

Saskatchewan Declares Sexual Assault Awareness Week

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Envision Counseling and Support Center helps victims of sexual violence.

Public conversation around sexual assault has changed dramatically in recent years, and the government of Saskatchewan is hoping to keep the conversation going. They've declared May 11-15 sexual assault awareness week in the province.

"Keeping citizens safe and free from violence is very important for government," Minister responsible for the Status of Women Office Tina Beaudry-Mellor says. "We are working to end the patterns which contribute to sexual assault and violence and look forward to the day when all people are free from the threat of psychological and physical harm."

Sexual violence education for Saskatchewan justice system professionals is also being developed, along with a province-wide awareness campaign to challenge and change attitudes about sexual violence. These initiatives will augment existing government support for sexual violence programming and awareness, such as the Philadelphia Model partnership with the Regina Police Service, Sexual Assault Services of

Saskatchewan (SASS), and the Regina Sexual Assault Centre launched in 2019.

Envision Counseling and Support Center works very closely with victims of sexual violence in the Southeast. They're happy to see the province recognizing the importance of supporting those who have faced such violence.

"Sexual violence needs to be talked about in our communities," said Christa Daku, Executive Director at Envision Counselling and Support Centre. "The more open we can be with these conversations, the more people will see they are not alone and reach out for support."

In the days of COVID-19, the province is seeing a rise in domestic violence and sexual assaults. Julie Dzuba, outreach coordinator for Envision, said people being at home together constantly and in some cases not able to leave may have made some bad situations worse.

"We are in very unique times right now," Dzuba said. "I think that because individuals don't necessarily have the option to leave their homes, we are seeing a rise in things like sexual violence. Whether it be because people are just in close quarters, maybe they don't have healthy coping mechanisms, it is something we're seeing a rise in."

Envision has stayed open throughout the pandemic, but not in a physical capacity. They've been giving out educational materials and keeping their counselors on standby for socially distant services. But for Dzuba, help can also come from people outside Envision.

"I think one of the most important things is to believe what that person is telling you," she said. "Be that safe space for that person, acknowledge that however they're feeling is valid and normal. Everyone is going to have different emotions that go along with experiencing sexual violence."