

New free legal service provides help for anyone in British Columbia who has experienced sexual assault

Vancouver, B.C., Coast Salish Territories | October 17, 2023 | A new program that provides free legal advice to anyone who has experienced sexual assault in B.C. launches today. **Stand Informed legal advice services** are offered by **Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS)**, a not-for-profit society that provides legal assistance, information, and education in B.C.

Stand Informed offers up to three (3) hours of free, confidential legal advice to clients regardless of age, gender, income, whether they have reported the assault to the police, or if they are uncertain what they experienced is sexual assault.

Sexual assault occurs frequently in British Columbia, but it is under-reported to police and few people seek help.

The *Criminal Code of Canada* defines sexual assault as intentional sexual touching without consent. Consent must be expressed freely and be ongoing and can be revoked at any time.

With funding from the **Government of Canada** through the **Department of Justice Canada**, **CLAS** is contracted by the **B.C. Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General** to provide **Stand Informed** legal advice services.

Multiple [research studies](#) conducted by **Statistics Canada** show that women, especially young women, Indigenous women, and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and two-spirited (LGBTQ2S+) disproportionately experience sexual assault. An alarming statistic from 2019 shows that 37% of women over the age of 15 have experienced sexual assault in B.C.

Meanwhile, very few instances of sexual assault (about 6% - Stats Canada 2021) are reported to police. Reasons people don't report include distrust of the police, fear that their case will not be taken seriously, or that they cannot achieve justice through the Canadian justice system, or because they are unaware of their options and unfamiliar with the legal system.

“Stand Informed legal advice services fill a gaping hole in the legal assistance available to people in British Columbia. Until now, anyone who experienced sexual assault had nowhere to turn for accessible legal advice,” said Jennifer Khor, CLAS Supervising Lawyer and Project Manager. “Our goal with this service is to inform people of their legal options and empower them to do what they feel is best in their situation. It’s also important to note that in B.C., there is no time limit for filing a criminal or civil complaint of sexual assault.”

“British Columbians should feel safe in their communities. People who experience gender-based violence need to be able to access support they need when and where they need it,” said Kelli

Paddon, Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity. “This program will give survivors of sexual assault the opportunity for free, accessible legal advice during a time when they may need it most, making a critical difference for many women, girls, and gender diverse people across B.C.”

Any person who experiences sexual assault in B.C. and lives in B.C. can receive free legal advice by calling ([604-673-3143](tel:604-673-3143)) or sending an email (standinformed@clasbc.net) to access CLAS’s Stand Informed services. Stand Informed staff and lawyers take a trauma-informed approach, which is to say they understand how trauma can affect a person and work to make sure the person feels safe and is not re-traumatized.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS) is a non-profit society providing legal assistance, information and education in B.C., and works to advance the law to address the critical needs of those who are disadvantaged or face discrimination. For further information, please see www.clasbc.net.

The Community Safety and Crime Prevention Branch of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General develops and delivers community safety and crime prevention programs. For more information, please see <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/crime-prevention/community-crime-prevention/about-us>.

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