

New grant program funds initiatives combating gender-based violence

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Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Canadian Women's Foundation has launched a new program, Safer + Stronger Grants, to provide financial support for organizations addressing and combating gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

‘There’s a lot of research that shows that gender-based violence does increase in times of disaster and this is something that’s global and Canada of course is no exception to that rule,’ said Andrea Gunraj, vice president of public engagement at Canadian Women's Foundation. ‘We’ve been seeing that that increase in gender-based violence tends to be because folks might be more isolated, folks might have less access to services, maybe communities are struggling with the disaster response and therefore the response or the services available for gender-based violence are limited.’

The Canadian Women's Foundation launched the grant program back in December after receiving a \$19.6 million investment from the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE). The grant will provide organizations with funding for a number of activities and expenses such as crisis intervention, digital resources, staffing, operating cost and COVID-19 prevention.

‘It’s very open in terms of what organizations could say they need uniquely in their community and the whole idea is we want to make sure that organizations get what they need in this emergency period, to be able to meet those needs of their communities.’

With the new grant Canadian Women's Foundation said through that they will be particularly committed in advancing initiatives in rural, remote and Northern areas which can see increased risk with less available support.

‘Statistics Canada has found that women in rural areas really do experience the highest rates of violence of intimate partner abuse, and of course some groups within those rural areas experience higher rates as well,’ said Gunraj.

‘We also see that there might be greater barriers for folks who are in rural and remote northern areas, which could be that the shelter is not available for them, if they want to find emergency shelter programs they may not be available in their areas, there may be issues with trying to get to the services because of the distance between and lack of affordable housing options, affordable transportation options,’ explained Gunraj. ‘Resources may be scarce for them, there’s the isolation and the difficulty in leaving a violent situation is going to be more difficult in those areas.’

During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic police calls for domestic disturbance increased through March and June. Women's Shelter Canada reported that 52 percent of 266 shelters surveyed reported seeing clients experiencing more severe forms of violence.

In a survey from Statistics Canada, released in April 2020, it showed that 1 in 10 women were very or extremely concerned about the possibility of violence in the home.

Family Transition Place (FTP) a local organization that provides services for women and children back in July said at the peak of the first wave they initially saw a decrease in calls for help, but as restrictions lifted they saw numbers begin to rise again.

With the second wave of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns, Canadian Women's Foundation says there is higher risk of intimate partner violence and that the emergency grant will help support stretched organizations.

Deadlines to apply for the Safer + Stronger Grant are Feb. 1 and 15. For more information on the grant go to www.canadianwomen.org.