



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Women's organizations express outrage, call for an immediate action plan to end pandemic of gender-based violence in the DTES

Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səíilwətaʔ/səíilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. — The [surfacing of a video](#) in which a man appears to be sexually assaulting a semi-conscious woman in broad daylight while pedestrians, buses and cars pass by, starkly highlights the rampant culture of gendered and sexualized violence in the DTES.

We have said it before and we will say it again: Gendered and sexualized violence continues to be normalized and accepted in our community by those in positions to make change.

We are calling on all levels of government for a coordinated action plan in response to the ongoing gendered and sexualized violence in Vancouver's DTES—where Indigenous women and girls are made particularly vulnerable. While there are multiple reports, inquiries and recommendations, what continues to be absent is a coordinated and robust response to a pandemic that pre-exists COVID: gender-based violence. This pandemic continues unabated in our neighbourhood and yet, no meaningful action has been taken.

“The ability to access safety and support has been drastically reduced or eliminated for many women in the community as a result of COVID-19,” said Alice Kendall, Executive Director of the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre. “We have been struggling for months seeking out and securing additional space to ensure women have access to safe respite, basic-need services, and specialized supports. In the meantime, women who are made vulnerable are outside on the same streets where it seems a woman was publicly sexually assaulted with no support whatsoever— this has to change.”

This week, it was a video of an apparent rape. Last week, a street-based sex worker called WISH's bad date line after she heard a woman screaming in a car while other people walked by. Three months ago, it was hours before the body of a woman was found outside the city-sanctioned street market. Back in April, the body of a dead baby was found inside a portable toilet, where a woman gave birth and no one noticed. And this, regrettably, is just the tip of the iceberg.

“Even more troubling is the fact that the majority of violent acts against women and gender-diverse folks in the DTES go unreported,” said Mebrat Beyene, the Executive Director of WISH

Drop-In Centre. “We continue to receive horrible accounts of gendered and sexualized violence through Bad Date Reporting. No one should ever have to fear for their safety while trying to work and survive or simply exist in the community yet women and gender diverse people in the DTES are being left to fend for themselves.”

“Gendered violence continues, even within our own programs, because there are so few choices available for women and gender-diverse women in terms of housing, employment, income security, safe, appropriate services and other opportunities that allow women to keep themselves safe,” says Janice Abbott, CEO, Atira Women’s Resource Society. “As long as women and gender-diverse women are forced to work in the unsanctioned economy, as long as they are criminalized, as long as they are forced to compromise their health and safety for a place to sleep and a way to put food on the table, they will continue to experience disproportionate levels of violence and exploitation.”

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