assault Trauma Therapy model proposed by SASNS is aligned with both Tier 2 and Tier 3 services:
  - Tier 2: Components of the Sexual Assault Trauma Therapy Program which provide immediate response and safety to victims of recent sexual violence would be aligned with Tier 2 mental health and addictions services. This would include a close partnership with Mental Health and Addictions for referral and capacity building to enable the program to safely screen and identify those in need of mental health and addictions support. Some aspects of Tier 2 services (i.e. screening and referral) may also be performed by the SANE Program, although not with the same clinical context and expertise as available through the Sexual Assault Trauma Therapy Program.
  - Tier 3: The Phase 2 and 3 counselling services delivered through the Sexual Assault Trauma Therapy Program are specialized clinical interventions that would be aligned with Tier 3 mental health and addictions services. The expertise in trauma therapy for victims of sexual violence demonstrated by existing and emerging sexual assault therapeutic counselling programs exceeds the current system capacity in the area of trauma informed and trauma-specific care. All of the recommended service delivery communities are aligned with SANE Programs, collaborate/partner with and cross refer with Mental Health and Addictions, and many have access to tertiary sexual assault support/response. These communities can provide counselling services in a non-clinical environment which may improve access and address the stigma that may prevent many from accessing formal mental health and addictions services.
  - The theoretical care model utilized by the sexual assault therapeutic counselling model is the Tri-Phase, Sequential Relational Model of Trauma Therapy which has been recommended by experts in the field of relational trauma. Included within this model are the following phases:
    - Phase 1: Stabilizing and Resourcing: Building a Collaborative Container and Strengthening Internal & External Safety
    - Phase 2: Incremental Trauma Processing, Addressing Dissociative Survival Patterns and Traumatic Grief
    - Phase 3: Expansion and Empowerment: Extending Healing into Present Life and Enhancing Relational Engagement
- The existing model of practise provides integrated specialized knowledge in anti-oppressive, relational therapeutic counselling for sexual abuse and assault survivors with the most updated neuro-biologically informed approaches to address acute trauma, PTSD and complex trauma effects. The result is sexual abuse/assault trauma-specific integrated treatment modalities and evidence-based approaches as follows:
  - Anti-Oppressive Feminist-Informed Lens for Causal Explanation of Sexualized Violence and Cross-Sectional Trauma
  - Collaborative Relational Therapeutic Counselling Approach
  - Tri-Phase/Sequenced Model
  - Neuro-biologically Informed Body-Centered Trauma Education and Mindfulness Awareness Skills
  - Sexuality, Body Shame and Intimacy Impacts
  - Specialized Modalities to Address Posttraumatic Dissociation and Complex Trauma
  - Addressing Negative Social/Systemic Responses or “Secondary Wounding” Experiences
  - Vicarious Trauma and Helping Relationships

- Specialized modalities to address attachment traumas and intergenerational trauma stemming from childhood sexual abuse and intimate partner sexualized violence.

#### **4. Legal Information, Support, Advocacy, and Accompaniment**

This service provides individuals who have experienced sexualized violence with law-related information and resources and assists them to navigate the legal system. It provides support related to reporting to police, court preparation and accompaniment, and follow-up. It also involves liaison with the justice system and community agencies as well as provision of law-related information and resources to organizations, agencies, and schools.

#### **5. Transitional and emergency crisis housing**

In most regions across Nova Scotia, community-based organizations can work together to develop or enhance community capacity to provide emergency and transitional housing for victims of sexualized violence.

#### **6. Provincial Sexual Assault Crisis Line**

A 24/7 sexual assault crisis line provides a trauma-informed first point of contact and other supportive contact in response to sexualized violence. Responders must have trauma-informed and sexualized violence training as well as knowledge of local sexualized violence services available throughout Nova Scotia.

#### **7. Culturally Appropriate Healing Practices and Ceremonies**

- Indigenous Cultural Healing Practices and Ceremonies:
  - This service provided for Indigenous individuals and communities supports access to healing ceremonies, talking circles, sweats, sentencing circles (restorative justice), therapeutic smudges, and connection with Elders.
- Culturally Inclusive and Specific Services:
  - Funding and support to sustain existing and to implement culturally specific services and build services providers' response to racialized victims/survivors.

#### **8. Professional Education**

Professional education involves reaching service providers and leaders in a wide range of sectors to raise awareness and strengthen knowledge and skills. This can involve enhancing understanding of sexualized violence, raising awareness of available supports and services, and identifying leading edge response practices and fields of knowledge that can improve an agency's and a community's collective ability to effectively respond to sexualized violence. Professional education results in strengthened communication and collaboration among practitioners and agencies, fosters change in organizational practice and response to individuals experiencing sexualized violence, and improves the collective community response to sexualized violence.

### **Case of Support for a Provincial Sexual Assault Therapeutic Counselling Model:**

Committed and sustained government funding would lead to consistent and sustainable full spectrum sexual assault services province wide. Those communities with some sexual assault services such as SANE Programs, initial support and referral, and community education or prevention programs have demonstrated the capacity for the implementation and sustainability of sexual assault trauma specific therapeutic counselling programs. As a result of the growing demand for counselling services, SASNS formally requests that the Province of NS begin the sexual assault service funding process by first investing in funding specialized sexual assault trauma specific counselling services across Nova Scotia.

SASNS recommends the government of NS provide \$2,249,000 to implement new therapeutic counselling programs in other suggested service delivery communities (2 therapists for each program) and to address gaps in sexual assault services in the Halifax Region for males, African Nova Scotians, Indigenous people, and rural HRM (2 therapists each).

In 2017, DOH committed funding for therapeutic counselling to the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association (ASRCSASA) and Avalon Sexual Assault Centre as part of the mental health and addiction service continuum (tier 2 and 3). The decision to fund was based on the following:

- Both organizations are currently funded by DCS to provide feminist, gender based, anti-violence services (Avalon as a sexual assault centre and AWRCASASA as a women's centre).
- Both centres operate Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Programs
- The services provided by both organizations do not duplicate services provided by Mental Health and Addictions but their services enhance the services provide by MHA and they provide specialized services currently not met by MHA's current service delivery model.

SASNS recommend that the Province of NS implement similar sexual assault trauma therapy services across NS following these same criteria as well as implement funding to address the service delivery gaps listed above. It is currently proposed that therapeutic counselling programs would provide counselling to all genders aged 16+ with the exception of Avalon Centre in Halifax. Avalon Centre provides counselling to women and Trans/non-gender binary individuals. Project New Start and Man Talk provide counselling for male survivors in HRM.

Provincial funding to sustain services for male survivors and for rural and racialized communities is imperative as funding currently provided through the Sexual Violence Strategy Community Support Network Grant is ending. This will result in a vast gap in supports and services for male and Indigenous, ANS, and rural survivors.

**Nova Scotia Investment in Specialized Trauma Therapy Programs:** \$173,000 for each of 13 new programs across the province requires an investment of \$2,249,000.

**Sources:**

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