



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Call for Immediate Provincial Support for Sex Worker Services Amidst Epidemic of Gender-Based Violence in BC

xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil Waututh) territory/Vancouver, B.C. – Sex worker-led and feminist organizations in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), and First Nations, are urging the Province of British Columbia to allocate stable and enhanced funding for critical programs serving sex workers, warning that ongoing closures and service reductions of sex worker supports are putting lives at risk.

This call comes on the occasion of the [International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers](#), and in the midst of a [provincially declared epidemic of gender-based violence](#).

The past year has been marked by a [string of closures and service reductions at organizations serving sex workers across Vancouver](#), including most recently the announcement of funding structure changes for the Kingsway Community Station and program suspension of Living in Community. This points to a concerning pattern of service closures occurring in the context of sustained underfunding for a highly criminalized and marginalized group.

"At Living in Community, we have seen first-hand sex worker-serving organizations having to close or reduce services over the past year and how detrimental this is to sex workers who need these programs day to day. Living in Community brings together these frontline organizations from across BC and beyond to advocate to governments at all levels & educate about the needs of sex workers. We have already warned about the concerning repetition of history we see happening with less funding & support for our organizations while more violence & predation is

happening. It is imperative that Living in Community and frontline organizations are fully funded to prevent further harm” Says Halena Seiferling, Executive Director of Living In Community.

Within the context of ongoing criminalization, stigmatization, and exclusion from social protections, sex workers continue to face [elevated risks of violence](#), requiring continued and expanded access to tailored, community-led services, including drop in spaces, mobile outreach services, occupational health and safety training, and bad date reporting to keep the community safe.

Sex workers cannot be left behind in the midst of a provincially declared epidemic of gender-based violence.

Supporting sex workers’ safety requires immediate provincial action consistent with recommendations outlined in [BC's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan](#), and [Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry](#). It is imperative that the Province does not repeat historical mistakes and ensures adequate funding for critical programs serving sex workers. Continued closures, underfunding and service reductions in the context of ongoing criminalization are putting sex workers' lives at risk.

“Addressing the shifting support landscape for sex workers, in the context of continued criminalization and structural exclusion, is essential in supporting health equity and occupational health and safety. Decades of peer-reviewed evidence highlight how criminalization undermines health equity and human rights of sex workers, including by creating barriers to community spaces and limiting opportunities for peer occupational health and safety support. Recent closures and service reductions at long-standing sex work organizations compromise these vital, life-saving support networks,” says Dr. Andrea Krüsi, Assistant Professor in the School of Criminology at SFU, and Principal Investigator for An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access (AESHA).

Sex worker-led and women serving organizations in Vancouver, and First Nations, are highlighting the urgency of this moment, and calling on the province to allocate stable and enhanced funding for critical programs serving sex workers, following many existing recommendations including those contained in the Final Report of the [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice](#), [Red Women Rising](#), and [Forsaken](#). We cannot accept the violence perpetrated against sex workers being minimized or overlooked.

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