

## Independent Legal Advice for Survivors of Sexual Assault Program

**Sexual assault is a crime.** Sexual assault takes many forms. It is any unwanted sexual contact. It does not have to include intercourse.

You have been sexually assaulted if someone forces you to participate in any type of sexual activity without your consent. A lawyer can help you make an informed decision about your next steps.

### Free legal advice program

Ontario provides victims of sexual assault with free legal advice **any time** after the incident, regardless of how much time has passed.

### How the program works

Legal advice is provided by phone or by video chat.

Eligible victims will receive a voucher and a list of lawyers to choose from.

The voucher provides two hours of legal advice. If a victim requires more time, they can ask for two additional hours.

In Toronto, survivors who identify as women and people with non-binary gender identity who would benefit from a women-centred space can access the program at the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic.

The lawyer will only provide legal advice, not representation (the lawyer cannot speak for a victim in court).

Advice could cover topics like reporting to the police, going through the criminal court process or deciding to start a lawsuit.

### Eligibility

The program is available to all eligible women, men, trans and gender-diverse people.

Victims of sexual assault are eligible if:

- they are at least 16 years of age and live in Ontario; and
- the sexual assault happened in Ontario.

### Accessing the program

**Online:** [ontario.ca/page/independent-legal-advice-sexual-assault-victims](https://ontario.ca/page/independent-legal-advice-sexual-assault-victims)

**Toll-free:** 1-855-226-3904

For the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic call: 416-323-9149

## Frequently asked questions

### Why would I want or need independent legal advice?

Independent legal advice can inform you about different legal options, such as reporting to the police, suing in civil court or applying for compensation, to help you decide what you want to do.

This advice can also help:

- if you want to discuss your situation in confidence with a lawyer before talking to the police
- if your case is going to trial in criminal court and you have personal concerns that you wish to discuss with a lawyer not associated with your case.

### Do I have to report the sexual assault to the police before I talk to a lawyer?

No. You can talk to a lawyer even if you have not made your decision about reporting the incident to police.

You may also benefit from other supports and services that can be accessed by calling the Victim Support Line, toll-free at 1-888-579-2888, or in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), 416-314-2447.

### I was sexually assaulted when I was a child. Is it too late to talk to a lawyer now?

In the criminal justice system, there is no time limit to coming forward. For civil actions, the limitation period was recently changed, and you can now come forward at any time.

### My case is going to trial soon. Can I still get this legal advice?

Yes you can. The only restriction is that the lawyer you choose cannot represent you in court.

### I don't meet the eligibility requirements for this program. Can I still access a lawyer if I can't afford to pay?

The following resources can help you find a lawyer:

#### **Legal Aid Ontario**

Toll-free: 1-800-668-8258

GTA: 416-979-1446

[www.legalaid.on.ca](http://www.legalaid.on.ca)

#### **Law Society of Ontario Referral Service**

[www.findlegalhelp.ca](http://www.findlegalhelp.ca)

#### **Pro Bono Ontario**

[www.probonoontario.org](http://www.probonoontario.org)

#### **JusticeNet**

[www.justicenet.ca](http://www.justicenet.ca)

### What other supports are available for survivors of sexual assault?

#### **Victim Support Line**

Toll-free: 1-888-579-2888

GTA: 416-314-2447

[chat online](#) option, Monday to Friday from 7am to 9pm.

#### **Support line for male survivors**

Toll-free: 1-866-887-0015

For a complete list of supports, visit [ontario.ca/victimservices](http://ontario.ca/victimservices)