
British Columbia's PROVINCIAL
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PLAN

Prepared by the PROVINCIAL OFFICE of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
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BRITISH
COLUMBIA

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



STEPHANIE CADIEUX
*Minister of Children
and Family Development*

I am pleased to present the government of British Columbia's Provincial Domestic Violence Plan. This three-year \$5.5 million plan is the result of the commitment made by government to continue to strengthen the approach to addressing domestic violence in BC. The plan acknowledges key areas that require immediate attention, and action including but not limited to an integrated response strategy and improved direct service delivery for children, survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence by building on the good work done by the community anti-violence sector.

The *Provincial Office of Domestic Violence* (PODV) was established in response to the 2012 Representative for Children and Youth's Report *Honouring Kaitlynn, Max and Cordon: Make Their Voices Heard Now*. PODV has engaged with British Columbians and also worked closely with community anti-violence and government partners. Those working and supporting children, survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence are most acutely aware of what's working and

what's not. Although much has been done in BC to address domestic violence and collaborative models of practice exist, there is much more to be done to ensure safety in relationships. Rather than wait for the release of the plan, important work has taken place in many key areas – changes to legislation, including proposed amendments to the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, implementation of the new *Family Law Act* protection orders, implementation of several cross-ministry initiatives and implementation of the *Taking Action on Domestic Violence in British Columbia* action plan.

The Provincial Domestic Violence Plan recognizes the need for an Aboriginal specific response that is developed collaboratively with Aboriginal communities and organizations and that results in a culturally appropriate and effective response to address the needs of Aboriginal peoples. This is important as research shows that Aboriginal women are at a higher risk of violence.

The plan also acknowledges the need to apply a diversity lens in order to address the unique needs of immigrant and refugee women. The needs of children and youth and their vulnerability when living in situations where there is domestic violence has been a key consideration in the development of the plan, as has the need to be responsive and inclusive for people with disabilities. The plan also considers the need to strengthen the approach to involving men in addressing domestic violence.

“ *The BC government is committed to making our communities safer, but we can't do it alone. Based on public input and advice from key anti-violence partners, we developed the Provincial Domestic Violence Plan – our plan to strengthen services, address violence in our homes and communities, and make BC a safer place for families.”*

**~ PREMIER
Christy Clark**

While societal attitudes are often difficult to change, we believe these efforts will help shift the attitudes that perpetuate domestic violence and help us collectively achieve our ultimate goal – preventing domestic violence. We have worked hard to find the right balance to build on what is currently in place in BC and strengthen direct services so that they are better coordinated, effective and meet the needs of children, survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Domestic violence cuts across all social, economic, religious and cultural segments of society. Both women and men experience domestic violence at the hands of their partners. However, women constitute the majority of survivors in dating and spousal violence incidents and fatalities reported to police. According to the 2009 General Social Survey, an estimated 6.5% of British Columbian women currently or previously living in a spousal relationship experienced spousal violence in the previous five years.

The Province spends over \$70 million a year to support survivors of crimes including those fleeing domestic violence. The Province is committed to supporting the implementation of this plan beginning in 2014/15. The evaluation of the implementation of the provincial plan will inform future actions and commitments. This plan will help strengthen the systemic response to domestic violence by building on the valuable and tireless work of the anti-violence community sector and make strong linkages to the Province's *Erase Bullying* and *Together To Reduce Elder Abuse* strategies aimed at preventing violence in its many forms.

I would like to thank all British Columbians, community and government anti-violence partners for their valuable contributions that helped finalize the three-year provincial plan. Together, let's prevent domestic violence in BC.



HONOURABLE STEPHANIE CADIEUX
Minister of Children and Family Development

INTRODUCTION

In March of 2012, PODV was established as the permanent lead for government, responsible and accountable for a coordinated response to improving and strengthening the services and supports for children, women and families affected by domestic violence. As a central coordinating office, PODV provides expertise, leadership and monitoring to ensure a strengthened systemic and coordinated approach to address domestic violence in BC. Monitoring, evaluating and reporting out on progress are key functions of the office.

The first task of PODV was to develop and release a cross ministry response to the Representative for Children and Youth's (RCY) 2012 report *Honouring Kaitlynn, Max and Cordon – Make Their Voices Heard Now*. On October 10, 2012, the *Taking Action on Domestic Violence in British Columbia* action plan was released setting a course towards a more coordinated and strengthened response to domestic violence in BC and providing a detailed response to the recommendations contained in the RCY report. A commitment made in the action plan was that PODV would develop a three-year provincial plan to address domestic violence in collaboration with community and government partners.

CROSS GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION

The following Ministries and Crown Corporations have identified the actions in the provincial plan relevant to their mandate:

- ▶ *Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation*
- ▶ *Ministry of Children and Family Development*
- ▶ *Ministry of Education*
- ▶ *Ministry of Health*
- ▶ *Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training and Responsible for Labour*
- ▶ *Ministry of Justice*
- ▶ *Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation*
- ▶ *BC Housing*

BACKGROUND

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence can be physical, emotional, sexual or verbal abuse. Domestic violence includes other coercive and violent behaviours to establish control of an individual including psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, isolation and financial control. It happens in all kinds of relationships and is often committed by a spouse, ex-spouse or another family member to control and intimidate someone.

Research confirms that violence against women and girls often begins before adolescence. The impact of this violence becomes more pronounced and debilitating when women and girls are also impacted by poverty, homelessness, isolation, disabilities, racism, sexism, and other factors.

For children, exposure to domestic violence can have serious negative effects, including psychological trauma that adversely impacts their safety and well-being. Exposure can include seeing, hearing or being aware of violence in the home by one parent against another.

While men are predominantly perpetrators of domestic violence, they too can be survivors and require supports and services. Perpetrators also require supports to break the cycle of violent or abusive behaviours and to reduce self-harm.

PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Families and individuals impacted by domestic violence often turn first to those closest to them – extended family, friends and neighbours. Hence, the full extent of the problem is difficult to comprehend and under reporting continues to be a challenge.

According to a Canadian Department of Justice Study released in 2012, *An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada, 2009*, the estimated overall cost of spousal violence in Canada in 2009 was a staggering \$7.4 billion.

According to the Statistics Canada Juristat Article, *Violent Victimization of Aboriginal Women in the Canadian Provinces (2009)*, Aboriginal women were almost three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to report having been a victim of a violent crime, and are significantly more likely to report the most severe and potentially life-threatening forms of violence.

The 2012 Statistics Canada report, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2010* indicated there were 16,259 police-reported survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) in BC. The rate of 427 survivors per 100,000 people in BC compares to a Canada-wide rate of 363 survivors per 100,000. Intimate partner violence, including both spousal and dating violence, accounts for one in every four violent crimes reported to police.

According to the BC Coroner's Service 2012 report – *Intimate Partner Violence in British Columbia, 2003-2011*:

- ▶ a total of 147 intimate partner violence (IPV) deaths occurred between 2003-2011
- ▶ 72% of IPV homicide victims were female
- ▶ male assailants were responsible for 83.7% of all IPV deaths, including 100% of incidents resulting in more than one death (i.e. children or unrelated individuals)

ACTION TAKEN TO ADDRESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN BC

2010 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACTION PLAN

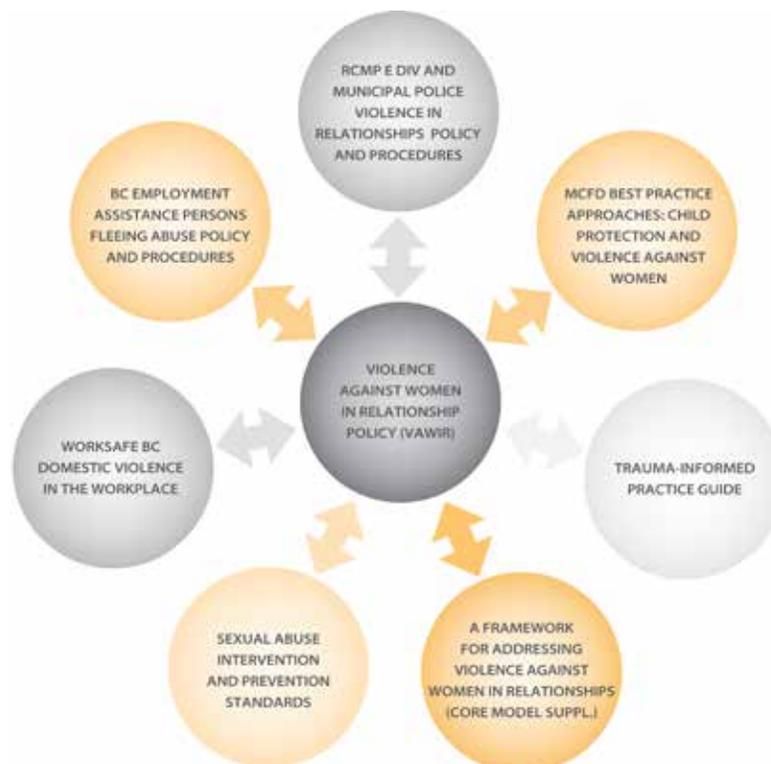
Since 2010 the provincial government has taken renewed action to protect and support survivors of domestic violence and ensure offender accountability. In January 2010, the province announced a Domestic Violence Action Plan in response to recommendations from the Lee/Park Coroner's Inquest and the Representative for Children and Youth's report *Honoring Christian Lee. No Private Matter: Protecting Children Living With Domestic Violence*. The focus of the Action Plan was on enhancing and integrating the response to domestic violence by justice and child welfare system partners.

POLICY

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN RELATIONSHIPS (VAWIR) POLICY

In BC, the provincial Violence Against Women in Relationships (VAWIR) policy (Ministry of Justice) defines violence against women in relationships and sets out the protocols, roles and responsibilities of service providers within the child welfare and justice system regarding their response to domestic violence. The VAWIR policy applies equally in all domestic violence situations regardless of the gender of the offender or survivor. The policy emphasizes cross agency collaboration as critical for ensuring comprehensive responses to domestic violence situations.

In addition to the VAWIR policy, there are several other government/agency policies and frameworks that speak to the needed response to domestic violence and how service providers must intervene in these situations.



The VAWIR policy also includes a protocol for the highest risk domestic violence cases. The *Protocol for Highest Risk Cases* outlines the responsibilities of justice and child welfare system partners for the delivery of a coordinated response to domestic violence cases designated by police as being highest risk. The protocol emphasizes the importance of the timely sharing of information in these cases, which may include the sharing of:

- ▶ risk assessment findings;
- ▶ court outcomes including bail and release conditions;
- ▶ breaches of conditions; and
- ▶ other relevant information pertaining to the accused/offender or victim.

Key protocol partners include police, Crown counsel, corrections, victim services and child protection workers.

BC has a provincial policy combined with a strong commitment to partnerships and being responsive to recommendations, but there is a need for an overarching approach and standardization of practice. PODV commits to working with anti-violence and government partners to implement this provincial plan that will support the development of an overarching approach and standardization of practice. PODV is an important component of this broader framework to support British Columbians impacted by domestic violence.



BUILDING A COMPREHENSIVE AND COORDINATED SYSTEMIC APPROACH

Research shows that an effective systemic approach to domestic violence includes a number of key components including information sharing, coordination, collaboration, a focus on risk assessment, safety planning, responsive/timely services for survivors and offender accountability and support.

Three-Year Provincial Plan

The three-year provincial plan is a cross-ministry plan that builds on previous action plans and articulates the key actions required to strengthen services and supports that improve outcomes for those affected by domestic violence. In this three-year provincial plan, the provincial government has recognized and acknowledged that a coordinated systemic approach to addressing domestic violence is critically needed.

This is achieved through an:

- ▶ integrated and coordinated response strategy;
- ▶ enhanced information sharing between all service providers across systems to increase safety; and
- ▶ improved direct services for survivors, children and perpetrators.

PURPOSE

To increase safety for individuals and communities by strengthening the systemic response to domestic violence in British Columbia.

VISION

British Columbians are safe in relationships and communities.

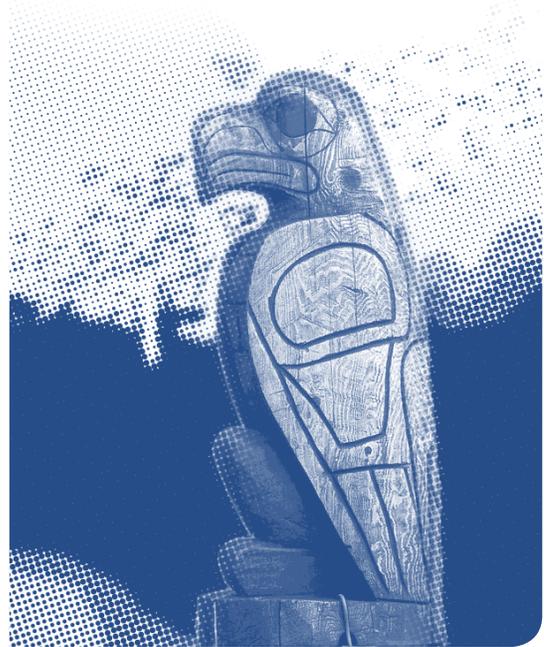
PRINCIPLES

- ▶ **Promoting Safety**
All individuals have an inherent right to be safe and free from threat, intimidation and violence.
- ▶ **Sharing Responsibility**
Protecting individuals from risk of harm and preventing violence is a shared responsibility.
- ▶ **Promoting Integrated Responses**
An integrated systemic response leads to better outcomes for survivors and perpetrator accountability.
- ▶ **Being Culturally Relevant, and Respectful**
The cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of British Columbians requires services and supports that are culturally relevant, respectful of diversity and inclusive of individuals with disabilities.
- ▶ **Striving for Continuous Improvement**
Monitoring outcomes and continuously improving services and supports will help strengthen the systemic response to domestic violence.

Aboriginal Response

Aboriginal peoples have a special legal and constitutional status within Canada. In 2005 the Province of British Columbia entered into a new government-to-government relationship with First Nations based on respect, recognition and accommodation of Aboriginal title and rights.

BC continues to work with Aboriginal peoples under the New Relationship mandate which requires the government to fundamentally change how we understand our relationship with Aboriginal peoples, to recognize and respect Indigenous ways in order to work more effectively with Aboriginal peoples, communities, and organizations. Given the unique historical, political and legal relationships Aboriginal peoples have with the province, it is recognized that an Aboriginal specific response is necessary.



Consultations on the development of a provincial domestic violence plan recognized the need to apply an Aboriginal lens to our work in order to support culturally responsive and relevant policies, programs and services. The Aboriginal response is a key component of the three-year provincial plan and was developed with valuable input from Aboriginal peoples and organizations in BC.

In order to effectively address domestic violence in the Aboriginal community, we need to recognize the complex history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. We know that generations of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples are still dealing with a broad range of complex issues that exist as a result of the history of traumatic experiences such as disconnectedness to family and community, the loss of land and territory, issues related to mental health and wellbeing, addictions, and poverty.

The current economic status of many First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples magnifies the issues that exist in homes and communities. While many programs exist to address domestic violence we recognize that specialized programs and services are required to address the unique needs of the Aboriginal community.

These services must support the vision whereby First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals and families, regardless of where they live in BC are empowered and supported by strong and respectful communities to live healthy, safe and vibrant lives free from domestic violence. We heard that in order to effect change in the Aboriginal community, programs and services must reflect the following principles: diversity; community-driven; strengths-based; culture and language; sensitivity and safety; unique needs of Aboriginal women and girls; holistic and reconciliatory; prevention; socio-economic lens; and a shared responsibility.

Aboriginal peoples voiced the need for approaches that reflect a holistic Aboriginal world-view and incorporate cultural ways of supporting families and eliminating domestic violence in their communities. Aboriginal women voiced the need to have services and support for men as victims and the need for the inclusion of male perpetrators in the process for addressing healing and safety. Through consultation with the Aboriginal community, the following eight elements have been identified as being essential for change:



There are other key cross-ministry partners who are working to address violence and in particular, violence against Aboriginal women and girls. PODV is committed to working with the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (MARR) and the Minister’s Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women (MACAW) in its advisory role to government, along with other key First Nation, Métis and Aboriginal organizations in addressing domestic violence in Aboriginal communities and developing an Aboriginal specific response.

MARR’s Minister’s Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women has recently submitted a report entitled *Direction to Government on Taking Action to End Violence and Improve the Lives of Aboriginal Women in BC*. Further, on November 5, 2013 the Ministry of Justice released *Safety and Security of Vulnerable Women in BC*, a Status Report in Response to *Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*, and has collaborated with Federal, Provincial and Territorial (FPT) colleagues on a *Draft Justice Framework to Address Violence Against Women* that is intended to facilitate ongoing dialogue with Aboriginal organizations and groups and other partners.

This plan recognizes there are a number of connected initiatives across BC that are taking action to address violence against Aboriginal women.

It is critical that government proceed in a way that respects the need for thoughtful dialogue, coordinated planning, and shared development of an Aboriginal specific response. As such, PODV will continue working with MARR and other key Aboriginal stakeholders.

Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Populations

This was an overarching theme in all the consultations and discussions surrounding the development of the provincial plan. BC has many distinct and diverse cultures and traditions requiring culturally responsive and relevant training, programs and services.

The increased vulnerability among immigrant and refugee women is a serious concern. This plan considers feedback from consultations and supports responsive and relevant approaches to address the unique needs of these populations by working closely with the settlement sector, anti-violence community and with government partners and advocacy groups.

Supporting Persons with Disabilities

The development of the provincial plan included engaging with organizations and advocates for persons with disabilities to better understand the unique needs of this population. The actions outlined in this plan will be carried out in a manner that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of this population.

Supporting Men

The plan also takes into account the feedback received from survivors, men's advocates and service providers to respond to the identified need for men to receive supports and services apart from what becomes available within the justice system, regardless if they are a survivor or a perpetrator. Initiatives that engage men such as the *Be More Than A Bystander* program, a collaboration between the BC Lions and the Ending Violence Association of BC, that educates men and boys to speak up and break the silence surrounding violence against women and girls, to help address the issue of violence against women.

CONSULTATIONS

PODV conducted a review of several reports and recommendations made by the Representative for Children and Youth, BC Coroner's Death Review panel, researchers and academics, investigative inquests, legal advocates, Aboriginal organizations, Federal/Provincial/Territorial committees, provincial umbrella organizations and police forces. This helped set the stage for the important work of consulting with partners on key themes in developing the provincial plan. After this review, and with input from our community and government partners, six key themes were selected to guide consultations and the development of the three-year provincial plan. The six themes were:

1. Public awareness and prevention
2. Supports and services for survivors and perpetrators
3. Justice system response
4. Coordination, information sharing and referral
5. Research, training and evaluation
6. Approaches to address the unique needs of Aboriginal, immigrant and refugee women, and women with disabilities

Response Areas

- ▶ As a result of the consultations, mapping of current services and supports throughout the province, hearing the voices of vulnerable populations, and engaging with partner ministries it has been identified that the following key actions are necessary to improving the response and outcomes when addressing domestic violence.

Public Awareness and Prevention

WHAT WE DO NOW:

A number of initiatives and actions support prevention of domestic violence in BC. They include:

- ▶ The website www.domesticviolencebc.ca includes information on what domestic violence is, where to get help, how to stay safe, and a section on teen dating violence;
- ▶ The *ERASE* (Expect Respect and A Safe Education) Bullying strategy is part of the Province's efforts to prevent and support those impacted by violence. The resources include information on domestic violence, including a student online reporting tool;
- ▶ The Province's *Together to Reduce Elder Abuse (TREA)* strategy includes development of multilingual *Information Kits* to help older adults learn how to prevent, recognize and know how to respond to abuse in all its forms; and
- ▶ The Province has provided nearly \$500K in funding over three years to support the *Be More Than a Bystander* Campaign which is aimed at engaging men and boys to end violence against women and girls and increasing understanding of the impact of men's violence against women and girls, to help address the issue of violence against women.

WHAT WE HEARD:

Consultations indicated support for increased public awareness about domestic violence. There was support for a public cross-media campaign, and for more education within the school systems. A need for information to be available in languages other than English was identified. It was recommended that prevention campaigns target and involve men and boys with an intention to reach potential offenders.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- ▶ Build on existing partnerships across sectors to increase public awareness and prevention work among diverse populations, and involve men and boys in standing up to end violence against women and girls;
- ▶ Promote and enhance public education materials with a particular focus on *VictimLink BC/Domestic Violence Helpline*; and
- ▶ Continue to increase accessibility to the Seniors Abuse and Information Line (SAIL) through increased hours and capacity.

Supports and Services for Survivors

WHAT WE DO NOW:

A comprehensive network of programs and services are available to British Columbians impacted by violence:

- ▶ Each year the Ministry of Justice funds more than \$40 million in programs and services for victims of crime including women and children impacted by violence. Key programs and services that form a network of supports across the province include the Crime Victim Assistance Program, Police-based and Community-based Victim Service Programs, VictimLink BC/Domestic Violence Helpline, Seniors Abuse and Information Line, Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs, Children Who Witness Abuse Programs, Outreach and Multicultural Outreach Programs, Victim Court Support Program, and the Victim Safety Unit;
- ▶ BC Housing provides \$32 million annually to support more than 800 spaces in women's transition houses, safe homes and second stage housing for women at risk of violence or who have experienced violence. In 2011/12, approximately 14,000 women and children stayed in transition houses and safe homes funded by the Province;
- ▶ VictimLink BC (1-800-563-0808) is a free, confidential, 24/7 helpline for survivors of domestic violence
- ▶ When clients applying for income assistance identify that they are fleeing abuse, appropriate policies and exemptions are applied to support them in a timely manner and ensure their needs are met; and
- ▶ Seniors Abuse and Information Line (1-800-437-1940) is a free, confidential helpline, available 7 days per week, 8am to 8pm, in over 100 languages, to provide support and referrals for older adults who are victims of abuse.



WHAT WE HEARD:

Consultations recommended that services and supports must consider the needs of survivors of domestic violence who face multiple barriers and also those who require long term counselling. Services that are holistic, long-term, family oriented (where appropriate), culturally responsive and community based were highly recommended.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- ▶ Cross ministry review, revision and enhancement of government policies and resources to ensure consistent responses to domestic violence situations involving survivors, children and families;
- ▶ Cross ministry improvements of programs addressing domestic violence and ensured flexibility for culturally responsive and holistic approaches to domestic violence; and
- ▶ Increase availability of settlement sector tools and resources to enhance recognition, risk assessment, reporting and responding to domestic violence among diverse populations.

Justice System Response to Domestic Violence

WHAT WE DO NOW:

- ▶ BC's VAWIR policy sets out the protocols, roles and responsibilities of service providers across the justice and child welfare systems that respond to domestic violence including the Police, Crown counsel, Corrections, Victim Services, Court Services, Family Justice Services and the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program;
- ▶ All police in British Columbia must take mandatory training on conducting evidence-based, risk-focused domestic violence investigations and on assessing domestic violence risk with a focus on safety planning;
- ▶ Crown counsel are guided by the *SPO-1 spousal violence policy* when dealing with domestic violence cases that have been forwarded to Crown for charge approval;
- ▶ Opened a new Justice Access Centre in Victoria, bringing the total to three in BC;
- ▶ The Protection Order Registry is a confidential database containing all civil and criminal protection orders issued in British Columbia. The police have 24-hour access to the Protection Order Registry and can obtain a copy of an order within minutes. The goal of the Protection Order Registry is to contribute to the reduction of violence against women, vulnerable adults, youth and children through support of the enforcement of civil and criminal protection orders;
- ▶ The province's Crime Victim Assistance Program provides financial supports and benefits to survivors, their immediate family members, and witnesses dealing with the effects of violent crime to help with some of the costs and services needed to assist in recovering from or coping with the effects of violence. Assistance is available whether or not a perpetrator is charged; and
- ▶ A new *Family Law Act* came into force on March 18, 2013. The new Act places the safety and best interest of the child first when families are going through separation and divorce and increases the ability of the court to deal with family violence. One significant enhancement is that family law protection orders are now criminally enforceable.

WHAT WE HEARD:

Consultations identified the need for a cohesive and timely legal system. Stakeholders recommended a court system dedicated to domestic violence with trained professionals. There was an identified need for more information sharing between criminal court and family court and a multi-pronged approach that sees the family unit as a whole and supports them throughout the court process. Respondents frequently raised concerns about the courts being abused by the perpetrator to re-victimize the survivor, and recommended supports for judges to identify when a perpetrator is using the court system to re-victimize the survivor.

Consistent risk assessment, effective use and enforcement of protection orders as well as training for service providers and others on the effective use and monitoring of these orders were recommended, along with integrated justice response and approaches.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- ▶ Work with the judiciary and other justice system partners to explore the development of a framework for domestic violence courts;
- ▶ Identify and implement improvements in communications between police and Crown counsel at the charge assessment stage;
- ▶ Support Legal Services Society (LSS) to expand the family legal aid services it provides and to test expanded criminal duty counsel; and
- ▶ In collaboration with Federal/Provincial/Territorial colleagues release a research report on issues, challenges as well as promising practices related to the intersections of the family and criminal justice systems.



Coordination, Information Sharing and Referral

WHAT WE DO NOW:

- ▶ Provincial pilot projects that will help health and social service system staff identify, as early as possible, parents with serious untreated mental illness, problematic substance use and/or risk of domestic violence;
- ▶ Coordination, information sharing and referrals are emphasized in the VAWIR policy and related Protocol for Highest Risk Cases;
- ▶ Establishment of a multi-sector Council to Reduce Elder Abuse to enhance collaboration and coordination; and
- ▶ Support the Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) program, which assists local justice and child welfare system partners to improve existing models of cross-sector coordination.

WHAT WE HEARD:

Public consultations revealed that policies and legislation must be consistent and support coordination efforts, and be fully implemented throughout the province. Effective referrals to specialized services for survivors of domestic violence are necessary to ensure safety, and in order for these referrals to be effective, it is important that professionals coordinate, collaborate and share information according to policy. Concerns were raised regarding lack of reporting of domestic violence by service providers involved with families and a need for better tools and resources to increase competency and effective service delivery.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- ▶ Work with the Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) program to provide ongoing support to coordination initiatives across the province, including supporting the development of local Violence Against Women in Relationship (VAWIR) committees and Interagency Case Assessment Teams (ICATs) targeting highest risk domestic violence cases; and
- ▶ Expand provincial pilot projects that will help health and social service system staff identify, as early as possible, parents with serious untreated mental illness, problematic substance use and/or risk of domestic violence.

Research, Training and Evaluation

WHAT WE DO NOW:

- ▶ Training for police, Crown counsel, child welfare, corrections staff, social assistance workers and victim support workers on domestic violence;
- ▶ Training to ensure all service providers across sectors are aware of the risk factors assessed by police while conducting and documenting domestic violence investigations;
- ▶ Support multi-disciplinary capacity building sessions for local and regional coordination initiatives;
- ▶ Provide a comprehensive, online training program specifically on domestic violence safety planning; and
- ▶ Research and promote best practices for addressing domestic violence.

WHAT WE HEARD:

Multi-disciplinary training is critical for an effective, skilled and coordinated response to domestic violence across systems and sectors. Appropriate training of professionals working in the government or community sector is essential to understand and respond to the complex issue. Joint training opportunities for police, health professionals, and social services were highly recommended. Training on domestic violence and the systemic response should include components that are sector specific and cross-disciplined allowing for better understanding and integration of perspectives and approaches to best support survivors and perpetrators. The general theme was that service providers need to have access to training and tools to deal with the sensitive issues around domestic violence.

Other suggestions included implementation of an evaluation structure to strengthen services and identify areas for improvement and a more formalized process for support workers to identify, report and address domestic violence.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- ▶ Partner with academic institutions that engage in domestic violence research;
- ▶ Develop an evaluation framework for the provincial plan using cross jurisdictional data to compare and ensure effectiveness of BC's response; and
- ▶ Develop cultural awareness and sensitivity training for police officers in the province, particularly related to the cultural implications in a range of settings including family violence, childhood sexual exploitation, and violence against women in the sex trade.

In addition to what has been outlined previously, the Provincial Domestic Violence Plan will utilize new funds to focus on four key areas.

Direct Services for Survivors, Children and Perpetrators

WHAT WE DO NOW:

- ▶ Domestic Violence Units (DVUs) that co-locate police, community-based victim services and, in 2 locations child welfare workers to respond to highest risk domestic violence cases. There are currently four integrated Domestic Violence Units: Vancouver, Victoria, Abbotsford and New Westminster;
- ▶ 90 *Children Who Witness Abuse programs* throughout the province that provide individual and group interventions, aimed at helping youth and children between 3 and 18 years of age to understand and cope with violence against their mother and the effects of this violence on themselves; and
- ▶ The Ministry of Justice funds over 160 local victim service programs as well as over 250 violence against women counselling and outreach programs. All programs have access to comprehensive online training on domestic violence safety planning.

WHAT WE HEARD:

Increased coordination, collaboration and information sharing across systems was highly recommended in the consultations.

The need for collaborative and integrated teams that represent various agencies and ensure that survivors are well supported was identified. Suggestions were made for better co-ordination, information sharing and referrals including funding for more integrative models with police, victim services and child welfare co-located to provide increased safety for survivors and children and accountability and support for perpetrators.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- ▶ Work with communities and expand the number of DVUs provincially that utilize a multi-disciplinary approach to provide direct services to survivors, children and perpetrators in high risk cases; and
- ▶ Support ICATs as some communities may prefer the ICAT model.



Direct Services for Aboriginal Children, Youth and Families

WHAT WE DO NOW:

- ▶ There are numerous victim services and violence against women programs across the province that specifically serve the needs of Aboriginal communities;
- ▶ Engage with MARR on how to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women across British Columbia;
- ▶ MACAW launched their *Giving Voice Project* this year and several communities and organizations received funding to “give voice” to stopping violence in this successful initiative;
- ▶ The VAWIR policy acknowledges that some groups of women are at greater risk of violence than others and directs justice and child welfare system partners to be sensitive to the unique circumstances of survivors of domestic violence including those that are Aboriginal. The policy recognizes that socioeconomic factors (poverty and homelessness), geography (rural isolation), and health factors (including mental health, addictions and physical disability) all affect a survivor’s experience of violence;
- ▶ VictimLink BC (1-800-563-0808) is a free, confidential, 24/7 helpline for survivors of domestic violence that provides services in 17 Aboriginal languages;
- ▶ All victims service and violence against women counselling and outreach programs have been given training opportunities to enhance their Indigenous Cultural Competency. Similarly, all provincial government employees have access to online training on building capacity in Aboriginal relations;
- ▶ The Ministry of Justice works with numerous Aboriginal Justice partners to deliver a comprehensive Aboriginal Justice Strategy for the province; and
- ▶ Corrections Branch programming related to Relationship Violence Prevention is tailored to Aboriginal communities.

WHAT WE HEARD:

During consultations concerns were expressed that there is limited direct supports and services for Aboriginal children, youth and families on and off reserve. This is especially concerning considering that there is a high incidence of domestic violence and homicides in Aboriginal populations compared to the general population. A need for increased cultural sensitivity was identified by many respondents. This included the need to build trusting and respectful relationships with First Nations communities.

Also identified was a need to work more effectively with communities, to better support community based, community driven action, and to involve communities and Aboriginal organizations in addressing domestic violence. Common to these responses was an expressed need for the community to become engaged in preventing and addressing domestic violence. There were also considerable indications that trust needs to be built between government agencies (MCFD, RCMP, local police) and communities. Most responses indicated that this was especially important for First Nations communities.

Overall, common recommendations within this theme were:

- ▶ Increased direct services for Aboriginal communities, including services for women, children and men;
- ▶ Increased awareness and training on cultural sensitivity; and
- ▶ Build more respectful and trusting relationships with First Nations communities.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

In addition to moving forward on joint development of an Aboriginal specific response, we will:

- ▶ Work towards equitable supports, programs and services focused on ensuring the safety of Aboriginal women in First Nations communities;
- ▶ Support Aboriginal communities and organizations, to develop or enhance programs which reflect traditional and evidence based practices specifically for Aboriginal women, men, children and youth impacted by domestic violence;
- ▶ Work in collaboration with Aboriginal communities to develop and deliver programs specifically for Aboriginal women, men, children and youth who have been impacted by domestic violence (including potential abusers/perpetrators) and that are culturally responsive and use holistic approaches;
- ▶ Apply an Aboriginal lens to initiatives emerging from the provincial plan to better serve Aboriginal populations;
- ▶ Continue to develop broad BC public service cultural competency through the Building Capacity in Aboriginal Relations (BCAR) initiative;
- ▶ Develop and deliver cultural awareness and sensitivity training for police officers in the province, particularly related to the cultural implications of violence against women in a range of settings including family violence, childhood sexual exploitation, and violence against women in the sex trade;
- ▶ Implement training on indigenous cultural competency to victim support workers across the Province; and
- ▶ Continue to support staff completion of the Indigenous Cultural Competency Training for Ministry of Health and health authority staff.

Direct Services for Perpetrators

WHAT WE DO NOW:

- ▶ The British Columbia Corrections Branch operates a comprehensive Family Violence Prevention Program that is delivered to medium and high risk sentenced spousal assault offenders in custody and in the community.

WHAT WE HEARD:

Concerns were raised that most services for perpetrators are available only after they become involved with the criminal justice system.

Perpetrator accountability and a spectrum of services for perpetrators are needed in order to fully address domestic violence. The spectrum of services should include supports for perpetrators who voluntarily seek help to stop being violent and before they become involved in the justice system. Counselling and rehabilitation that is holistic, long-term, family oriented (where appropriate), and community based was highly recommended.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- ▶ Introduce and provide direct services for perpetrators of domestic violence prior to involvement with the criminal justice system;
- ▶ Implementation will include an evaluated, evidence-based program across BC to provide support and intervention to perpetrators to hold them accountable and support change in behaviour and attitude.



Direct Services for Rural and Remote Communities

WHAT WE DO NOW:

- ▶ VictimLink BC/Domestic Violence Helpline –toll-free, province-wide helpline to connect victims with services in their community and to provide immediate crisis support for victims of family and sexual violence;
- ▶ Outreach Programs identify and connect women in crisis with support services they need by providing emotional support, information and referrals, and accompaniment and transportation to other necessary services;
- ▶ Support Community Coordination for Women’s Safety (CCWS) to work with women in rural communities to identify and eliminate barriers to women’s safety by strengthening coordination across sectors;
- ▶ The BC Association of Community Response Networks and the individual Community Response Networks (CRNs) are promoting a coordinated community response to adult abuse and neglect. 92 communities throughout the province are now served by CRNs; and
- ▶ The Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation have specialized regional subject matter experts on domestic violence whose roles and responsibilities are to address specific rural coverage needs.

WHAT WE HEARD:

Consultations identified that there was limited access to transportation, supports and services in rural and remote areas. It was identified that funding was needed for service providers in smaller rural and remote communities to provide transportation to services for survivors and children who have no other means of accessing necessary services. Services and supports must consider the needs of survivors of domestic violence who face multiple barriers.

Consultations also identified that there is a lack of affordable housing, especially in rural northern communities that get an influx of well paid trades’ people seeking rental accommodation. The demand for rentals increase the cost of accommodation, leaving lower income families with children and those fleeing abuse in unsafe or inadequate shelter.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- ▶ Increase direct support for those impacted by domestic violence in rural and remote communities by providing rental supplements in communities where there is limited or no social housing; and
- ▶ Increase funding available for transportation to support survivors and children to get to necessary services such as income assistance appointments, medical services, court services, counselling, or to transport survivors to safety in another community.

Immigrant and Refugee Response

WHAT WE DO NOW:

- ▶ The Province provides settlement services to immigrant and refugee populations, which includes providing settlement information and referral to services for immigrant families;
- ▶ VictimLink BC (1-800-563-0808) is a free, confidential, 24/7 helpline for victims of domestic violence that provides services in over 100 languages;
- ▶ There are numerous victim service and violence against women programs across the province that specifically serve the needs of immigrant/refugee communities. Numerous resources for victims of crime, including families impacted by domestic violence, have been translated into multiple languages and are available online;
- ▶ Corrections Branch programming related to Relationship Violence Prevention is tailored to multicultural communities in the lower mainland;
- ▶ Multicultural Outreach Programs identify and connect women in crisis with support services they need by providing emotional support, information and referrals, and accompaniment and transportation to other necessary services; and
- ▶ Mothers without legal status in Canada who are leaving abusive relationships, but unable to leave the country with their children, can access income assistance in BC.

WHAT WE HEARD:

Consultations identified that the unique needs of immigrant and refugee populations require special attention. A need for increased cultural sensitivity was identified by many respondents. This included understanding unique barriers faced by individuals who may not have been living in Canada for a long period of time, and to identifying social, religious, or other factors that may prevent an individual from seeking help. Several factors were identified that may contribute to increased risk of abuse for mothers without legal status in Canada. These included reliance on their partner to obtain permanent resident status and to meet their basic needs, vulnerability of deportation, language barriers and cultural differences, and a lack of knowledge about their rights in Canada, lack of a support system, and fear and distrust of authority.

Also identified was a need to co-operate with different communities, and the need to involve them in addressing domestic violence. Common to these responses was a need for the community to become engaged in preventing and addressing domestic violence. Providing information in multiple languages was viewed as an effective way to remove barriers to accessing services and supports.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- ▶ Work with federal counterparts and Citizenship and Immigration Canada to leverage federal investment in settlement community initiatives;
- ▶ Develop and implement prevention materials with a focus on immigrant/settlement populations who are impacted by domestic violence;
- ▶ Develop and implement domestic violence competency and safety planning tools and resources to support the settlement sector to provide culturally appropriate services to immigrant families who are impacted by domestic violence; and
- ▶ Identify on-going support, training and resources for staff/agencies to strengthen and enhance community-capacity to provide culturally appropriate women's transition house/safe home programs.

THE PROVINCIAL PLAN – MOVING FORWARD

The implementation of the provincial plan will be effective April 1, 2014. The implementation of the plan (2014 – 2017) will focus on achieving the following outcomes:

- ▶ Integrated, coordinated response;
- ▶ Enhanced information sharing between all service providers to increase safety; and
- ▶ Improved direct services for survivors, children and perpetrators.

PODV will monitor implementation of the provincial plan and report out progress annually.

Strengthening coordination and collaboration that strives for increased safety and improved direct services for those impacted by domestic violence will be a priority in moving forward. This acknowledges and honours what was shared during *consultations*. The provincial plan will support and foster partnerships across systems and sectors to ensure British Columbians experience safety in their relationships and communities.

Each one of us has an important role to play in addressing and ending domestic violence. Together, we can prevent domestic violence in British Columbia.



CLICK HERE TO VIEW **PART 2** OF THE PLAN,
WHICH OUTLINES THE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESPONSE BY YEAR

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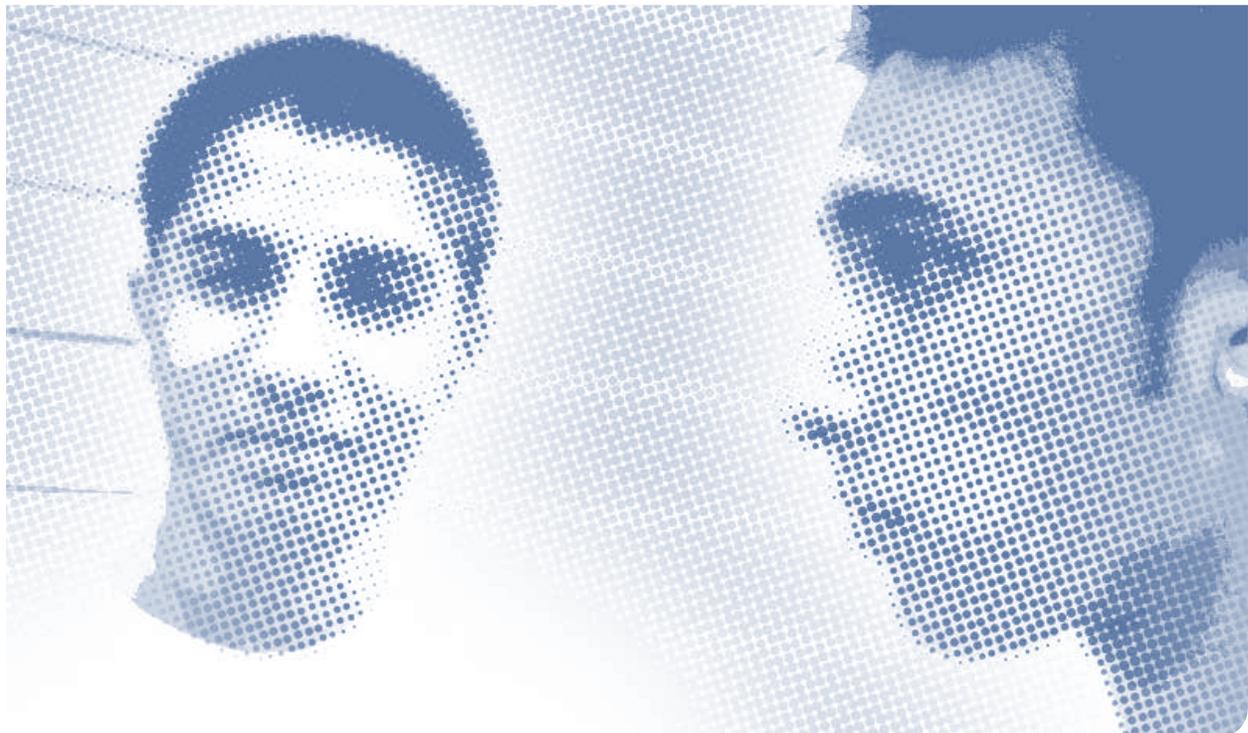
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