



A large, stylized silhouette of a group of people, composed of many small, colorful photographs. The photos depict various scenes: nature (forests, lakes, mountains, sunsets), people (hiking, sitting, holding hands, embracing), and close-ups (hands, faces). The overall theme is human connection and the beauty of the natural world.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Government of British Columbia acknowledges with respect and gratitude that Safe and Supported: British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan was produced on the territories of the ləkʷəŋən People, known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, and the WSÁNEĆ Peoples, represented by the WJOŁŁP (Tsartlip), BOKÉĆEN (Pauquachin), STÁUTW (Tsawout), WSIKEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEL (Malahat) Nations, whose deep connections with this land continue to this day.

The Province also acknowledges with respect that the B.C. Public Service carries out its work on the traditional lands of more than 200 First Nations across rural, remote and urban communities. The Province extends gratitude to the Indigenous Peoples, the Elders and the Knowledge Keepers, for their stewardship of these lands and waters.



Table of Contents

Resources and Support.....	2
Ministers' and Parliamentary Secretary's Message	4
Summary of Actions	6
Introduction.....	8
Building from a Solid Foundation	12
Working Together With Partners on a Way Forward	14
British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan.....	17
Increasing safety and supports for survivors	18
Lifting up Indigenous-led approaches	26
Breaking cycles of violence through prevention, healing and accountability	31
Learning from and monitoring our progress.....	35
Reflections and Next Steps	37
Appendices.....	38
Funding our work	38
Implementation Timeline	39
Terminology.....	40
References.....	43

Resources and Support

This document may contain information that is difficult or distressing. If you fear for your immediate safety, have been injured, are thinking about harming yourself or others, or if you have witnessed violence, resources are available to support you. Individuals and communities have varying experiences with some institutions, and some resources may not be appropriate or accessible to everyone.

Emergency services	Immediate assistance from police, fire or ambulance	Call 9-1-1 or local police station
VictimLinkBC	A toll-free, confidential, multilingual service offering crisis support and information for victims of family violence, sexual violence and all other crimes including referrals to over 470 local victim services and violence against women programs across the province. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	1-800-563-0808 (call or text) VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca (email) www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/victimlinkbc
Crisis Centre of BC	A toll-free service for immediate, non-judgmental support and services. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) www.crisiscentre.bc.ca
Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre	A crisis line to support survivors of gender-based violence, including sexualized violence. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	604-255-6344 (Lower Mainland) 1-877-392-7583 (Toll-free national line) www.salalsvsc.ca
Indian Residential School Survivors Society	Serving First Nations people in British Columbia with trauma-informed, emotionally and culturally appropriate health and wellness support. The society operates a 24-hour crisis line to support survivors and families across British Columbia and beyond, including access to trauma-informed cultural supports to survivors of gender-based violence.	1-800-721-0066 www.irsss.ca
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Support Line	A national, independent support line offering services in English, French, Cree, Anishnaabemowin (Ojibway) and Inuktitut. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	1-844-413-6649 (Toll-free national line) www.mmiwg-ffada.ca
Hope for Wellness Help Line	Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for Indigenous people across Canada.	1-855-242-3310 Online chat at: www.hopeforwellness.ca

Trans Lifeline	A peer support phone service run by trans people for trans and questioning peers.	1-877-330-6366 (Toll-free national line) www.translifeline.org
QMUNITY	A B.C. queer, trans and Two-Spirit resource centre that offers free counselling, support groups and referral services.	604-684-5307 www.qmunity.ca
Métis Crisis Line	Free 24-hour phone support for Métis people experiencing challenges like anxiety, grief and loss, abuse, bullying and more.	1-833-Metis-BC (1-833-638-4722)
Métis Elder Line	Toll-free phone line to provide health information and friendly conversation to Métis Elders, Monday to Friday from 8:30am-4:30pm.	1-833-For-Metis (1-833-676-3847)
Kids Help Phone	Free, confidential, 24-hour e-mental health services for young people in English and French.	1-800-668-6868 Text: 68-68-68 (24 hours per day) www.kidshelpphone.ca
Help Starts Here	Information, articles and links to over 2,500 service listings related to well-being, mental health and substance use supports.	www.helpstartshere.gov.bc.ca
Ending Violence Association of BC	Provides contact information for anti-violence services throughout B.C.	www.endingviolence.org/ services-directory
BC Society of Transition Houses	Provides contact information for transition houses and safe homes throughout B.C.	www.bcsth.ca/get-help-now
Police Victim Services of BC	Provides contact information for police-based victim services programs throughout B.C.	www.policevictimservices.bc.ca
Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline	Confidential, multilingual 24/7 service. Connects human trafficking victims and survivors with emergency, social services and law enforcement and receives tips from the public.	1-833-900-1010 www.canadianhumantrafficking hotline.ca

Ministers' and Parliamentary Secretary's Message

Everyone should feel safe. But for too long, gender-based violence has deeply harmed women, girls and gender diverse people – from intimate partner violence to online harassment to being preyed on in public spaces.

Our work must respond to the needs of Indigenous women and girls, who are most impacted by gender-based violence. We are facing a devastating crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls here in B.C. and across Canada.

Gender-based violence also disproportionately impacts other racialized women, newcomers and gender diverse people. We know that living in poverty or with a disability can further increase the risk of violence and leave people without the resources they need to be safe and supported.

Too often, these experiences are normalized, silenced and erased.

But gender-based violence is preventable, and it will take all of us rising to meet this challenge head on to raise awareness, ensure all survivors are believed and supported, and hold those who cause harm accountable for their actions. That is what Safe and Supported: British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan is all about.

With this plan, we are reporting on the vital work that is already underway and new actions – implemented in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous partners, and with advice from community service providers, advocates, survivors and their families – that will make substantial progress toward realizing a vision where every person in B.C. is free to pursue their dreams without the risk of being harmed just because of who they are.

The action plan is focused on four priorities:

1) increasing safety and supports for survivors; 2) lifting up Indigenous-led approaches; 3) breaking cycles of violence through prevention, healing and accountability; and 4) learning from and monitoring our progress. It includes a range of initiatives that make sure survivors receive critical supports when they need them the most, that communities can invest in healing and repair, and that we work together to prevent the conditions that enable and perpetuate violence and exploitation.

Some of these actions include:

- Building new transition homes and spaces to help thousands of survivors leaving violence.
- Updating consent-based prevention and awareness programs for children, youth and young adults, and creating new legislative tools to remove intimate images shared without consent.
- Boosting life-saving programs, including setting up two new 24/7 crisis lines, five new sexual assault centres and funding 70 new sexual assault programs, 22 of which are specifically for Indigenous survivors.
- Increasing and stabilizing funding for Indigenous-led programs, such as the Path Forward Community fund.
- Establishing new free virtual counselling to improve access for people from underserved communities who have experienced intimate partner violence and sexual assault.

- Mandating new provincial policing standards that make sure survivors are better supported during sexual assault investigations.
- Increasing funding for specialized community and police partnerships that support survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation and human trafficking.
- Supporting new Indigenous-led, culturally appropriate initiatives that advance prevention and healing.
- New training and protocols, including brain injury awareness, that help staff identify and respond to gender-based violence in homeless shelters and supportive housing.

We take seriously the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and our legal obligations under B.C.'s Declaration on the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. This document responds directly to action 3.8 in the Declaration Act Action Plan that requires the Province to consult and cooperate with Indigenous Peoples to develop and implement community-driven activities to end violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. The actions outlined in Safe and Supported complement and advance the B.C. Government's response and commitments laid out in A Path Forward: Priorities and Early Strategies for B.C., released in 2021.

We are grateful to everyone who engaged with this work and shared their wisdom, expertise and lived experiences. We would like to acknowledge the significant contributions of the Gender-Based Violence Action Plan Advisory Committee, the Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women, the First Nations Leadership Council, Métis Nation British Columbia and Naqsmist.



Honourable Katrine Conroy
Minister of Finance



Honourable Mike Farnworth
Minister of Public Safety and
Solicitor General



Kelli Paddon
Parliamentary Secretary
for Gender Equity

Summary of Actions

Increasing safety and supports for survivors



- **More homes for women and families leaving violence** by doubling the Women's Transition Housing Fund spaces to 3,000, with over 1,000 units complete or underway, and more to come
- **New provincial policing standards** to better support survivors during sexual assault investigations
- **70 new sexual assault programs**, 22 of which are specifically for Indigenous survivors – while **reducing waitlists and boosting resources** for existing victim services and violence against women programs
- **Five new sexual assault centres** where survivors will find compassionate, community-based care
- **New 24/7 crisis line launched by Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre** to provide immediate support and referrals for people experiencing gender-based violence
- **Getting exploitative images offline quickly** with B.C.'s new Intimate Images Protection Act
- **Increased flexibility and support for survivors** with changes to the Crime Victim Assistance Program
- **Increased cell service** in rural and Indigenous communities and along high-risk transportation corridors
- **Paid leave** for people experiencing domestic or sexual violence
- **Launch new free virtual counselling** for survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault, tailored for underserved communities
- **Make sure the locations of survivors and shelters are kept confidential** working across government and with ICBC
- **Provide better support to survivors** with new training, including brain injury awareness, to help shelter and supportive housing staff identify and respond to gender-based violence
- **Boost funding to specialized community teams** that support survivors of domestic violence, sexual exploitation and human trafficking

Lifting up Indigenous-led approaches



- **Address violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people** with continued work through A Path Forward: Priorities and Early Strategies for B.C. to respond to the recommendations from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
- **Help families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls** access information about their loved ones' cases through the B.C. Family Information Liaison Unit
- **Provide direct resources for Indigenous-led safety planning** and capacity building by boosting the Path Forward Community Fund
- **Crisis support for Indigenous people** through a new 24/7 crisis line led by the Indian Residential School Survivors Society
- **Expand community-driven healing** through programs like the Giving Voice grant program
- **Move the justice system towards more safety and responsiveness** for First Nations people impacted by gender-based violence, with cultural safety initiatives led by the First Nations Justice Council
- **Support Indigenous-led responses** to gender-based violence and alternative resolution through Indigenous Justice Centres and programs
- **Support First Nations-led cultural practices** and coming of age ceremonies to support inter-generational healing and resiliency
- **Implement new gender-based violence services for Métis people** through partnering with Métis Nation B.C.

Breaking cycles of violence through prevention, healing and accountability



- **To prevent sexualized violence at post-secondary institutions**, continue annual consent campaigns and launch a new initiative to help end sexualized violence at these institutions
- **Promote bodily autonomy and safety for students** with consent-based training for educators with updated Student Health Guides in the K-12 school system
- **Educate about bodily autonomy for young children** by relaunching 'Let's talk about touching', an inclusive child sexual abuse prevention program for children ages 3-8
- **Help men repair relationships after abuse** with an expanded Caring Dads Program
- **Support young people at a vulnerable time** by launching new online resources for youth transitioning out of government care
- **Support children and youth who've experienced abuse** with increased funding for the Sexual Abuse Intervention Program
- **Increase access to prevention education** on intimate partner violence and counselling for K-12 students experiencing violence
- **Develop new conditions for gender and cultural safety** on and around work camps, working with the Environmental Assessment Office
- **Make our province safer and more inclusive** for transgender and gender diverse people by continuing our work to combat hate and violence
- **Improve civilian oversight** for gender-based violence and harassment in policing

Learning from and monitoring our progress



Identify gaps and address barriers for racialized and newcomer communities, by leveraging the Anti-Racism Data Act to expand culturally inclusive supports

Bring together providers and experts to support the implementation of the Gender-Based Violence Action Plan, and expand their mandate to help us monitor and evaluate actions

To strengthen prevention and survivor supports, research and evaluate programs as they are rolled out, and improve data collection and reporting on gender-based violence

Introduction

Gender-based violence is pervasive – and it must end.

The Province is already taking important steps to support survivors and break the cycles of violence. Through transformational provincial investments in transition housing, we are expanding safe, short-term housing and supports for women and their dependent children leaving violence – building spaces where thousands of survivors can begin to rebuild their lives. We are increasing access to sexual assault services across the province with new, stable funding that supports a range of critical services including new sexual assault centres and 24/7 crisis lines. We have established new policing standards for sexual assault investigations that will respect and support the diverse needs of survivors and ensure more effective investigations. And we are implementing new legislation that will help prevent the sharing of intimate images without consent.

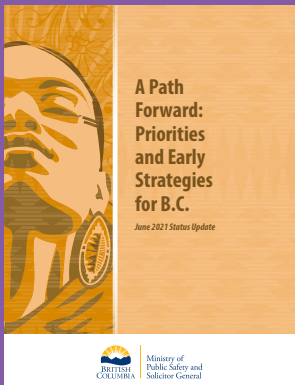
But more action is needed. Guided by the plan's four priorities, and in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous partners and with expertise and advice from community service providers and advocates, this 3-year action plan builds on current work and responds to what partners and advocates have told us is urgently needed to prevent and address gender-based violence.

Safe and Supported is a living document that will guide and coordinate new action across government year by year, in a way that prioritizes continuous learning and close monitoring to make sure that survivors are getting the safety and support they need.



RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS OF MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN, GIRLS AND 2SLGBTQIA+ PEOPLE

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples are more likely to have experienced violence than non-Indigenous people in Canada. This violence and victimization are linked to past and present colonial policies, including the residential school system, the Sixties Scoop, marginalization and institutional racism, which have disrupted community and family structures and caused intergenerational trauma. Government institutions have created and continue to maintain harmful systems and practices, and must take responsibility for dismantling the colonial and racist structures that continue to disenfranchise and harm Indigenous people.



In 2021, the Province issued A Path Forward: Early Priorities and Strategies for B.C. in response to the sacred work of Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Developed in collaboration with Indigenous survivors, their families and other Indigenous partners, A Path Forward outlines key actions B.C. is taking in

response to the National Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice. The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General releases status reports annually in June to report on the progress of provincial actions.

Safe and Supported: British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan is not intended to replace work taking place under A Path Forward. Instead, this action plan will strengthen collaboration across government, and complement and further advance some key actions identified in A Path Forward, including core funding for sexual assault services, establishing new provincial policing standards for responding to sexual assaults, and providing further investments in the Path Forward Community Fund and other Indigenous-led initiatives that support safety planning, capacity building and culturally safe approaches and solutions to gender-based violence. Safe and Supported provides an additional framework for the Province to consult and cooperate with Indigenous peoples throughout the life of the plan on ways we can further support First Nations, Métis and Inuit people to build capacity and develop and implement responses to gender-based violence that centre Indigenous knowledge, priorities and cultural practices, in keeping with the Province's obligations under the Declaration Act.

Troubling growth of hate-related and violent incidents

The B.C. Government has focused on building a safer, more inclusive and equitable province. We have taken significant action to break down barriers and create new opportunities for women and gender diverse people to reach their full potential.

But we have also seen a rise in hate and violence directed at people based on their identities, including their gender, perceived gender or gender expression. This is particularly true for women, girls and gender diverse people with intersectional identities – people who face discrimination and inequity because of multiple factors like Indigeneity, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, income or criminalization – who are at greater risk of being targeted with violence.

The B.C. Human Rights Commissioner's inquiry into hate during the COVID-19 pandemic, *From Hate to Hope*, documented a dramatic rise in the frequency and severity of gender-based violence during the pandemic, partly because public health measures designed to stop the spread also increased social isolation and limited access to personal and community supports, increasing the risk of violence and making it harder for survivors to seek help. The Commissioner also drew a connection between gender-based violence and hate, noting evidence of increases in online hate in the form of sexual harassment, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia.

MEETING NEW CHALLENGES: COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND OTHER PROVINCIAL EMERGENCIES

In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations referred to increases in gender-based violence as a 'shadow pandemic.'

Public health restrictions designed to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus made it harder for people to access services, particularly for those living in rural and remote areas. Financial uncertainty and lack of child care also made it more difficult for women with children to leave violent relationships.

Research on intimate partner violence during and after natural disasters indicates women and girls remain at heightened risk of violence in the aftermath of natural disasters.¹ As B.C. is increasingly exposed to the effects of climate change, such as wildfires and flooding, we must reflect on and learn from the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is Gender-Based Violence?

Gender-based violence can be verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial, online – or a combination of any of these – and includes violence committed by a spouse or intimate partner, family members, acquaintances or strangers. This is a complex social issue rooted in patriarchal political, social and economic systems, meaning that many parts of daily life are subject to male dominance and control. Existing institutions, laws, policies and social norms can perpetuate gender-based violence and sustain gender inequity and other inequalities that contribute to the challenges facing survivors – due to the harmful legacies of systemic racism, colonialism, toxic masculinity, homophobia and transphobia.

More women and girls are killed each year in Canada due to intimate partner violence. And with global inflation increasing costs, from groceries to housing, it can be even harder for survivors to leave a violent situation and build a new life if they need to.

Although gender-based violence does affect men and boys, it is women, girls and gender diverse people who are disproportionately targeted – Indigenous women are four times more likely to experience gender-based violence – and the perpetrators are most often men.^{2,3}

Indigenous women are 1.5 times more likely than non-Indigenous women to experience physical or sexual assault in their lifetime.

Gender-based violence is verbal

It can be jokes, rumours, threats or slander – encouraging violence or hate. Verbal violence aims to humiliate, dehumanize and make people scared.



Building from a Solid Foundation

From the beginning, our government has made gender equity foundational to everything we do. As we continue to work on the issues that matter most to people in B.C. – the cost of living, the housing crisis, our healthcare system, poverty reduction, reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, community safety and climate change – we are focused on increasing safety, security and well-being for women, girls and gender diverse people, and ending the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

People who experience gender-based violence need to know they have options. Access to safe and affordable necessities like child care, housing, income support and the ability to stay connected with family and friends while travelling in isolated areas, can be a deciding factor for women and gender diverse people leaving violent situations.



Our foundational actions include:

- Through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, implementing the Declaration Act Action Plan. The following priorities in the Declaration Act Action Plan are being advanced through Safe and Supported in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples: supporting community-driven activities to end gender-based violence (action 3.8), implementing police reforms such as updating policing standards and enhancing independent oversight (action 3.11), prioritizing implementation of the First Nations Justice Strategy (action 3.12), and increasing availability and accessibility of culturally safe and trauma-informed Indigenous-led and community-based social services and supports for those who are in crisis, at-risk or have experienced violence, trauma and/or significant loss (action 4.11).
- Through ChildCareBC, delivering on our commitment to expand \$10-a-day child care and increasing access to affordable, high-quality and inclusive child care, with over 32,000 new spaces funded since 2018. Knowing their children are cared for can help survivors rejoin the workforce and become more financially independent, reducing their reliance on an abusive partner.
- Introducing our new housing plan, Homes for People, and investing \$1.2 billion over the next 10 years, part of which will go toward doubling the number of Women's Transition Housing Fund spaces to 3,000. When in crisis, the most critical lifeline for survivors is a place to land that is safe, affordable and stable. To date, over 1,000 units are complete or underway, giving women and their children a safe space to rebuild their lives.
- Developing B.C.'s first poverty reduction strategy in 2019, TogetherBC, which outlines a comprehensive cross-government approach to achieving B.C.'s legislated targets of reducing the poverty rate by 25% and the child poverty rate by 50% by 2024.
- Allocating \$90 million (including \$75 million in Budget 2023) to expand cellular service to make travel safer on more than 1,000 kilometres of highway through rural and remote communities in B.C. This includes completing continuous cellular service along Highway 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert, known as the Highway of Tears. These vital investments will make it safer for people to travel on isolated routes and keep in touch with their support networks.
- Legislating five days of paid leave for employees impacted by domestic or sexual violence or for parents or guardians of a child or dependent adult impacted by this type of violence.
- Joining together with Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women across Canada to endorse a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. Federal funding under this national plan will build on provincial investments in British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan to address the needs of diverse communities and people.

Working Together With Partners on a Way Forward

Safe and Supported: British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan was developed in dialogue with Indigenous partners, survivors, service providers and advocates. We heard their voices and perspectives and have built their priorities into this plan. They told us that we need to take bold action in many areas across the provincial government, as well as improve support for Indigenous and community-led initiatives and pay close attention to how various initiatives complement and reinforce each other.

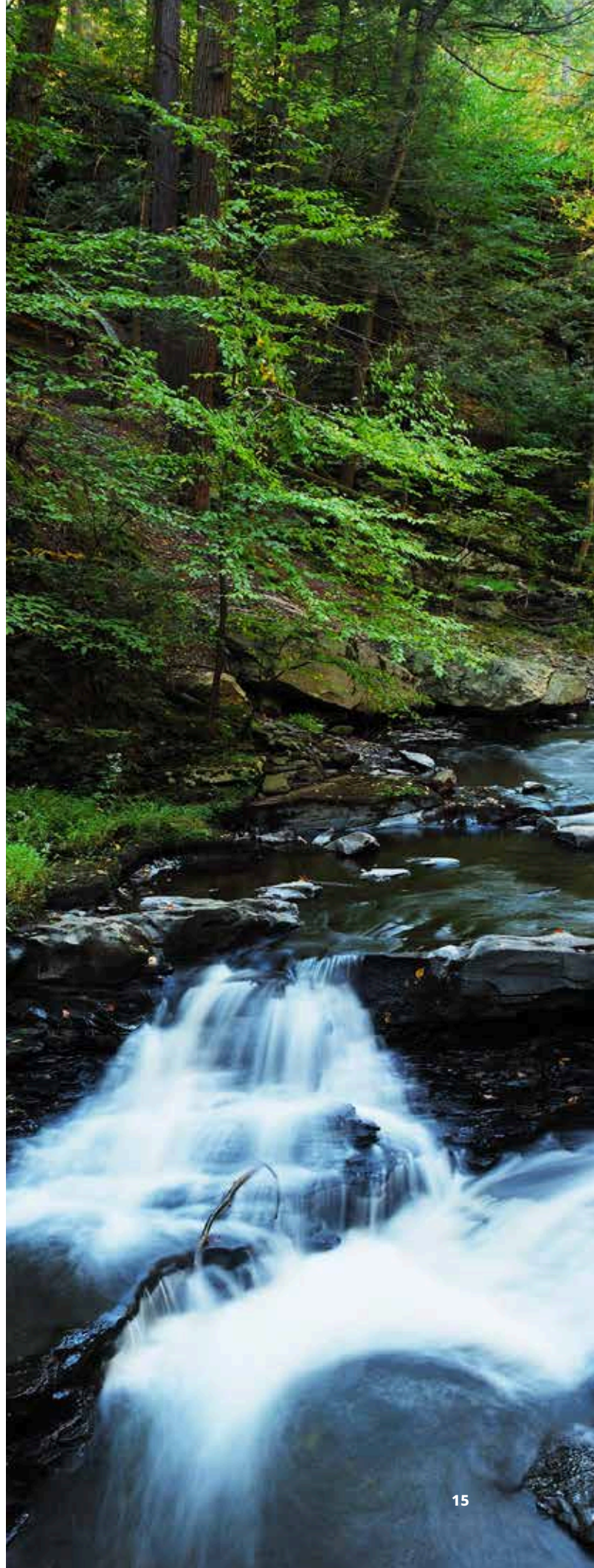
The key themes identified during engagement were:

- **Eliminating the root causes of violence.** The root causes of gender-based violence – colonialism, misogyny, patriarchy, racism, homophobia, transphobia, poverty and systemic discrimination – must be acknowledged and addressed to make progress on preventing and addressing gender-based violence. These systems of inequity and discrimination place equity-deserving groups at higher risk of being targeted with gender-based violence and create barriers to accessing health, justice and social services. Making sure everyone in B.C. has equitable access to housing, child care, employment, transportation, physical and mental health care, and reliable cellular and internet service creates safety and stability in people's lives. Access to these necessities can increase choices for people experiencing violence or at risk of violence so they can plan for their safety.
- **Recognizing Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination.** Past and present colonial approaches, marginalization and racism in institutions like policing, justice, child welfare, education, health care and other public agencies have caused intergenerational trauma and disproportionate violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. Supports and services designed by non-Indigenous people are inadequate and do not meet Indigenous peoples' needs and priorities. Recognizing and supporting Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination means putting resources in the hands of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people to determine how best to move forward on preventing and addressing gender-based violence in their communities in ways that build on Indigenous strength.
- **Preventing gender-based violence through education and awareness.** Early education can protect children and youth from experiencing gender-based violence, influence long-term changes in attitudes and disrupt violent behaviour. Children and youth – of all genders, ages and backgrounds – benefit by learning about consent, body sovereignty, healthy relationships and boundaries.
- **Supports for survivors.** Gender-based violence is traumatic and can disrupt a person's life. Survivors need to know they are not alone and have support to rebuild their lives. And they need to be able to access safe, timely and culturally appropriate services to begin the process of recovery.

- **Healing and accountability for people who use violence.** While perpetrators of gender-based violence are most often men, the distinction between people who use violence and people who have survived violence is not always clear cut. Perpetrators may also be survivors themselves. That is why we need services and supports that incorporate principles of healing and accountability and recognize the impacts of intergenerational trauma and cycles of violence.
- **Improving access to justice.** Access to justice means different things to different people. Many survivors and their families face significant barriers and discrimination when trying to access B.C.'s legal and justice systems. This results in a lack of trust in and access to the justice system and points to the need to address social, cultural, economic and geographic barriers in criminal, civil and family law.
- **Collaboration and coordination.** Creating a province free of gender-based violence requires effort from everyone across governments, sectors and communities. And it means building an inclusive and integrated system that supports people first and foremost.

Gender-based violence is **physical**

It can be pushing, kicking, strangling or other force and can result in injuries and health problems.



ENGAGEMENT INFORMING SAFE AND SUPPORTED

March – April 2022: Provincial roundtables held with partners, advocates and service providers
148 participants shared feedback in five topic-specific roundtables

June 2022: Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity establishes Gender-Based Violence Action Plan Advisory Committee

Members represent the breadth of the anti-violence sector, including:

- Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres
- Battered Women's Support Services
- B.C. Federation of Labour
- B.C. First Nations Justice Council
- B.C. Society of Transition Houses
- Ending Violence Association of B.C.
- Inclusion B.C.
- Living in Community
- Men's Therapy Centre
- Métis Nation B.C.
- Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women
- Northern Society of Domestic Peace
- PACE Society
- Police Victim Services of B.C.
- Qmunity
- Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre
- Simon Fraser University's Sexual Violence Support & Prevention Office
- Students for Consent Culture
- West Coast LEAF
- 411 Seniors Centre Society

May – June 2023: Naqsmist, an Indigenous-led consulting company, hosts engagement sessions
148 participants from First Nations, Inuit, and urban and rural, on- and off-reserve communities

May 2023: Métis Nation B.C. (MNBC) hosts a separate engagement with Métis women
19 Métis women from across B.C. share perspectives and ideas

British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan

Survivors and their families, Indigenous partners, community-based service providers and many others are calling for transformational change in British Columbia. This action plan sets out four priorities that respond to the feedback we heard during engagement and details the areas we will focus on over the next three years.

The action plan reflects the urgency with which we are acting to prevent and address gender-based violence in British Columbia. Recent actions detailed in the next sections have been announced or are underway now, and future actions will be implemented within the first year of this three-year plan.

We know that more work will need to be done. That's why we're expanding the mandate of the Gender-Based Violence Action Plan Advisory Committee to provide guidance and feedback moving forward. Based on the advice of Indigenous partners and the Advisory Committee, and funding availability, we will identify further actions to be taken in the second and third years of this plan that align with the plan's four priorities. Much of this work will focus on meeting the specific needs of equity-deserving groups, such as Indigenous and other racialized people, transgender and gender diverse people, seniors, immigrants and newcomers, persons with disabilities, people living in rural and remote communities and sex workers, and coordinating and advancing systemic change across government.





Increasing safety and supports for survivors

British Columbia has an extensive network of services and supports for survivors. But we heard that it can still be difficult to find information or access help where and when survivors need it, and in ways that meet their individual needs. Many survivors continue to experience waitlists, as well as barriers and stigma because of their race, gender identity, language abilities, where they live or because of a disability, including brain injury.

RECENT ACTIONS

STABLE FUNDING FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Sexual assault profoundly impacts a survivor's life. Survivors need to know they will be believed and treated with respect, dignity and compassion. Locally relevant and culturally appropriate support close to home can prevent further trauma and harm.

Stable new funding of \$10 million annually is supporting expanded sexual assault services in communities across B.C. This includes 70 local sexual assault programs launched in 2023, including 22 programs designed specifically for Indigenous survivors, and new funding for five sexual assault centres in Victoria, Prince George, Surrey, Vancouver and Kamloops. These centres will deliver coordinated, community-based services that meet survivors' diverse needs. For example, some survivors may not feel comfortable going to the hospital or a police station for forensic exams and interviews. These community spaces

will offer integrated, compassionate care designed specifically around survivors' comfort and safety.

In total, this government now provides over \$54 million annually in stable funding for services and programs for victims of crime, including more than 470 victim services, violence against women and sexual assault programs operating in communities across B.C.

Launched in May 2023, a new partnership between the B.C. government and the federal government is increasing survivors' access to two new crisis lines. These crisis lines, operated by Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre and the Indian Residential School Survivors Society, now provide 24-hour provincewide, comprehensive, specialized gender-based violence support, including culturally appropriate risk assessment and immediate safety planning.

WOMEN'S TRANSITION HOUSING FUND

The Women's Transition Housing Fund was created in 2018 as a \$734-million investment over 10 years to build and operate 1,500 transition housing, second-stage housing and long-term housing spaces for women and children leaving violence. As part of the Province's new housing plan, Homes for People, the government is investing a further \$1.2 billion over the next 10 years to double

the number of Women's Transition Housing Fund spaces, bringing the total to 3,000. As of September 30, 2023, nearly 379 units are complete and 624 units are underway, giving women and their children a place to regroup and rebuild their lives. Most of the projects under development are expected to be completed within the next two years.



UPDATING LEGISLATION TO BETTER SUPPORT SURVIVORS

As part of British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan, we are working to modernize legislation and improve services and supports for survivors. This includes work that is underway to modernize the Family Law Act and recently introduced amendments to the Crime Victim Assistance Act. These amendments will remove eligibility barriers to the Crime Victim Assistance Program and enable government to address other issues, such as addressing the gap between the cost of services and the benefit rates available through the program.

These steps are a critical component to strengthening the existing network of victim services in B.C., providing benefits to victims, immediate family members and certain witnesses as they cope with and recover from the effects of violent crime. These benefits address a range of needs, including financial support, medical treatment, counselling services and protective measures for victims in high-risk situations.

The Crime Victim Assistance Program primarily serves survivors of gender-based violence. Between 2019 and 2020, 75% of applicants were women and girls. The average applicant is female, between the ages of 20 and 34, and the victim of assault (often intimate partner violence) or sexual assault.

Since the program began in 2002, demand has grown and applicants' needs have evolved. We've heard from participants and partners across the anti-violence sector about the need for services and benefits that are trauma- and violence-informed and culturally appropriate. We are working to identify additional service-level improvements that will further embed trauma-informed practices and streamline administrative processes.

The effects of intimate partner violence may also compromise the safety of a workplace. Through the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, WorkSafeBC has established a legal obligation for employers to address violence in the workplace that puts employees at risk. This means employers must take the necessary steps to keep workers safe from the risks of gender-based violence while they are at work.

As well, amendments made in 2020 to the Employment Standards Act give employees affected by domestic or sexual violence access to up to five days of paid leave and five days of unpaid leave per calendar year. If necessary, an employee can also take up to 15 more weeks of unpaid leave. This leave gives people time to seek medical attention, counselling and other supports, get legal advice or find new housing. The leave also applies to parents or guardians of a child or of a dependent adult affected by this kind of violence. This is an important change in the law to help people who experience domestic or sexual violence take the time they need to receive care and support.

Gender-based violence is **sexual**

Sexual violence includes any type of sexual activity without consent. It includes unwanted touching, sharing of intimate images or forced sexual contact.

PROTECTIONS AGAINST SHARING INTIMATE IMAGES

No one should face the devastating impacts of intimate images being shared without their consent, or being threatened with this. Perpetrators share these types of images to control, coerce and exploit their victims. The effects of having intimate images shared without consent are wide-ranging and long-lasting. We want people to know they are not alone and have options to take back control of their lives.

In March 2023, this government passed the new Intimate Images Protection Act. Beginning in early 2024, this law will help people who have had their intimate images shared without their consent get the images removed from the internet more quickly. This will also give people a more effective way to seek monetary damages.

To support this legislation, the Civil Resolution Tribunal is expanding its website information and will provide people with information about their rights and access to immediate self-help tools. It will also provide a fast-track process to get a legal decision that an intimate image was recorded or distributed without consent, and order people or online and social media platforms to stop distributing or threatening to distribute intimate images. A new specialized unit will provide direct support to victims, as well as referrals and assistance in implementing the Civil Resolution Tribunal's orders.

CENTRING SURVIVORS' NEEDS IN JUSTICE AND POLICING SYSTEMS

Some survivors of crimes, including gender-based violence, still face barriers in accessing legal services. Having a low income shouldn't prevent someone from getting legal information, advice or representation.

To help make sure more people can access legal services in B.C., provincial and federal funding for Legal Aid B.C. has increased by over \$53 million in the past seven years. Our government also funds a network of eight legal clinics, which are administered by the Law Foundation. This includes allocating federal funding for a new pilot program called Stand Informed that was launched by the Community Legal Assistance Society in October 2023. This program offers up to three hours of free, confidential legal advice to anyone who has experienced sexual assault in B.C., regardless of age, gender, income or whether they have reported the assault to the police, and can support people in a variety of languages. The pilot program is available to support people even if they are uncertain if what they experienced is sexual assault.

Survivors who report a sexual assault to the police must be empowered to exercise their rights, including their right to privacy, security and information about their case. New policing standards introduced in July 2023 emphasize coordination with local health and other community-based services to support victims throughout investigations. These new standards will apply to all B.C. police officers and are victim-centred, trauma-informed, inclusive and culturally safe to better shield victims from further harm and traumatization. The new standards will also require closed cases to be reviewed to improve training and future investigations.

MEETING THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE AVENUES

Not all survivors feel safe getting help from police or going to court. For some, access to justice may mean going through an alternative justice process with a perpetrator or using different ways to disclose or report their experiences, such as reporting information about a sexual assault to police through a trained community-based victim service agency.

Most survivors of gender-based violence do not report to police. Self-reported data from the 2019 General Social Survey on victimization indicates that only about 6% of sexual assaults in Canada are reported to police.⁴ Seventy per cent of spousal violence victims indicate they never involved police.⁵

It is essential that survivors know they have options for alternatives to the criminal justice system and policing systems.

The Province has invested in ten additional Indigenous Justice Centres to be opened by 2024-25, delivering community justice programs that will help meet this need by providing culturally appropriate information, advice, supports and representation for Indigenous Peoples involved in the justice system, both for criminal and child protection matters. These centres aim to address the circumstances that may have led to the offences in the first place, and ensure that needs, such as housing, mental health and addictions treatment and employment services are addressed. They also offer people assistance with creating personalized restorative justice plans. Budget 2023 includes funding of \$44 million to expand these services to 15 locations and one virtual centre.

Bad date reporting systems provide an alternative avenue for sex workers to report negative incidents or violent clients and to keep other sex workers safe. That's why the Province has provided funding for a provincially integrated B.C. Bad Date and Aggressor Reporting system. This system will be a tool for sex workers to anonymously share reports about bad dates with each other across B.C.



PROTECTING SURVIVORS IN HOUSING, HEALTH CARE AND AT WORK

Protecting survivors' location and contact information is critical to their safety. This also means protecting the location of transition and second stage housing for people leaving violence. Vehicle licensing and insurance documents require the vehicle owner's address to match where they are living. If a survivor's insurance documents do not have an updated address, the survivor could risk having an insurance claim denied and be unable to renew their insurance. On the other hand, including a confidential location of a transition home on vehicle insurance documents could expose the home's location and risk the safety and security of survivors and staff who are living or working there. We are working across government, and in partnership with Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, to identify and implement short-term actions and longer-term solutions that will help keep survivors' locations and shelter and transition house locations confidential.

We are working with health sector partners to improve access to appropriate, culturally safe and trauma-informed sexual assault forensic

examinations in hospital emergency departments. We are also reviewing sexual assault care within our health care system with the goal of identifying opportunities to improve delivery and coordination of care for survivors of sexual assault.

To protect people at their jobs, WorkSafeBC is updating the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, policies and guidelines with a single definition of harassment and violence. This will include harassment and violence that is based on protected grounds of discrimination, including sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression, and make it easier for workers to understand their rights.

PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking and gender-based violence are closely connected. Women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people who are Indigenous are at higher risk of human trafficking, as are survivors of gender-based violence. B.C. is collaborating with other governments and police to address and prevent human trafficking. At the community level, we also support prevention and awareness initiatives and organizations that support survivors.

FUTURE ACTIONS

EXPANDING ACCESS TO COUNSELLING WITH VIRTUAL SERVICES

We need to make it easier for survivors to access counselling where and when they feel ready. Each survivor's circumstances are different, and many face barriers in accessing in-person counselling, or prefer the flexibility and safety afforded by virtual counselling services.

In 2021, the rate of police-reported violent crimes perpetrated by an intimate partner in rural areas was nearly twice the rate of these crimes in urban areas.⁶

That is why we are introducing new virtual counselling for survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. These services will prioritize survivors who are Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+, living with a disability or who face other barriers in accessing supports when they need it most. Offering supports virtually will also help reach survivors who live in rural and remote parts of B.C.

STABILIZING COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SPECIALIZED TEAMS

Domestic violence units and the counter exploitation unit are specialized teams that can help break the cycle of family violence, keep kids safe and support survivors of intimate partner violence. We are providing funding to support some units to ensure these vital partnerships continue.

Domestic violence units are dedicated teams involving community-based victim service workers, child protection workers and police officers focused on coordinated responses when the risk of violence is high. These units aim to increase safety, prevent future violence and enhance accountability.


The counter exploitation unit is a partnership between victim service workers and detectives to

support victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking through the investigation process and the criminal justice system. Victim service workers help people navigate the criminal justice system, support their mental and emotional well-being and collaborate with detectives on safety planning.

Other victim services and violence against women programs, like the Stopping the Violence Counselling program, community-based and police-based victim services, outreach services, and the Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment (PEACE) program, also provide crucial supports for survivors, including assistance in French and other languages for people who do not speak English as their first language. But long waitlists for some programs mean survivors can't access vital supports when they need it. Under this action plan, we are boosting funding to help service providers reduce waitlists and respond to pressures unique to their programs, enabling more access to services.

IMPROVING RESPONSE IN SHELTERS, SUPPORTIVE HOUSING AND TRANSITION HOUSING

Some survivors seek safety at shelters, supportive housing or transition housing. These spaces can offer survivors support while they determine their next steps, but a lack of resources has made it difficult for some service providers to adequately meet survivors' needs. We are changing this by updating existing supportive housing and transition housing protocols to reflect best practices and supporting umbrella organizations such as the Homelessness Services Association of B.C. and the B.C. Society of Transition Houses to create training and protocols. These resources will help housing staff know how to identify instances of gender-based violence and how to support survivors when they come forward, including survivors who may have experienced a brain injury as a result of the violence.



Women who experience intimate partner violence are at high risk of suffering a brain injury. Research indicates up to 92% of women survivors experience signs and symptoms of traumatic brain injury. Compared to sports concussions, for every NHL player who acquires a brain injury, approximately 5,500 women in Canada suffer from the same injury.⁷



Lifting up Indigenous-led approaches

The Province is committed to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and to upholding its legal obligations under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. We acknowledge that the Province still has significant work to do to fully respond to the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, address this ongoing crisis and make meaningful progress toward reconciliation.

Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and other gender diverse people are still significantly more likely to experience gender-based violence than non-Indigenous people.

More than one-quarter of Indigenous women (26%) experienced sexual violence by an adult during their childhood, compared with 9.2% of non-Indigenous women, 5.8% of Indigenous men and 2.8% of non-Indigenous men.⁸

Gender-based violence is **emotional**

Psychological violence causes emotional harm – it could mean controlling or restricting someone’s movements, intimidating them or excluding them from family and friends.

Provincial institutions must take responsibility for transforming harmful colonial and racist systems, approaches and processes. This includes continuing to advance systemic change initiatives within health, education, child welfare, justice and policing, and shifting decision-making to First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban as well as rural or remote Indigenous communities. We are guided by the principle of respectful collaboration and recognize that preventing and addressing gender-based violence requires respect for Indigenous values, laws, beliefs, knowledge systems and cultural practices.

While the actions under all four priority areas in this plan will be culturally responsive to the distinct needs and priorities of Indigenous Peoples and improve outcomes for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, this priority of ‘Lifting up Indigenous Approaches’ responds directly to advice and recommendations from Indigenous partners to support new Indigenous-led initiatives. Through this priority, we firmly commit to supporting Indigenous self-determination by putting resources in the hands of First Nations and Indigenous communities and organizations to determine their own priorities in a way that best meets the needs of Indigenous people.

Recognizing and supporting Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination means putting resources in the hands of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people to determine how best to move forward on preventing and addressing gender-based violence in their communities in ways that build on Indigenous strength.

DISTINCTIONS-BASED APPROACHES

Under B.C.'s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, the Province must consider the rights and diversity of Indigenous Peoples in the province, including the distinct languages, cultures, customs, practices, rights, legal traditions, institutions, governance structures, relationships to territories and knowledge systems. This distinctions-based approach was upheld throughout the development of this plan, including through Indigenous-led engagement, priority-setting and implementation. This approach respects that there are over 200 individual First Nations, as well as urban off-reserve Indigenous Peoples, rural and remote off-reserve

Indigenous Peoples, Métis people and Inuit living in the province of B.C. This approach is also consistent with the principles of supporting Indigenous-led solutions and centering the experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, as set out in Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the 231 Calls for Justice, and in Thanks for Listening: Witnessing Métis Women and Girls Experiences of Violence and Pathways to Healing.



RECENT ACTIONS

THE PATH FORWARD COMMUNITY FUND

A Path Forward: Priorities and Early Strategies for B.C. sets out the Province's response to Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and its 231 Calls for Justice. A Path Forward was developed through engagements with Indigenous survivors, their families and other Indigenous partners, and outlines the Province's actions and commitments to prevent, protect and respond to violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Establishing the Path Forward Community Fund responds to the number one priority identified through Indigenous community engagements in 2019 and 2021: capacity building and safety planning for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Since 2022, this government has invested more than \$10.8 million in this fund, which is operated by the B.C. Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres. These funds are accessible each year to First Nations communities, urban/off reserve communities, Métis, Inuit and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES OF MISSING OR MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

In collaboration with the federal government, the B.C. Family Information Liaison Unit helps families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls access information about their loved ones' cases in a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive way. These units also connect families with services and supports to promote healing, including local victim services, cultural supports and grief counselling.

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS-LED INITIATIVES

We are expanding partnerships with Indigenous leaders and organizations that are working to protect Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people from violence. Their leadership is enabling more Indigenous people to reconnect with Indigenous ways of knowing and healing that have been disrupted by colonialism.

For example, the Huu-ay-aht First Nations is leading development of the Oomiiqsu (Aboriginal Mother Centre) with provincial support. This will provide a safe and culturally appropriate home for as many as 48 mothers and children leaving violence or abuse, or facing mental health and addictions challenges, poverty or other trauma.

The B.C. Government also continues to promote change and awareness within its systems by supporting employees to participate in the Moose Hide Campaign, a nationwide initiative of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who share a commitment to moving forward on lasting reconciliation and creating a safer world for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

And since 2017, we have provided \$1.3 million in funding for the Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women to deliver grants in support of community-led initiatives that encourage dialogue about gender-based violence and opportunities for healing.

FUTURE ACTIONS

Through Safe and Supported: British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan, the Province will continue to support Indigenous-led approaches that centre Indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, justice systems and structures, and support Indigenous-led healing and well-being for survivors and their families.

INCREASING FUNDING FOR INDIGENOUS-LED APPROACHES

This government will invest further in the Path Forward Community Fund to support First Nations governments, communities and Indigenous

organizations to advance their important work to develop culturally safe approaches to addressing violence. This additional funding will support capacity building, planning and implementation so resources reach those most in need.

We will also continue to support healing through community-based projects led by Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender diverse people, including the Giving Voice project administered by the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation on behalf of the Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women.

INDIGENOUS SELF-DETERMINATION AND 'COMING-OF-AGE'

Engagement sessions facilitated separately by Naqsmist and Métis Nation B.C. in spring 2023 reached Indigenous participants from diverse communities, cultures, regions and experiences. While participants shared many different perspectives, several common themes emerged.

Participants at the Naqsmist-led engagements urged government to support self-determination by putting resources in the hands of First Nations communities and Indigenous organizations to determine their own priorities in a way that best meets their needs. Participants also emphasized the importance of approaches that are distinctions-based and led by communities.

A key theme was how cultural ceremony can be fundamental to individual, family and community

healing. Indigenous participants shared their experiences of feeling disconnected and unsupported during transitions to adulthood without coming-of-age and rites of passage ceremonies. Reconnecting with culture through ceremony is a way to foster belonging, identity and connection – essential elements of healing and empowerment within Indigenous communities that can help break the cycle of violence.

No single solution will work for every Indigenous community, organization or individual. For example, participants at Métis Nation B.C.'s engagements shared that responses led by and for Métis women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people are critical to Métis self-determination and preventing and addressing gender-based violence.



Part of B.C.'s commitment to reconciliation involves putting in place funding and other supports for Indigenous people to pass their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge to future generations.

One way we will meet this commitment is by collaborating with First Nations communities and organizations who wish to develop new initiatives

Gender-based violence is **financial**

It can mean controlling someone's assets or income, denying education or making someone unfit for work through abuse.

focused on cultural practices and coming-of-age ceremonies to help rebuild connections to community, culture and Indigenous ways of knowing, and help reduce the risk of violence.

Affirming First Nations self-determination and enabling the restoration of traditional justice systems is essential to addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples impacted by the justice system. New funding will stabilize the position of Provincial Director for Women and Children at the First Nations Justice Council and support development and delivery of cultural safety training as part of the First Nations Justice Strategy. By continuing to work with the First Nations Justice Council to implement the First Nations Justice Strategy, we will make the justice system safer and more responsive for survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence.

Under Métis Nation B.C.'s leadership, we will also support the development of new gender-based violence programming specific to the experiences of Métis women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.



Breaking cycles of violence through prevention, healing and accountability

Children and youth who witness violence between family members or who are sexually or physically abused themselves are at significantly greater risk of experiencing violence in adulthood. They are also more likely to use violence against others during adulthood.

Prevention is about education and awareness, but it is also about healing and accountability for those who use violence. This is what breaking the cycle is all about, and why Safe and Supported also prioritizes both education and resources for young people and support for men who use violence. These proven methods of changing harmful attitudes and behaviours can disrupt cycles of abuse.

RECENT ACTIONS

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

The responsibility to support children and youth learning about healthy relationships belongs to everyone – at child care centres, in elementary and secondary schools, in families and in community or recreational settings. We need to work together to support children and youth in learning about healthy relationships, consent, body sovereignty and boundaries, and how to interact with others when they feel emotions like anger, frustration or rejection.

As part of the Canada-British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, this government supported Early Childhood Educators of B.C. to update and relaunch Let's Talk About Touching, an inclusive child sexual abuse prevention program developed entirely in B.C. for children aged 3 to 8 years old. Updates reflect current educational practice, are more responsive to the needs of a diverse population of children and their families, and are designed for use in both early childhood programs and in kindergarten to Grade 3. This newly released course has also been piloted in collaboration with multiple Indigenous communities across B.C.

Working with kindergarten-to-Grade 12 teachers, we also produced a Supporting Student Health Guide

that gives educators a starting point for discussing health, including consent in various contexts. Schools are also using Respectful Futures, a learning resource developed by B.C. Corrections and Stroh Health Care as a relationship violence prevention tool for youth ages 12 to 18 years old.

INVESTING IN SAFER POST-SECONDARY COMMUNITIES

Sexualized violence at post-secondary institutions is a serious issue. Since 2018, this government has invested \$2.2 million towards preventing and addressing sexualized violence in post-secondary communities. This has included training and resource development, supporting sexualized violence reporting systems, and a sexualized violence awareness campaign.

To help educate students about their rights and responsibilities, the Province has run several sexualized violence awareness campaigns to convey messages about consent, assault and a zero-tolerance approach toward all forms of sexualized violence at post-secondary institutions. Government is exploring opportunities to improve future awareness campaigns based on feedback from the sector and subject matter experts.



SUPPORT FOR TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE

We release this action plan at a time when there is a concerning rise in hate, threats and violence against transgender and gender diverse people in B.C. and around the world. This rise in hate is directed at a community that already faces disproportionate levels of gender-based violence in their daily lives. Although data specific to B.C. is limited, evidence suggests that transgender and gender diverse individuals are 1.5 to 2.5 times more likely to experience multiple forms of sexual, physical and generalized violence compared to cisgender people. Indigenous and other racialized community members are especially impacted.

Through this plan, we will continue working to make our province safer and more inclusive for transgender and gender diverse people. We will:

- Continue to support education that promotes safe, caring and inclusive schools, to ensure young people learn to value diversity and to treat everyone with respect and dignity, so that every student feels like they belong.
- Ensure that the Provincial Health Services Authority and Trans Care B.C. continue to provide gender-affirming care and address gaps experienced by transgender and non-binary people in health care settings.
- Through the new anti-hate community support fund, support 2SLGBTQIA+ community organizations to enhance security measures and help with the costs of graffiti removal and repairs to damaged property when hate-motivated vandalism is inflicted on the community.
- Gather data and engage with transgender and gender diverse people on further measures we can take to reduce the unique forms of gender-based violence these communities experience and improve supports for survivors.

FUTURE ACTIONS

STABILIZING PROGRAMS SO PEOPLE CAN ACCESS SERVICES FASTER

Survivors and community partners have told us that the Sexual Abuse Intervention Program is effective in supporting children and youth who have experienced abuse. This program is important and valued in community, requiring renewed investment so that service providers can focus on helping children and youth with their healing.

We also know that children and youth benefit from learning about healthy relationships, boundaries and regulating emotions. That is why we will invest in the Violence is Preventable Program, which brings Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment program counsellors to schools to deliver presentations about intimate partner violence and help connect K-12 students experiencing violence to these counsellors. This new investment will enable the Violence is Preventable Program to be delivered in more classrooms and schools across B.C.

Breaking the cycle of intimate partner violence also means making sure that men who have abused their partners can access effective interventions. The Caring Dads Program is a community-based program that helps men take responsibility for their abusive behaviour and develop healthier relationships with their children and partners. Additional funding will increase access to this high-demand program.

SPECIALIZED SUPPORTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TRANSITIONING OUT OF GOVERNMENT CARE

Evidence shows that young people transitioning out of government care may be vulnerable and at a greater risk of experiencing gender-based violence. As part of our ongoing actions to support young people who have been in government care, we will continue to work with community partners and young people with lived experience to develop new online resources. [AgedOut.com](https://agedout.com) will provide up-

to-date information about gender-based violence, consent, healthy relationships and other important topics to help young people stay safe while building independence.

IMPROVING OVERSIGHT OF POLICE

Survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault involving police and public safety personnel can experience unique barriers and may feel particularly unsafe when seeking justice. Having access to civilian-led oversight in these circumstances can be an effective alternative to pursuing help directly from the police.

Options to expand the mandate of civilian-led oversight to include incidences of intimate partner violence and sexual assault by police and public safety personnel are currently being explored as part of the Policing and Public Safety Modernization Initiative. This is in response to recommendations by B.C.'s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, as well as recommendations from the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act for streamlining and modernizing police oversight.

Gender-based violence is online

It can be any kind of violence facilitated by technology, like online sexual harassment, online threats of sexual violence, trolling and non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF RESOURCE EXTRACTION AND DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRIES

The Firelight Group's Indigenous Communities and Industrial Camps: Promoting Healthy Communities in Settings of Industrial Change, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and media reports have drawn attention to crime, missing women, sexual abuse and other serious issues occurring at and near industrial, agricultural, firefighting and tree planting camps, as well as highway construction sites.

These reports call on governments and resource extraction and development industries to improve safety and security for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people working or living in or near industrial camps and work sites.

Resource extraction and development industries are associated with increased demand for sex work. Many of these intensive projects establish industrial camps to house workers near the worksite. Some sex workers travel to meet demand at work camps where they face intense stigma and discrimination and the potential for violence. At the same time, sex work stigma may also impact those who purchase sexual services, resulting in sex work moving further underground.

The B.C. Government has taken steps to introduce mechanisms for oversight, enforcement and monitoring to improve health and safety at or near work camps. Changes made to the Environmental Assessment Act in 2018 require assessment of a project's potential effects on First Nations communities and rights, and consider disproportionate effects on distinct populations,

including gender-specific effects. In 2020, the Environmental Assessment Office issued guidance on assessing how a project may affect communities and vulnerable populations.

The Environmental Assessment Office is developing a new standard condition that will apply to any future industrial projects with a large work camp which are approved to proceed. The condition will require a gender and cultural safety plan to be developed, to better protect the safety and security of women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people who live or work in nearby communities or in the work camp. Enhanced training for compliance and enforcement officers to increase their knowledge of and ability to monitor new measures put in place to prevent gender-based violence when they are inspecting work camps will also be rolled out.

The Focus Project, a multi-year initiative led by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, engaged 62 victim service and violence against women programs along the LNG Canada and Coastal Gaslink pipeline route in Northern British Columbia. The project was launched in January 2021 to better understand and document any impacts of pipeline construction activities on service utilization and demand, and early recommendations include strengthening partnerships and improving communication between industry and victim service and violence against women programs. The findings from the Focus Project will support the Environmental Assessment Office's work to develop future training and oversight.



Learning from and monitoring our progress

Effectively preventing and addressing gender-based violence depends on continuous learning about what works and taking action to change what doesn't. That's why collecting data, conducting research and supporting dialogue with Indigenous partners, advocates, survivors and their families to evaluate the effectiveness of this action plan is critical.

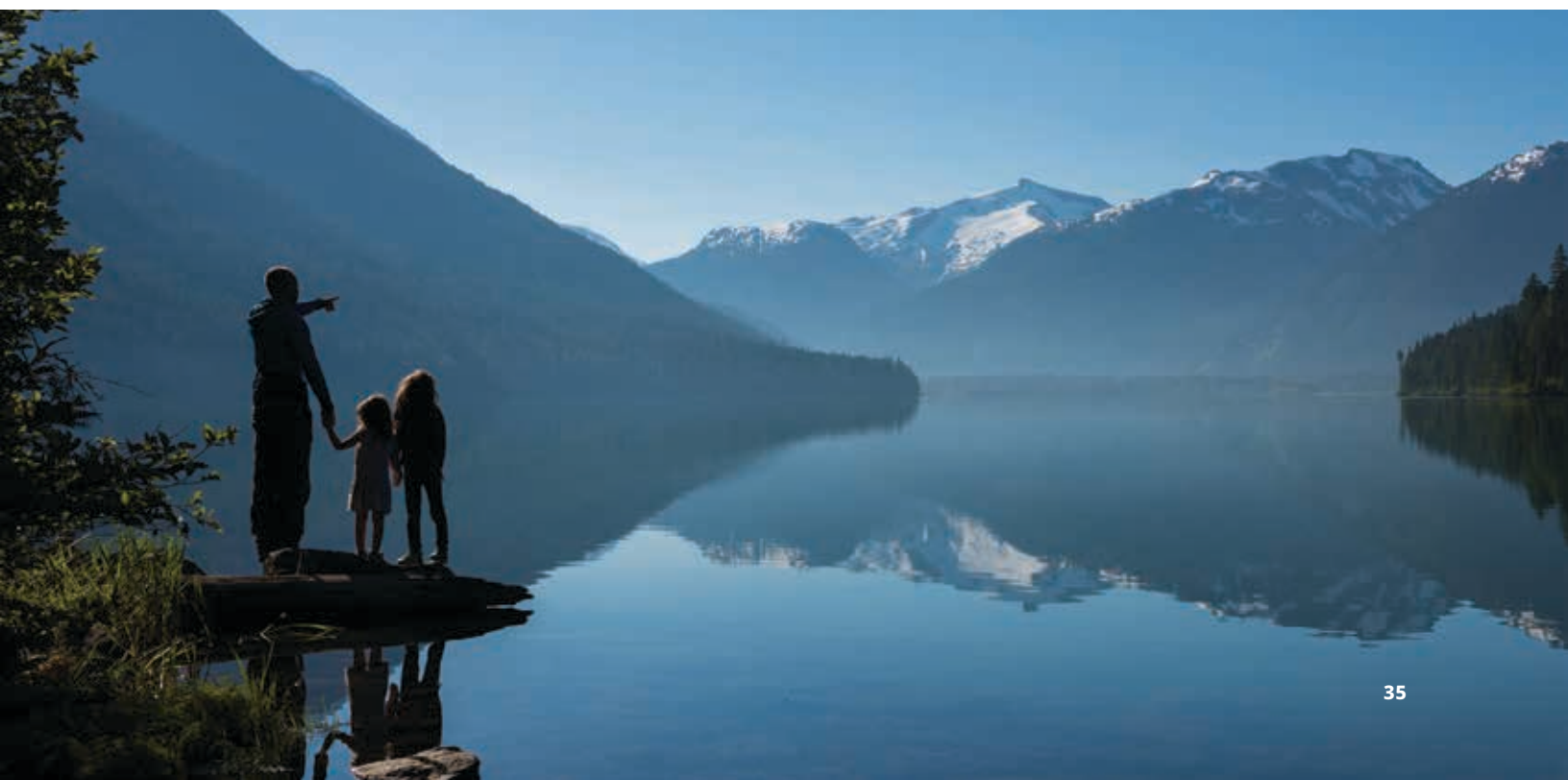
RECENT ACTIONS

IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC RACISM

Passed in June 2022, B.C.'s Anti-Racism Data Act was created to help identify gaps and address systemic racism in provincial programs and services. We need to understand who is seeking help from community organizations and victim services, and when and why survivors don't access supports. This law focuses on four areas that include continued collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, collaboration with an anti-racism committee, increasing transparency and accountability, and annual public data releases.

COLLABORATING WITH KEY PARTNERS

In summer 2022, we created a Gender-Based Violence Action Plan Advisory Committee that includes members from 20 organizations who represent the wide diversity of people impacted by gender-based violence in B.C. Advisory Committee members have been instrumental in providing advice and guidance on this action plan, generously sharing their wisdom and expertise.



FUTURE ACTIONS

IMPROVING DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION

We will work with victim services and violence against women programs to better understand the ways their services make a difference and what gaps and barriers still exist, especially for Indigenous, racialized and other equity-deserving survivors. As part of our approach to monitoring progress, we will work with providers to enhance data collection systems.

As gaps in services are brought to light, we will continue to improve programs and outreach for newcomer and racialized communities who experience specific barriers to accessing ongoing programs. Ongoing initiatives will continue to prioritize culturally inclusive and survivor-focused approaches and identify ways to expand this work.

Women and girls in newcomer and racialized communities face distinct barriers to reporting and recovering from gender-based violence.

We also recognize there are many areas that intersect with gender-based violence. That is why we are committing to researching and evaluating different approaches to prevention and supporting survivors, from understanding how to better prevent violence connected to natural resources projects, to evaluating the links between gender-based violence, crime data and misogynist and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ violence.

ENDING SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE AT POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Attending post-secondary education is a major milestone for many people. These spaces should be safe, inclusive and welcoming for everyone. But too many people, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and girls and gender diverse people, experience risks of sexualized violence and worry about their safety during class, while working or studying or at social gatherings.

In addition to the work we have been supporting at post-secondary institutions, it is critical to have a specialized sexualized violence action plan developed and designed specifically for post-secondary communities. Starting in early 2024, we will be engaging with First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners, and with students, faculty and staff at post-secondary institutions around the province to ensure we have a plan that meets the unique needs of post-secondary communities.

EXPANDING THE ROLE OF THE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ACTION PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

We are committed to having ongoing conversations with partners and advocates to understand how to increase access to supports and services, enhance prevention and education on gender-based violence and support capacity building so that local communities and equity-deserving groups can develop and lead solutions that are reflective of the diversity of people and communities in B.C. With an expanded mandate, the Gender-Based Violence Action Plan Advisory Committee will provide continued advice and leadership throughout the life of this action plan and help us monitor and evaluate our actions.

The background of the page is a soft-focus photograph of a natural landscape. In the foreground, there are several pink and yellow wildflowers. A river flows through the middle ground, its surface reflecting the warm light. The background shows rolling green hills and a line of trees under a hazy, golden sky, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

Reflections and Next Steps

As we implement the plan, our goal is to learn from our progress, incorporate new wise practices, identify innovative solutions and continuously adapt and improve, all while listening to the voices of survivors whose needs must always come first. Throughout the life of this action plan, we will embrace opportunities to communicate progress and share stories about what we are learning as we build a safer and more inclusive B.C.

We honour the survivors, their families and the advocates who shared their stories and lived experiences with us in the development of Safe and Supported: British Columbia's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan. Their openness and honesty are legacies to future generations.

We are deeply committed to this work and recognize that it must proceed with ongoing consultation and cooperation with Indigenous partners and in dialogue with community members.

We will continue to centre survivors and their families and follow the path they set for this work to achieve our goal of a province free of gender-based violence, where everyone feels safe and supported.



Appendices

Funding our work

Through Safe and Supported: B.C.'s Gender-Based Violence Action Plan, the Province will continue to invest more than \$60 million each year in stable funding to strengthen and expand services and programs that address violence against women, sexual assault and sexual abuse. In addition, the Canada-British Columbia Bilateral Agreement to End Gender Based Violence, announced in December 2023, will contribute a further \$62 million in federal funding over four years to support this ongoing work.

This funding will build on significant foundational investments already underway that will increase the safety, security and well-being of women, girls

and gender diverse people, including \$1.2 billion over 10 years to build and operate new transition housing, second-stage housing and long-term housing spaces for women and children leaving violence, the new \$200 million fund to support the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and historic new investments in child care.

The steps outlined here are not a closed list – as we implement the action plan we will continue to work with partners to remove barriers and identify new initiatives that strengthen our efforts to end gender-based violence in B.C.

Implementation Timeline

LAUNCHED PRIOR TO 2023

- Women's Transition Housing Fund
- Increased cell service in rural and remote communities
- Paid leave for people experiencing domestic or sexual violence
- Path Forward: Early Priorities and Strategies for B.C. and Path Forward Community Fund
- New Indigenous Justice Centres and programs
- Indigenous-led Giving Voice Grant Program
- First Nations Justice Strategy
- Updated Student Health Guides in the K-12 school system
- Annual consent campaigns at post secondary institutions

LAUNCHED IN 2023

- Safe and Supported: B.C.'s Gender-Based Violence Action Plan
- Signing of Canada-British Columbia Bilateral Agreement to End Gender-Based Violence
- New provincial policing standards
- 70 new sexual assault programs
- 5 new sexual assault centres
- New 24/7 crisis lines launched by Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre and Indian Residential School Survivors Society
- Intimate Images Protection Act
- Crime Victim Assistance Program amendments
- Relaunch "Let's Talk About Touching"
- Work with ICBC to keep location of survivors and shelters confidential
- Boost funding to specialized community teams that support survivors of domestic violence, sexual exploitation and human trafficking
- New investments in Path Forward Community Fund
- New funding for the Sexual Abuse Intervention Program
- Increased funding for the Violence is Preventable Program for K-12 students
- New funding for the Caring Dads Program

TO LAUNCH IN 2024 AND BEYOND

- Reduce waitlists and boost resources for existing victim services and violence against women programs
- New virtual counselling for underserved communities
- New training and supports for staff at shelters and transition housing, including on brain injury awareness
- New support services under the Intimate Images Protection Act
- New investments in Path Forward Community Fund
- New investments in Indigenous-led Giving Voice Grant Program
- New supports for the First Nations Justice Council to support culturally responsive training
- New investments in First Nations-led cultural practices and coming of age ceremonies
- New gender-based violence supports for Métis people through partnering with Métis Nation BC
- New initiative to end sexualized violence at post-secondary institutions
- New online resources for youth transitioning out of government care
- New gender and cultural safety conditions for work camps with the Environmental Assessment Office
- New civilian oversight for gender-based violence and harassment in policing
- New initiatives to make B.C. safer and more inclusive for transgender and gender diverse people

Terminology

Language and terminology are constantly evolving as laws and policies are updated, new technology and research is produced, and as society and culture change. Diverse language and terminology are used across sectors when describing how to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in British Columbia. The definitions provided here describe the current meaning of some terms that are used in this document, with appreciation that terminology will continue to evolve after this action plan is released.

Body sovereignty: Refers to a person's right to make decisions about their own body and their future. 'Bodily autonomy' is another term that refers to the same concept.^{9,10}

Colonialism and Colonial Violence: Colonialism occurs when a group of people take control of other lands, regions or territories outside of their own by turning those other lands, regions or territories into a colony. Colonialism remains embedded in the legal, political and economic context of Canada today.

Consent: Consent is an agreement to engage in an activity; it occurs when you ask, or give, permission to do something. People use consent in their daily life, including giving and asking for consent for food or drink, physical touch, to take a picture or to participate in an activity. In the context of sexual activities, consent refers to giving voluntary permission to engage in a sexual activity. Consent must be asked for and given at each stage of a sexual interaction and/or when there is a shift from one sexual activity to another. Consent must be given voluntarily and can be withdrawn at any time. Even if a person has consented to sexual activity in the past, consent must be asked for each time.

Equity-deserving: Equity deserving groups are communities that experience significant collective barriers in participating in society. This could include attitudinal, historic, social, and environmental barriers based on age, ethnicity,

disability, economic status, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation and transgender status, etc. Equity-seeking groups are those that identify barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination and actively seek social justice and reparation.¹¹

Gender-based violence: Gender-based violence is violence committed against someone based on their gender, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender, and can be verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial or online. Gender-based violence manifests in many ways, such as intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, child abuse, sex trafficking, coercion, non-consensual disclosure of intimate images and other forms of technology-facilitated violence, femicide and homicide, among many other forms of gender-based violence. People who face overlapping experiences of sexism, misogyny, racism, colonialism, transphobia, homophobia, poverty, stigma, ableism, ageism and/or criminalization (among other systems of discrimination and inequity) are at greater risk of being targeted with gender-based violence.

Gender diverse person: An individual who does not self-identify as exclusively man or woman. Some individuals self-identify as non-binary, while others use terms such as genderfluid, genderqueer, agender or Two-Spirit.

Intersectional/Intersectionality: Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American scholar and civil rights advocate, introduced the term ‘intersectionality’ in 1989. It considers ways in which systems of inequity based on gender identity/expression, race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, sexual orientation, disability, class and other forms of discrimination ‘intersect’ to create unique dynamics and effects.¹²

Intimate partner violence: Intimate partner violence describes physical, sexual or psychological harm by a current or former intimate partner or spouse. This is also known as domestic abuse or spousal violence and is a major public health concern that destroys lives, devastates families and affects communities around the world. The term **domestic violence** is sometimes used interchangeably with the term intimate partner violence, but domestic violence can also mean child or elder abuse that may not be gender-based violence. Domestic violence is also used in this action plan where it is a term defined in legislation or in the name of a program or service.

Misogyny: Belief or attitude that masculinity, and specifically maleness, is not only desired, but more powerful and naturally dominant over femininity, and specifically femaleness.

Racialized: British Columbia’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner defines racialization as “the process by which societies construct races as real, different and unequal in ways that affect economic, political and social life. Racialized is the imposition of those constructions onto people, in ways that unequally impact economic, political and social life.”¹³

Sexualized violence: Sexualized violence is any non-consensual, unwanted, actual, attempted, or threatened act or behaviour that is carried out through sexual means or by targeting a person’s sex, sexual identity, or gender identity or expression. This act or behaviour may or may

not involve physical contact, and it can take place through any form of communication. Sexualized violence is the preferred term to describe these behaviours, but the term **sexual assault** or sexual violence is used on this action plan where it is a term defined in legislation or it is the name of a program or service.

Survivor/Victim: Both these terms are used intentionally in this document. Survivor is the preferred term for this action plan, but victim is used where it is a term defined in legislation or in the name of a program or service. We recognize that a person who experiences gender-based violence may identify as a survivor, or as a victim, or neither.

Systemic racism: Practices or attitudes that have, whether by design or impact, the effect of limiting an individual’s or a group’s right to the opportunities generally available because of unfounded beliefs based on race or ethnicity.

Technology-facilitated sexualized violence: Any form of sexualized violence that occurs online is considered technology-facilitated sexualized violence. This term “refers to a wide range of unacceptable, violent and abusive behaviours, where technology is used as a central tool to carry out these behaviours.”¹⁴ These behaviours can include online sexual harassment, online threats of sexual violence, trolling, non-consensual distribution of intimate images, and many other harmful behaviours that occur online and/or are facilitated using technology.

Toxic masculinity: The phrase ‘toxic masculinity’ describes behaviour that encourages or gives legitimacy to misogyny, homophobia and sexualized violence. The term does not imply that men are inherently violent; rather it is used to refer to societal expectations of masculinity that is often linked to strength, aggression, assertiveness and power.

Transphobia: The fear and/or hatred of, and discrimination against, trans people. Transphobia can take the form of disparaging jokes, rejection, exclusion, denial of services, employment discrimination, name-calling and violence.¹⁵ It can also be internalized, as well as show up as external behaviours.

Trauma- and violence-informed: Trauma- and violence-informed approaches are practices that recognize the connections between violence, trauma, negative health outcomes and behaviours. These approaches increase safety, control and resilience for people in relation to experiences of violence and/or a history of experiencing violence.¹⁶

Traumatic brain injury: A traumatic brain injury is an alteration in brain function caused by external forces or a reduction in oxygen supply. A concussion

is a form of traumatic brain injury caused by a hard blow or jolt to the head, neck or body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. Brain injuries can also happen due to strangulation, which cuts off blood flow and oxygen to the brain. Nearly half of women survivors have been strangled. It's a common cause of brain injury in intimate partner violence, and a strong indicator of future fatality.

2SLGBTQIA+: Sexual orientation and gender identity or expression have different meanings and are subjective and circumstantial to the individual. It's also important to note that 2SLGBTQIA+ is an acronym that represents many, but not all, groups specifically. The acronym refers to Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual and the '+' recognizes that there are many more identities as well.



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