



MARCH 2021

WHAT WE HEARD

DEVELOPING CANADA'S
NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO
END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



WHAT WE HEARD FROM SURVIVORS

Leading up to the development of a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, WomanACT consulted survivors of gender-based violence on priority areas and solutions they would like to see in the Plan. The consultations were supported through Women and Gender Equality Canada and YWCA Canada. The consultation engaged over 100 survivors in February 2021.

KEY MESSAGES

- The lack of financial security and access to income is a key barrier to survivors leaving abusive relationships and establishing safety. Survivors are often financially dependent on perpetrators because of the abuse and gender roles. There is a lack of access to emergency financial aid and income supports to help survivors live independently, such as income for rent and food.
- Many survivors, especially racialized survivors, face discrimination and racism from the police and do not want to report gender-based violence because they do not trust the police and fear the police.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges faced by survivors and increased their risk of violence due to isolation with abusers.
- A lack of social and affordable housing options makes it difficult for women to leave an abusive situation and establish independence.
- The lack of trust in and fear of the justice system results in survivors not reporting or wanting to engage in the justice system. Survivors experience victim blaming in courts and by the media.
- Immigrant and refugee women experiencing gender-based violence face immense and unique challenges in accessing services, including ineligibility for certain services, unfamiliarity with systems, language and fear of deportation.
- Employers and workplaces lack the knowledge and policies to identify and support employees who are experiencing gender-based violence. This can lead to survivors leaving their employment.

“ There is a real lack of wrap around care for survivors facing multiple barriers, so survivors repeatedly fall through the cracks. Case management and one- stop shop agencies in which survivors can walk into one building and have all of their related needs met is very necessary. ”

OPPORTUNITIES

- Create community-based hubs where there are multiple services in one location for survivors.
- Require mandatory training on gender-based violence and trauma-informed approaches for lawyers, judges, police officers, nurses and physicians.
- Create community-led alternatives to responding to gender-based violence reporting which stops current practices that are putting Black and Indigenous communities at harm.
- Fund communities to develop new and restorative justice models, with integration of Indigenous practices and community expertise.
- Increase availability and awareness of crisis lines for survivors, including text lines.
- Invest more in mental health supports for survivors, including long-term counselling.
- Ensure survivors have easy access to compensation, including compensation in the form of long-term counselling.
- Increase the availability of affordable housing for survivors and create programs that support survivors into home ownership.
- Prioritize the prevention of gender-based violence, with a focus on learning about gender-based violence and healthy relationships in schools.
- Ensure that discussions on gender-based violence include sex workers, people living with disabilities, women who are older, Black women, and 2SLGBTQQI+ folks.
- Make legal aid free for survivors, including for family, criminal, and immigration law and other legal matters.

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“Use restorative justice models centred in Indigenous practices to deal with issues of violence in communities instead of one singular approach led by the racist legal system in Canada.”

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ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

- Give survivors decision-making and leadership roles in the development and implementation of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for input and feedback with survivors through surveys and consultations, with compensation available for their time and input.



WHAT WE HEARD FROM COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Leading up to the development of a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, WomanACT consulted community organizations on priority areas and solutions they would like to see in the Plan. The consultations were supported through Women and Gender Equality Canada and YWCA Canada. The consultation engaged over 50 participants in February 2021.

KEY MESSAGES

- Limited funding and resources are directed towards prevention initiatives or initiatives that tackle the root causes of gender inequity and gender-based violence.
- Different forms of gender-based violence are often left out of prevention education and response strategies, including cyber violence, financial abuse, violence against older women, coercive control, sexual violence and rape in relationships.
- The general public needs information, education and understanding on gender-based violence so they can respond and support appropriately when they know of a family member, friend or colleague who is experiencing abuse.
- Immigrant, refugee and non-status women face significant barriers to information, housing, legal aid and support services. Targeted messages and information for immigrant women are needed in communities and workplaces.
- Anti-violence organizations require funding that enables them to provide flexible, accessible and long-term services and supports for survivors.
- A lack of affordable housing in the community is a key barrier for survivors establishing safety and independence and leads to bottlenecks in shelters for survivors. Shelters should be short-term and not the first or only option for survivors.
- The pandemic has restricted survivors from accessing in-person support services and some survivors may not have access to technology or cannot use technology for safety reasons.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Prioritize and move on the MMIWG National Action Plan to ensure recommendations and actions are implemented and accounted for.
- Increase public awareness of gender-based violence through public education campaigns outside of the social service sector and in new spaces such as television, childcare centres, grocery stores, hospitals, workplace and other public spaces. Public campaigns must be offered in different languages and rooted in communities.
- Start prevention efforts in communities and schools, including engaging young people to challenge gender inequities that lead to gender-based violence and education on consent, sex, healthy relationships and identifying gender-based violence, including dating violence.
- Address and adapt public policies to ensure women's equitable access to economic security, including removing discrimination in employment, immigration and income security policies.
- Fund the development of multi-agency hubs where survivors can access services and supports in one place, including a dedicated advocate to help them navigate the system. This will increase engagement and partnership between services, and reduce the re-traumatization of survivors having to tell their stories time and time again.
- Invest in a range of housing options for survivors, with a focus on social and independent housing. This should include mandated affordable housing in new developments and a specific mandated number of units for survivors of violence in government strategies and budgets.
- Provide survivors with housing options, including the choice to remain in their own homes with the perpetrator removed.
- Require mandatory training on gender-based violence and trauma-informed approaches for professionals in the social service sector, lawyers, and judges.
- Create multi-sector tables to identify and respond to cases in the community of high-risk domestic violence, with the aim of providing wrap around supports and interventions, and reducing the risk of harm and femicide.
- Invest in free and comprehensive legal services for survivors.
- Eliminate laws and policies that are driving racial bias and discrimination in the justice system.
- Create community-led alternatives to gender-based violence to divert response from police and to community agencies, support and interventions.