

BRIEFING NOTE FOR INFORMATION

DATE: February 6, 2015

PREPARED FOR: Premier Christy Clark, Province of British Columbia

MEETING: Meeting with Perry Bellegarde, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations on February 16, 2015

ISSUE: Murdered and Missing Aboriginal Women

SUMMARY:

- Our government is committed to creating a legacy of safety in BC.
- The Violence Free BC strategy, launched on February 6, 2015, is our roadmap to creating a province where each of us does our part, working together, to keep women safe from harm.
- We recognize the unique needs and situations of Aboriginal women, as well as the systemic issues that may complicate issues of violence.
- In June 2014, the Province of BC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Regarding Ending Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls with Aboriginal Leadership; the MOU outlines our joint commitment to addressing violence against Aboriginal women and girls in our province.
- We are committed to work with the signatories of the MOU 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.
- We will also continue to work closely with the Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women (MACAW); the Council was created in 2011 to provide advice to government on how to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women.
- We are looking forward to participating in the important dialogue at the National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Ottawa on February 27, 2015 (pending).

BACKGROUND:

Violence Free BC

Last year's throne speech promised a concrete plan toward ending domestic violence, and the VFBC strategy delivers on that promise (Appendix 1). It combines immediate actions with a long-term vision, and identifies five key priorities for moving toward a violence-free B.C. over the next decade. These include:

- Challenging beliefs and behaviours.
- Ensuring services are responsive, innovative and co-ordinated.
- Supporting women to rebuild their lives.
- Addressing violence against Aboriginal women.
- Fostering strong relationships and new partnerships.



Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Regarding Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls

The MOU was signed on June 13, 2014 by the Province of BC, First Nations Leadership Council, First Nations Summit, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, BC Assembly of First Nations, and the Metis Nation BC (Appendix 2).

Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women (MACAW)

Following the National Aboriginal Women's Forum in June 2011, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation announced the creation of the MACAW. In November 2011, the original 10 members were appointed (Appendix 3). MACAW is intended to provide advice to government on how to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women across British Columbia (Appendix 4).

Murdered and Missing Aboriginal Women

On December 4th, the final update report on the recommendations of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry was released. The report details progress made on the report recommendations. Government prioritized those recommendations that support responsive action, such as expanding services, enhancing policy and practice and increasing service provider knowledge. The approach has helped to maximize the effectiveness of response given the breadth and scope of the recommendations, the most complex of which will take several years to implement (Appendix 5).

National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

In the absence of support from the federal government for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls, the Premiers and National Aboriginal Leaders agreed to a National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Organized by all the National Aboriginal Organizations (NAOs), the Roundtable is scheduled for February 27, 2015 and will be an important opportunity for dialogue on coordinated action to prevent and address violence against Aboriginal women. The federal government has yet to confirm its attendance but has expressed an interest in participating in the Roundtable in the media.

DISCUSSION:

Aboriginal women experience disproportionate levels of violence, as well as socioeconomic gaps in many aspects of their lives from employment to education to housing, to health and well-being.

As outlined in the Violence Free BC strategy, the province is committed to engaging and connecting Aboriginal women in culturally safe and responsive services, programs, and initiatives that facilitate enduring safety and well-being.

Government is committed to working respectfully and in partnership with Aboriginal women, organizations and leadership to develop the necessary framework and supports systems to address violence that many Aboriginal women experience. This includes working with MACAW and the MOU signatories, including the BC Assembly of First Nations.

The Province's commitment includes addressing the immediate and critical needs of Aboriginal women experiencing violence, and utilizing approaches that reflect a holistic Aboriginal world-view and incorporate culturally based ways to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women.

BC supported the call for the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Aboriginal Women, and also supported the decision for NAOs to host the National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. BC is in the process of confirming its BC delegation and is well-positioned to attend the



Roundtable because of its commitment to creating safety and well-being for Aboriginal women and girls (Appendix 6).

Attachments/Appendices (if applicable):

- Appendix 1: Violence Free BC Strategy – Action on Violence Against Women in BC
- Appendix 2: Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls
- Appendix 3: MACAW Biographies
- Appendix 4: MACAW Terms of Reference
- Appendix 5: Murdered and Missing Women Commission of Inquiry – Final Report
- Appendix 6: BC Efforts to Address Violence against Aboriginal Women and Girls

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REVIEWED BY:

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SID/PCR
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INITIALS:




FACTSHEET

Feb. 6, 2015

Office of the Premier
Ministry of Justice
Ministry of Children and Family Development**Action on Violence Against Women in B.C.**

Violence against women happens in all cultures, religions and ethnic communities, at every age, and in every income group. It takes many forms, including domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, missing and murdered women, and violence against Aboriginal women.

The prevalence of violence against women in British Columbia is a significant social issue:

- Domestic violence killed 113 women in B.C. from 2004 to 2014.
- There were more than 12,300 police-reported victims of intimate partner violence throughout B.C. in 2013.
- Over 3,200 sexual assaults were reported to police in 2013. An estimated 90% of sexual assault cases go unreported each year.
- 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.

The Violence Free BC strategy is a roadmap to end the violence, and to support women whose lives and well-being have been impacted by violence. It is a strategy that combines immediate actions with a long-term vision to keep women safe from harm.

The five key priorities for moving toward a Violence Free BC, and examples of actions B.C. will take to stop violence against women, include:

1. Challenging beliefs and behaviours
 - Action: Launch a public awareness campaign, focusing on domestic violence, to educate and engage British Columbians on how to stop the violence.
 - Action: Target new investment in school-based prevention programming to shift attitudes and behaviour around the issue of violence against women and girls.
 - Action: Continue to enhance the K-12 curriculum by including learning objectives that support core competencies around healthy and safe relationships.
2. Ensuring services are responsive, innovative and co-ordinated
 - Action: Work with post-secondary institutions to explore best practices and approaches to better prevent and respond to the issue of sexual violence.
 - Action: Develop a provincial sexual assault policy.

3. Supporting women to rebuild their lives
 - Action: Ensure women who are fleeing abuse and receiving assistance through B.C.'s Employment and Assistance Program are eligible for moving supplements, even when they are living in transition homes.
 - Action: Improve access and availability of culturally appropriate skills development and labour market programs for Aboriginal people.
4. Addressing violence against Aboriginal women
 - Action: Work with federal, provincial and territorial governments to take targeted action to address violence against Aboriginal women.
 - Action: 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.
5. Fostering strong relationships and new partnerships.
 - Action: Target investments to support innovative partnerships that raise awareness and take action on violence against women, and increase service delivery collaboration and co-ordination, such as through Interagency Case Assessment Teams, Domestic Violence Units, Child Advocacy Centres and mobile sexual assault response teams.
 - Action: Explore new opportunities through social innovation initiatives that aim to increase community-based prevention and response services through private sector partnerships and investment.

Help is available at any time to victims of violence in B.C. VictimLink BC, a toll-free, confidential telephone service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in more than 110 languages at 1 800 563-0808 (www.victimlinkbc.ca).

To read the complete Violence Free BC strategy, visit:

<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/shreddocs/pubs/violence-free-bc.pdf>

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MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING Regarding STOPPING VIOLENCE Against ABORIGINAL WOMEN and GIRLS

Between:

THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Represented by the Premier of British Columbia and
the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, on behalf of all ministries)

THE FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT, the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS, and the
BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS, in collaboration as the FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL.

MÉTIS NATION BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Represented by the President)

The Parties recognize that Aboriginal women and girls suffer disproportionately high levels of violence and that research indicates that the root causes can be linked back to years of colonial policies and practices that sought to exclude Aboriginal people economically and socially, and attempted to destroy their cultures.

The Parties recognize that the legacy of these policies and practices has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today and may include the expression of trans-generational violent behaviour (e.g. lateral violence), believed to not normally be found in pre-colonial Aboriginal communities; and additionally, that these colonial policies and practices have contributed to racist and sexist beliefs towards Aboriginal people, and females in particular, which are seen manifested as lateral, stranger and societal violence.

By undertaking this MOU, the Parties are seeking to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees enjoyed by all citizens, against all forms of violence and discrimination and recognize that particular attention should be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

The Parties acknowledge that the *New Relationship Statement of Vision*, the *Transformative Change Accord* and the *Métis Nation Relationship Accord* are all based on shared commitments to reconcile the historical Aboriginal-Crown relationship in British Columbia which has given rise to the present socio-economic disparity between Aboriginal people and other British Columbians.

The First Nations Leadership, Métis Nation British Columbia Leadership, and the Provincial Government (The Parties) acknowledge that the Province is developing a coordinated framework to address violence against women and girls and that, while various actions are being undertaken to address the problem, the levels of violence against Aboriginal women and girls remain unacceptable; as such, Parties agree that a focused, collaborative, coordinated approach needs to be taken by all parties to address the disproportionate levels of all types of violence experienced by Aboriginal women and girls:

1. The Parties agree to work together, or through their delegates to identify shared priorities, core relationship and implementation principles, intended outcomes, actions required to achieve the outcomes, targets, indicators of success and accountabilities.
2. The Parties agree that success is a shared responsibility with shared accountabilities and to report on the collective progress in stopping violence against Aboriginal women and girls.
3. The Parties, or their delegates, agree to meet annually or more frequently as required to ensure the agreed upon work is proceeding, that the reporting is on track and to make additions or amendments to the priorities as the work evolves.

JUNE 13, 2014

HONOURABLE CHRISTY CLARK
Premier of the Province of British Columbia

HONOURABLE JOHN RUSTAD
Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation
Province of British Columbia

GRAND CHIEF STENGART PHILLIP
(stengart)
President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs

CHIEF BOB CHAMBERLAIN
(Chamberlain)
Vice-President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs

ELDER JUDY WILSON
Secretary-Treasurer
Union of BC Indian Chiefs

GRAND CHIEF EDWARD JOHN
(John Crow)
First Nations Summit Task Group

ROBERT PHILLIPS
(qun-ben)
First Nations Summit Task Group

CHERYL CASIMER
(qaghamatik pleak patiy)
First Nations Summit Task Group

REGIONAL CHIEF PUGAAS
(Jody Wilson-Raybould)
British Columbia Assembly of First Nations

PRESIDENT BRUCE DUMONT
Métis Nation British Columbia

Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women – Member Biographies

Chastity A. Davis (Chair)

Chastity Davis is the Principal and Lead Consultant with Chastity Davis Consulting. Previously, she was a Key Account Manager with BC Hydro and prior to that, a Project Manager with Refinery Leadership. Active in the community, Ms. Davis is a Director on the Board of the Minerva Foundation, as well as serves as a Council member for the Combining Our Strength Initiative. In the past, Ms. Davis was the Vice President of the Aboriginal Women's Leadership Association of BC and is a frequent speaker at events, including the Women's World Conference, National Women's Retreat, Healing Our Spirit Worldwide, and BC Institute of Technology's (BCIT) Aboriginal Alumni. Ms. Davis holds her Diploma in Marketing Management and Professional Sales from BCIT, her Bachelor of Arts in Professional Communications from Royal Roads University, and will be completing her Master of Arts in Intercultural and International Communication in the Spring of 2015 from Royal Roads University.

Paulette Flamond

Paulette Flamond, a Métis, has 18 years' experience in business and management, including international business experience. In addition to sitting on several provincial and national boards, Paulette has been the executive director for the Northeast Aboriginal Business Centre for the past 11 years, and currently owns Scoop Boutique, a successful women's clothing store in Fort St. John (www.scoopclothing.ca).

Paulette is a recent graduate of the Ch'nook Aboriginal Management Certificate Program (AMP), as well as Erickson College in Vancouver, where she completed The Art and Science of Coaching program. She is also a graduate of the Native Communications program at MacEwan University (formerly Grant MacEwan College); holds an associate arts degree; has a Life Skills Certificate from the Life Skills Institute in Edmonton; has completed extensive courses in both social work and business management; and is certified as a Professional Aboriginal Economic Developer by the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO). In 2009 Paulette was named Economic Developer of the Year by CANDO and was presented with the Aurora Award of Distinction as Aboriginal Woman of the Year from Community Futures Peace Liard. She also received a Northern British Columbia Business & Technology Award in 2011.

Paulette is passionate about the work she does and is inspired to help improve communities and individuals by encouraging wellness, training, and entrepreneurship. She was instrumental in starting Walk in Balance, the first-ever Aboriginal wellness conference in northeastern BC. As an Aboriginal woman, she is committed to being a leader and role model, and was recently appointed to the Ministry's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women by Mary Polak, BC's former Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation.

Sophie Pierre

Sophie Pierre is the current Chief Commissioner of the BC Treaty Commission. She led the St. Mary's Indian Band for 30 years as elected Chief and was the administrator of the Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council for 25 years. She has also served on the boards of many major organizations, including BC Hydro and the First Nations Financial Authority.

Darlene Shackelly

Darlene Shackelly is a member of the Nooaitch First Nation. Her family origin is from the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation. She has dedicated 32 years to working with the Native Court Worker and Counselling Association of British Columbia, and has been the Executive Director for the past 14 years. Darlene is the author of three women safety guides and sits on many committees to support justice issues that affect Aboriginal people.

Mary Tegee

Mary Tegee is from the Takla Lake First Nation in north-central BC. She is the Executive Director of Child and Family Services with Carrier Sekani Family Services. Mary provides cross-cultural training to agencies and individuals who offer services to the Carrier Sekani people. She believes that community wellness depends on nurturing tradition, cultural values and the environment.

Barbara M. Ward-Burkitt

Barbara Ward-Burkitt is a member of the Fort McKay First Nation and is currently the Executive Director of the Prince George Native Friendship Centre. She has been actively connected in many capacities to the Friendship Centre movement for 43 years. In the past she was a Faculty Mentor in Field Programs at Simon Fraser University and a Native Childcare Worker for the Quesnel School District. Active in her community, Ms. Ward-Burkitt is Vice President of the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres and President of Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association. She completed her First Nations Design and Technology Course from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design and her Masters of Education Degree from Simon Fraser University. Ms. Ward-Burkitt also holds her Provincial Instructor's Diploma from the Vancouver Community College and her Native Adult Instructor's Diploma from the BC Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. Ms. Ward-Burkitt was invested into the Order of British Columbia in 2010.

Marjorie White

Marjorie White, a citizen of the Huu-ay-aht First Nation, is an Elder Advisor and former Executive Director of Circle of Eagles Lodge Society. Currently, she serves as Founder and member of the BC Association of Friendship Centre Elder Council, past-President of Aboriginal Mother Centre, Senator of the National Association of Friendship Centres, Vice President of Luma Native Housing, Chair of the Vancouver Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, member of the Pacific Association of First Nation Women, the Vi Fineday Transition Society, Huu-ay-aht Government, and Vancouver Aboriginal Transformative Justice Service Society. Ms. White is the recipient of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Commemorative Medal, the International Year of the Volunteer Award from Correctional Services Canada, Women Making a Difference Award from the Vancouver Society of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women, Volunteer Recognition Award from Volunteer Vancouver, the Women of Distinction Award from the YWCA, the Gold Feather Award from the Professional Native Women's Association, and the Courage Award from the Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centres Society, to name a few. In addition, she was previously appointed to the Langara College Board, Citizenship Courts, the Vancouver Police Commission, and the Safer Cities Task Force. Ms. White has two daughters, four grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Debbie Williams

Debbie Williams is the Executive Director of Hiiye'yu Lelum (House of Friendship) Society, the Friendship Centre in Duncan, and brings an urban Aboriginal focus. She has served in this position for 27 years and is the longest-serving Friendship Centre Executive Director in the province. Debbie is a member of Cowichan Tribes, was born and raised in Somena village and carries the traditional name of Lateethiya.

She serves on Coast Salish Employment and Training Society Board of Directors and the Makola Housing Society Board of Directors.

Lorna Williams

Lorna Williams is the current Chair of the First Peoples' Cultural Council. She is a member of the Lil'wat First Nation of Mount Currie. Until her retirement in 2013, she was the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledge and Learning, an Associate Professor in Indigenous Education, Curriculum and Instruction and Linguistics, and former Program Director of Aboriginal Education at the University of Victoria. Before joining the University of Victoria, Ms. Williams worked at the Ministry of Education as Director of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Branch. Prior to this appointment, she worked as a First Nations Education Specialist with the Vancouver School Board. Ms. Williams received her Doctorate in Education at the University of Tennessee. She has co-directed a series of videos called *First Nations: The Circle Unbroken* and has written children's books, teachers' guides and developed Lil'wat language curriculum to teach people to read and write the Lil'wat language. Ms. Williams was invested into the Order of British Columbia in 1993 in recognition for her work in education.

Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women Terms of Reference

Background:

The Province of British Columbia wishes to work respectfully and in partnership with Aboriginal women, organizations and leadership to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women. Following the June 15 – 17, 2011 *Collaboration to End Violence: National Aboriginal Women's Forum* and respecting the theme x̓simíwən ct ʔiʔ θayθat ct (We are courageous and we are healing ourselves), the province is committed to work with Aboriginal women and key informants to develop the necessary framework and support systems to address the risks and violence that many aboriginal women are currently exposed to. The overarching goal of the advisory council is to provide advice to government on how to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women across British Columbia. The establishment of the advisory council will support the successful implementation of this commitment and work to empower those women.

Members:

Core membership will include key British Columbia Aboriginal leadership, organizations and women, and other organizations or individuals based on their unique ability to contribute to the work of the council.

Goals:

1. Develop and review an inventory of current programs available to support Aboriginal women.
2. Identify outcomes needed to improve quality of life for Aboriginal women.
3. Develop targets to achieve outcomes of Goal 2.
4. Maintain the baseline and update outcomes annually.

Tasks:

1. Provide advice to government to ensure programs supporting Aboriginal women will respond to their needs, build on effective practices and success, and be supported by key partners.
2. Review, revise and help implement an engagement plan if required (e.g. co-hosting discussions with partners and communities).
3. Review, revise and maintain a progress report on outcomes.

Governance

- The council will report to government through the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation.
- The Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation will appoint the chair and council members.

Appendix 4

- The council will consist of up to ten members, including one position designated for an Elder.
- The council will utilize a consensus decision making model founded on the principles of shared responsibility and cooperation.
- The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation will provide administrative support for the council with support from a cross-ministry team.

Term

The term will be for up to two years and the Council will meet quarterly, or as determined by the chair, and at least twice a year with the minister.

Murdered and Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) Final Report

- On December 4th, the final update report on the recommendations of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry was released. The report details progress made on the report recommendations.
- While this may be the final official update report, actions on the recommendations will continue and work is actively underway. *(Example of continuing action include: review of how policing is structured and funded; development of justice-specific cultural competency training, and integrating cultural competency and bias free policing training into training curricula etc.)*
- Government prioritized those recommendations that support responsive action, such as expanding services, enhancing policy and practice and increasing service provider knowledge.
- The approach has helped to maximize the effectiveness of response given the breadth and scope of the recommendations, the most complex of which will take several years to implement.
- In addition to detailing progress made on the recommendations, the report also speaks to the current and future actions that government is committed to taking to address the broader issue of violence against women, such as:
 - Establishment of the Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women;
 - Ongoing implementation of the Human Trafficking Action Plan, the BC Policing and Community Safety Plan, and the Provincial Domestic Violence Action Plan;
 - Signing of an MOU between government and Aboriginal Leadership to address violence against Aboriginal women and girls (June 2014);
 - Development of a Joint Partners table to oversee implementation of the MOU commitments; and,
 - The Violence Free BC Strategy.

Why is this the final report?

- While this may be our final official update report, we want to be very clear that this work will continue and must not end.
- The work on responding to the MWCI recommendations is not being undertaken as an isolated activity. It has been, and will continue to be, woven into larger government reform and change initiatives.
- Government's response to the recommendations is connected to other work that remains ongoing, such as the Provincial Domestic Violence Action Plan, and the signing and implementation of the MOU between government and Aboriginal leadership to end violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

- Learnings from the MWCI Report on what is needed to improve safety and meet the needs of women in our communities have also been integrated into the Violence Free BC Strategy.

Report details

- The report organizes the progress made on the recommendations into four major themes: compensation and healing, improvements to policing, safety for vulnerable women and supports in missing persons' investigations.
- Highlights of recent work completed or underway since the initial status report update in November 2013 include:
 - Establishment and implementation of a **Compensation Fund** for each of the living, biological children of the sixty-seven women identified in the MWCI Report. (\$50,000 per child. 77 people have contacted the province and are in various stages of the compensation process.)
 - Passing **missing persons legislation** that will give police needed tools and powers to potentially find missing persons sooner. (Missing Persons Act).
 - Providing funding to the Justice Institute of British Columbia to facilitate the integration of **cultural competency and bias free policing** core values throughout training curricula for police. (\$205K).
 - Providing funding to Carrier Sekani to support **community safety workshops** held in communities across Highway 16 (\$350K since 2012).
 - Committing **\$3.4 million in civil forfeiture grants to supporting vulnerable women** – including funds for: drop-in and outreach services; projects to support the safety of Aboriginal Women and Girls transitioning from rural to urban communities; the evaluation of SisterWatch; and sex-worker awareness and education workshops.
 - Striking an expert committee with police, local government and First Nations representatives to look at the recommendations related to **police structure and funding**.
 - On **Highway 16**, expanding cell phone service along 160 kilometers since 2009, funding enhanced community safety workshops and continuing to invest \$4.5 million in northern public transportation options. *(Note: the report also announces practical solutions to address transportation concerns identified as a result of meetings with municipal and First Nations Leaders in communities along the Highway 16 corridor. These include (1) a new web-based portal providing consolidated information on transportation services along the corridor and (2) \$75,000 in one-time funding for increased access to education, safe driver and driver licensing programs for First Nations to address transportation concerns).*

BC Efforts to Address Violence against Aboriginal Women and Girls

- Key efforts to improve the safety and well-being of Aboriginal women and girls in BC include:
 - The release of the *Violence Free BC strategy*, which includes a focus on addressing violence against Aboriginal women. The *Violence Free BC strategy* is intended to act as a blueprint, tying together existing initiatives in the area of violence against women, and identifying priorities for continued action and renewed response.
 - Signing the MOU regarding stopping violence against Aboriginal women and girls and forming the MOU Joint Partners' Table.
 - Providing community grants through the Giving Voice initiative.
 - *British Columbia's Provincial Domestic Violence Plan* was publicly released February 2014 and includes a focused Aboriginal Response. The Plan lays out a three-year action and funding framework including a \$2M investment for development and delivery of programs specifically for Aboriginal women, men, children and youth who have been or are at risk of being impacted by domestic violence (includes potential abusers/perpetrators).
 - BC's *Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking*, which focuses on preventing and addressing trafficking of youth for sexual exploitation; vulnerable workers; and the domestic trafficking of Aboriginal youth and women.
- In addition, the final status report on the recommendations from the *Missing Women's Commission of Inquiry* was released on December 4, 2014. The Province has acted on over 75 per cent of the recommendations to date.
- Government has introduced an enhanced flagging system in the Integrated Justice Information Database (JUSTIN) to improve the identification of files involving child victims. This was completed as a commitment in the *Taking Action Report*.
- The Moosehide Campaign, initiated by the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres as an outcome of the 2011 National Aboriginal Women's Forum, is achieving growing success (February 2015).

**MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CRIME PREVENTION BRANCH
BRIEFING NOTE**

PURPOSE: For INFORMATION for Suzanne Anton, Attorney General and Minister of Justice; John Rustad, Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation; and, Stephanie Cadieux, Minister of Children and Family Development

ISSUE: Public release of the Violence Free BC strategy on February 3, 2015.

SUMMARY:

- Cabinet Committee on Secure Tomorrow approved the release of the Violence Free BC Strategy s.12,s.13
- The Violence Free BC strategy will be publically released on February 3, 2015 at Surrey's new Domestic Violence Unit.
- The event will also include announcements related to:
 1. Civil forfeiture grant funding of over \$2 million to address violence against women;
 2. Official opening of Surrey's new Domestic Violence Unit (DVU); and
 3. Launch of a public awareness campaign focused on domestic violence (TBC).

BACKGROUND:

Violence Free BC

- In the February 2014 Throne Speech, government committed to developing a long-term, comprehensive strategy to ensure all women have the supports they need to prevent violence, escape from violent situations and recover from victimization.
- The Ministry of Justice coordinated development of the Strategy in partnership with the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and the Ministry of Child and Family Development (Provincial Office of Domestic Violence).
- An inter-ministry working group was also established to inform the Strategy with members from: Ministry of Advanced Education; Ministry of Community, Sport, and Cultural Development; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Natural Gas Development (Housing); and, Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation.

- Violence Free BC outlines the scope and prevalence of violence against women, while highlighting current action and future commitments within five strategic priority areas (see Appendix A for a full overview of the Strategy; Appendix B for the complete strategy):
 1. Challenging beliefs and changing behaviours that perpetuate violence against women.
 2. Ensuring BC has responsive, innovative and coordinated services.
 3. Supporting women to re-build after violence.
 4. Addressing violence against Aboriginal women.
 5. Fostering strong relationships and new partnerships.

Civil Forfeiture Funding

- In November 2014, government announced that it was accepting applications for civil forfeiture grant funding to support programs aimed at addressing violence against women and reducing youth involvement in crime.
- This year, over \$2 million of available civil forfeiture funding will be specifically allocated to support projects and programs that address violence against women in the following 5 areas:
 1. School-based Violence Against Women Prevention Programs
 2. Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking of Vulnerable Girls and Women
 3. Innovative Partnerships for Responding to Violence Against Women
 4. Healing and Rebuilding After Violence Against Aboriginal Women
 5. Training and Education for Front-line Service Providers Responding to Violence Against Women

Surrey Domestic Violence Unit

- In March 2014 government announced \$1 million in civil forfeiture grants to support vulnerable and at-risk women through existing and new DVUs in Kelowna, Surrey, Nanaimo, Vancouver, New Westminster, Abbotsford and the Capital Region (Victoria).
- The Surrey DVU is a partnership between the Surrey RCMP and Surrey Women's Centre. In March 2014 the Surrey Women's Centre received \$175,000 in civil forfeiture funding to support the development of the DVU.
- With the opening of the Surrey DVU there are now 6 fully operational DVUs in the province.
- DVUs protect victims at the highest risk of domestic violence, connect them with resources, and get them to safety. DVUs involve co-located teams of police, community-based victim services and in some locations child protection workers.

This allows incoming cases to be immediately triaged and ensures coordinated safety planning.

Violence Against Women Awareness Campaign

- To coincide with the release of the VFBC Strategy, government will launch or foreshadow the launch of, a new social media-based awareness campaign focused on domestic violence.
- The campaign's goals are consistent with the objectives in the VFBC strategy including: raising awareness, changing societal attitudes, linking to existing services, and highlighting government investments in responding to domestic violence
- Official launch date of the campaign is still to be determined.

OTHER MINISTRIES IMPACTED/CONSULTED:

- Ministry of Children and Family Development (Provincial Office of Domestic Violence)
- Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation
- Ministry of Advanced Education
- Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation
- Ministry of Community, Sport, and Cultural Development
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Natural Gas Development (Housing)

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Attachment(s)

Appendix A: Overview of Violence Free BC
Appendix B: Violence Free BC Strategy (Confidential Draft)

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT

A VISION FOR A VIOLENCE FREE BC

Addressing Violence Against Women in British Columbia

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE

DRAFT

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT

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.

Violence Free BC 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.

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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.ⁱ 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.ⁱⁱ
- From 2004 to 2014, domestic violence claimed the lives of 113 women in BC, an average of 10 women each year.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Research suggests that fewer than 1 in 4 victims of intimate partner violence report the crime to police.^{iv} In 2013, there were 12,359 police-reported victims of intimate partner violence across British Columbia.^v 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.^{vi}
- There were 3,238 police-reported sexual assaults in 2013.^{vii} This is significant given that an estimated 90% of sexual assault cases go unreported each year.^{viii}
- In 2011/12, 11,945 abused women sought shelter in BC, an average of over 32 women a day province wide.^{ix} In 2012/13, 35,751 women and children were referred to violence against women counselling and outreach programs.^x
- Since 1980, there have been 40 unsolved Aboriginal female homicides and 36 unresolved cases of missing Aboriginal females in British Columbia, the highest numbers in Canada.^{xi}

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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. Increasing 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.^{xii} 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.^{xiii} 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

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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.^{xiv}

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.^{xv}

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 have the highest rates of being victims of homicide, including spousal homicides.^{xvi}

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.^{xvii}

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 to women who do not have these limitations.^{xviii}

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

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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.^{xxix} Emerging research also suggests that trans people face increased risk of violence, including domestic and sexual violence.^{xxx}

Contributing Factors

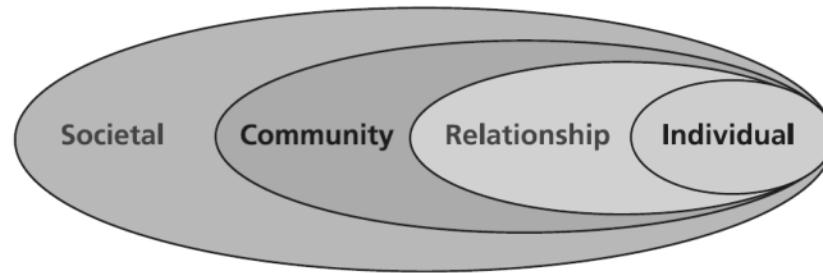
Understanding why certain people or groups may be at higher risk for violence is not simple or straightforward and does not lead back to any single factor. Research indicates that there are a number of factors in women's lives that contribute to overall risk of violence and abuse.^{xxxi} Socioeconomic 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 colonization, 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 addiction. 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, 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.^{xxii} 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 below (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1: Ecological Model for Understanding Violence



Increasingly, research is showing that various forms of violence are not only interconnected, but often share the same root causes.^{xxiii} 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.

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.

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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 Violence Free BC 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.

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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 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.

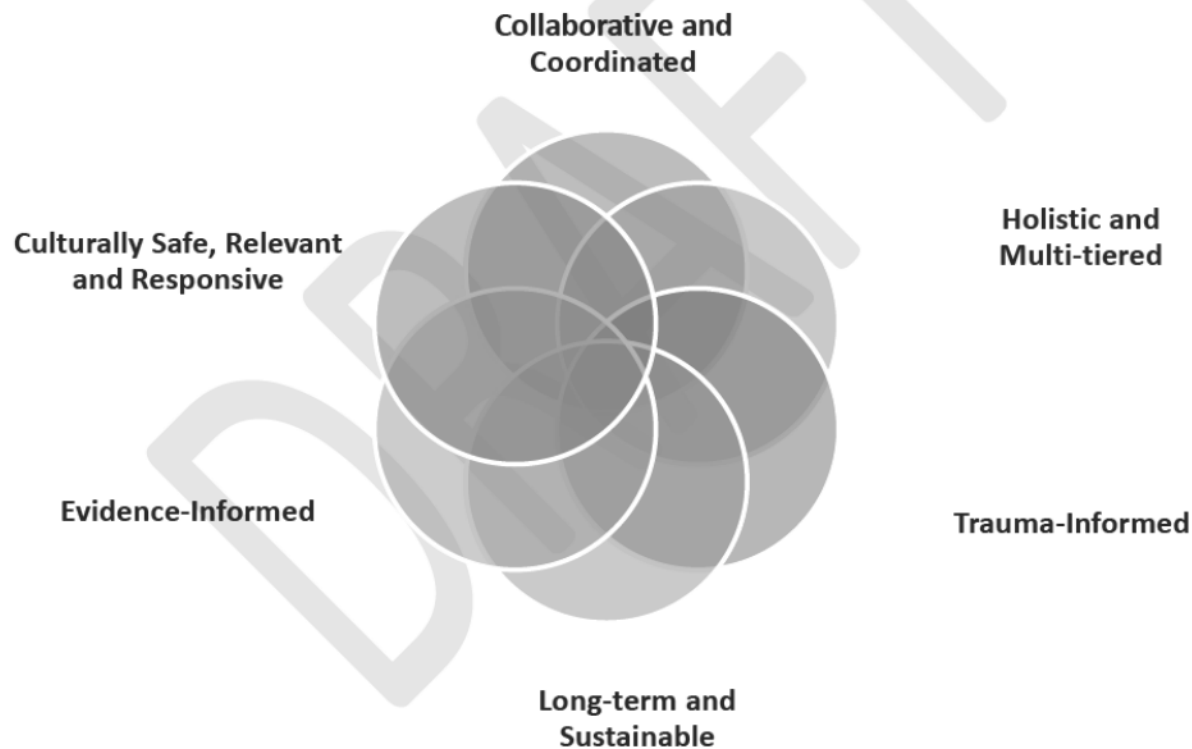
Rebuilding from the impacts of violence

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.

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A Principled Approach

The following principles 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.



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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. Challenging Beliefs and Changing Behaviours

The Goal:

Attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate violence are challenged and changed.

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

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(Expect Respect and A Safe Education) 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 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. This
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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 also 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.^{xxiv}

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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.
- ❖ 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.

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

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2. Ensuring BC has Responsive, Innovative and Coordinated Services

The Goal:

Commitment to innovative practice and continuous quality improvement ensures responsive services.

Services and supports need to be grounded in best practice 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

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 is unique; however, each contains consistent priorities of prevention, effective responses and services and supports to aid in recovery.

Human Trafficking

Publically 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.



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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, including counselling and protective measures.

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

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 cultural competence 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 November 5, 2013, the Ministry of Justice released a status report on the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry's recommendations. One year later, government released a second 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.



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.



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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, and in others, 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 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 *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

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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.

Violence Against Aboriginal Women

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



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- ❖ Explore the development of a provincial sexual assault policy.
- ❖ Develop province-wide memorandums of understanding 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.
- ❖ 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 victims 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.

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- ❖ 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.

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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.

Housing Supports in BC

- **Transition Houses** provide safe, 24/7 staffed shelter for women, and their children, who are fleeing violence, on a temporary basis. They also provide crisis intervention, emotional support, 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, 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, safety planning, as well as referrals to and assistance accessing support services and housing, financial, medical and legal assistance.

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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.

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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.

The Homeless Prevention Program 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.

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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.

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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 unique challenges in their ability to access information, services and supports. 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. The council'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](#)

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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 three-year 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 part of the Province's three-year 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 Wellness and Substance Use Ten Year Plan. The collaboratively developed plan is the first of its kind designed 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

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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

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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.
- ❖ 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.

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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 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

Linking with Other Provincial Initiatives

Violence against women does not occur in isolation. Many factors contribute to women's safety and wellbeing. These factors, which intersect in women's lives to compound their experience of violence and abuse,³ include things like socioeconomic factors (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.



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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 **community-driven projects** have brought together different partners to work on projects that empower and build capacity in local communities to prevent violence against women and enhance responses. 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.

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.



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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.

Future Direction:

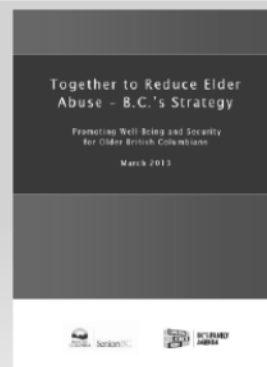
Community leaders and organizations support innovative initiatives that prevent, respond to and rebuild from the impacts of violence against women at the local level.

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:

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.

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- ❖ 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.

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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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