

Violence

A Vision for a Violence Free BC

Addressing violence against women in British Columbia

Free
BC



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Contents

Message from the Premier	2
Introduction	3
Understanding Violence Against Women	4
<i>Impacts of Violence Against Women</i>	4
<i>Groups at Increased Risk</i>	5
Aboriginal Women	5
Immigrant, Refugee and Visible Minority Women	5
Young Women (ages 15 to 24)	5
Older Women	5
Women with Disabilities	5
Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, and Queer Women	6
<i>Contributing Factors</i>	6
A Strategic Direction for a <i>Violence Free BC</i>	9
<i>A Principled Approach</i>	9
<i>Strategic Priorities</i>	10
1. Preventing Violence by Changing Behaviours	10
2. Ensuring BC has Responsive, Innovative and Coordinated Services	12
3. Supporting women to re-build after violence	16
4. Addressing Violence Against Aboriginal Women	17
5. Fostering Strong Relationships and New Partnerships	20
The Way Forward	23
Endnotes	24

Message from the Premier



Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia

Sometimes it's lurking in the shadows, other times it's hiding in plain sight – but violence against women is a problem we need to end. That's why we've been taking steps to end the violence, and to support women impacted by it. Combining immediate action with a long-term vision, the **Violence Free BC** strategy is our roadmap towards a better, safer British Columbia.

Violence against women is not only a women's issue – it's everyone's issue. It affects entire communities, as the trauma ripples through families and children, schools and workplaces. Ending violence takes all of us to decide to challenge attitudes, and change behaviour to prevent it from happening in the first place. Government has a role, as does every British Columbian.

This strategy is our path to creating a province where all women have the supports they need to help prevent violence, escape from violent situations, and recover if they have been victims of violence. It describes how to better support responsive and innovative services, recognizes the need to raise awareness about the issue, and supports an approach with government and stakeholders all doing our part.

We will focus on priorities that challenge beliefs and behaviours, ensure services are responsive, support women to rebuild their lives, address violence against Aboriginal women, and foster strong relationships and new partnerships.

We're starting 2015 by taking the next steps forward. That includes up to \$3 million in civil forfeiture funding to support anti-violence and prevention initiatives focused on violence against women, a public awareness campaign to encourage British Columbians to take action, and showing how we can all work together to be more effective combating violence against women.

This strategy reflects invaluable input and insights provided by the community anti-violence sector, and builds on significant work the provincial government has done over the past year. That includes the release of a three-year, \$5.5-million Domestic Violence Plan; a Memorandum of Understanding with Aboriginal leadership to address violence against Aboriginal women; opening new Domestic Violence Units in Kelowna and Surrey; and more than \$70 million in annual investments in prevention and intervention services, and the continuing work on the recommendations of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry.

These are the first steps of a long journey. Ending violence against women will take time. We all have a role to play in preventing violence before it starts, responding to violence when it happens, and rebuilding from its devastating effects.

Stopping the violence starts with all of us – together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christy Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Christy" being more prominent than the last name "Clark".

Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia

Introduction

Violence against women is a devastating social problem in British Columbia and around the world. We are all too often reminded of the violence perpetrated against women – from sexual assaults taking place in our communities, to significant numbers of vulnerable women going missing, to the tragic deaths of women who have suffered extreme violence at the hands of their intimate partners. The women subjected to this violence are not just a series of unknown names and faces – they are our mothers, daughters, sisters, friends and neighbours. And while this violence is directed at women, the truth is that it impacts each and every one of us in very real and significant ways.

Over the next decade, the Government of British Columbia is committed to leading strategic actions that make meaningful progress towards stopping violence against women. But this goal cannot be achieved through government action alone. We all have a stake in ending violence against women. And while a **Violence Free BC** is a bold and ambitious vision for the future, it is worth aspiring to a province where women live free from violence and from the attitudes, beliefs and inequalities that perpetuate it. This type of change will not be easy and will not occur overnight. If we want communities to be safe and if we want individuals and families to thrive, then there needs to be a shared, sustained commitment and effort to end violence against women.

This strategy establishes a vision for collective action and sets a direction for change in pursuing shared goals of preventing violence before it starts, responding effectively when it happens, and helping to rebuild from its impacts.

Understanding Violence Against Women

Violence against women takes many forms, including: domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, missing and murdered women, and violence against Aboriginal women. While each type of violence has distinct characteristics requiring specialized responses, various forms of violence are interconnected and share similar root causes.¹ They are also related in their shared impact on the health and wellbeing of women, their families and, ultimately, society as a whole.

While progress has been made in many areas over the last decade, the prevalence of violence against women in British Columbia remains an issue of great concern:

- *From 2004 to 2009, it is estimated that over 160,000 British Columbians were victims of spousal violence.²*
- *From 2004 to 2014, domestic violence claimed the lives of 113 women in BC, an average of 10 women each year.³*
- *Research suggests that fewer than 1 in 4 victims of intimate partner violence report the crime to police.⁴ In 2013, there were 12,359 police-reported victims of intimate partner violence across British Columbia.⁵ The number of reports to Crown counsel of spousal violence sent to the BC Ministry of Justice (Criminal Justice Branch) has increased in the last year.⁶*
- *There were 3,238 police-reported sexual assaults in 2013.⁷ This is significant given that an estimated 90% of sexual assault cases go unreported each year.⁸*
- *In 2011/12, 11,945 abused women sought shelter in BC, an average of over 32 women a day provincewide.⁹*
- *Since 1980, there have been 36 unsolved Aboriginal female homicides and 40 unresolved cases of missing Aboriginal females in British Columbia, the highest numbers in Canada.¹⁰*

Impacts of Violence Against Women

The human, social, and economic costs of violence against women in our society are substantial. Domestic violence in the home can negatively impact a child's ability to be successful in school, and can increase their likelihood of being in an abusive relationship as an aggressor or victim as an adult. Incidents of sexual violence can damage a community's sense of safety and individual wellbeing. Experiences of violence can also result in increased employee absenteeism, leading to lost wages and decreased productivity.

Demands on the justice, health and social service systems cost tax payers in Canada hundreds of millions of dollars a year. According to the Department of Justice Canada, the total economic impact of spousal violence in Canada in 2009 was estimated at \$7.4 billion.¹¹ Based on this data, the socioeconomic

impact of spousal violence in British Columbia was close to \$1 billion in 2009 alone. Another major Canadian study estimates that the total annual costs attributable to violence against women was \$13,612 per survivor, which includes select government, non-profit, private and personal expenditures.¹² Of this amount, 86% of the cost was borne by government – equaling \$11,370 in taxpayer funding per woman who had experienced violence.

Groups at Increased Risk

Violence against women happens in all ethnic, cultural and religious groups, across all income levels, at every age, and in communities across the province. While all women are more at risk of violence than men, research shows that some groups of women are at greater risk of violence than others.

Aboriginal Women

A complex set of factors, including the intergenerational impacts of residential schools and other assimilation policies, racism and poverty, contribute to the increased likelihood that Aboriginal women will experience violence. Aboriginal women are nearly three times as likely as non-Aboriginal women to be victims of spousal violence and are significantly more likely to experience the most severe and potentially life-threatening levels of violence. Aboriginal women are also the most at risk of homicide and are disproportionately represented in cases of missing persons.¹³

Immigrant, Refugee and Visible Minority Women

Immigrant, refugee and visible minority women may be more vulnerable to violence due to isolation, financial dependence, sponsorship concerns, language barriers, and lack of knowledge of community resources. In addition, immigrant and visible minority women who experience abuse from their partners are less likely to report it to the police and are often hesitant to use available support services, or are unaware that they exist.¹⁴

Young Women (ages 15 to 24)

Consistent with overall patterns of violence, young women aged 15 to 24 are the most likely to experience the highest rates of violence. Of note, young women also have the highest rates of being victims of homicide, including spousal homicides.¹⁵

Older Women

It is estimated that between 4 – 10% of older adults will experience some form of physical, emotional, financial or sexual abuse, and/or neglect. At the same time, it is believed that for many reasons, abuse experienced by older women is significantly under reported.¹⁶

Women with Disabilities

Mobility limitations, such as a health problem that restricts a person's activities, have been found to be associated with a significantly greater risk of violent victimization. For example, women with mobility limitations experience rates

of spousal violence that are nearly double compared with women who do not have these limitations.¹⁷

Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, and Queer Women

Overall, violence rates for those who self-identify as lesbian or bisexual are nearly five times the rate for those who self-identify as being heterosexual.¹⁸ Emerging research also suggests that trans people face an increased risk of violence, including domestic and sexual violence.¹⁹

Contributing Factors

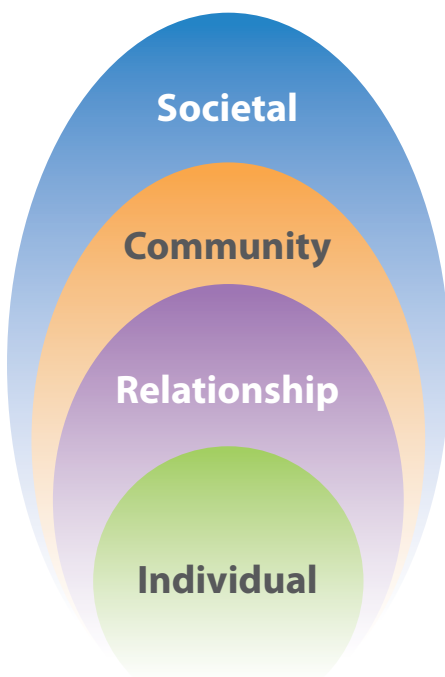
Understanding why certain people or groups may be at a higher risk for violence is not simple or straightforward and does not lead back to any single factor. Research indicates that there are a number of factors in women's lives that contribute to their overall risk of violence and abuse.²⁰ Socioeconomic factors (poverty and homelessness), geography (rural isolation), and health factors (including mental health, problematic substance use and physical disability), for instance, have all been found to increase a woman's likelihood of experiencing violence. The purpose of identifying contributing factors such as these is not to assign blame to victims of violence, but to better understand the context in which the violence is happening.

Within the context of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, a broad range of complex issues exist as a result of the history of the traumatic experiences associated with colonial policies, such as disconnectedness from family and community, the loss of land and territory, intergenerational and collective trauma, and issues related to poverty, mental health and wellbeing, and problematic substance use. Adding to the complexity of these experiences are the socioeconomic gaps that exist for Aboriginal people in many aspects of their lives, from employment, education, and housing, to health and wellbeing.

Among experts in violence prevention, it is increasingly acknowledged that violence is the outcome of interactions among many factors at four different levels – the individual, the relationship, the community, and the societal.²¹ The interconnectedness of these levels suggests that factors at each level can be modified and influenced by factors at each of the other levels, as shown by the Ecological Model (see Figure 1).

Increasingly, research is showing that various forms of violence are not only interconnected, but often share the same root causes.²² It is possible, for example, to identify factors that either increase or decrease the likelihood of certain types of violence. These risk and protective factors can be identified at each level of the Ecological Model. Risk factors contributing to violence against women may include witnessing violence as a child; social isolation; poverty and marginalization; harmful learned behaviours and norms around masculinity and femininity; and, cultural norms that support aggression towards others. Protective factors may include: family support/connectedness; coordination of resources and services among community agencies; and, strong health, educational, economic and social policies/laws.

Figure 1: Ecological Model for Understanding Violence



Knowledge of common risk and protective factors, as well as links between various types of violence, is critical to understanding how violence against women is perpetuated. Awareness of these types of contributing factors helps to inform the breadth and scope of actions required in moving towards a ***Violence Free BC***.

*Moving towards
a violence free BC
means **preventing**
violence before it
starts, **responding**
to violence when
it happens, and
rebuilding from the
impacts of violence.*

Preventing violence before it starts

Violence prevention is perhaps the most challenging and critical element of the task ahead. The best way to end violence against women is to prevent it from happening in the first place. The body of knowledge gathered to date points to a number of key elements that will help to address the root causes of violence. Educating children, youth and adults by promoting respectful and healthy relationships, working with men and boys to understand and prevent violence, changing attitudes and behaviours, and addressing key socioeconomic and health factors are all components of effective prevention efforts.

Responding to violence when it happens

When violence does occur, women, children and families need access to services and supports to help them escape violence and recover from its impacts. BC has a strong network of services and supports across the province to build upon. Effective responses to violence against women include: ensuring services meet the needs of BC's diverse communities; enhancing the policies, practices and training of service providers; and, supporting coordinated responses across ministries and service sectors.

Rebuilding from the impacts of violence

The impacts of violence can have serious and long-term consequences including mental health problems, isolation and social exclusion, problematic substance use, and negative impacts on attainment in education and employment. Reducing the long-term consequences of violence is an important part of the rebuilding process. This involves addressing not just the violence itself but also ensuring wrap-around supports, such as counselling, housing, employment and income assistance, are available to assist in recovery from experiences of violence.

A Strategic Direction for a *Violence Free BC*

A British Columbia where women live free from violence is an ambitious vision for the future. It will require significant social, cultural and attitudinal change over the long-term, and the approach must be multi-faceted, innovative and comprehensive.

Government is well-positioned to lead the transformation of our collective understanding as well as our approach to violence against women. There has been significant effort provincially and nationally to better understand the complexity of violence against women in our society, as well as to determine how best to address it.

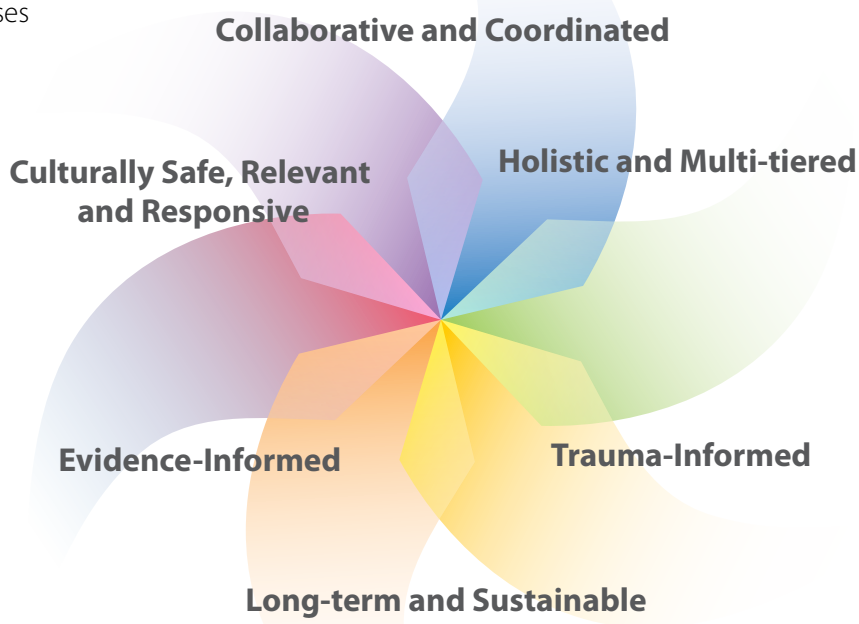
Violence Free BC is a blueprint for changing the way violence against women is viewed, addressed, and approached. Building on existing action plans and initiatives, this document outlines the overarching strategic framework and identifies future priorities for continued action and renewed response as we work together to end violence against women in our province.

The development of this strategy has been informed by an analysis of information and knowledge gathered from a number of key sources, including: academic studies and research on violence against women; reports, recommendations, and actions to address violence against women within the BC context; scans of relevant strategies and action plans in other jurisdictions; feedback received through consultation and engagement sessions with anti-violence partners and provincial associations, such as the Ending Violence Association of BC and the BC Society of Transition Houses, including a dedicated dialogue session on **Violence Free BC** and stakeholder sessions held in preparation for the [Provincial Domestic Violence Plan](#), [BC's Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking](#), BC's [Together to Reduce Elder Abuse Strategy](#), and [the BC Policing and Community Safety Plan](#); and, engaging nine ministries to strategize and align cross-government responses to violence against women. The direction, goals and priorities identified within the Strategy reflect the findings and key themes across this accumulated body of knowledge.

A Principled Approach

There are a number of key principles (see Figure 2) that will guide future planning and action to prevent, respond and rebuild from the impacts of violence against women. These principles are a foundation for moving forward, and will strengthen our approach to collectively achieving the vision of a violence free BC.

Figure 2: Principles of a Violence Free BC



Strategic Priorities

To ensure a sustained focus on actions that will prevent violence from happening, respond effectively when it does occur, and help to re-build from its impacts, the **Violence Free BC** strategy focuses on five strategic priorities:

1. Preventing Violence by Changing Behaviours

The Goal:

Engage British Columbians to challenge and change attitudes that perpetuate violence.

Research shows that negative attitudes and behaviours towards women, such as those rooted in sexism and gender inequality, are important predictors of violence against women. If real progress is to be made towards preventing violence against all women, it is essential to shift the attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate it. Community leaders, educators, industry professionals, media, and citizens all have an important role to play in challenging societal beliefs and attitudes and shaping future conversations about violence against women.

Work Underway:

In the past several years, efforts to change attitudes and behaviours have been focussed in three key areas: school-based prevention initiatives, awareness-raising activities, and anti-violence programming for male perpetrators of violence against women.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), in partnership with the Ministry of Education, supports two **school-based prevention** programs specifically designed to increase social and emotional understanding in children, increase pro-social behaviour and decrease social aggression – Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy. Currently, 419 Roots of Empathy programs are delivered annually in 82% of the province's school districts, reaching approximately 10,500 students. Seeds of Empathy programs take place in 41 preschool settings, including 16 programs in Aboriginal centres, reaching approximately 660 children.

In addition, the ERASE (Expect Respect and A Safe Education) Bullying Strategy, introduced in June 2012, focuses on creating schools where students of all backgrounds and experience are free from harm, where clear expectations of acceptable behaviour are held for members of the school community, and where there is a sense of connectedness. Through the ERASE Bullying Strategy, training is being provided for educators and community partners to highlight the prevention of violence through building respectful school communities and educating students and teachers to recognize when relationships are unhealthy. The training also builds awareness about strategies for addressing violence, in particular, violence that affects children and youth in the school, community and home.

Through civil forfeiture proceeds grants, government has been supporting **community led awareness raising activities** related to a number of violence against women issues. This has included the development of a community engagement campaign focused on domestic violence and delivery of

workshops designed to strengthen awareness of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. In addition, the Province has helped to fund community prevention and public awareness initiatives such as “Be More Than a Bystander” which is an initiative of the Ending Violence Association of BC and the BC Lions. The campaign aims to break the silence surrounding violence against women by providing practical ideas about how to speak up. Government has also raised awareness about services to victims of crime, such as VictimLink BC, through the use of targeted advertising in local BC papers and radio stations, and through social media.

Finally, programs have been developed to work directly with perpetrators to challenge attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate violence. The Respectful Relationships Program and the Relationship Violence Program are offered to **men convicted of violent offences against women** in both custody and community correctional settings. These programs are delivered in Farsi, Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, Punjabi, and Hindi, and have been adapted to better reflect the unique cultural differences and realities of men from diverse cultural backgrounds. In a number of communities, the Respectful Relationships Program is co-facilitated with Aboriginal partners.

Offenders who have completed both the Respectful Relationships and the Relationship Violence Treatment programs have been found to be 35% less likely to commit another domestic violence offence, and 50% less likely to commit another offence.²³

Future Direction:

Prevention initiatives are in place that focus on key population groups and target important locations for the ongoing development of positive sociocultural beliefs, such as schools and workplaces.

Training, education and awareness initiatives are implemented to challenge attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that perpetuate violence against women.

To support efforts to challenge beliefs and change behaviours, government will focus on the following actions:

- *Target new investments, as funding becomes available, in school-based prevention programming to shift attitudes and behaviours around the issue of violence against women and girls.*
- *Continue to support evidence-based programs, such as Seeds of Empathy and Roots of Empathy, preventing violence through promotion of respectful behaviour and addressing aggressive behaviours such as harassment, violence and intimidation.*
- *Continue to enhance the K-12 curriculum by including learning objectives that support core competencies around healthy and safe relationships.*
- *Work with Boards of Education to increase school staff understanding of violence against girls and women. This will be achieved through a variety of professional learning opportunities such as in-service, focused dialogue and professional development days.*
- *Develop public awareness initiatives, including a social media campaign in 2015, to encourage everyone to take action to end violence against women of all ages.*
- *Increase participation in anti-violence programming within custody centres by profiling available anti-violence programs and increasing appropriate referrals.*

- Investigate the feasibility of expanding delivery of the multicultural edition of the Relationship Violence Prevention Program to offenders engaged with community corrections.
- With the Provincial Domestic Violence Plan, develop new programming that will be available for men who have not been convicted of an offence.

2. Ensuring BC has Responsive, Innovative and Coordinated Services

The Goal:

Ensure responsive services are in place by committing to innovation and continuous quality improvement.

Services and supports need to be grounded in best practices and flexible enough to support both quality improvement and innovation. Evidence shows that services are most impactful when they are coordinated, responsive and tailored to meet specific needs. Services and systems need to work well together for women to be supported and protected, and appropriate policies and practices need to be in place to assist this work.

Work Underway:

In collaboration with our partners, BC delivers a comprehensive system of **services and supports** including more than 500 victim service and violence against women counselling, outreach, victim assistance, and shelter programs to help women and children affected by violence. Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs, for example, provide individual and/or group counselling for women who have experienced violence in relationships, childhood abuse or sexual assault to help them deal with the trauma of the experience and resulting effects. Outreach and Multicultural Outreach Services help women fleeing violence identify and access the services they need by providing emotional support, information and referrals, and accompaniment and transportation to other necessary services. In addition, the Crime Victim Assistance Program is available to provide victims of violent crime, including women who have experienced violence, with financial assistance and benefits, such as counselling and protective measures.

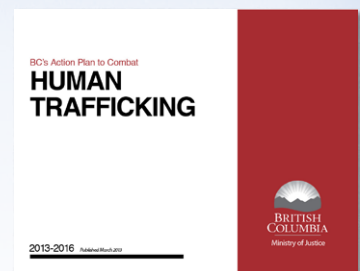
Recent Action Plans on Violence Against Women

Over the last decade, government has established a strong foundation of services and supports across the province for women, children, families and communities impacted by violence. We have also developed innovative strategies and initiatives targeting violence against women in all its forms.

In recent years, the Province has developed targeted plans and initiatives in the areas of human trafficking, missing and murdered women, and domestic violence. The dynamics of violence in each of these areas are unique; however, each contains consistent priorities of prevention, effective responses and services and supports to aid in recovery.

Human Trafficking

Released on March 15, 2013, [BC's Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking](#) focuses on preventing and addressing the trafficking of youth for sexual exploitation; vulnerable workers; and the domestic trafficking of Aboriginal youth and women. The [One-Year Status Report](#), released in July 2014, provides a summary of immediate actions and additional activities completed to fulfill year one of the three-year Action Plan.



The health care system has worked to ensure that specialized responses to sexual assault victims are available in a number of hospitals around the province, and third-party reporting protocols have been established in the justice system to help adult women report sexual violence through community-based organizations if they are concerned about going directly to the police.

In recent years there has been an increasing focus on **integrated and collaborative models of service delivery**. Work has been underway to expand the number of Domestic Violence Units in BC that co-locate police, community-based victim services and, in some cases, child protection workers to respond to the highest risk cases. There has also been support for the development and implementation of Interagency Case Assessment Teams, which bring together service providers from various sectors (police, victim services, corrections, MCFD, transition houses and others) to share information, identify risks and develop safety plans for specific highest risk domestic violence cases.

Specialized responses and processes to address certain forms of violence against women are also receiving increased attention. Specialized domestic violence docket/court processes are gaining recognition as a promising practice and are in place in Duncan, Nanaimo and several courthouses in the Interior (Kelowna, Kamloops and Penticton). In some of these locations, there are designated Crown counsel who have enhanced file ownership in domestic violence cases. This means that the same Crown counsel is responsible for handling the file through various stages in a prosecution, from

Building Capacity of Front Line Service Providers

BC has been working to expand its approach to training in order to ensure that service providers and first responders have the knowledge, skills and tools they need to effectively prevent, recognize and respond to violence against women. For example, training on domestic violence has been provided to front-line service providers, including police, victim service workers, outreach workers and counsellors, transition house staff, Crown counsel, probation officers, public health nurses, and MCFD and Delegated Aboriginal Agency social workers. While training initiatives have been tailored for specific audiences, they share a common goal of enhancing our understanding of the complex dynamics of domestic violence and promoting best practices for supporting women, children and families dealing with domestic and sexual violence. Other training initiatives have focused on increasing trauma-informed practice cultural competencies for health workers, and educating students and teachers on the importance of building respectful relationships and school communities in order to prevent violence.

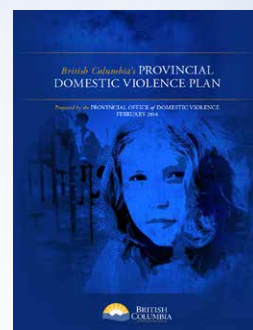
Missing and Murdered Women

On Dec. 4, 2014, the Ministry of Justice released a [final status update report](#) outlining actions, both ongoing and completed, that support implementation of the MWCI Report recommendations. The actions are organized within four major themes: healing and compensation, improvements to policing, safety for vulnerable women and supports in missing persons investigations. This builds upon government's earlier [status report](#) on the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry's recommendations, which was released on Nov. 5, 2013.



Domestic Violence

On February 5, 2014, the Provincial Office of Domestic Violence released British Columbia's three-year [Provincial Domestic Violence Plan](#). The plan is focused on prevention and awareness, services and supports, coordination and information sharing, the justice system response to domestic violence, and research and evaluation.



charge assessment to arraignment or, in some limited locations, through to trial. Enhanced file ownership is intended to provide better victim engagement, earlier resolution of these prosecutions without the necessity of a trial, and improved trial preparation. A [Framework for Domestic Violence Courts](#) in British Columbia has also been developed. It outlines a set of consistent, evidence-based key principles and critical components that should be considered prior to the implementation of specialized domestic violence court processes in BC and will form part of the Provincial Strategy for Specialized Courts that will be finalized in March 2015. In addition, BC held its fourth Justice Summit, “Better Responses to Violence Against Women,” in November 2014. The Summit generated discussion and gathered input on how to work across the sector to collectively improve justice system responses to violence against women, specifically domestic and sexual violence. The Summit also focused on the needs of vulnerable populations, such as Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, women involved in the sex trade, and immigrant and visible minority women.

Updating provincial **policies and practice** guides for justice and child welfare partners to ensure effective and coordinated responses has been a priority. Government has also recently introduced or amended legislation to strengthen responses and improve information sharing. In March 2013, the new Family Law Act came into force. The Act defines family violence and increases the court’s ability to deal with family violence through a variety of measures, including a new criminally enforceable protection order.

On June 1, 2014, domestic violence amendments to the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA) came into force, bringing a stronger focus to the seriousness and gravity of domestic violence, particularly its effect on women and children. In addition, new legislation (the *Missing Persons Act*) was passed in 2014 to support investigations in missing persons cases – a recommendation from the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. Further, a new policy to provide guidance to Crown counsel in the prosecution of serious cases involving adult vulnerable victims and witnesses was implemented early in 2015.

Future Direction:

All women have access to relevant and effective services, and that these services are enhanced through the coordination of multidisciplinary teams.

High quality services are available to respond to all forms of violence against women, including a broadened response to sexual violence.

To support responsive, coordinated and innovative services that respond to violence against women, government will focus on the following actions:

- *Update the 2004 Women’s Health Strategy to include actions to prevent and address violence against women within the health system as a priority area.*
- *Target new investments, as funding becomes available, to support the enhancement and development of responses to address sexual assault.*

- *Develop provincewide letters of agreement between the Ministry of Justice and the RCMP, as well as the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the RCMP, to support coordinated responses to highest risk domestic violence cases by co-locating police, community-based victim services and, in some locations, child protection workers in integrated domestic violence units.*
- *Enhance capacity through training and education on violence against women for front-line service providers, such as victim support workers, outreach workers and counsellors, child protection workers, educators, health care professionals and justice system professionals.*
- *Work with post-secondary institutions to explore best practices and approaches to better prevent and respond to the issue of sexual violence.*
- *Target new investments, as funding becomes available, to address the sexual exploitation and human trafficking of vulnerable girls and women.*
- *Develop a provincial sexual assault policy.*
- *Develop policy and practice supports to improve the responsiveness of core services, including practice guidelines to assist staff within MCFD and Delegated Aboriginal Agencies in assessing the risks in cases of domestic violence, when a couple with children wish to stay together, reunite and/or the perpetrator wishes to have access to the child(ren).*
- *Continue to review and improve the use of protection orders under the Family Law Act, making them easier to obtain and supporting effective order enforcement.*
- *Target new investments, as funding becomes available, to assist families and communities to heal and recover from fatal cases of violence against women.*
- *Where opportunities for new resources become available, establish designated domestic violence Crown counsel teams and support full Crown file ownership (where the same Crown counsel team handles a file from charge assessment to case conclusion) in key locations across the province.*
- *Informed by themes emerging from the Fourth BC Justice Summit on “Better Responses to Violence Against Women,” explore key policy and practice changes to improve coordination and justice system response in cases of domestic violence and sexual violence, including those most responsive to the needs of Aboriginal women and other populations facing disproportionate levels of violence.*
- *Ensure every hospital in BC has a protocol in place to support local care and response to cases of sexual violence.*

Housing Supports in BC

Transition Houses provide safe, temporary shelter for women and their children who are fleeing violence. Staffed 24/7, they provide crisis intervention, emotional support and safety planning, as well as referrals to and assistance accessing support services and housing, financial, medical and legal assistance.

Safe Homes provide temporary short-term shelter, and are often located in small, remote communities where there typically is not a Transition House. They also provide crisis intervention, emotional support, and safety planning, as well as referrals to and assistance in accessing support services and housing, financial, medical and legal assistance.

Second Stage Housing provides safe, affordable, temporary housing to women who have left abusive relationships so they can make plans for independent living. Second Stage Housing provides crisis intervention, emotional support and safety planning, as well as referrals to and assistance accessing support services and housing, financial, medical and legal assistance.

3. Supporting women to re-build after violence

The Goal:

Women experiencing violence have the necessary housing, employment and income assistance supports to assist in re-building their lives.

Access to basic socioeconomic supports is a crucial step for increasing women's safety, security and wellbeing. Issues such as unstable housing, lack of employment, and insufficient financial resources can greatly contribute to whether or not a woman is able to successfully leave situations of violence and vulnerability. Housing stability and social housing in rural and northern communities is a particular challenge.

Work Underway:

In BC, there is a continuum of **housing supports and services** for women and families who are fleeing violence or may be at risk of violence. This includes the Women's Transition Housing and Support Programs, specialized shelters, and supportive housing. Second Stage Housing supports women fleeing violence to regain their independence, and priority access to long-term, subsidized supportive housing is offered through the Housing Registry for women and low-income families.

The Employment Program of BC is committed to protecting applicants and recipients who are fleeing from abuse. Eligibility decisions on **income assistance** in situations of domestic violence are expedited to assist in meeting the immediate safety needs of women and their children.

Through WorkBC Employment Services Centres located across the province, the Employment Program of BC also provides access to a flexible range of services and supports to meet the unique **employment needs** of clients who are survivors of violence and abuse. The program supports women by helping them build towards employment readiness, with alternative service delivery options to support safe access.

In the recently released 10-year action plan to reduce barriers and increase accessibility for people living with disabilities, [Accessibility 2024](#), government has committed to a number of key actions that will support the safety and wellbeing of women with disabilities. Specific commitments in the action plan include: increasing accessible housing, supporting financial security, and adapting the disability assistance system to better meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

The Aboriginal Community Skills Development Project, in support of government commitments outlined in the [BC Skills for Jobs Blueprint](#), focuses on supporting a culturally relevant, diverse and sustainable approach to employment and economic development by expanding the availability of culturally appropriate skills training and employment programs. Working with First Nations communities, government is gathering information on barriers and opportunities that will be shared with cross-sector partners to support increased access to skills development and labour market programs.

Future Direction:

Women have access to appropriate and accessible housing options to support them in moving towards safe and stable living situations.

Women have enhanced access to training and pre-employment services to assist with entry or re-entry into the workforce.

To support women's access to housing, employment and income assistance supports, government will undertake the following actions:

- Through the Homeless Prevention Program, provide portable rent supplements to women facing homelessness in order to help them access rental housing in the private market, with priority given to Aboriginal women, young women, and women fleeing violence.
- Ensure that women who are fleeing abuse and receiving assistance through BC's Employment and Assistance Program are eligible for moving supplements even when they are living in transition homes.
- Support increased referral and access by victims of violence to the Employment Program of BC through targeted activities to increase knowledge and awareness among anti-violence sector service providers of pre-employment services offered in communities throughout BC.
- Improve access and availability of culturally appropriate skills development and labour market programs for Aboriginal people.

4. Addressing Violence Against Aboriginal Women

The Goal:

Aboriginal women are engaged in and connected with culturally safe and responsive services, programs and initiatives that facilitate enduring safety and wellbeing.

To effectively address violence against Aboriginal women, it is important to recognize the unique needs and situations of Aboriginal women, as well as the systemic issues that may complicate issues of violence and present challenges in their ability to access information, services and supports. As outlined in the [MOU](#) between the BC government and Aboriginal leadership regarding Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls, colonial policies and practices have contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

Aboriginal women experience disproportionate levels of violence as well as socioeconomic gaps in many aspects of their lives from employment, to

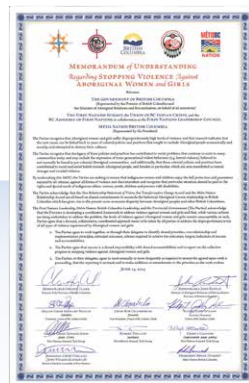
The Homeless Prevention

Program (HPP) is a new initiative undertaken by the Ministry Responsible for Housing, through BC Housing, aimed at providing people in identified at-risk groups, including youth and women fleeing violence, who are facing homelessness, with portable rent supplements to help them access rental housing in the private market. Support services will also be provided under the new program through the funding of mobile outreach workers to connect individuals with enhanced access to housing and community based services such as health services, life skills and employment training programs.

The HPP is available in six communities around British Columbia and will grow to over 30 communities around the province. Over the next five years, it is estimated that the program will provide housing and support for up to 4,000 people.

Violence Against Aboriginal Women

In June 2011, the Province established the Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women to provide advice to government on how to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women across British Columbia. In June 2014, Premier Christy Clark signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with Aboriginal Leadership outlining our joint commitment to addressing violence against Aboriginal women in our province.



education, to housing, to health and wellbeing. Government is committed to working respectfully and in partnership with Aboriginal women, organizations and leadership to develop the necessary framework and support systems to address the violence that many Aboriginal women experience. This includes a commitment to address the immediate and critical needs of Aboriginal women experiencing violence, and utilize approaches that reflect a holistic Aboriginal world-view and incorporate culturally based ways to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women.

Work Underway:

The **Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women** (MACAW) was created as a direct result of the BC government's co-host role at the Collaboration to End Violence: National Aboriginal Women's Forum in June 2011. MACAW's overarching goal is to provide advice to government on how to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women across British Columbia. The council's efforts recently resulted in the signing of the [*Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls*](#) (MOU). The MOU commits parties to work together to identify shared priorities, core relationship and implementation principles, intended outcomes, actions, targets, indicators of success and accountabilities. A Joint Aboriginal-Government Partners Table is being developed to ensure this shared commitment moves forward.

Additionally, as part of ongoing work with MACAW, the Province is providing funding to the Giving Voice initiative, which supports Aboriginal communities to speak out and take action on the issue of violence against women. This is in addition to funding provided to the project in 2013/14.

The Aboriginal response is also a key component of the Provincial Domestic Violence Plan. It is recognized that there is a need for community-driven responses and to apply an Aboriginal lens to the work in order to support culturally responsive and relevant policies, programs and services. A commitment to work with Aboriginal partners to **develop and deliver programs** specifically for Aboriginal women, men and children affected by domestic violence is also part of the plan.

One of the priority focus areas of [*BC's Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking*](#) is to prevent and address the domestic trafficking of Aboriginal youth and women. Since the release of the plan in 2013, work has been underway to support Aboriginal communities to **develop local responses** to the issue. Several BC communities have begun to build their capacity to respond to human trafficking. Train the Trainer projects were launched in Prince Rupert, Quesnel, the Nisga'a First Nation and the Saulneau First Nation to alert service providers to human trafficking indicators, and educate them on appropriate referrals and support services for trafficked persons. BC also has crime prevention projects aimed at preventing vulnerable Aboriginal youth and women from being lured by traffickers and sexually exploited, especially when they transition from rural to urban centres.

In April 2013, the First Nations Health Authority, BC Ministry of Health, Health Canada, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, and Métis Nation BC released [*A Path Forward: BC First Nations and Aboriginal People's Mental*](#)

The Giving Voice Initiative

The Giving Voice project is an initiative of the Minister's Advisory Council for Aboriginal Women. This initiative allows communities to access grant funding to "Give Voice" to the issue of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, identify champions, build partnerships, engage community, and take action on community-identified issues.

Grants have supported a number of community projects, including workshops and cultural activities such as talking circles, sweat lodges, and medicine gathering trips for women and men to promote health, well-being and a violence-free way of life. For participants, the positive impacts of these projects continue today.

Wellness and Substance Use Ten Year Plan. The collaboratively developed plan is the first of its kind in the province. It seeks to improve services, supports and health outcomes for all First Nations and Aboriginal people in BC, while reflecting individual and family needs that are community-driven and nation-based, and keeping First Nations and Aboriginal people's wellbeing at the centre of initiatives. In relation to violence against women, a key aspect of the plan is to provide leadership in addressing the sensitive topic of sexual abuse and to work towards the collaborative development of supports and resources to address sexual violence against First Nations and Aboriginal children and women. It also includes actions to:

- *Reduce the impacts of inter-generational and other forms of trauma;*
- *Train health and human service providers to support culturally safe treatment and care for First Nations and Aboriginal people;*
- *Develop and deliver policies and programs to reduce family violence among First Nations and Aboriginal people; and,*
- *Increase education and awareness in First Nations and Aboriginal communities related to mental wellness and wellbeing.*

The plan is currently being reviewed at the regional level by First Nations communities and Aboriginal organizations, in partnership with regional Health Authorities, to identify and begin working towards addressing regional priorities.

Future Direction:

In partnership, access to and effectiveness of services is enhanced through increased cultural competency and safety in both program design and delivery.

Aboriginal communities and organizations are supported to develop holistic, culturally based programs and services that respond to community-identified needs.

To support efforts to address violence against Aboriginal women, government will focus on the following actions:

- *Work with the signatories to the MOU regarding Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls to establish a joint partners table to oversee implementation of the MOU commitments, including the development of shared priorities and actions required to achieve outcomes in stopping violence against Aboriginal women and girls.*
- *Work with federal, provincial and territorial governments to take targeted action to address violence against Aboriginal women.*
- *Develop justice-specific modules, in partnership with the Provincial Health Services Authority, in the Indigenous Cultural Competency (ICC) training course to support culturally responsive and sensitive services and target cultural competency learning needs for staff working in various areas of the justice system, including police, courts, corrections, and Crown counsel.*
- *Support culturally responsive delivery of the Respectful Relationships Program through increased partnered facilitation within Aboriginal communities across the province.*

In partnership with communities, BC's civil forfeiture program is helping to make BC an even safer place to live. Grants provided through the Civil Forfeiture Program have funded numerous important and innovative projects, including the Fraser Health Authority's online training "Human Trafficking – Help Don't Hinder" which assists emergency health care professionals to identify and help victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. This first of its kind training was launched in September 2014 and is empowering emergency room staff to interrupt the cycle of violence when trafficked persons attend the ER.

- Continue with work underway to support actions identified in *A Path Forward: BC First Nations and Aboriginal People's Mental Wellness and Substance Use Ten-Year Plan* to address sexual violence, family violence, and the impacts of trauma on First Nations and Aboriginal people.
- Target new investments, as funding becomes available, to support Aboriginal communities in efforts to promote healing from the impacts of violence against women.

5. Fostering Strong Relationships and New Partnerships

The Goal:

New ways of working with a broader range of partners strengthens collective action and commitment to ending violence against women.

In order to make meaningful progress towards our goal of a violence free BC, we will need to partner in new and innovative ways with various levels of government, the private sector, business, industry, Aboriginal groups, nongovernmental organizations and concerned British Columbians. This means strengthening relationships with current government and community partners to ensure that efforts are well-aligned and better coordinated. Importantly, this also means identifying and engaging new partners in this work who have not traditionally been involved or at the forefront. Working together with a broader range of partners allows for a greater collective impact. Strong partnerships and collaborative action are critical to the work of ending violence against all women.

Work Underway:

Collaborative relationships and innovative partnerships have been instrumental in BC's progress in addressing violence against women. These relationships and partnerships take many forms and government continues to build on relationships with the anti-violence sector, community partners, various levels of government, Aboriginal leadership and others.

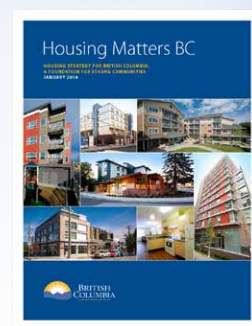
Through civil forfeiture proceeds grants, the Province has provided funding to support hundreds of innovative projects and collaborations to address violence against women at the local level. In many instances, these

Linking with Other Provincial Initiatives

Violence against women does not occur in isolation. Many factors contribute to women's safety and wellbeing. Factors, which intersect in women's lives to compound their experience of violence and abuse, include socioeconomic status (poverty and homelessness), geography (rural isolation), and health (including mental health and substance use issues and physical disability). **Violence Free BC** recognizes these links and will strengthen connections between government's strategic initiatives in order to help address the diverse challenges that can shape women's lives.

Housing

Access to safe and stable housing continues to be a challenge for women and children fleeing abuse in British Columbia. Government's *Housing Matters* Strategy focuses on ensuring BC's most vulnerable citizens and those with low incomes have improved access to housing assistance. This includes prioritizing assistance for women and children fleeing violence.



community-driven projects have brought together different partners to empower and build capacity in local communities to prevent and enhance responses to violence against women. The Province also funds the Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) program, which assists BC communities to develop new models or improve upon existing models of cross-sectoral, coordinated responses to violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual violence.

Following the release of *Together to Reduce Elder Abuse – B.C.'s Strategy* (TREA Strategy), a **multi-sector council** was established to enhance coordination and collaboration in efforts to reduce elder abuse, including violence against older women. The council includes broad representation from health, justice, financial and private sectors as well as non-profit agencies.

Rapid economic growth in small communities presents many positive opportunities, but it is important to anticipate potential impacts. Preparation for significant population growth includes consideration of the infrastructure, health, safety, and victim/social services demands as proposed new industrial projects move from concept to construction stages and beyond.

Expanding beyond traditional partnerships, there have been several successful private-public partnerships aimed specifically at addressing violence against women. Many businesses recognize the importance of corporate social responsibility and have shown serious interest in working with community and other partners on targeted initiatives.

In planning for increased economic activity in BC's northern communities, the **Northwest Readiness Project** is key to ensuring that provincial service providers and communities expected to experience significant population growth are prepared for it.

Accessibility

Released in June 2014, *Accessibility 2024*, articulates government's 10-year vision for BC to be the most progressive jurisdiction in Canada for people with disabilities. This strategy seeks to establish an inclusive approach that places an accessibility lens on all of our decisions. An important direction within the Strategy is to ensure that people with disability are safe from exploitation and neglect. This is significant to women with disabilities, as research tells us they face a greater risk of experiencing violence.



Early Years

Launched in February 2013, the *BC Early Years Strategy* is an eight-year government commitment to support early childhood development and help families with child care. The BC Families Early Years Strategy will improve the integration, accessibility, quality, and affordability of BC's early years programs, including the current child care system.



Future Direction:

Community leaders and organizations support innovative initiatives that prevent, respond to and rebuild from the impacts of violence against women at the local level.

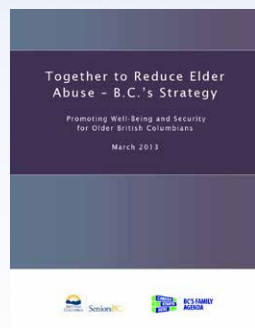
New partnerships between the private sector and government are created to provide additional opportunities for supporting social change.

To support collaborative and innovative relationships that prevent, respond to, and rebuild from the impacts of violence, government will focus on the following actions:

- *Target investments, as funding becomes available, to support innovative partnerships that raise awareness and take action on violence against women, and increase service delivery collaboration and coordination, such as through Interagency Case Assessment Teams, Domestic Violence Units, Child Advocacy Centres and mobile sexual assault response teams.*
- *Work with communities and industry proponents on the development of Socio-Economic Management Plans to improve information sharing on the possible effects of increased industrial activity (in Northern communities in particular) and how they can be mitigated.*
- *Work with the Council to Reduce Elder Abuse to enhance coordination and collaboration, and build partnerships, to implement commitments in the TREA Strategy that support collective and individual actions to reduce elder abuse, including violence against older women.*
- *Engage diverse groups of stakeholders on the implementation of key components of **Violence Free BC**, including a series of dialogue sessions to explore specific topics requiring collective effort and innovative approaches.*
- *Explore new opportunities through social innovation initiatives that aim to increase community-based prevention and response services through private sector partnerships and investment.*

Older Women

Together to Reduce Elder Abuse – B.C.'s Strategy, released in March 2013, outlines BC's commitment to addressing elder abuse through coordinated actions that build capacity within communities to prevent, identify and respond to elder abuse. The Strategy includes actions to increase awareness and training/education about elder abuse, and enhance collaboration and coordination efforts to reduce elder abuse.



Moving Forward to Create Linkages

The strategies listed above are just a few of the broader initiatives that *Violence Free BC* will seek to engage with. Other provincial initiatives include: *Healthy Minds, Healthy People 10 Year Plan*; *BC Jobs Plan*; *ERASE Strategy*; and *A Path Forward: First Nations and Aboriginal Mental Wellness and Substance Use Plan*. As we move forward, we will ensure that we leverage opportunities to promote alignment and connect government strategies that support our efforts to end violence against women.

The Way Forward

Truly transformative change – to effectively end violence against women – will require a collective effort and commitment by many different partners. If we are to achieve a **Violence Free BC**, we will need to work together. But we are not starting from square one. Governments, police, non-governmental organizations and communities have already undertaken significant work to address this issue. **Violence Free BC** provides the framework for building upon our collective foundation and moving forward in a principled manner with a shared vision and a commitment to sustained action.

Over the next decade, government is committed to providing strong leadership and making meaningful progress towards the goal of a violence free BC. To do so, we will establish a cross-government leadership committee, chaired by the Ministry of Justice, to be accountable for ensuring the objectives of this strategy are achieved. This committee will identify and prioritize emerging issues, work with partners to develop new actions to support **Violence Free BC**, monitor progress, and help ensure sustained momentum on the issue of violence against women in British Columbia.

The work of the committee will include involving a broad range of partners to shape this work going forward. This requires meaningful engagement with diverse groups, such as community organizations, other levels of government, business, industry, unions, service providers, provincial associations, and community leaders. Establishing and maintaining connections with the work of other key tables such as the Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women, the Joint Partner's Table, the Justice and Public Safety Council, and the Council to Reduce Elder Abuse, will also be critical to moving forward. The committee will work to ensure alignment of policies, services and supports and will connect government strategies with community initiatives that contribute to the safety and wellbeing of women.

There are no easy solutions to this work. Progress towards a **Violence Free BC** will require continued efforts to build on the strong foundation laid over the past several decades. It will also require a commitment from all British Columbians to take steps to eliminate violence against women.

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