

**Report in Response to
FORSAKEN: THE REPORT OF
*The Missing Women Commission of
Inquiry*
Status Update**



Ministry of Public Safety
and Solicitor General

February 2018

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Message from the Minister

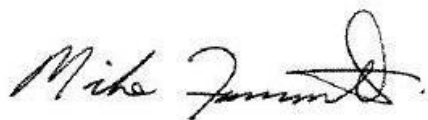
Since the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) report, significant actions and initiatives have been undertaken by the Province, police agencies and community organizations to work towards increasing the safety of vulnerable women and supporting affected families.

Violence against women hurts everyone, and has long-term effects on families and our communities. Recognizing the profound loss and continued impact on survivors, government strives to implement responsive actions to better support women who are vulnerable to violence, as well as those who have been affected by these tragic losses.

Efforts to increase the safety of vulnerable women in B.C. will continue, guided by the recommendations of the B.C. Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and the Principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Province will engage with Indigenous communities and stakeholders on justice and public safety initiatives and support projects and programs that provide much needed services to survivors, families and communities.

Looking forward, funding for community initiatives will continue to promote healing for families and communities and support women living in vulnerable circumstances. Further work will also continue to establish policing standards and increase the capacity of the justice and public safety sector to provide services which are culturally appropriate for Indigenous people and communities.

Our government is committed to moving forward on actions and initiatives to increase safety and respond to the needs of women escaping violence across the province. This will include enhancing supports, and investing in education and prevention programs to stop gender-based violence, as we consider how best to strengthen our response to violence against women both now and in the future.



Mike Farnworth
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General

Introduction

Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI Report) was released on December 17, 2012. The MWCI Report discusses the findings of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry and outlines two urgent measures and sixty-three recommendations for action. Since its release, a substantial amount of work has been undertaken to implement the MWCI Report recommendations and to enhance the safety and security of vulnerable women in British Columbia.

In November 2013, the BC government released a status report on activities underway that responded to the recommendations. The following year (December 2014), a second status report highlighted recommendation-specific actions that had been initiated or completed since the previous update. The 2014 status report also focused on how the recommendations would be used more broadly to inform government reform and change initiatives, including those addressing violence against women.

In 2016, the BC Office of the Auditor General (OAG) completed an examination to report on how the provincial government had responded to select recommendations made by the MWCI. The OAG included 21 recommendations and two urgent measures in their examination – verifying actions taken by the government and assessing to what degree the government had responded to the intent of each recommendation.

The OAG report was released in December 2016, making one recommendation: that the Province resume annual reporting on the implementation of the MWCI Report recommendations. The Province has committed to implementing the OAG's recommendation and, starting with the release of this report, will resume annual reporting on initiatives related to the MWCI recommendations. It is hoped that this will support a common understanding of efforts taken to address the MWCI recommendations and better demonstrate government's ongoing commitment to addressing the issue of violence against women.

This status report focuses on actions taken towards implementation of MWCI recommendations since the release of the 2014 status report. In alignment with past status reports, updates on the work have been organized into four themes: Compensation and Healing; Improvement to Policing; Supports for Missing Person Investigations; and Safety for Vulnerable Women.

Updates on Actions by Themes

I. Compensation and Healing

“There is an enormous need for services that promote healing including counselling, grief counselling, spiritual guidance and support from other families experiencing similar situations. These services need to be ‘accessible, accommodating, timely and flexible,’ and they must be culturally appropriate, especially for First Nations persons.”

— Commissioner Oppal, Vol III, page 51

The families of the missing and murdered women have suffered immeasurably. The pain of loss and grief continue to impact lives and there is continued need for services and supports to promote healing.

As acknowledged by Commissioner Wally Oppal, steps toward healing and reconciliation take time. Recognizing this, government

continues to prioritize this work in support of families and communities impacted by the violence. Key actions include the development of a compensation fund for children of the missing or murdered women identified in the MWCI report, and grant funding allocated to community-led initiatives that support healing and rebuilding from violence in Indigenous communities.

Progress Since 2014

Compensation Fund (Rec. 3.2)

- A Compensation Fund for children of murdered and missing women was established in April 2014 to support the children’s participation in activities that will help them move towards healing and to contribute towards their education, housing and other needs. Jointly established by the Province, the Government of Canada, and the City of Vancouver, the fund offers \$50,000 in compensation to each of the children of the women identified in the Report. To date, 93 of the 98 children of the missing or murdered women have been compensated.

Supporting Healing and Rebuilding (Rec. 3.3)

- Since 2014, funding through the Civil Forfeiture Grant program has been allocated to support Indigenous healing and rebuilding initiatives. To date, over \$1.4 million in grant funding has been provided for projects supporting healing and rebuilding from violence in Indigenous communities. This includes over \$336,000 provided in 2017 to support 17 projects focused on Indigenous women and girls.

In 2017, Bridges for Women Society received funding for the W’SANEC Bridging & Outreach Program in Victoria. This project provides trauma counselling to isolated Aboriginal women impacted by violence, abuse and trauma; trains reserve frontline workers on the impacts of trauma, violence and abuse; and, supports traumatized community members.

Another example of a project supported in 2017 is the Strong Women Moving Forward Project. With grant support from the Province, the BC Bereavement Helpline (BCBH) coordinated a healing retreat for Indigenous women who are family members to a missing or murdered Indigenous woman or girl. The BCBH 2017 Sisters in Strength Retreat was held in October 2017 at the Sts'ailes Lhawathet Lalem retreat centre in Agassiz, B.C. Fifteen Indigenous women participants and ten supporters/facilitators joined together for one weekend of healing and strength building. Activities included a blanketing ceremony, self-care opportunities, a healing art project, and a drumming celebration. The retreat followed shortly after the National Inquiry community/family hearing in Smithers in September 2017.

- Other notable investments to support healing and rebuilding among families of missing and murdered Indigenous women include:
 - \$470,000 provided for a three-day Family Gathering event held in Prince George in February 2016. Over 350 family members attended the Gathering – representing over 100 missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls – and participated in cultural healing ceremonies and activities. The Provincial Family Gathering was co-hosted by the Province, Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, First Nations Leadership Council, Métis Nation BC, Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, Carrier Sekani Family Services, and MACAW.
 - \$48,000 provided to the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council to host a community-based gathering for families of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls, which took place September 12-14, 2017 in Port Alberni, B.C.
- The Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) continues to support victims and their immediate family members through access to financial benefits that support healing, including funding for counselling or memorial services.
- The Province has provided a number of training initiatives to support frontline service providers including training on supporting family members of missing and murdered women, and facilitator training for supporting persons bereaved by homicide.

Civil Forfeiture Funding:

Established in 2006, the Civil Forfeiture Office operates to undermine the profit motive behind criminal activity by taking away the tools and proceeds of crime and putting them back into programs that support community crime prevention and safety.

Through the Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Grants one-time funding is provided to crime prevention and remediation projects that align with funding categories chosen on an annual basis. Since 2012 the annual Crime Prevention and Remediation grants have included funding categories to support projects to address violence against women and sexual exploitation, implement the MWCI recommendations and support healing and rebuilding from violence in Indigenous communities.

More information on Civil Forfeiture Grants and information on the application process can be found on the [Grants from Civil Forfeiture Proceeds webpage](#).

II. Improvements to Policing

“Equality is the first guiding principle for building the women’s legacy. I have set out a framework for understanding equality in policing in this report. This framework sets the context for both understanding what went wrong and the change required to fix the underlying problems.”

— Commissioner Oppal, Vol III, page 9

Examining police investigative practices was a key part of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry’s mandate, and many of the recommendations focus on improvements to policing. A significant amount of work in policing had already taken place prior to the Inquiry to improve and strengthen policing through enhanced information sharing and integrated

policing initiatives. This work is ongoing, and since the last progress report in 2014 changes to policing have continued with a focus on Provincial Policing Standards, training, processes, and tools to support best practices for both policing vulnerable populations and collaborating across jurisdictions.

Progress Since 2014

Provincial Policing Standards (Rec. 4.1, 4.2, 4.10, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 10.1 & 10.2)

The *BC Police Act* allows the Director of Police Services to establish binding provincial policing standards for all police agencies in British Columbia, on specific topics listed in s. 40 of the *Act*. The MWCI Report recommended that standards be established in four key areas. To date, the Province has completed standards to address three of these areas, and work on the fourth is underway. Standards are developed in consultation with stakeholders. The standards are available on the [Provincial Policing Standards webpage](#).

- *British Columbia Provincial Policing Standards* for Missing Person Investigations were completed in 2015 and came into effect beginning in September 2016 (please see page 11).
- *British Columbia Provincial Policing Standards* for Major Case Management and Inter-agency Cooperation and Coordination were completed in January 2017. The standards will begin to take effect in January 2019, providing time to implement the required changes and develop associated training. These standards were established to help ensure appropriate police response to serious incidents, and include a requirement that all police agencies enter into a protocol regarding multi-jurisdictional major case investigations.
- A number of MWCI recommendations relate to ensuring equality in the delivery of policing services and supporting effective police responses to vulnerable individuals. These recommendations involve the development of provincial policing standards, police training, improving relationships with Indigenous peoples and vulnerable persons, and monitoring. The Province has developed a framework and is conducting a broad public and stakeholder consultation process on the response to these related recommendations, with particular emphasis on provincial policing standards. Once in place, the standards will provide a basis against which police agencies’ responses to vulnerable groups may be assessed and monitored.

Training to Support Better Response to Vulnerable Persons, Cultural Competency, and Fair and Impartial Policing (Rec. 4.12)

The Province has engaged in a number of initiatives which respond to the recommendation for mandatory and ongoing experiential and interactive police training concerning vulnerable community members. The recommendation included training for police on topics such as unbiased policing, violence against women in different contexts, and better responses to Indigenous peoples and Indigenous women specifically. This work is ongoing and since 2014:

- A customized version of Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP) © training, has been developed for the B.C. context. The B.C. FIP training increases officer understanding of human bias, self-awareness in recognizing personal bias, and introduces skills for officers to work towards fair, impartial, and effective policing. The training was successfully piloted and rolled-out throughout 2017 and early in 2018.
- The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), in consultation with stakeholders, completed the development of justice-specific modules for San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training. This training targets cultural competency learning needs for staff working across the justice and public safety sector, including supporting culturally safe approaches in their day-to-day work. Early in 2017, the course was piloted with police recruits at the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) Police Academy. Options are being considered for offering this training more broadly.
- The Police Academy reviewed and amended its core curriculum for recruit training. As a part of this work, and supported by funding from the Province, the JIBC Police Academy will continue to integrate the principles of cultural competency, bias-free policing, and the treatment of vulnerable persons into recruit training.

Providing Public Warnings (Rec. 4.7)

- To ensure information on risks to the public are available to those most vulnerable to the threat, the BC Association of Chiefs of Police (BCACP) has examined the issue of public warnings. Public safety warnings issued by the police are a proactive step to protect the public by communicating information on specific risks and safety precautions. A best practice guide has been developed for all police agencies in B.C. The guide was endorsed by the BCACP in June 2017 and was distributed to all police executives.

SisterWatch Evaluation (Rec. 5.1)

- Through the SisterWatch program, the Vancouver Police Department and the Women's Memorial March Committee collaborate to transform the relationship between the police and the community. The Province provided the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) with \$50,000 in one-time grant funding to undertake an evaluation of SisterWatch and develop a best practices guide to be shared with police forces. The SisterWatch evaluation report, which included best practices, was completed in June 2015. The report was shared with police forces through the BC Association of Chiefs of Police in an effort to build upon best practices of effective and meaningful police/community relationships using SisterWatch and other similar programs as examples.

Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines (Rec. 5.8)

- The BCACP developed Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines and Principles for police in B.C. The guidelines and principles emphasize considerations for the safety of persons involved in sex work when police develop enforcement priorities, policies, or procedures, and the importance of ongoing dialogue and relationship-building with sex workers and community service providers to this end. The BCACP Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines and Principles were endorsed by the BC Association of Chiefs of Police in November 2017 as a basis for the development of local policies.

Real Time Intelligence Centre (Rec. 10.3)

- The Real Time Intelligence Centre-British Columbia (RTIC-BC) was implemented in January 2015. The RTIC-BC's mission is to enhance public safety through the delivery of real-time operational support to frontline police officers and investigators by providing actionable intelligence. The goal of the RTIC-BC is to accelerate serious criminal investigations, investigations of persons reported missing, and locate suspects at the earliest opportunity. The focus is on offences where there is a concern for public or police safety and also those that cross jurisdictional lines. RTIC-BC serves all police in Metro Vancouver, including RCMP and municipal police.

Support for Police Boards (Rec. 11.4)

- The Province has worked with the Institute of Corporate Directors and Rotman Executive Programs to develop a custom British Columbia curriculum to strengthen a police board's ability to effectively govern through the greater understanding of police board roles and responsibilities under the Police Act. The first module of the five-day pilot training program was presented to 25 BC police board members in December 2017 at the Justice Institute of BC and the second module was presented in January 2018 in Victoria. The training program generated interest from other jurisdictions in Canada.

Vancouver Police Department SisterWatch: Protecting Women in the Downtown Eastside (DTES):

Recognizing the need to address violence against vulnerable women in the Vancouver Downtown Eastside and to build trust between the community and the Vancouver Police Department, members of the DTES community and the police have met at a joint table every six weeks since 2010. This joint initiative, the SisterWatch Project, has furthered dialogue and has taken concrete actions to increase the safety of women living and working in the DTES.

One SisterWatch initiative has been to establish a 24-hour telephone hotline so women living in the DTES can anonymously report violence. The goal is to use the information received as the building blocks to respond to violence against women in the DTES. Other initiatives have included installing 911 phone boxes in the DTES and community gatherings to increase information sharing between the DTES community and the Vancouver Police Department. Information shared has led to police investigations and convictions.

III. Supports for Missing Person Investigations

“A missing person report can be the first step in an investigation of a serious crime or an opportunity for the police to intervene to protect a woman from violence, abuse or exploitation. How police accept, prioritize, investigate and ultimately conclude missing person reports determines whether police recognize and effectively address the significance of the disappearance of vulnerable women.”

— Commissioner Oppal, Vol III, page 130

Supports for missing person investigations are fundamental to advancing safety for vulnerable women and building trust with family members, friends, and the community. Since the release of the MWCI report and the last status update in 2014, the government has continued to work to standardize missing person investi-

gations, strengthen police investigative tools, and enhance supports to family members with missing loved ones. Timely investigations by the police and timely access to information for families and loved ones continue to be a main focus.

Progress Since 2014

Missing Persons Act (Rec. 8.1)

- The Missing Persons Act and Missing Persons Regulation were brought into force June 9, 2015. By allowing police to access records when a person hasn't been seen, or in touch with the people who are normally involved in their lives, but there is no evidence that the person's disappearance is the result of a crime, the legislation responds to the need for police to access personal information quickly while still protecting rights to privacy.

The Missing Persons Act sets out circumstances where the police may apply for a court order to access information in respect of a missing person, such as telephone, credit card and employment records to help their investigation. In cases involving a minor, vulnerable person or person at risk, police may also apply for a court order to access the records of a third party last seen with or believed to be in the company of the missing person, or to enter a place or premise where they believe the missing person may be located. This creates additional tools to help locate vulnerable or at-risk persons whose safety and welfare are of concern because of their age, physical or mental capabilities, or the circumstances surrounding their absence.

Trauma-informed Practice (Rec. 4.9 & 4.12)

- The Province has initiated a project to support trauma-informed justice, public safety and anti-violence community sectors in British Columbia. When complete, the trauma informed practice curriculum will ensure participants will be able to:
 - Recognize and understand trauma and its effects on victims and witnesses and have a clear understanding of how violence and abuse shapes victim responses;
 - Assess their own practices and processes with a trauma informed lens; and,
 - Incorporate trauma informed learnings to reduce potential re-traumatization experienced by victims and witnesses participating in the justice system.

Standardized Approach to Missing Person Investigations (Rec. 7.2)

- The BC Provincial Policing Standards on Missing Person Investigations cover a range of topics, from intake through to the conclusion of a missing person investigation, as well as prevention and follow up. The Standards are founded on a number of guiding principles, including that investigations into missing person reports should initially be approached as high risk until a risk assessment is completed. The principles also acknowledge that Indigenous women and girls are at an increased risk of harm.

An additional key principle is that families and those who have made a missing person report must be kept appropriately informed of the progress of an investigation, and treated with compassion and respect. Family members and people who have made a missing person report should always know who to contact if they have questions about or have information relevant to the investigation, and should be informed of key developments in the investigation in an appropriate manner.

In keeping with this principle, the Standards require that:

- Specific pieces of information, such as support services that may be available and the file number for the investigation, are provided to the family or the person who made the missing person report.
- A family liaison is appointed to each investigation and provides updates on the status of the investigation to the family or individual who made the missing person report.
- Wherever possible, the family is consulted about information to be released to the public about the missing person, and notified in advance of media or public statements about the investigation.
- In long term cases, or sooner where appropriate, a plan for ongoing communication is established in consultation with the family or person who made the report.

An online orientation for police officers on the Missing Person Investigation Standards and the BC Missing Persons Act has been available to all police officers in B.C. since September 2016.

Missing Person Act:

When there is an emergency such as a risk of serious harm to a missing person or a concern that records could be destroyed, the *Missing Persons Act* authorizes police officers to directly demand access to records. Emergency Demands for Records under the *Missing Persons Act* are relatively rare.

- In 2015, the year the Act came into effect, police in B.C. report there were no demands. In 2016, there were 19 missing person investigations for which Emergency Demands were made: 10 made by RCMP in B.C., five by the Vancouver Police Department, three by Delta Police Department, and one by Nelson Police Department.
- The majority of requests for use of Emergency Demand for Records were due to a concern that the time required for applying for an order may have resulted in serious bodily harm to or the death of a missing person.
- In 13 of the 19 cases involving an Emergency Demand for Records, a missing person was found.

Supports for Families of Missing Persons (Rec. 7.9)

- Leveraging federal funding, the Province launched the BC Family Information Liaison Unit in July 2017, providing a dedicated service for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls who are seeking information related to the loss of their loved one. The BC FILU services were designed to be available throughout the duration of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. While the Inquiry is considering systemic causes of violence, the BC FILU will be supporting families directly to access general or case-specific information on their loved one's murder or disappearance.

When a family member contacts the BC FILU for assistance, frontline family support staff will work with them to request the information they are seeking from system and/or government partners (e.g. RCMP, BC Coroners Service, Crown Counsel). The BC FILU will then work with these partners to share the information with the family in a trauma-informed and culturally appropriate manner¹. In addition to serving families' information requests, BC FILU frontline staff also coordinate with local services to ensure that family members have access to the healing and wellness supports they need (e.g., counselling, cultural supports).

Family members may access the BC FILU directly, or through referrals by community agencies, National Inquiry Commission staff, and other provincial/territorial FILUs.

BC Police Missing Persons Centre (BCPMPC):

The BCPMPC was created in 2004 at the recommendation of the BC Association of Chiefs of Police as a result of an identified need for more oversight and standardization of missing person investigations, which was further defined in BC Provincial Policing Standards. The BCPMPC reviews and monitors missing person investigations to ensure adherence to policy and Standards, offers guidance and suggestions to investigators, and determines files requiring further monitoring.

Since last reporting the BCPMPC has been designated as an automated Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Human remains (CMPUR), which is an extension of the of the National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains (NCMPUR). The BCPMPC now uses automated reporting and analytical tools through the MCPUR database and access to the NCMPUR's national database, assisting significantly in the detection and follow up of potential links between cases.

1. The release of information is subject to privacy laws, regulations, and policy directives. In some cases, this may mean that information can only be released to legal next of kin. When the information being requested cannot be shared, the BC FILU staff will ensure that a clear explanation is provided to the family member (e.g., active investigation)

IV. Safety for Vulnerable Women

“All of us can, however, work together to build a legacy for the missing women: a legacy of safety and security for vulnerable women; a legacy through which we can reclaim the abandoned promise of equal protection.”

— Commissioner Oppal, Vol III, page 4

Increasing safety for vulnerable women requires that a range of complex and intersecting issues that contribute to women’s safety be addressed, including poverty, mental health, substance use, and access to housing, education, and employment options. In moving forward, it has been important to support community organizations throughout the province which provide services directly to women to meet their immediate safety needs and attend to these contributing factors. Since 2014, funding

has continued to be provided to support short term projects as well as the ongoing operation of organizations with a vision towards improving safety for vulnerable women. Significant progress has also been made in promoting transportation safety for women in northern B.C., and supports for survivors participating in the justice system. These actions have contributed to important advancements in addressing violence against women in our province.

Progress Since 2014

Services for Vulnerable Women (Urgent Measure #1, Rec. 6.4)

- Enhancement to emergency services for vulnerable women has been prioritized in the provincial response to the MWCI Report recommendations. Since 2013, \$750,000 in annual funding has been provided to WISH Drop-In Centre to improve services to vulnerable women who work in the sex trade in Vancouver. As of November 2017, annual funding to the WISH Drop-In Centre Society has increased to almost \$1 million.

WISH also receives annual funding to support the Mobile Access Project (MAP) Van. The MAP Van trains and employs former sex workers to deliver services across Vancouver to women working in the street level sex trade. It provides a safe place of respite with referrals, support and supplies for women who are vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation.

Since 2013/2014, annual funding to the Downtown Eastside Women’s Center has increased by almost \$600,000 and in 2017/18 the centre received over \$1.5 million in total funding from the Province. Work is currently underway to increase the number of shelter beds, and once complete the shelter will offer 24/7 service delivery.

- Since 2014, over \$1.2 million in civil forfeiture grant funding has been directed towards projects that address sexual violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and vulnerable women in the sex trade. Funding has supported initiatives such as the It Matters: Ending Human Trafficking Project undertaken by the Boys and Girls Club of Williams Lake. This project, funded in 2016-2017, applies a multi-tiered approach in addressing human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and related violence against women issues, with special attention given to Aboriginal girls.

In December 2017, The Province renewed its call for grant applications to support projects and initiatives focused on Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation and Vulnerable Women in the Sex Trade in 2018/2019.

- Through the three-year Provincial Domestic Violence Plan, from 2014-2017, the Province has provided grant funding totalling \$750,000 to more than 50 transition houses and safe homes in rural/remote communities and those operated by an Indigenous service provider. This funding has supported Indigenous women and children to access transition houses, safe homes and support services. The grants have also been used to assist women to travel to safe places and to access support services such as legal, medical and financial assistance.
- In December 2017, the Province announced \$5 million in one-time grant funding for community organizations that are working to prevent and respond to violence against women and children. The funding will enhance frontline services across existing victim service and violence against women programs, in order to help reduce waitlists and better meet demand for vital services such as counselling, outreach, and support.
- In 2016, the Province invested \$250,000 through a grant to support the Moose Hide Campaign. This campaign, led by the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, aims to engage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men to stand up and speak out about the violence committed against women and children.

Aboriginal Justice Strategy:

In September 2017, the Ministry of Attorney General, the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, and the British Columbia Aboriginal Justice Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding that recognizes significant improvements are required in the way that the justice system interacts with Indigenous people in British Columbia. The signatories agreed to jointly develop an Indigenous justice strategy that includes a focus on reconciliation; decreasing overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the justice system; culturally meaningful services and engagement; enhanced access to justice; and addressing violence against Indigenous people, especially women and girls.

Enhancing Safety Along Highway 16 (Urgent Measure #2, Rec. 6.1)

- In 2016, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure began working to implement a Five-Point Transportation Action Plan which has been under development since 2014. The plan addresses the need for safe and reliable transportation between communities along Highway 16 and includes transit expansion; a community transportation grant program to purchase and operate vehicles; a First Nations driver education program; highway infrastructure safety improvements including webcams and transit shelters; and ongoing collaboration to increase interconnectivity of services with BC Transit, Northern Health and others.

As of March 22, 2017, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure committed \$6.4-million in provincial and federal funding for the Highway 16 Transportation Action Plan. This plan increased access to transportation and improves safety for vulnerable women traveling along the Highway 16 corridor.

- The provincial government has also continued to provide funding to support priority actions identified during the Highway of Tears Symposium. In March 2016, civil forfeiture

grant funding was provided to Carrier Sekani to increase supports to families of missing and murdered persons linked to Highway 16, as well as to support activities of the Highway of Tears Awareness project.

In 2017, Carrier Sekani Family Services also received civil forfeiture grant funding for their ongoing work in supporting families along Highway 16. The Highway of Tears Supporting Families Project supports families who have lost loved ones on Highway 16 (Highway of Tears) by connecting and bridging the gap between service providers, such as RCMP and victim services, to address the issues of trauma and healing. Supports include:

- Assisting family members and supporting them through trials, vigils, memorials, meetings and other events;
- Supporting the costs of accommodation, transportation, meals, supplies and whatever is needed to bring awareness to the murdered victims case;
- Ensuring a counsellor or spiritual advisor is present as a support resource during the court hearings, vigils, memorials, meetings etc.; and
- Healing workshops conducted as forums in each of the previous participating communities along Highway 16.

Supports for Vulnerable Witnesses (Rec. 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 & 4.9)

- Between 2015 -2017, the Province implemented a variety of initiatives that reduce barriers and support vulnerable victims and witnesses, including vulnerable women, to participate in the criminal justice process;
 - The courts have expanded and upgraded their testimonial accommodation equipment, including the use of new testimonial accommodation screens, assistive listening kits and soft-spoken witness kits, which better support vulnerable victims and witnesses in criminal justice procedures;
 - Factsheets were developed for victims on the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights (CVBR) including one describing how to file a complaint with a justice agency if they believe their rights under the CVBR were not respected, and multilingual guides on Victim Impact Statements and the submission process;
 - A Community Impact Statement Program was implemented to provide community members with the opportunity to describe to the court how an offender's crime has impacted their community;
 - The Canadian Victims Bill of Rights now forms an integral part of the policy and service delivery framework for Crown Counsel and administrative staff in B.C. who interact directly with vulnerable women, including women engaged in the sex trade. The BC Prosecution Service has reviewed its policy manual and amended relevant policies to ensure that this legislation is appropriately reflected;

New Transition House Along Highway 16:

In February 2017, Carrier Sekani Family Services in partnership with Lake Babine Nation were approved for funding to build and operate a shelter to address family violence on the Woyenne Reserve. The location was chosen to address the significant need and gap for culturally specific safe house services in the centre of the Highway 16 corridor. The 4,500 square foot shelter will accommodate up to 23 occupants and provide programming that blends evidence-based best practices with traditional healing approaches for First Nations People. Funding for this project comes from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, with BC Housing supporting capital costs. The target completion date for the safe house is mid-2018.

- A community engagement outreach session was hosted with justice system personnel and community organizations to identify and discuss opportunities, challenges, best practices and lessons learned on testimonial accommodation for vulnerable witnesses and victims.
- On December 29, 2014, the BC Prosecution Service implemented the Vulnerable Victims and Witnesses – Adult (VUL 1) policy. This policy is expressly aimed at ensuring that “all victims and witnesses, regardless of vulnerabilities, have an equal opportunity to participate in the criminal justice process.” The new policy identifies best practices for Crown Counsel in assisting vulnerable persons, including sex trade workers, to effectively participate in the criminal justice process. To assist with the application of best practices under the policy, Crown Counsel have “Resource Crown Counsel” available to them who have particular expertise in the area of vulnerable victims and witnesses. “Resource Crown Counsel” can be accessed for advice, used as a sounding board and/or a source of information on practice resources. The [Crown Counsel Policy Manual](#) can be accessed online.
 - In its 2014/2015 - 2016/2017 Strategic Plan, the BC Prosecution Service identified the need for a full Crown Counsel Policy Manual review project as a priority initiative. As part of that project, the recommendations from the Missing Women’s Commission of Inquiry Report were considered when reviewing both the Introduction and the Charge Assessment Guidelines (CHA 1) policy. As a result, both the Introduction and CHA 1 were amended, including adding language consistent with the recommendation 4.5. It is anticipated that the revised policy manual will be implemented and publically available within the next few months.

Transit Expansion Along Highway 16:

As of March 22, 2017, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure committed \$6.4-million in provincial and federal funding for the Highway 16 Transportation Action Plan. One of the focus areas of the action plan is transit expansion:

- New inter-community transit services are now operating along Highway 16 from Terrace to Prince George.
- All Highway 16 BC Transit services allow people to travel to their next largest community and return home the same day.
- On January 30, 2017, BC Transit started a commuter service between Smithers and Moricetown, on a six days per week schedule.
- Three days per week service between Burns Lake and Smithers and Burns Lake and Prince George began on June 19, 2017. Planning is in place to get larger buses to meet the public demand for service between Burns Lake and Prince George since this service was launched.
- New transit service between the Hazeltons and Terrace began in November 2017.

In addition to transit expansion, the Highway 16 Transportation Action Plan includes a community transportation grant program, a driver education program, infrastructure and safety improvements, and collaboration to increase the interconnectivity of existing transportation services. More detailed updates on activities within these areas can be found on the [Highway 16 Transportation Action Plan Updates](#) webpage.

Direction Forward

Since release of the second status report in December 2014, government has continued to take significant steps to address and respond to the MWCI Report recommendations. While important strides have been made, our work continues alongside and in alignment with other key government priorities. This includes our commitment to implementing and following the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which emphasize the rights of Indigenous women and girls to live free from violence and the central role of Indigenous peoples in this effort.

While continuing to act on the recommendations of the BC Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, the Province is also committed to fully participating in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The recommendations of the National Inquiry, informed by the experiences and insights of families and survivors, and the knowledge shared by experts across the country will add to our understanding of the underlying issues and strategies to address the systemic causes of violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls and their greater vulnerability to violence.

As the Province moves forward with addressing recommendations and implementing measures to increase the safety of vulnerable women, annual public reporting will ensure information about the work being done in this area is available and remains part of the broader conversation on ending violence against women.