

A FINAL STATUS UPDATE REPORT IN RESPONSE TO:

**FORSAKEN – THE REPORT OF**  
*The Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*

*December 2014*



Ministry of  
Justice





## MESSAGE *from* the MINISTER

Government's response to the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) report has been both a top priority for the Ministry of Justice and one of my personal priorities as Minister. The recommendations in the report have been a catalyst for a collaborative effort between government and other organizations that work to protect vulnerable women and girls in this province.

We recognize that the families of the victims continue to feel the loss experienced by this tragedy and this, along with wanting to prevent any similar kind of incidents in the future, has kept us moving forward to take action. It has also guided our response to the recommendations and it was the reason for compensating the children of the women who are named in the MWCI Report. We hope this compensation will be used to enhance their lives in the present and future.

Overall, the Province has taken significant action on the recommendations, with work underway or complete on more than 75% of them. We have put urgency on those recommendations that support responsive actions, such as expanding services, enhancing policy and practice, and increasing knowledge of service providers. Already, the results of these actions are improving the lives of vulnerable women across the province.

While this may be our final official update report, I want to be very clear that this work will continue and must not end. The Province is committed to moving forward and continually improving the situation for vulnerable women in B.C. Our response to the recommendations is also connected to other work that remains ongoing such as the Provincial Domestic Violence Plan, BC's Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and the BC Policing and Community Safety Plan.

Our response to the MWCI Report has also led to our government's greater commitment to a Violence-Free BC. Under the leadership of Premier Christy Clark, this long-term strategy will move our province towards our goal of being a place where all women have the supports they need to help prevent violence, to escape from violent situations, and to recover if they have been victims of crime.

British Columbians deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities, and we will continue to press on with our efforts to ensure a tragedy like this never happens again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'A'.

*Honourable Suzanne Anton, QC*  
Attorney General, Minister of Justice



# INTRODUCTION

On December 17, 2012, *Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry* (MWCI Report) was released. The MWCI Report discusses the findings of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry and outlines two urgent measures and sixty-three recommendations for action.

Since its release, a substantial amount of work has been undertaken to implement the MWCI Report recommendations and to enhance the safety and security of vulnerable women in British Columbia.

In November 2013, the BC government released a status report on activities underway to respond to the recommendations. Since that time, we have continued to build on this

work and significant progress has been made. To date, action has been taken on over three quarters of the recommendations directed at the Province (44 of 56).

The purpose of this report is to outline actions, both ongoing and completed, that support implementation of the MWCI Report recommendations. These actions are organized within four major themes: compensation and healing, improvements to policing, safety for vulnerable women and supports in missing persons investigations. In addition to detailing our progress, this report will speak to current and future action that government is committed to taking to address the broader issue of violence against women in British Columbia.

# PROCESS *to* ADDRESS RECOMMENDATIONS

The initial work towards implementation of the MWCI Report recommendations was informed by the feedback gathered by appointed champion, The Honourable Steven Point, through a broad stakeholder engagement

## ENGAGEMENT

While government has taken the lead, work on the recommendations has been a collaborative effort. Government has engaged stakeholders in a number of targeted ways to ensure that actions taken are informed by their knowledge and expertise.

Approaches to engaging with stakeholders and gathering input have been tailored to specific issue areas and recommendation themes. Well over half of the MWCI Report recommendations directed at the Province are related to policing and as such, a fair amount of engagement and identified action has been focused in this area.

To examine and determine actions on a number of MWCI policing-related recommendations, government, in collaboration with the BC Association of Chiefs of Police (BCACP), struck an Advisory Committee and funded a review to examine policing policies, procedures and operational responses. To support the development of provincial policing standards, which are the subject of a series of recommendations, a standing Advisory Committee comprised of police and non-police stakeholders, including Union of BC Municipalities, Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the BC Civil Liberties Association was established and work on standards is underway.

process. Valuable input was received during this process and the accumulated knowledge left government well-positioned to move forward and lead the response to the recommendations.

An Expert Committee has recently been struck to look at recommendations related to police structure and funding. The committee is comprised of representatives from police agencies, local governments, the BC Police Association, and First Nations. An Advisory Panel will also be established to provide an arm's length review and perspective on the work of the Expert Committee.

In addition to these engagement activities, a significant number of stakeholder groups, including women-serving organizations, First Nations leadership and privacy groups were invited to engage with government on the *Missing Persons Act* implementation and further consultation is actively being coordinated, which will inform the development of associated regulations.

Government has also implemented a consultation process to gather input and advice from other key external stakeholders on the implementation of a number of policing-related recommendations from the development of cultural sensitivity training to standards on missing persons investigations, and other missing persons resources. Engagement opportunities are also being explored with respect to the recommendations in the report regarding healing and reconciliation.

## PRIORITIZING ACTION

Due to the breadth and scope of the recommendations, efforts have been made to prioritize implementation in a manner that supports responsive action and the effective use of time and resources. As such, recommendations related to services, policy and practice, training and other concrete actions have been prioritized. Information detailing the actions taken on these recommendations is included in the next section of this report.

There are also recommendations that have been determined to be of lower priority and they will not be acted on at this time. This includes recommendations that call for research projects and feasibility studies, such as recommendations 4.8, 5.6, and 6.5. Government will instead rely on the current body of knowledge stemming from recent studies and reports, as well as the input

and advice from key stakeholders, to inform our response to these issues.

As well, some of the recommendations may be addressed through work currently underway on other related recommendations. For example, there are recommendations around the creation of a provincial partnership committee to facilitate collaboration in missing person cases (recommendations 7.5, 7.10 & 7.11). While government will not be establishing a provincial partnership committee, efforts to facilitate enhanced collaboration on missing persons cases are in progress in areas such as the development of provincial policing standards on missing persons investigations, the establishment of a Real Time Intelligence Centre and through other supports in missing persons cases.

## GOING FORWARD

Given that significant progress has been made since the Honourable Steven Point completed his work, a new champion will not be appointed. Work will continue on the recommendations currently underway as more time is required to complete them. Some recommendations are more complex and will take several years to implement. There are also recommendations

that require further consideration and input from stakeholders to determine the best course of action. As we carry on with implementing the recommendations, we will continue to consult with our partners and key stakeholder groups to ensure an effective and meaningful approach to completing this work.

# COMPENSATION *and* HEALING

*“Commissioner Oppal detailed our shared responsibility for the exceptional and troubling circumstances that contributed to the disappearance and death of dozens of B.C. women. In turn, he called on us to compensate their children – and we are doing so.”*

– ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE SUZANNE ANTON, MARCH 18, 2014

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The impact of this tragedy continues to be felt most by the families. The devastation and profound emotional grief that families have suffered cannot be measured or remedied. Although the past cannot be undone, it is hoped that as we look to the future, healing can occur. For each individual, the path to healing will look

different. The Province has assisted families of the missing and murdered women by providing counselling and other benefits and supports to foster their healing. Additionally, the Province has provided further supports to the children of the missing women, who have suffered the tragedy of losing their mothers.

## PROGRESS:

### *Compensation & Healing*

#### ► **COMPENSATION FUND FOR THE CHILDREN** *(Rec. 3.2)*

A Compensation Fund for the children of the missing and murdered women has been established by the Province, Government of Canada and the City of Vancouver. Compensation in the amount of \$50,000 is being offered to each of the living, biological children of the women identified in the MWCI Report.

Since the announcement of the Compensation Fund, 77 individuals have contacted the Province and are in various stages of the process. Although there is no amount of money that can make up for the loss of a parent, it is hoped that the funding will provide the children with an opportunity to enhance their education, housing or other circumstances as they progress with their lives.

**STATUS:** *Compensation Fund created March 2014.*

Through the course of criminal justice processes and the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, victim support was provided to families. This included emotional support, debriefing and crisis intervention services. It also included referrals to community resources, such as local victim service programs, and help connecting family members with ongoing counselling services and other benefits available through the Crime Victim Assistance Program.

The Crime Victim Assistance Program has provided approximately \$1.44 million in financial assistance and benefits to families in this case.

## ▶ IDENTIFYING APPROACHES TO HEALING

(Recs. 3.1, 3.3, 3.4)

Healing is an important aspect of moving forward, both for the families of the missing and murdered women as well as the broader community.

Government is building on previous dialogue and engagement with the Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women (MACAW), and is exploring opportunities to further engage stakeholders on how best to ensure effective and meaningful implementation of the recommendations related to healing.

**STATUS:** *Work is underway.*

In March 2014, government provided \$400,000 to the MACAW for the Giving Voice Initiative. This initiative allows communities to access grant funding to "Give Voice" to the issue of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, identify champions, build partnerships, engage community, and take action on community-identified issues.

The Giving Voice project contributes to broader efforts to address violence against women and supports the healing of families and communities whose loved one has gone missing or been murdered.

# IMPROVEMENTS *to* POLICING

*“Change is required in the overall government model for policing in order to ensure greater accountability of police to the communities they serve.”*

– COMMISSIONER WALLY OPPAL, VOLUME III, PG. 206

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In the decade which has passed since the period of time under review by the Commission, there have been significant changes in policing. Improved information sharing and support for integrated policing initiatives have led to a stronger and more effective police response. Partnership initiatives with the community have begun to lay the groundwork for healthier

and more productive relationships between police and the people that they serve. But this is just the beginning. Through implementation of the strategic plan on policing – the BC Policing and Community Safety Plan – targeted improvements to policing practices, standards, structure and accountability will continue to be prioritized over the next decade.

## PROGRESS:

### *Supporting Bias-Free and Equitable Policing*

#### ▶ **JUSTICE-SPECIFIC INDIGENOUS CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING** *(Rec. 4.12)*

Justice system representatives are providing input into the development of justice-specific modules within the Provincial Health Services Authority’s (PHSA) renowned Indigenous Cultural Competency (ICC) training course. Building from the foundational ICC training, PHSA will be developing these additional modules to target cultural competency learning needs for staff working in various areas of the justice system, including police, courts, corrections, and Crown Counsel.

**STATUS:** *Development of training is underway.*

Developed and delivered by the PHSA, the ICC training is a facilitated online cultural competency training course designed to increase knowledge, enhance self-awareness, and strengthen the skills of those who work both directly and indirectly with Aboriginal people. The course includes online discussions, videos, interactive activities, and dialogue between peers and the facilitation team.

▶ **INTEGRATING CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND BIAS FREE POLICING TRAINING**

*(Rec. 4.10)*

The Police Academy of the Justice Institute of British Columbia has received a \$205,000 grant through the Civil Forfeiture Office to facilitate the integration of cultural competency and bias-free policing core values throughout training curricula. This will include training police officers with respect to developing and maintaining community relationships, particularly with vulnerable members of the community.

**STATUS:** *Work is underway.*

▶ **MECHANISMS TO SUPPORT BIAS-FREE POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

*(Rec. 4.1)*

An examination of policies and practices of police agencies has been initiated, with specific focus on ensuring bias-free policing and the equitable treatment of all people.

**STATUS:** *Examination is underway.*

On April 9, 2014, the *Police Act* was amended to allow for additional standards to support bias-free policing and audits for unsolved major case investigations.

**STATUS:** *Police Act amendments were passed to be brought in force by regulation.*

### *Strengthening Standards of Practice*

▶ **PROVINCIAL POLICING STANDARDS**

*(Rec 4.2, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4 10.1 & 10.2)*

Provincial standards on missing persons' investigations, major case management, inter-agency cooperation, and bias-free policing are currently being developed. A standing Advisory Committee on Provincial Policing Standards (ACOPPS) comprised of police and non-police stakeholders, including Union of BC Municipalities, Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the BC Civil Liberties Association, has been established to provide input into the process.

**STATUS:** *Development of standards is in progress.*

► **INTRODUCTION OF ENHANCED CIVILIAN COMPLAINTS COMMISSION FOR RCMP**  
(Rec. 4.14)

Federal Bill C-42 introduced amendments to the *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act*, including the creation of a new Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP (CRCC) to provide civilian oversight over the conduct of RCMP members. The new CRCC will replace the former Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP and will have enhanced powers to conduct policy reviews, access all RCMP information relevant and necessary to its mandate, and exercise a wider range of investigative powers (e.g., power to compel testimony and evidence).

**STATUS:** *Bill C-42 achieved Royal Assent on June 19, 2013. Amendments are not yet in force.*

### *Reviewing Police Structure and Funding*

► **EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OPTIMIZING POLICE SERVICE DELIVERY AND STRUCTURE** (Rec. 9.1, 9.2 & 11.1)

A multi-year project has been initiated to examine how policing is currently structured and funded. The project will engage municipal leaders and police agencies to explore ways to build on the regional delivery of specialized services. This will lay the groundwork for exploring models of service delivery ranging from further integration to the regional delivery of services while retaining local, community-focused policing.

To further this endeavour, an Expert Committee on Police Structure and Funding comprised of representatives from police agencies, local governments, BC Police Association, and First Nations has been established. The project will roll out in the following phases: clarifying responsibility; exploring alternate police service delivery; and, reviewing and developing options for governance models and funding. Concurrent policy and legal work will be undertaken, including consideration to amend the Police Act, as required.

**STATUS:** *Project is underway.*

Bill 4, the *Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2014*, was introduced in the Legislature on October 23, 2014. The proposed amendment clarifies government's authority within the *Police Act* to sustain and expand integrated policing teams and other specific, specialized policing services. This not only responds to recommendations made by the MWCI regarding coordination of policing across multiple jurisdictions, but also strengthens government's ability to ensure an adequate, effective level of policing is maintained throughout B.C.

## *Building on Promising Partnerships between Police and Community*

### ► **EVALUATION OF SISTERWATCH INITIATIVE** (Rec. 5.1)

One-time funding has been provided to the Vancouver Police Department to undertake an evaluation of the multi-year SisterWatch initiative. The evaluation findings will be used as a foundation for developing best and promising practices for meaningful police-community partnerships.

**STATUS:** *Funding has been distributed and development of the evaluation is in progress.*

## *Identifying Key Improvements to Police Policy, Procedure and Operational Responses*

### ► **MWCI POLICING POLICY REVIEW**

(Recs. 4.1, 4.6, 4.7, 4.11, 5.4, 5.8, 5.13, 7.6, 7.7 & 7.8)

Working in partnership with the BC Association of Chiefs of Police (BCACP) Advisory Committee, the Policing and Security Branch has conducted a review of existing police departments' policies, procedures and operational responses as they pertain to the MWCI Report recommendations. This work will identify gaps and needs, and recommends a number of action items to address the identified gaps and guide implementation. This work continues in collaboration with the BC Association of Chiefs of Police.

**STATUS:** *Policy review is underway.*

### ► **NEW NATIONAL DNA MISSING PERSONS INDEX** (Rec. 8.5)

The Federal Budget 2014, released in February 2014, announced \$8.1 million over five years, starting in 2016-17, with \$1.3M ongoing, to create a DNA-based Missing Persons Index (MPI). The DNA-based MPI would supplement the work of the RCMP's National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains by enabling the collection and matching of DNA profiles from missing persons and unidentified remains to other DNA profiles contained within the Convicted Offenders Index and the Crime Scene Index of the National DNA Data Bank. The intent of the MPI is to provide provincial and municipal law enforcement agencies, coroners and medical examiners with a new tool for their investigation of cases involving missing persons and unidentified remains, as well as to help bring closure to the families of missing persons. British Columbia is participating in consultations regarding this national initiative.

**STATUS:** *FPT consultations and development of the Missing Persons Index are in progress.*

Positive police-community relations are essential to ensuring the safety of vulnerable women. SisterWatch is a promising collaboration between the Vancouver Police Department and a community organization in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The project is designed to improve communication and relations between police and individuals from marginalized populations living in the Downtown Eastside. Working together, efforts to improve these relationships help to increase safety through earlier reporting and police response to incidences of violence.

# SUPPORTS *in* MISSING PERSONS INVESTIGATIONS

*“Timely access to information is integral to the analysis of a missing person case and can be of vital importance in an investigation.”*

– COMMISSIONER OPPAL, VOLUME III OF THE MWCI REPORT, PG. 180

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When a person goes missing, time is of the essence. The more tools that police have to investigate a person’s disappearance, the more likely they will be to locate that person. But it is not only the investigative tools that are vital, it is also the positive relationships with family members, friends and the community that assist

police. Since the release of the MWCI Report, the government has worked to strengthen police investigatory tools and enhance supports to family members who may have loved ones who have gone missing. It is the networks of support and integrated responses that will help solve any future cases of missing persons.

## PROGRESS:

### *Enhanced Investigative Tools*

#### ▶ INVESTIGATIVE TOOLS TO FIND MISSING PERSONS SOONER (Rec. 8.1)

The recently passed, but not yet in force, *Missing Persons Act* will provide police with tools to help find missing people sooner. The Act focuses on cases where a missing person hasn’t been seen, or in touch with people who are normally involved in their lives. It also focuses on vulnerable or at-risk persons whose safety and welfare are of concern because of their age, physical or mental capabilities, or the circumstances surrounding their absence.

**STATUS:** *The Missing Persons Act received Royal Assent on March 24, 2014. Development of the associated regulations is in progress.*

#### ▶ A REAL TIME INTELLIGENCE CENTRE TO ENHANCE INVESTIGATIONS (Rec. 10.3)

A Real Time Intelligence Centre (RTIC) has been developed by the RCMP and municipal police partners that will ensure that information can be shared more readily and will enhance the ability of police to investigate all crimes, including those of missing persons. The RTIC will soon be available to provide 24/7 analytical support to police investigating crimes. Once fully operational, the RTIC will be staffed by 43 sworn and civilian members and the annual operational budget will be shared by municipalities, the Province and the federal government.

#### *How can the RTIC enhance police investigations?*

After a serious crime is reported, the RTIC will help police by assisting in the identification of suspects. For example, analysts at the RTIC will monitor other major crimes across an area and let investigators know if there are any links.

The Centre will work to identify crimes that may be occurring in multiple cities, as offenders are mobile and do not necessarily confine themselves to one jurisdiction.

The RTIC will initially serve all police in Metro Vancouver, including RCMP and independent municipal police. Over the next two phases of implementation, the RTIC will examine expansion to Greater Victoria (2016) and then the remainder of the province (2017).

**STATUS:** *Implementation of the Real Time Intelligence Centre started June 1, 2014.*

## *Public Information*

### ▶ **MORE INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC** (Rec. 7.7 & 7.8)

British Columbia is working with the federal government and other provinces and territories to ensure the public is able to assist and engage in proactive approaches around prevention and investigation of missing persons cases. Since the release of the MWCI Report, there have been several initiatives undertaken to provide the public with more information. For example, in January of 2013, the federal government announced Canada's first national missing persons website, [www.canadasmising.ca](http://www.canadasmising.ca). The website is designed to engage the public in reporting tips and information related to ongoing cases.

**STATUS:** *Work is ongoing.*

## *Better Supports for Missing Persons' Families*

### ▶ **TRAINING FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS ACROSS BC** (Rec. 7.9)

Victim support workers across British Columbia are receiving training to enhance supports to families of missing and murdered persons. Eight training sessions across the province will enhance front-line service providers' knowledge around grief, trauma, and supports to family members of missing and murdered persons.

**STATUS:** *Delivery of training sessions is underway.*

### ▶ **SUPPORTS TO FAMILIES OF MISSING AND MURDERED PERSONS IN NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA** (Rec. 7.9)

The government has helped to secure \$180,000 in federal funding to support families of missing and murdered women. This includes over \$120,000 for Carrier Sekani Family Services to undertake a community consultation and to engage in training for first responders in trauma cases. It also includes \$60,000 to Sisters in Spirit in Fort St. John for a cultural healing camp for families of missing and murdered persons.

**STATUS:** *Funding has been distributed and work is underway.*

# SAFETY *for* VULNERABLE WOMEN

*“Like the vast majority of female victims of sexual predators, the women were situated in a vulnerable and marginalized place.”*

– COMMISSIONER WALLY OPPAL, VOLUME I, PG. 79

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For many, this tragedy has highlighted the heightened vulnerability experienced by those who are already facing a broad range of complex issues, from poverty to mental health and substance use issues to limited housing and employment options. Increasing safety and security of vulnerable women and girls in British Columbia requires access to services and supports. Since the release of the MWCI

Report, significant progress has been made on implementation of the recommendations related to safety, including expansion of services, improvements to transportation safety, and enhancements to supports provided to vulnerable women. These actions contribute to important advancements in addressing violence against women in our province.

## PROGRESS:

### *Increasing Supports in the Community*

#### ▶ ENHANCEMENT OF SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE WOMEN

*(Urgent Measure #1)*

Access to emergency services, including those available 24 hours a day, is an important way to both prevent and respond to experiences of violence. As a way to support the availability of these services through increased hours and enhanced programming, government has provided funding to drop-in and outreach programs that serve vulnerable populations. This includes annual funding of \$750,000 to the WISH Drop-In Centre Society, an annual increase of almost \$400,000 to the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre, as well as a total of \$450,000 in one-time funding to other key organizations that provide services to individuals involved in the survival sex trade (e.g., PACE, Warm Zone, New Hope Society, PEERS Victoria).

**STATUS:** *Funding has been distributed and services have been expanded.*

▶ **MORE COMMUNITY PROGRAMS FOR TRANSITIONING OUT OF THE SEX TRADE**  
(Rec. 6.5)

Providing exiting supports for individuals involved in the sex trade assists women to transition to alternative employment and life options. Through grant funding, the Province has supported a number of innovative projects to help women transition out of the sex trade. A service delivery model is being developed to help agencies in the Lower Mainland work effectively together to facilitate and support individuals who wish to exit the sex trade. A small business training program will be delivered in partnership with community women-serving organizations in Esquimalt to vulnerable women interested in developing the tools needed to start their own business. Funding has also been provided to support a community program that offers meaningful employment and mentorship opportunities for young women aged 13-18 through a 10-week job placement and a variety of other learning and skills-based training opportunities.

**STATUS:** *Funding has been distributed and projects are underway.*

### *Supporting Safe Rural to Urban Transitions*

▶ **SAFETY WORKSHOPS FOR TRANSITIONING FROM RURAL TO URBAN ENVIRONMENTS** (Rec. 6.2)

Levels of risk and vulnerability are heightened for Aboriginal women and girls transitioning from rural to urban communities, especially for those without existing supports and resources in the urban environment. In March 2014, government distributed \$110,000 in grant funding to a number of Aboriginal and Aboriginal-serving organizations to support projects/activities that will lead to safer transitions from rural to urban communities. This included one-time funding to the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres to develop and deliver prevention workshops on sexual exploitation and human trafficking of Aboriginal youth, including information about the risk factors associated with moving to an urban setting.

**STATUS:** *Funding has been distributed and projects are underway.*

## Enhanced Safety Along the Highway of Tears

The Province recognizes the importance of continued effort to improve the safety of travel along northern routes, including Highway 16. Unfortunately, there is no easy fix. The distance between communities presents a significant challenge for people to travel back and forth. Since the Highway of Tears Symposium Report was released in 2006, government has engaged in a number of activities to not only increase the safety of northern highways, but to support communities in developing and delivering prevention initiatives to enhance the safety of vulnerable women. Government remains committed to continuing to work with communities to identify practical solutions to the transportation challenges.

### ▶ ADDRESSING TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

#### *(Urgent Measure #2)*

The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI) has been engaged in a number of activities to determine how best to address the need for safe and reliable transportation between communities along Highway 16. This included face-to-face meetings with over 80 leaders representing communities, First Nations, local governments and municipalities along the Highway 16 corridor between Prince George and Prince Rupert. Previous discussions were held with the RCMP, the Omenica Beetle Action Coalition and the North Central Local Government Association.

During the meetings, the ministry heard that there was no one, comprehensive source of information about existing transportation services in communities along the Highway 16 corridor. To address this concern, the ministry has developed the province's first web-based portal that consolidates information about transportation related services in locations along the corridor, into one place. The new portal provides residents with easy-to-access information on transit, medical transportation, inter-city bus, rail and community based transportation services in each community along the corridor. The website is located at: [www.gov.bc.ca/Highway16Corridor](http://www.gov.bc.ca/Highway16Corridor)

Another key issue the ministry heard was that many First Nations communities have access to some kind of vehicle, but lacked licensed drivers to operate these vans or buses. In response, the ministry is providing one-time funding of \$75,000 to the Carrier Sekani Family Services to support increased access to driver education, safe driver, and driver licensing programs for First Nations. This new funding will allow for the development and implementation of a First Nations driving instructor training program to support driver training for youth and adults living in First Nations communities. The program will provide dedicated training for First Nations drivers seeking Class 5 and Class 4 licences.

**STATUS:** *Progress made. More work required.*

- ▶ A significant amount of new cellular coverage has been added – nearly 160 kilometers since 2009 – to Highway 16. To date, Highway 16 has approximately 69% cell coverage, allowing drivers and people to use their cell phones to call for emergency services and support if needed.
- ▶ UNBC and the RCMP have a joint study underway to come up with recommendations for hitchhikers, police and communities on how to improve safety, and identify alternatives to hitchhiking.
- ▶ Government commits \$1.5 million per year to BC Transit to partner with local communities for local bus service throughout the week. BC Transit is offering to work with other local governments or First Nations who might wish to partner in a cost-share for similar services.
- ▶ The Northern Health Authority operates a subsidized shuttle service to provide safe transportation to individuals travelling to medical appointments outside their home communities.

▶ **SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HIGHWAY OF TEARS SYMPOSIUM REPORT**  
(Rec. 6.1 and 6.2)

Since 2012, \$350,000 has been provided to Carrier Sekani to raise awareness through a media campaign, and to develop, deliver and enhance community safety workshops along Highway 16, which include discussions about safe transportation options.

**STATUS:** *Funding has been distributed and work is underway.*

### Enhancing Support Services

▶ **CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING FOR JUSTICE SYSTEM PERSONNEL** (Rec. 4.12)

Beginning in April 2013, 540 frontline victim service workers participated in the Indigenous Cultural Competency (ICC) Core Training, which was developed by the PHSA and provided with the support of the federal government. This training opportunity increased the capacity of support workers to employ culturally sensitive approaches in their day-to-day work.

**STATUS:** *Training is complete.*

▶ **EXPANSION OF “LIVING IN COMMUNITY” MODEL** (Rec. 5.3)

One-time funding was provided to the Living in Community (LIC) Steering Committee so that it can work with and support interested municipalities in Northern BC and the Lower Mainland to adopt the LIC collaborative community engagement model. This work will include the delivery of LIC’s Curriculum for Change sex work awareness and education workshops to key front-line service providers and community members.

**STATUS:** *Funding has been distributed and work to support adoption of the model is underway.*

Since 2006, government has provided funding to support implementation of a number of the Highway of Tears Symposium Report recommendations, including:

- ▶ development of a new community coordinator position;
- ▶ hosting of Aboriginal youth forums focusing on safety and violence prevention;
- ▶ delivery of key workshops to engage youth on the risks associated with hitch-hiking; and,
- ▶ the creation of a youth safety toolkit.

The LIC model is an evidence-informed and coordinated approach to addressing challenging issues associated with sex work and sexual exploitation, including increased safety and belonging of vulnerable women.

► **SUPPORT FOR “LIVING IN COMMUNITY” PROJECTS** (Recs. 5.2)

Released in 2007, the Living in Community Action Plan includes 27 recommendations aimed at addressing the impacts of sex work on all community members. In response to priority actions identified in the Action Plan, one-time funding was distributed in March 2014 to support community-led projects and activities that address a number of the recommended actions from the Action Plan (Action 4, Action 14, Action 19, and Action 20).

**STATUS:** *Funding has been distributed and projects are underway.*

► **MORE SAFE SPACES FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN SEEKING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS.** (Rec. 6.4)

Government has purchased and completed renovations on the Astoria Hotel in Prince George, which now offers a supportive environment, cultural supports and services, and a safe place of healing for women facing a range of challenges, including mental health and substance use issues.

**STATUS:** *Work is complete.*

Grant funding was provided in 2013 to the BC Society of Transition Houses to undertake a pilot project aimed at increasing the accessibility of transition houses for Aboriginal Women by enhancing staff cultural competency.

**STATUS:** *Project is underway.*

Through the three-year Provincial Domestic Violence Plan, government has committed to working collaboratively with Aboriginal communities and partners to develop and deliver culturally responsive programs specifically for Aboriginal women, men, children and youth who have been impacted by domestic violence.

**STATUS:** *The implementation of the plan began on April 1, 2014 and work is underway. The Provincial Office of Domestic Violence will report out on this work annually.*

► **POLICY REVIEW FOR VULNERABLE WITNESSES** (Recs. 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.9)

A comprehensive policy review related to equality and vulnerable witnesses has been completed by the Criminal Justice Branch and a new policy addressing vulnerable victim and witnesses in serious cases will be implemented in December 2014. Further assessment of potential policy changes is currently underway. Strategies to strengthen prosecution business processes and promote increased collaboration are also being explored. A **progress report** regarding these strategies can be found on the public website for the Criminal Justice Branch.

**STATUS:** *Work is underway.*

On April 3, 2014, Federal Justice Minister Peter MacKay introduced Bill C-32: An Act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and to amend certain Acts. The bill creates a new Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and amends other related legislation.

Some of the rights provided to victims under the new Canadian Victim Bill of Rights include:

- the right to information, on request, about the criminal justice system and the programs and services that are available to victims of crime
- the right to information, on request, about the status of investigations and criminal proceeding
- the right to information, on request, about reviews while the offender is subject to the corrections process, or about hearings after the accused is found not criminally responsible on account of mental disorder or unfit to stand trial

# ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN *in* B.C.

In addition to implementation of the MWCI Report recommendations, government has committed to meaningful action on a number of fronts to address violence against women. This has included the development of a number of provincial plans, including the three-year *Provincial Domestic Violence Plan* and *BC's Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking*.

The *Provincial Domestic Violence Plan*, released by the Provincial Office of Domestic Violence in February 2014 was developed after completing extensive consultations with government and community anti-violence partners, including several key Aboriginal organizations. The \$5.5-million commitment to strengthen approaches to addressing domestic violence includes key areas for action, including \$2 million for direct services for Aboriginal children, youth and families, and \$1.5 million for direct services for rural and remote communities.

*BC's Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking*, released in March 2013, was informed by input received through a consultation process involving over 130 stakeholders. The Action Plan focuses on preventing and addressing trafficking of youth for sexual exploitation; vulnerable workers; and, the domestic trafficking of Aboriginal youth and women. Highlights of the actions that have been completed in the first year of the Action Plan are included in a *status report* released in July 2014.

Another important development has been the establishment of the Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women (MACAW). MACAW was formed in Fall 2011 to provide advice to government on how to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women in B.C. On June 13, 2014, Premier Christy Clark and Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Minister John Rustad signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Aboriginal Leadership, confirming their shared commitment to end violence against Aboriginal women and girls. The work of MACAW, solidified with the signing of the MOU, ties into the provincial government's wider goal to reduce violence against women.

Lastly, in early 2014, government committed to introducing a provincial strategy to prevent, respond to and rebuild from the impacts of violence against women. The Violence Free BC Strategy will act as the blueprint for addressing violence against women in the province and prioritizing action over the next decade. This strategy will build from, and be informed by, the large body of knowledge accumulated through recent research, reports and consultations on the issue of violence against women. It will also tie together initiatives that British Columbia is currently working on in the area of violence against women, setting the direction for continued action and renewed response to this important issue.

## CONCLUSION

*“Together, we can and we must, build a legacy of safety to honour the missing and murdered women who are remembered and missed.”*

– COMMISSIONER OPPAL, VOLUME III OF THE MWCI REPORT, PG. 216

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Since the release of the MWCI Report, significant action has been taken by the BC Government in partnership with many others. This includes work on national, provincial and local levels to intervene and prevent violence against vulnerable women and to examine issues related to the investigation and prosecution of cases involving the serial murder of women.

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. The MWCI Report significantly influenced the direction of the BC Policing and Community Safety Plan, which outlines actions that will be taken over the next several years to improve public safety and guide policing reform and law enforcement in our province. Learnings from the MWCI Report on what is needed to improve safety and meet the needs of women in our communities will also be integrated into the Violence Free BC Strategy – a long-term strategy currently under

development that will address violence against women in B.C.

Efforts to implement the MWCI Report recommendations have both contributed to and strengthened the Province’s overall response to the issue of violence against women in British Columbia. This work has happened alongside commitments and actions to address other key violence against women issues, including the establishment of MACAW and the development of provincial action plans. Taken together, these efforts have resulted in important changes over the past number of years to help address violence against women.

Moving forward, it is clear that work on these issues needs to be ongoing. Partnerships between all levels of government, Aboriginal communities, nongovernmental organizations, and community groups are essential to ensuring steady and meaningful progress. It is only by working together that we can take the steps necessary to collectively put an end to violence against women and ensure that a tragedy such as this never happens again.





Ministry of  
Justice