



Living in  
Community

**Living in Community Submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance  
and Government Services: Annual Budget Consultation**

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June 2020



On behalf of Living in Community, we are writing to offer several recommendations for Budget 2021 regarding the importance of providing increased funding and support for sex worker safety in BC.

Living in Community (LIC) is an innovative community initiative that brings together different groups who are impacted by or have an impact on sex work: current and former sex workers, sex work support and advocacy organizations, Indigenous groups, health organizations, law enforcement, business, all levels of government, and social service organizations. By bringing stakeholders together to discuss community concerns, LIC identifies and acts upon collective solutions. The LIC model is an integrated way to improve the health, well-being and safety of all community members who are impacted by sex work, from sex workers themselves to businesses, community organizations, and residents.

From our work over the past 15 years, we know there are many misunderstandings about sex work which can have a dangerous impact on policy and funding priorities. As we have noted in past presentations to this Committee, past budget consultation reports have included the need to address gender-based violence and human trafficking; however, little to no support is available for those engaged in sex work who have not been trafficked, but who do experience violence. Trafficking and sex work are different and need to be recognized as such. In addition, not all sex workers are in a place to or want to exit sex work, yet they still have a fundamental right to safety and security. Simply focusing on trafficking or on exiting dangerously reduces the programs and interventions available. Focusing on trafficking also erases the experiences of male, transgender, non-binary, and LGBTQ2SI sex workers, whose experiences the common trafficking narrative fails to capture.

Therefore, we offer three main recommendations which address this concern through focusing on sex worker safety. We were pleased to also make these recommendations in a presentation to the Committee on June 8, 2020. These are further described below:

### **Recommendations:**

1. *Ensure that provincial funding explicitly supports the safety of sex workers, not only victims of trafficking and those looking to exit sex work.*
  - a. *Further, the Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant stream currently titled "Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation and Vulnerable Women in the Sex Trade" should be updated to reflect an explicit inclusion of sex worker safety in its title and funding deliverables.*

Our first recommendation for Budget 2021 is to ensure that provincial funding explicitly supports the safety of sex workers, not only victims of human trafficking and those looking to exit sex work. The main way this funding is currently delivered is through the Civil Forfeiture granting program, of which we are also a recipient. For years, the program had no granting streams that mentioned sex work or the sex trade, with the closest stream titled "Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking".

More recently the title has changed to include the phrase "vulnerable women engaged in the sex trade." While an improvement, this framing erases the need for support services for male, transgender and non-binary sex workers. Moreover, by naming women as 'vulnerable', the title ignores both the perpetrators of violence who target a stigmatized and criminalized group as well as the systemic reasons that violence and exploitation flourish. This government must ensure that it is not inadvertently perpetuating a victim-blaming narrative through problematic framing in funding streams.

Everyone has the right to safety, regardless of the kind of work they are engaged in. And ensuring sex worker safety will also reduce trafficking as it reduces vulnerability to the conditions under which traffickers thrive.

Therefore, we recommend that Budget 2021 must include sufficient funding for programs and services that promote the safety and security of all individuals who engage in sex work, regardless of gender, circumstance or type of sex work, and without the sole focus being on exiting or trafficking services. Sex work organizations should be funded before organizations that want to eradicate the sex industry. We further recommend that the name of the existing Civil Forfeiture granting stream mentioned here should be updated to reflect an explicit inclusion of sex worker safety in its funding deliverables. Our suggestion for a new name for this stream is “Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation and Sex Worker Safety.”

- 2. Provide proactive funding to sex work support organizations across the province, so that these organizations do not need to rely on unstable annual grants.*

To aid in the delivery of increased funding for sex worker safety, the necessary Ministries should connect with organizations supporting sex workers across the province and proactively provide them with funding. We would be happy to help facilitate these connections, as we work with over 20 organizations across BC that serve and support sex workers as members of a group we coordinate called the BC Sex Work Support Service Network. This Network is comprised of both sex work organizations and their allies like anti-violence organizations and women’s shelters which provide services to sex workers where no local sex work organization exists.

These local organizations know their communities best, and many are already facing funding shortages and barriers in tracking down and applying for new grants every year. We therefore recommend that sex work support organizations across the province receive proactive funding to improve sex worker safety.

- 3. Provide funding toward a provincial bad date reporting system.*

Finally, we recommend that Budget 2021 include funding for a provincial bad date reporting system. ‘Bad dates’ refers to cases where sex workers experience harassment, assault, or other types of violence while working. By having a system to report on bad dates, the information collected about the perpetrators can be distributed to other sex workers to screen their clients and increase their safety. Sex workers who engage with the justice system to report bad dates repeatedly experience stigmatization and vulnerability, so a sex worker- led bad date reporting system is critical. There is a local bad date reporting system in Metro Vancouver, but there are few mechanisms elsewhere in BC, and they are not connected. A province-wide bad date reporting system is imperative to ensure predatory violence does not continue with impunity.

The BC Sex Work Support Service Network has reiterated this need, particularly for sex workers who travel and work across the province. Recently, several members of the Network were approved for nearly \$1 million in funding for the creation of a provincial system, but the delivery of this funding has been delayed due to COVID-19. The provincial government can provide funding toward this project to ensure its life-saving work is not further delayed.