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	Executive Director Initials Approval: BL	

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) is a sex positive, evidence-informed agency committed to harm reduction practices that positively impact those living with, at risk for, or affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. It is with this foundation that we believe that sex work is real work and that we support the decriminalization of sex work. This recognition is made knowing that sex work, as with all forms of labour, is influenced by the social force of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy and those involved can experience violence and exploitation. However, the act of exchanging sexual services for money (or other similar transactions) is not inherently violent or oppressive.

We support an individual’s right to consent to engage in sex work or not. This choice is critical in understanding the difference between sex work and sexual violence, human trafficking and exploitation as the latter are never a choice. In our affirmation of sex work, we recognize that the overwhelming bulk of evidence-based research demonstrates that full decriminalization (of both supply and demand) consistently produces the best outcomes for sex workers, victims and survivors of human trafficking, and the community more broadly. “Full decriminalization” in this context refers to “the removal of all criminal and administrative prohibitions and penalties on sex work, including laws targeting clients and third parties”.¹


We highlight the voices of those with lived experiences who promote the decriminalization of sex work and are the experts of this matter. Sex worker organizations and collectives, such as Maggie’s: Toronto Sex Workers Action Project, Stella and London’s own – Safe Space, have stated their support of decriminalization as a way to reduce harm and better support those doing the work here in our community.

Supporting local sex workers is vitally important to the mission of RHAC as UNAIDS states that globally, HIV infection is almost 12 times higher among sex workers than for the population as a whole.² Access to health care is also a concern for sex workers, and the criminalization and stigma associated with the work creates harmful barriers. The evidence is overwhelming that when sex work is criminalized, workers are at an increased risk of violence, their ability to engage in HIV and Hepatitis C prevention is limited and they experience heightened stigmatization.³

¹ “Sex Workers Rights are Human Rights.” Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada. 2015. Accessed: March 29 2019. <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/postionpapers/102-sexworker-rights.pdf>

² UN AIDS. “Sex workers.” *The Gap Report*. Pg. 186-199. 2014. Accessed: March 29 2019. http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_Gap_report_en.pdf

³ Shannon, K. “HIV prevention, criminalization, and sex work: Where are we at.” *CATIE*. Fall 2016. <https://www.catie.ca/en/pif/fall-2016/hiv-prevention-criminalization-and-sex-work-where-are-we>

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At RHAC, we have seen first-hand the long term and deathly consequences of stigma and believe decriminalization will help to reduce these experiences and promote greater autonomy and dignity for sex workers.

Given all these variables, we the Board of Directors at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection, would like to state our strong support for the full decriminalization of sex work by the Government of Canada and the removal of local policies that do not reflect the lived experiences of those in our community engaging in sex work.