

A Provincial Bad Date Reporting System for BC:

What it is, why it's needed, and how to make it happen

Violence against sex workers

Sex workers in British Columbia experience substantially higher rates of violence than the general population, and this vulnerability is often higher for Indigenous, homeless, im/migrant, and trans sex workers. The vast majority of the violence toward sex workers is not reported to authorities. This is due to multiple barriers, including a distrust of police, an often unresponsive criminal justice system, and the ongoing impacts of colonization, as pointed out in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry.

Many opportunities for the justice system to provide follow-up supports are missed. Due to stigma, the criminalization of sex work, and other legal barriers, both justice system and sexual assault centre reporting mechanisms are widely regarded as unsafe or inaccessible for sex workers.

What is bad date reporting?

Due to these barriers within the justice system, bad date reporting is sometimes the only safety mechanism available to sex workers. Sex workers have had to take safety into their own hands.

Bad Date and Aggressor Reporting (BDAR) – commonly called bad date reporting – is a useful tool for documenting and sharing information, and is a more accessible option for seeking support than existing justice system supports and programs. In BDAR systems, sex workers report violent incidents or safety concerns to peers or outreach workers, which are then tracked in online databases. This information is then distributed to other sex workers to help keep each other safe.

There are local BDAR systems in Vancouver, Victoria, Kamloops, and Prince George that are linked to outreach services in their respective communities. However, BDAR does not exist in most of the province, with a notable gap in rural and remote areas.

Further, the BDAR initiatives that currently exist operate separately, often targeting one segment of the sex industry, based on different age groups, genders, and geography. The formats are inconsistent, and there are limited resources dedicated to documenting and sharing information, as well as coordinating follow-up supports.

A provincial BDAR system in BC will be the first of its kind in Canada, and one of a select few geographically-linked reporting systems that exist internationally.

BDAR addresses a critical gap in gender-based violence prevention and response work. It increases access to justice for multiple vulnerable populations who are over-represented in sex work (e.g., LGBTQ2S, low-income, BIPOC, im/migrant women, people experiencing homelessness, and people with disabilities).

Why a provincial BDAR system?

Building an integrated, provincial BDAR system closes these gaps across BC and ensures a consistent, safe way for sex workers to share critical information. Their safety and survival depends on it.

A provincial bad date reporting system would link the existing local reporting systems and would include all sectors of the sex work industry in one integrated system. Local bad date reporting systems, if coordinated into a provincial system, would be more efficient for sex workers to use and could also identify serial offenders.

Getting to a provincial system

Currently, five sex work support and advocacy organizations have formed a working group to secure funding and build a provincial BDAR system. These are Vancouver-based organizations WISH Drop In Centre Society, PACE Society, SWAN, and Living in Community, along with Peers Victoria.

The proposed BDAR project will include province-wide community consultations with a diverse range of sex workers and sex work support organizations. It will also involve extensive research on legal education and law reform, as well as training with provincial stakeholders about how to advocate for this system and use it once it is established.

The project is innovative because sex workers will develop it and lead its implementation. All too often, well-meaning programs are created without the input of sex workers and cause inadvertent harm. This project will engage diverse sex workers at every phase; their expertise and knowledge will inform all policy and practical recommendations. This project will also be evidence-based, including strong research and evaluation elements throughout all stages of the project.

The creation of a provincial BDAR system will be a catalyst for systemic change among law enforcement, those engaged in harm reduction and gender-based violence prevention and response work, politicians, policymakers and funders. This project and the networks it develops will lay the groundwork for a more coherent legal, policy, and service approach to violence against sex workers across BC.

