



## Brief for the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) for its study on the Participation of Women & Girls in Sport

December 2022

The Canadian Women's Foundation is a national leader in the movement for gender equality in Canada. Through funding, research, advocacy, and knowledge sharing, we work to achieve systemic change. We support women, girls, and gender-diverse people to move out of violence, out of poverty, and into confidence and leadership. Since 1991, our partners and donors have contributed more than \$185 million to fund over 3,000 life-transforming programs throughout the country. We welcome the Standing Committee's interest in the safety of women and girls in sport and the opportunity to contribute knowledge gained through our decades of work on violence prevention and gender justice.

The Canadian Women's Foundation funding reaches a wide range of organizations and programs working to enhance the safety of women and girls in sports and all spheres, from girl-serving sports organizations to teen healthy relationship programs and sexual assault centres. Since 1999, the Canadian Women's Foundation has funded and worked with violence prevention organizations to achieve the goal of every teen able to recognize and prevent relationship violence. Our violence prevention research shows that the teen years are a critical time to teach healthy relationship skills.<sup>1</sup>

Recent reports of widespread sexual assault and sexual abuse in sport are shocking but, sadly, not surprising. They are part of and consistent with sexual violence across society, particularly in situations structured by a gendered power imbalance. The Canadian Women's Foundation welcomed Sport Canada's strong response to Hockey Canada's actions with respect to reports of sexual assaults by elite hockey players in its charge. Sport Canada's withdrawal of funding from Hockey Canada is an example of the swift and decisive leadership required to effect culture change and support development of a consent culture in sports environments. Anything less than zero tolerance of sexual assault is insufficient.

From our work funding programs across the country, we know that a coordinated effort is required to bring about systemic, sustainable change. Ensuring a safe and inclusive sport environment with supports for young women and girls and effective responses to reports of abuse will require a critical mass of organizations and individuals aligned in purpose and working together effectively on the issues and approaches outlined below.

- **Build Consent Culture in Sports**

Education on sexual assault and consent is essential to ensuring safe and inclusive sports environments for girls and women. A recent survey conducted for the Foundation found that, less than half of 1,500 Canadian adults surveyed demonstrated an understanding of the consensual sexual activity that meets the legal threshold.<sup>2</sup> Consent education is needed throughout school systems and across the culture. For women and girls to safely join in sports and access the benefits of physical activity, participants, and coaches and administrators, as

part of their accreditation, need to understand and uphold consent. The Foundation recently extended funding to the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters for their [Leading Change](#) program, which works with competitive sports teams to engage boys and men to become ambassadors of change in the prevention of violence against girls and women. Expanding and mandating programs like these would help foster the needed change in culture.

- **Support Disclosure and Transparency**

Increasing safety and reducing abuse and sexual assault requires supporting disclosure of abuse and transparent responses to violence in sports. Women and girls participating in sports need to be aware that trusted adults with authority to act are present. Non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), requiring silence in return for compensation, have become the default solution for organizations, corporations, individuals, and the public sector to cover up sexual misconduct. NDAs allow organizations to protect their reputations and perpetrators to conceal their abusive history from future employers. Through silencing women who have experienced assault, NDAs work against creation of a transparent sports culture that supports disclosure, permanently preventing them from speaking to friends, family, and therapists about their experiences and from warning others about a perpetrator. NDAs disproportionately impact women, LGBTQAI+, and racialized communities. The Foundation recently extended funding to the [Can't Buy My Silence](#) campaign, led by survivors, which is working across Canada to end misuse of non-disclosure agreements through amending legislation and educating the public.

- **Expand the Tools for Change - Sexual Assault Centres and New Approaches**

Chronic insufficient government funding for sexual assault centres from a patchwork of provincial and territorial ministries and departments limits their capacity to provide expertise to lead culture change on sexual violence. The rise of #MeToo followed by the pandemic stretched sexual assault centres further as they experienced significant increases in calls without matching increases in funding.<sup>3,4</sup> The Foundation recently extended funding to La voix des jeunes compte, a collective of Black and racialized young women advocating for introduction of a framework law to prevent and combat sexual violence in elementary and secondary schools in Quebec. Thriving sexual assault centres and new systemic approaches are needed to ensure safety for women and girls in sports.

#### Recommendations:

- Zero tolerance of sexual assault in sports organizations
- Build consent culture in sports, sports clubs and associations
- Foster culture of disclosure and transparency and ban non-disclosure agreements
- Adequately fund Sexual Assault Centres to lead culture change on sexual violence
- Adopt new systemic approaches to preventing sexual violence in sport

Contact: Ann Decter, [adecter@canadianwomen.org](mailto:adecter@canadianwomen.org)

---

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Women's Foundation, [Building the Field of Teen Healthy Relationships 2015-18](#), 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Conducted by Maru Public Opinion October 18-19, 2022, commissioned by the Canadian Women's Foundation, released November 2022. According to Canada's Criminal Code, [consent is the voluntary and ongoing agreement](#) to engage in sexual activity, which can be withdrawn at any time.

<sup>3</sup> Greg Moreau, Police-reported crime statistics in Canada 2018, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2019

<sup>4</sup> Melissa Mancini & Ioanna Roumeliotis, [Sexual assault centres struggle with limited funding as more women come forward to say #MeToo](#), cbc.ca, February 10, 2020