

Report in Response to
FORSAKEN: THE REPORT OF
The Missing Women Commission of
Inquiry
2019 Status Update



Ministry of Public Safety
and Solicitor General

February 2019

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Message from the Minister

The Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) provided important insight into the actions required to improve the safety of women and support the impacted families in British Columbia. The Province directly responded to specific recommendations made by the Commission, and identified and implemented additional initiatives that are aligned with the intent of the MWCI recommendations.

Since the *2018 Status Update*, work has continued on enhancing the safety and well-being of women in B.C., and in addition to the targeted actions detailed in the *2019 Status Update*, our government has recently made strong commitments to addressing the systemic causes of violence against women and girls. This is supported through various cross-government initiatives that have made significant progress in the past year. These initiatives are intended to be complementary to those required in response to the *MWCI Report*.

For instance, in Budget 2018 we introduced *Homes for BC: A 30-Point Plan for Housing Affordability in British Columbia*. Through this historic investment of more than \$6 billion over 10 years, we launched the Building BC: Women's Transition Housing Fund – a \$734-million commitment to build 1,500 transition housing, second-stage housing, and long-term housing spaces for women and children leaving violence.

Our government is also implementing a new policy and budgeting tool – Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), a well-established analytical tool that includes the examination of diverse identity factors, such as gender, race, Indigeneity, ethnicity, age, mental or physical (dis)ability, language, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, etc. This means that the Province can be more responsive to the diverse needs and circumstances of all British Columbians – including women and girls.

The new *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* includes specific consideration for populations considered in the *MWCI Report*, including Indigenous people, persons living in rural and remote communities, persons living with or fleeing abuse, and persons living with mental illness or addiction. The strategy will include a range of topics, including housing, education, employment, as well as income and social supports.

The Province is also developing a mental health and addictions strategy to create a seamless mental health and addictions system of care. The initial focus will be on addressing the needs of Indigenous people and children and youth through prevention and early intervention, and improving access to evidence-informed and culturally safe mental health and addictions treatment and recovery services and supports.

We recognize that Indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to violence, and are overrepresented as missing persons and as victims in homicide investigations. Our ongoing commitment to reconciliation – through the adoption and implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action* – is necessary to achieving improved safety for Indigenous women and girls as well as better outcomes for Indigenous communities.

The Province has also underscored its commitment to work with Indigenous Peoples in the spirit of respect and collaboration by introducing the *Draft Principles that Guide the Province of British Columbia's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples*¹, which are designed to guide the daily work of all provincial government employees. Additionally, our government participated in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and looks forward to receiving the final report from the Commission.

We will continue to work closely with Indigenous communities and partners to develop a path forward on ending violence against Indigenous women and girls that considers not only the information gleaned from the inquiries, but also the significant input and recommendations we have received directly from Indigenous survivors, family members, communities, and partners through previous engagement.

Violence against women hurts everyone, and has long-term effects on families and our communities. Our government acknowledges the tremendous impacts caused by violence against women and girls, and understands the urgency with which this issue needs to be addressed. Moving forward, we will continue our efforts to protect and support women and girls to achieve their full and rightful potential.



Mike Farnworth
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General

¹ Government of British Columbia (2018). *Draft Principles that Guide the Province of British Columbia's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/careers/about-the-bc-public-service/diversity-inclusion-respect/draft_principles.pdf

Introduction

In September 2010, the Lieutenant Governor in Council issued an Order in Council establishing the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI), which examined the conduct of police investigations into the disappearance of nearly 50 women reported missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside between 1997 and 2002. In December 2012, the Commission released *Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI Report)*², outlining 63 recommendations – 54 of which were directed to the Province – and two urgent measures.

In November 2013, the Province published a status report³ that described progress made to implement the recommendations of the Commission and enhance the safety and security of women in British Columbia (B.C.). In December 2014, a second and final status report⁴ provided information on further progress made since 2013, and spoke to how the intent of the recommendations would be used to inform future government action, including efforts to end violence against women and girls.

In December 2016, the BC Office of the Auditor General (OAG) released *Follow-Up On The Missing Women Commission Of Inquiry*⁵, examining the degree to which the Province responded to the 21 recommendations and two urgent measures selected for audit by the OAG. The report found that eight recommendations had been implemented, six recommendations had been partially implemented, five had not been implemented, and four recommendations were not far enough along to determine whether the Province's approach would address the intent of the recommendation. The report issued one recommendation: that the Province report publicly each year on how government's actions are meeting the intent of the Commission's recommendations.

The Province subsequently committed to implementing the OAG's recommendation, and in February 2018, released a status update⁶ that reported on activities undertaken since 2014.

This *2019 Status Update* continues the Province's commitment to annual reporting on initiatives undertaken since 2018 related to the MWCI recommendations. In alignment with past status updates, initiatives are organized into four themes: Compensation and Healing, Improvement to Policing, Supports for Missing Person Investigations, and Safety for Marginalized Women. There is a further section on Additional Initiatives that includes broader government actions that are not in direct response to specific MWCI recommendations, but support addressing the systemic causes of violence against women and girls.

² Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (2012). *Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*. <http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Forsaken-ES-web-RGB.pdf>

³ Government of British Columbia (2013). *Safety and Security of Vulnerable Women in B.C.: A Status Report in Response to: Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/about-bc-justice-system/inquiries/bcgovstatusreport.pdf>

⁴ Government of British Columbia (2014). *A Final Status Update Report in Response to: Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/about-bc-justice-system/inquiries/mwci_report_2014.pdf

⁵ BC Office of the Auditor General (2016). *Follow-Up On The Missing Women Commission Of Inquiry*. https://www.bcauditor.com/sites/default/files/publications/reports/FINAL_MWCI_2.pdf

⁶ Government of British Columbia (2018). *Report in Response to Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry: Status Update*. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/about-bc-justice-system/inquiries/mwci-status-update-2018.pdf>

Updates on Actions by Themes

I. Compensation and Healing

“Healing and reconciliation will not happen overnight. My recommendations do not require that restorative measures be taken before other steps; rather that they go hand in hand. This requires a long-term commitment on behalf of all parties.”

— Commissioner Oppal, page 114

The families and communities of the women who have been taken have suffered an immeasurable loss, and the impacts of this grief and pain are ongoing. In the aftermath of these tragedies, there is a continued need for services and supports to promote healing for families and communities impacted by gender-based violence.

As acknowledged by Commissioner Wally

Oppal, steps towards healing and reconciliation take time, and government continues to prioritize the important work of supporting families and communities impacted by violence. Key actions have included supporting community-based healing and rebuilding initiatives, and continuing the compensation fund for the children of the missing or murdered women identified in the *MWCI Report*.

Compensation Fund (Rec. 3.2)

A Compensation Fund for children of missing and murdered 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, 94 of the 98 children of the missing or murdered women have been compensated.

Healing, Rebuilding, and Reconciliation (Rec. 3.3)

Crime Prevention and Remediation Grants

In 2018/19, over \$1.4 million was provided to support 53 projects focused on healing and rebuilding in Indigenous communities, including projects supporting healing from violence against women and girls. Highlighted projects include:

- \$30,000 provided to Bridges for Women for their Indigenous Healing and Outreach Program. This project provided outreach and trauma counselling to isolated First Nations women in Southern Vancouver Island, as well as urban Métis women impacted by violence, abuse, and trauma.
- \$28,885 provided to Circle of Indigenous Nations Society for the “Kaytayak” Aboriginal Women’s Healing Conference. This project involved a four-day healing conference for 30 women from the West Kootenay and Boundary region that used medicine wheel teachings to guide the process and support activities and experiences that reflect spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical wellness.

- \$30,000 provided to Fort St. John's Woman Warriors – Sisters in Spirit to offer the Peace River Valley Healing Camp for Indigenous Families of Northeast B.C. This project fostered the holistic healing journey for families of the Missing and Murdered Women of Northeastern B.C. using the medicine wheel and its traditional teachings. The project included a multi-day Cultural Healing Camp, as well as a healing and talking circle held each month for five months.
- \$29,924 provided to Northern Society for Domestic Peace for their Pathways to Healing project. This project helped connect survivors and family members who participated in the National Inquiry for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls community hearing in Smithers, B.C. in September 2017. This project offered critical aftercare support and resources through a multi-tiered, holistic approach that supports healing from the trauma and victimization.

In November 2018, the Province renewed its call for grant applications to support projects and initiatives focused on Indigenous Healing and Rebuilding in 2019/20.

Crime Victim Assistance Program

The Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) assists victims, immediate family members, and, in some cases, witnesses in coping with the effects of violent crime. It provides financial benefits to help offset financial losses and assist in recovery. 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. In 2017/18, CVAP provided a total of \$15,104,251 to claimants.

Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women and the Giving Voice Project

The [Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women](#) (MACIW) was established in 2011, and provides advice to government on how to improve the quality of life for Indigenous women in B.C. MACIW is comprised of up to 10 Indigenous women, with one position designated for an Elder representative and another for a Youth representative. One of MACIW's priorities is to prevent violence, and MACIW has recently focused on advising government on the best ways to support families, particularly during the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. MACIW continues to work with relevant ministries to identify steps towards healing and reconciliation regarding ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Between 2013 and 2016, MACIW delivered the Giving Voice Project, which supports community-led projects that give Indigenous women, men, youth, and Elders a safe opportunity to give voice

Civil Forfeiture Funding

Established in 2006, the Civil Forfeiture Office, located within the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 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 about Civil Forfeiture Grants and the application process can be found on the [Grants from Civil Forfeiture Proceeds webpage](#).

to issues of violence and abuse within their lives, their families, and communities; learn from each other successful strategies to address these issues; and be inspired to create change. Through the Giving Voice Project, MACIW allocated \$420,000 to 50 projects that took place in communities across the province and engaged over 2,000 participants. The impacts of the Giving Voice Project have been inspiring, compelling, and far-reaching, and have been captured in MACIW's *Giving Voice 2013-2016 Final Report*⁷.

In 2018/19, the Province committed to providing \$400,000 over two years to a new offering of the Giving Voice Project. Over 100 applications were received, which reflects the importance and need for healing opportunities that these kinds of projects offer.

Support for Community-Based Healing

The Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation provided funding to support healing and rebuilding among families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. In 2018/19, \$36,000 was provided to host a healing ceremony for Kwakwaka'wakw families that took place May 19, 2018 in Yalis (Alert Bay), home to the 'Namgis of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation, hosted by Hereditary Chief Rande Cook. Close to 1,000 participants attended the event, which included 60 Chiefs from Kwakwaka'wakw Nations. The customs and protocols of the big house are to have Hereditary Chiefs listen and witness the work of each ceremony, and to take that message home to their families and community. Over 100 families were honoured on the floor of the big house during a blanketing ceremony, and 50 singers were given songs to learn for the ceremony that had been collected from archives at the Royal BC Museum and had not been heard or sung in hundreds of years. Speakers from across B.C. were invited to share their stories and knowledge, and were provided opportunities for healing and blanketing of families. The event was a critical success that saw the incorporation of traditional cultural practices and ceremonies from start to finish into a gathering designed to promote healing and wellness.

⁷ Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women (2017). Giving Voice 2013-2016 Final Report. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/giving_voice_2013-2016_final_report.pdf

II. Improvements to Policing

“Policing approaches that listen to, learn from, and respond to the safety needs of marginalized women will contribute to effective crime prevention.”

— Commissioner Oppal, page 126

Police investigative practices were one of the key areas examined by the MWCI, and many of the resulting recommendations focus on improvements to policing. As noted in the *2018 Status Update*, a significant amount of work on

improvements to policing took place prior to the *MWCI Report*, with recent and ongoing actions focusing on Provincial Policing Standards, leadership development, and cross-agency information sharing.

Provincial Policing Standards

[Provincial Policing Standards](#) are established under authorities set out in the *British Columbia Police Act*. They provide high-level direction to ensure that police services across the province adopt similar approaches in key areas. As noted in the *2018 Status Update*, the *MWCI Report* recommended that standards be established in a number of areas: missing person investigations (completed in 2015 and in effect since September 2016), major case management and inter-agency cooperation (completed in 2017 and in effect since January 2019), and ensuring equality in the delivery of policing services (underway).

Major Case Management

Provincial Policing Standards for police governing Major Case Management came into effect in January 2019. They impose requirements on police agencies to use major case management methodology for cases meeting the threshold set in the standards, including for all homicides, missing persons where foul play is suspected, and sexual assaults that are suspected to be serial or predatory.

Major Case Management structures an investigation by providing clear goals and objectives; establishing lines of responsibility and decision-making authority; and creating infrastructure for the recording, storage and sharing of information, and contributing operational efficiencies.

Provincial Policing Standards (Rec. 4.1, 4.2, 4.12)

Unbiased Policing and Street Checks

The *MWCI Report* included a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring equality in the delivery of policing services and supporting effective police responses to vulnerable people. As part of the continuing work on these recommendations, the government has undertaken stakeholder and public engagement on the development of Provincial Policing Standards to promote unbiased policing. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders was a central theme of the MWCI recommendations and is important to ensure that the resulting standards are meaningful, effective, and reflect a broad spectrum of input.

Building on targeted consultation with stakeholder organizations in fall 2017, the Province sought the public’s input on what types of issues are important to include in the standards to ensure police services are delivered in a manner that is fair, equitable, and responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups. As this work proceeded, street checks were identified as an important issue to include in the Province’s efforts to promote equality in policing. Stakeholders expressed concerns about this practice and an interest in standardization. The Province is

currently developing Provincial Policing Standards on street checks.

To inform the drafting of standards on unbiased policing and street checks, the Province has consulted and will continue to consult with a range of police and non-police stakeholders through various processes, including but not limited to, the Advisory Committee on Provincial Policing Standards (ACOPPS). Chaired by the Director of Police Services, ACOPPS is a standing committee that provides input during the development of all provincial policing standards. ACOPPS includes representatives from policing, the BC Association of Police Boards, the Independent Investigations Office, the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, BC Civil Liberties Association, Union of BC Municipalities, Justice Institute of British Columbia, and the RCMP Provincial Regional Training Centre.

Police Leadership and Communications (Rec. 4.11)

To help overcome communication gaps and silos between police executives and front-line staff, in 2018, the BC Association of Chiefs of Police (BCACP) developed a practical guide titled *Police Leaders and Communication*. This guide discusses police culture, its hierarchical command-and-control structure, and the challenges it poses to ensuring clear and unfiltered information flows. To this end, the guide outlines what effective leadership and communication should look like and provides examples of good practices for police leaders and executives. The guide incorporates lessons learned through the BC experience, current research, and a review of the literature. The Province supported this work by providing grant funding.

Monitoring High Risk Offenders (Rec. 5.13)

The BCACP canvassed BC police agencies and developed an inventory of current police-based programs related to monitoring high-risk offenders. Supported by a grant from the Province, the BCACP will build on the program inventory to develop a protocol for monitoring high-risk offenders and facilitate information sharing among agencies.

What We Heard - Unbiased Policing

Between March 12, 2018 and April 16, 2018, the Province conducted a public and stakeholder engagement initiative to hear the view of British Columbians on a range of issues related to the promotion of unbiased policing in B.C. The process allowed individuals and organizations to complete an online survey or make a written submission. Submissions were posted online, as was a report summarizing the feedback and input collected during the engagement.

Most respondents support the proposed concepts and themes that may be part of Principles for Provincial Policing Standards on the promotion of unbiased policing, with many offering constructive feedback, concerns and recommendations. For example, a number of participants noted that principles and standards:

- Should be clear and specific, use plain language, and define terms used.
- Should embed theoretical aspects and include practical mechanisms.
- Support policing, improve police-community relationships, support human rights, fairness, and equity.
- Should identify specific groups that may be more likely to experience violence or be the subject of stereotypes.

More information about this engagement and what was heard can be found on the [engagement website](#).

Enhancing Diversity of Police Boards (Rec. 11.3)

The *MWCI Report* recommended that additional steps be taken to ensure representation of vulnerable and marginalized members and Aboriginal peoples on police boards. The Province is working with the Crown Agency and Board Resourcing Office to increase diversity and Indigenous representation on police boards.

“Unfounded/Founded” Definition Changes

The landscape of police-reported crime and the collection of associated data continues to evolve in Canada, potentially making a meaningful impact on the safety of women.

Since the *Globe and Mail’s* investigation into sexual assault cases in 2017, there has been a focus on high rates of sexual assaults determined to be unfounded by police, raising concerns about the response to victims and the quality of investigations for this type of crime. Data were obtained by the *Globe and Mail* directly from police services and were in sharp contrast to self-reported victimization data which indicates that sexual assault is one of the crimes most under-reported to police.

Prior to 2018, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS), which administers the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, defined a crime—including sexual assault—as one where “after police investigation it has been determined that a Criminal Code or other federal statute violation has occurred, even if the charged/suspect chargeable (CSC) is unknown.”

As of January 2018, this definition has been extended to include “...or there is no credible evidence to confirm that the reported incident did not take place. This includes third party reports that fit these criteria.” Police in Canada are in the process of implementing this change.

The new expanded definition represents a “victim-centred approach” to recording crimes, which means it is to be believed that the crime occurred unless there is credible evidence to prove it did not. The CCJS anticipates that this new definition will result in higher criminal-incident counts and lower clearance rates for numerous types of crimes, particularly sexual assaults, but that this will better reflect the realities of these crimes.

III. Supports for Missing Person Investigations

“Building and maintaining positive relationships with family members, the community, the wider public and the media can be essential to locating missing persons and solving potential crimes.”

— Commissioner Oppal, page 144

In the *MWCI Report*, Commissioner Wally Oppal noted that the proper handling of missing person investigations is critical to improving safety for women, especially those who are marginalized. It was also noted that supports for the family members, friends, and communities impacted during missing persons investigations are fundamental in building trust.

The *2018 Status Update* highlighted the

implementation of the *Missing Persons Act* and Provincial Policing Standards for missing person investigations. Over the past year, government has continued to enhance available supports for those impacted by a missing persons case by developing improved training, making information on missing persons investigations more accessible to the public, and continuing to provide supports to families with missing loved ones.

Trauma-Informed Practice (Rec. 4.9)

The Province is in year three of a five-year project to support trauma-informed justice, public safety, and anti-violence community sectors in B.C. When complete, the trauma-informed practice curriculum will enable justice, public safety and anti-violence community personnel to:

- Better recognize and understand trauma and its effects on victims and witnesses and have a clear understanding of how violence and abuse may shape 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.

A cross-sector training symposium was held in March 2017 and research to support curriculum development was undertaken. Since 2017/18, the Trauma-Informed Practice Project team has been working with the Justice Institute of BC to develop foundational online and in person cross sector curriculum on trauma-informed practice for the justice, public safety, and anti-violence community sectors. The online curriculum will be launched in Spring 2019.

Information about Missing Person Investigation Processes (Rec. 7.7, 8.5)

In June 2018, the Province added a [new page](#) to the Government of British Columbia website, which provides information to the public about the missing person reporting

Canada’s Missing Website

[Canada’s Missing](#) is a national public website that contains information on missing children, missing persons and unidentified remains cases where the lead police investigator or medical examiner has determined that featuring the case on the website may assist in advancing the investigation. In making this determination, the primary investigator in a missing person investigation must consider a number of factors, including privacy issues. The purpose of the website is to solicit tips from the public. Under the Provincial Policing Standards, police agencies must include the consideration of profiling a missing person investigation on Canada’s Missing on their checklist of investigative steps.

Federal DNA Missing Persons Index

In March 2018, the Federal Government announced the RCMP's new National Missing Persons DNA Program, which provides all Canadian police with an additional tool that supports missing persons and unidentified human remains investigations across Canada. As a national Program, it provides equal access to the same consistent service by every police force and coroner's and medical examiner's office across Canada.

Legislative amendments to the DNA Identification Act ("Lindsey's Law") enabled the RCMP to expand the national use of DNA analysis through the creation of three new humanitarian indices within the RCMP's National DNA Data Bank:

- Missing Persons Index – DNA profiles of missing persons developed from biological samples of the missing person or personal effects, such as a toothbrush or an article of clothing.
- Human Remains Index – DNA profiles developed from found human remains.
- Relatives of Missing Persons Index – DNA profiles developed from voluntarily submitted biological samples of close relatives of the missing person. These profiles are used to assist in the identification of unidentified human remains that may be associated to a known missing person.

Two new criminal indices have also been created:

- The Victims Index – Voluntary DNA profiles from victims of crime, which could help police identify serial offenders and link crime scenes.
- The Voluntary Donors Index – DNA profiles voluntarily submitted by any person, other than a victim, to advance a criminal, missing persons or unidentified human remains investigation.

Through the coordination of the RCMP's National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains in Ottawa, biological samples and/or personal items for missing persons and human remains investigations will be submitted by police, coroners and medical examiners across Canada to the RCMP's National DNA Data Bank laboratory in Ottawa for DNA analysis. The National Missing Persons DNA Program is considered to be a valuable tool for police to help bring closure to loved ones.

process, and links to BC police agencies and other resources. In addition, the Provincial Policing Standards for missing person investigations were amended to require each police agency to ensure that information about missing persons can be easily located on each police agency's website.

Supports for Families of Missing Persons (Rec. 7.9)

Leveraging federal funding, the Province's BC Family Information Liaison Unit (BC FILU) has continued to provide a dedicated service for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls seeking information related to the loss of their loved one.

In August 2016, the Department of Justice Canada announced funding to support the establishment of a Family Information Liaison Unit (FILU) in every province and territory. The FILU initiative was introduced in response to feedback received from families during the pre-inquiry consultation process for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls regarding the need for access to more consistent, reliable, and fulsome information about the loss of their loved one. The FILUs are independent from the National Inquiry, but were designed to offer services parallel to the National Inquiry. On June 5, 2018, the federal government announced additional funding to extend the operational timelines of the FILUs until March 31, 2020.

When a family member contacts the BC FILU for assistance, frontline family support staff 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 then works with these partners to coordinate sharing the information with the family in a trauma-

informed and culturally appropriate manner. In addition to serving families' information needs, 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).

Since launching in July 2017, BC FILU staff have engaged in over 190 outreach and awareness activities with over 515 community agencies, Indigenous organizations, and band or tribal councils in 85 communities who work with families of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls throughout the province to support greater awareness of and access to FILU services.

In addition to the BC FILU, family members and friends of a missing loved one – including all women and girls – can access supports and services through over 160 provincially-funded victim service programs providing emotional support, information, referrals, and practical assistance to victims of crime. This includes 70 community-based victim service programs that serve victims of sexual violence and their families and operate out of non-profit organizations, as well as 91 police-based victim service programs that service victims of all types of crime and trauma and assist police and communities in situations involving multiple injuries or deaths and operate out of RCMP detachments and municipal police departments.

IV. Safety for Marginalized Women

“Building the women’s legacy of safety requires authentic and sincere collaboration between a wide cross-section of individuals and groups representing the police, government, and groups and communities...”

— Commissioner Oppal, page 114

As noted in the *2018 Status Update*, increasing safety for marginalized women requires consideration of a number of complex and intersecting factors, including poverty, access to housing, mental health, substance use, educational, and employment opportunities. This work also requires that community organizations throughout the province are supported to provide services directly to women in both

addressing and preventing violence. Since 2018, government has continued to support short-term projects through grant funding as well as increasing annual funding for initiatives that serve women and their safety needs. Work has also continued on enhancing safer transportation options for women in northern B.C., and improving supports and safety for women within the justice system.

Programs and Services for Marginalized Women (UM#1, Rec. 6.3, 6.4)

WISH Drop-in Centre

In 2018/19, the WISH Drop-in Centre Society received \$257,666 from the Province as 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.

Interagency Case Assessment Teams

In December 2018, the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC) received a one-time grant of \$100,000 to continue supporting new and developing interagency case assessment teams (ICATs). ICATs are a partnership of local agencies – including police, social services, and transition houses – that bring together service providers to share information, identify risks, and create safety plans for high-risk domestic violence cases. There are approximately 55 teams throughout the province. This grant will allow EVA BC to deliver between four and seven training sessions, which will enhance skills and understanding of domestic-violence risk identification, safety planning, as well as collaboration and coordination.

Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre

The Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre provides services and supports for women and children in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, including a range of programs, a drop-in center, and emergency shelter services. In 2018/19, the Province provided \$1,599,279 in annual funding to the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre. Since 2018, construction to accommodate an increase in shelter beds has continued and is nearing completion. Once this work is complete, the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre will have increased the number of beds from 50 to 57 and will offer a 24/7 service model.

Women’s Transition Housing and Supports program

In 2017/18, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, through BC Housing, provided more than \$36 million to support 863 spaces for women and children affected by violence through the Women’s Transition Housing and Supports Program. Six transition houses and one safe home either have an Indigenous focus or are operated by an Indigenous agency supporting Indigenous women. The first-year roll-out of Budget 2018 funding for the Women’s

Transition Housing Fund is estimated to total approximately \$16 million (in addition to the more than \$37 million budgeted in 2018/19 for the existing program). Over the next three years, an additional \$141 million will be invested, reaching the total commitment of \$734 million and 1,500 units over ten years. Projects will be built in both urban and rural communities throughout the Province. The Province, along with the Government of Canada, recently contributed \$10.9 million for the construction and renovation of shelters and transition houses for victims of family violence through the Social Infrastructure Fund agreement under the Agreement for Investment in Affordable Housing.

Crime Prevention and Remediation Grants

In 2018/19, over \$300,000 in Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant funding was directed toward projects that address sexual violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and vulnerable women in the sex trade. Highlighted projects include:

- White Buffalo Aboriginal and Métis Health Society's project, *Our Voices: Let's Talk About Youth Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking*, which provides a series of workshops on education and awareness, as well as intervention and prevention strategies for youth, parents, and community members.
- Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Society's project, *Kwam Kwum Shu!lheni* ("Quam Qwum Sil-Ann-Ee" Hulquminum for "Strong, Healthy Women"), which targets at-risk Indigenous girls ages 8-16 through workshops and other activities to help prevent human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

In November 2018, 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 2019/20.

Domestic Violence Units

In Budget 2018, the Province increased annual funding to victim service, violence against women, and court support programs, and provided stable ongoing annual funding for Domestic Violence Units (DVUs) across the province, starting in 2018/19. Domestic Violence Units (DVUs) are an evidence-based model of co-located service delivery that pairs dedicated police officers with community-based victim services and, in some communities, a child protection worker to improve case coordination and collaboration in highest risk cases of domestic violence. Funding will be further increased by an additional \$3 million in 2020/21, for a total increase of \$18 million over three years to better meet the ongoing demand for programs and services.

Violence Against Women Programs

- The Province provides annual funding to over 240 violence against women counselling and outreach programs that provide assistance to women and children who are impacted by violence including:
 - 94 Stopping the Violence Counselling programs;
 - 55 Outreach programs;
 - 11 Multi-cultural outreach services; and,
 - 86 Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment programs for children who have witnessed abuse, threats, or violence in the home.

The Province now provides over \$35 million annually in funding to support over 400 victim service and violence against women programs across B.C.

Aboriginal Domestic Violence Funding Project

The Province's 2014 three-year *Provincial Domestic Violence Plan* included an investment of \$1.5 million aimed towards addressing domestic violence in Indigenous communities.

Through this investment, the Aboriginal Domestic Violence Funding Program (ADVFP) was developed through a partnership between the British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, the Provincial Office of Domestic Violence, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, and Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women.

The ADVFP supported the delivery of 24 community-based programs for Indigenous women, men, children, and youth who have been, or are at risk of being, impacted by domestic violence.

Through a reinvestment of \$850,000 by the Province, the programs were provided top-up funding so that they could continue to provide services throughout 2017/18.

The ADVFP projects reached 3,791 clients and community members across the province. The most prominent outcome for participants was "increased awareness about domestic violence,"

Violence is Preventable Program

In December 2018, the BC Society for Transition Houses received a one-time grant of \$75,000 to deliver the Violence is Preventable (VIP) program in schools. The VIP program is a comprehensive provincial strategy linking B.C. schools with the Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling, and Empowerment program and their resources to help ensure children and youth who have been impacted by violence against women receive the support services they need.

which is crucial to changing the pervasiveness and normalization of domestic violence in Indigenous communities. Participants also reported an "increased ability for participants to openly discuss domestic violence and trauma" and many projects noted an increased knowledge and skill base of their participants in healthy relationships and communication methods. Importantly, projects cited a reconnection to culture and traditions, an influence on personal healing and self-care, understanding of and increase in traditional roles and responsibilities, increased reunification of family mentorship, and, without specific numbers or stats, projects alluded to a decrease in domestic violence incidents.

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

The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure continues to deliver on priorities identified in the \$8.1 million *Highway 16 Transportation Action Plan*. This comprehensive, community-driven, five-point plan is helping provide safer and more reliable transportation options for First Nations and remote communities along the corridor. The plan includes funding for five years of expanded inter-community transit services along the Highway 16 Corridor, a community vehicle grant program, a First Nations driver education program, new transit shelters and webcams, and coordinated transportation services along the corridor.

The Province has committed to fund transit improvements along Highway 16, on a cost-share basis with local governments. This includes four new BC Transit operated inter-community bus routes that make it easier and more affordable for residents to travel to their next largest community and return home the same day. Three of the new routes provide three round trips per week. The fourth route is a six day per week commuter service between Smithers and Witsset (formerly known as Moricetown). Over 1,000 people benefit from Highway 16 inter-community transit every month. User feedback has been tremendously positive, and ridership has steadily grown.

The Community Transportation Grant Program continues to support 12 community service providers throughout the corridor with \$2 million of capital and operational support. This enables vehicle purchases, service start-ups and three years of operational support. Together, these services provide more than 2,500 rides each month.

A \$400,000 driver training program has been jointly funded with the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, and is helping to increase the number of Class 4 and Class 5 drivers in First Nations communities. Indigenous community members within the corridor from Prince George to Prince Rupert are participating in a driver education program, and to-date, over 200 participants received training for Class 7L, 7N, 5 and 4 licenses.

The plan included \$1.5 million (\$1 million of which is federal) in funding for highway webcams, transit-style shelters, and infrastructure for vehicles to stop safely at the shelters (e.g. pull outs). The Province has installed 12 new web cameras and 15 all-weather bus shelters to increase the safety and visibility of pedestrians and motorists along Highway 16. The ministry also completed the 'Bear Road at Highway 16' shelter site preparation in Prince George, and helped the City of Terrace procure and install four shelters. In addition, six traveller shelters have been installed to support the community vehicle grant program.

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

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 policy was updated and released publicly on March 1, 2018. The 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, as well as used as a sounding board and/or source of information on practice resources.

On March 1, 2018, a fully revised BC Prosecution Service *Crown Counsel Policy Manual* was released. It includes changes to the Introduction and the Charge Assessment Guidelines (CHA 1) policy, including additional language consistent with recommendation 4.5.

Recommendation 4.5:

"That Provincial Government adopt a policy statement in the BC Crown Policy Manual requiring that a prosecutor's evaluations of how strong the case is likely to be when presented at trial should be made on the assumption that the trier of fact will act impartially and according to the law."

CHA 1 Policy (page 3):

"In assessing the evidence, Crown Counsel should assume that the trial will unfold before an impartial and unbiased judge or jury acting in accordance with the law, and should not usurp the role of the judge or jury by substituting their own subjective view of the ultimate weight or credibility of evidence for those of the judge or jury."

The *Crown Counsel Policy Manual* as well as several policies relevant to the *MWCI Report*, including VUL 1, CHA 1, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV 1), and Victims of Crimes - Adult (VIC 1), have been translated into nine additional languages. The [Crown Counsel Policy Manual and all policies](#) are publicly available.

Additional Initiatives

The Province recognizes that the work needed to address gender-based violence and improve safety for women and girls across B.C. is ongoing. The Province also recognizes that this type of systemic change requires diverse leadership and action at all levels – from grassroots initiatives to intergovernmental partnerships. The initiatives highlighted below demonstrate some of the work that is happening throughout B.C. in collaborations between the Province and other leaders to enhance the well-being of women, families, and communities.

Moose Hide Campaign

In 2018/19, the Province committed \$2 million over four years to support the [Moose Hide Campaign](#), which is a grassroots movement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys who are standing up against violence towards women and children. As part of the Province's ongoing commitment to ending violence, the B.C. Public Service co-sponsors and participates in the Moose Hide Campaign Annual Provincial Gathering and Day of Fasting. At the 2018 Provincial Gathering, approximately 200 public servants participated.

Indigenous Communities and Industrial Camps

In February 2017, the Firelight Group, with Nak'azdli Whut'en and Lake Babine Nation released a report entitled *Indigenous Communities and Industrial Camps: Promoting Healthy Communities in Settings of Industrial Change*⁸ which outlines the potential negative social impacts of industrial camps on Indigenous women and children. The Province has created a cross government working group, with representatives from MACIW, Lake Babine and Nak'azdli Whut'en to examine the issue and develop a response. The Province is continuing to lead the development of a response to the impacts of industrial camps on Indigenous women and children, and working with proponents to better understand, track, and respond to the issues as they arise.

Tripartite Partnership on the Social Determinants of Health

In July 2018, the Government of Canada, the Province, and the First Nations Health Council (FNHC), signed the *Memorandum of Understanding: Tripartite Partnership to Improve Mental Health and Wellness Services and Achieve Progress on the Determinants of Health and Wellness* (MOU)⁹.

The MOU was developed based on an extensive two-year engagement process led by the FNHC that included regional caucus sessions and the annual Gathering Wisdom forum that brings together Chiefs and leaders across the province for dialogue and to provide direction to the FNHC. The MOU aims to transform mental health and wellness services by putting Nations at the center of the design and delivery of these services. The MOU supports this transformation by increasing investment in mental health and wellness services and supports, supporting Nations to plan, collaborate, design, and demonstrate programs that support social determinants of health and wellness, establishing simplified and more flexible approaches to funding and reporting, and facilitating greater cross-government collaboration on actions aimed at improving

⁸ Firelight Group, with Nak'azdli Whut'en and Lake Babine Nation (2017). *Indigenous Communities and Industrial Camps: Promoting Healthy Communities in Settings of Industrial Change*. http://www.thefirelightgroup.com/fire-lightmaterials/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Firelight-work-camps-Feb-8-2017_FINAL.pdf

⁹ <https://news.gov.bc.ca/stories/agreement-reaffirms-tripartite-commitment-for-improving-mental-health-and-wellness-services-with-fir>

health and wellness outcomes. The MOU is supported by a \$10 million commitment each from Canada, the Province, and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), for a total of \$30 million over two years (2019-2021) to support community-driven, Nation-led Mental Health and Wellness planning activities and demonstration sites. The parties will work with Nations to establish a mental health and wellness reporting framework, and this reporting will inform the development of a ten-year social determinants of health strategy, as committed in the MOU.

The systemic causes of violence against women and girls are rooted in many of the upstream factors of the social determinants of health and wellness. Through this holistic approach to health and well-being, the Province is working in partnership with the FNHC, FNHA, and the Government of Canada towards a shared vision of healthy, self-determining, and vibrant First Nations children, families, and communities in B.C.

Indigenous Justice Strategy

In September 2017, the *Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Development of an Indigenous Justice Strategy* (MOU)¹⁰ was signed by the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, the Attorney General, and the co-chairs of the BC Aboriginal Justice Council.

The overarching objective of the Indigenous Justice Strategy is to improve how the justice and public safety system interacts with Indigenous people in B.C. As set out in the Memorandum of Understanding, the Indigenous Justice Strategy will focus on reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples; decreasing the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the justice system; addressing violence against Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women and girls; improving access to justice and justice services for Indigenous people; and designing services for Indigenous people that are culturally relevant and appropriate. In addition, it is envisioned that the Indigenous Justice Strategy will enable ongoing engagement with Indigenous communities in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner.

As part of developing the Indigenous Justice Strategy, the partners are undertaking a comprehensive review of past engagement, research, and reports. In this context, the *MWCI Report* is of particular interest as it included a number of important recommendations relevant to improving the experience of Indigenous people in the justice system.

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

The [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#) was established by the federal government in September 2016. The National Inquiry's purpose is to examine and report on systemic causes of violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls and their greater vulnerability to violence. Systemic factors that may be considered by the commission include issues related to child welfare practices, policing, health, education and the justice and public safety sector. Each of the provinces and territories established its own commission of inquiry, with the same mandate and commissioners as the federal commission of inquiry, to participate in the National Inquiry. The British Columbia Commission of Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and girls was established in November 2016. The commission has until April 30, 2019 to deliver its final report, and operations must conclude by June 2019. The National Inquiry is conducted under the federal *Inquiries Act*, the *British Columbia Public Inquiry Act* and the respective public inquiry legislation of the other provinces and territories in Canada. The Province committed to fully participating in the inquiry, and has provided relevant files and

¹⁰ <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2017AG0020-001548>

records, as requested and as appropriate to the Province's jurisdiction; participated as observers in community, institutional, and expert hearings; and supported information-sharing and referral to families through the BC FILU.

The Province prepared a [written submission](#) for the commission, which provides comprehensive, B.C.-specific information related to the commission's mandate to inform the commission's final report and recommendations.

The Province looks forward to receiving the final report from the commission in April 2019 to provide additional information and insight regarding missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and will work closely with Indigenous communities and partners to develop a path forward on ending violence against Indigenous women and girls that is meaningful for B.C.

Direction Forward

The work reflected in this *2019 Status Update* illustrates the steps taken since 2018 to address and respond to the *MWCI Report*, as well as the Province's ongoing commitment to address the systemic causes of violence against women and girls. In past year, the Province has made significant progress on the *MWCI Report* recommendations and will continue to take action to improve the safety of all women and girls.

While the Province has continued to act on the *MWCI Report* recommendations, the Province has also deepened its commitment to addressing violence against women and girls more broadly through initiatives such as participation in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, appointment of the Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity, and development of cross-government initiatives that seek to address the intersecting factors that contribute to marginalization and violence.

The Province looks forward to the insight that will be gleaned and the outcomes that will be achieved through these actions so the safety and well-being of women and girls in B.C. can continue to be enhanced.

Appendix of Referenced MWC Recommendations

Urgent Measures	1	To provide funding to existing centres that provide emergency services to women engaged in the sex trade to enable them to remain open 24 hours per day.
	2	To develop and implement an enhanced public transit system to provide a safer travel option connecting the Northern communities, particularly along Highway 16.
Restorative Measures	3.2	That Provincial Government establish a compensation fund for the children of the missing and murdered women.
	3.3	That Provincial Government establish a healing fund for families of the missing and murdered women. These funds should be accessed through an application process pursuant to established guidelines.
Equality-Promoting Measures	4.1	That the Minister of Justice direct the Director of Police Services to undertake equality audits of police forces in British Columbia with a focus on police duty to protect marginalized and Aboriginal women from violence. These audits should be carried out by an external agency and with meaningful community involvement.
	4.2	That Provincial Government set a provincial standard establishing that police officers have a general and binding duty to promote equality and to refrain from discriminatory policing.
	4.3	That Provincial Government amend the BC Crown Policy Manual to explicitly include equality as a fundamental principle to guide Crown Counsel in performing their functions.
	4.4	That Provincial Government develop and implement a Crown Vulnerable Women Assault Policy to provide guidance on the prosecution of crimes of violence against vulnerable women, including women engaged in the sex trade.
	4.5	That Provincial Government adopt a policy statement in the BC Crown Policy Manual requiring that a prosecutor's evaluations of how strong the case is likely to be when presented at trial should be made on the assumption that the trier of fact will act impartially and according to the law.
	4.9	That Provincial Government develop guidelines to facilitate and support vulnerable and intimidated witnesses by all actors within the criminal justice system based on the best practices identified by the Commission through its review of protocols and guidelines existing in other jurisdictions.
	4.11	That the BC Association of Municipal Chiefs of Police and the RCMP establish a working group to develop a best practices guide for the establishment and implementation of formal discussion mechanisms to facilitate communication and collaboration that transcends the institutional hierarchy within a police agency.

Appendix of Referenced MWCI Recommendations

<p>Equality-Promoting Measures</p>	<p>4.12</p>	<p>That police officers be required to undergo mandatory and ongoing experiential and interactive training concerning vulnerable community members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Active engagement in overcoming biases, rather than more passive sensitivity training (sometimes called anti-oppression training); ➤ More intensive and ongoing training in the history and current status of Aboriginal peoples in the province and in the specific community, particularly with respect to the ongoing effects of residential schools and the child welfare system; ➤ Training and resources to make prevention of violence against Aboriginal women a genuine priority; ➤ Training to ensure an understanding of violence against women in a range of settings including family violence, child sexual exploitation and violence against women in the sex trade; in particular, the scenarios used in police training should incorporate issues of cultural sensitivity and violence against women; and ➤ Training in recognizing the special needs of vulnerable individuals and how to meet those needs, including recognition of a higher standard of care owed by the police to these individuals.
<p>Measures to Enhance the Safety of Vulnerable Urban Women</p>	<p>5.13</p>	<p>That the BC Association of Municipal Police Chiefs and the RCMP, with support from the Director of Police Services, should develop a protocol containing additional measures to monitor high-risk offenders, including recommendations for the efficient and timely sharing of information.</p>
<p>Measures to Prevent Violence Against Aboriginal and Rural Women</p>	<p>6.1</p>	<p>That Provincial Government fully support the implementation of The Highway of Tears Symposium action plan, updated to the current situation and in a manner that ensures involvement of all affected communities along Highway 16.</p>
	<p>6.3</p>	<p>That Provincial Government provide additional funding to Aboriginal women’s organizations to provide more safe houses and counselling programs run for and by Aboriginal women and youth.</p>
	<p>6.4</p>	<p>That Provincial Government provide additional funding to Aboriginal women’s organizations to provide more safe houses and counselling programs run for and by Aboriginal women and youth.</p>

Appendix of Referenced MWCI Recommendations

Improved Missing Person Policies and Practices	7.7	That provincial authorities create and maintain a provincial missing person website aimed at educating the public about the missing persons process and engaging them in proactive approaches to prevention and investigation.
	7.9	That provincial authorities develop an enhanced, holistic, comprehensive approach for the provision of support to the families and friends of missing persons. This should be based on a needs assessment carried out in consultation with the provincial partnership committee on missing persons.
Enhanced Police Investigations	8.5	That Provincial Government take active steps to support the development of a National DNA Missing Persons Index and to assist in overcoming the impasse on outstanding concerns over its creation and operationalization.
Increase Police Accountability to Communities	11.3	That additional steps need to be taken to ensure representation of vulnerable and marginalized members and Aboriginal peoples on police boards.