



## Recent Im/migration to Canada Linked to Gaps in Health Care Among Sex Workers in Metro Vancouver, Canada

### Background

Research has shown that immigrant and migrant (im/migrant) populations experience a number of barriers to healthcare. Women working in sex work face heightened health and social vulnerabilities that may be related to high rates of unmet health needs. Despite universal healthcare in Canada, sex workers and im/migrants experience suboptimal healthcare access.

### The Question

What contributes to unmet health needs experienced by sex workers in Vancouver, BC?

### The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data from **interviews with 742 street and indoor women sex workers in Vancouver, BC between January 2010 and February 2014**. This project is part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access), an ongoing study on working conditions, health and safety in the sex industry led by GSHI/BCCfE and UBC, in collaboration with a range of community partners, with ongoing outreach to street and indoor sex work venues (by experiential and non-experiential team members).

### The Results

- Of 742 women sex workers interviewed, **25.5% reported unmet health needs** at least once over the 4-year study period.
- Approximately **one-quarter (24.3%) of women sex workers were im/migrants** to Canada. Of these, **10.5% were recent im/migrants** (moved to Canada for less than or equal to 5 years), and **13.8% were long-term im/migrants** (moved to Canada for more than 5 years).
- Those who experienced unmet health needs were more likely to be recent or long-term im/migrants, experienced police harassment, and experienced lifetime abuse or trauma.

*Recent im/migration had the strongest impact on unmet health needs of women sex workers in Metro Vancouver.*

### The Policy Implications

- Integrated health models that include community and social support services should be promoted, such as sex worker-specific drop-in centres.
- It is imperative that culturally appropriate health services and strategies be prioritized to ensure equitable access to general as well as sexual and reproductive care.
- Policy reform in immigrant health is recommended to ensure that im/migrant women are connected to care upon arrival to Canada.

Julie Sou, Shira M. Goldenberg, Putu Duff, Paul Nguyen, Jean Shoveller, Kate Shannon. Recent im/migration to Canada linked to unmet health needs among sex workers in Vancouver, Canada: Findings of longitudinal study. *Health Care Women International*, 2017.