



BC Association of
Specialized Victim
Assistance &
Counselling Programs



B.C./Yukon
Society of Transition
Houses



BC Institute
Against Family Violence

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

BRIEFING DOCUMENT

ISSUE: Specialized Support for Women Who Are Victims of Violence

Current specialized support services for women who are victims of domestic or sexual violence must be maintained and significant gaps should be filled.

KEY POINTS

- BC should be very proud of the significant progress that has been made over the past three decades in providing a critical social safety net for women who are victims of violence, including specialized Community-Based Victim Services, Stopping the Violence Counselling programs, Outreach programs and Transition Houses.
- Services for women report increasing caseloads, waitlists and stressors on programs and staff. This increases women's vulnerability and threatens significant advances made in services for women who are victims of violence. Current levels of funding and services must be maintained in some areas and increased in others, in order not to further jeopardize women's safety.
- The Ministry of Community Services (MCS) is to be commended for attending to some of the service pressures experienced by their anti-violence programs, including adding a 24-hour service capacity to most Transition Houses and adding 50 Outreach programs, including 11 Multicultural Outreach programs throughout BC. However, more remains to be done. For example, waitlists for some Stopping the Violence Counselling services remain long, and there is a need for additional Outreach programs not only for women from multicultural communities, but for aboriginal women.
- The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General (MPSSG) has not attended to such service pressures. Many victim service programs are staffed by one person, many are unable to respond adequately to their communities' victim service needs and many communities lack a Community-Based Victim Service program.
- Specialized hospital-based approaches to sexual assault have demonstrated their effectiveness experientially as well as through independent evaluations and research (e.g. Ericksen 2002).
- Existing provincial organizations (including those listed below) provide crucial cost-effective resources and support to community-based service providers across BC.
- Some pressing gaps in services for women who are victims of violence are:
 - Specialized counselling services for women who are under 18 who are victims of sexual assault or dating violence

- Services, including outreach, for marginalized, and therefore, particularly vulnerable, women such as aboriginal women, immigrant women and women with disabilities, including interpreter services to help women access appropriate victim support services
- Specialized hospital-based responses to domestic violence and sexual assault in partnership with community-based programs

THE CONTEXT

- Current specialized support services for women who are victims of violence include:
 - **62 specialized victim service programs** in communities over 20,000, funded by MPSSG to serve victims of family and sexual violence and certain diversity groups
 - **80 Transition Houses, Safe Houses and Second Stage Houses**, funded by MCS to provide emergency shelter for women who are victims of violence and their children
 - **100 Stopping the Violence Counselling programs**, funded by MCS to provide counselling for women who are victims of violence
 - **51 Outreach and Multicultural Outreach Services**, funded by MCS to help women who have been abused and their children access the services they need
 - **91 Children Who Witness Abuse programs**, funded by MCS to provide support and counselling for children who have witnessed their mothers being abused
 - **Specialized hospital-based sexual assault services** in some BC communities, including Vancouver, Nanaimo, Surrey and Victoria, which provide a specialized medical service to sexual assault patients. These services are not funded by the either MCS or MPSSG. Where funding does exist, it is provided only partially by the local hospital.
- Effective, timely, coordinated services to women who are victims of violence serve an important preventive function because of the ongoing nature of many of these crimes.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- MPSSG funding should be increased for existing Community-Based Victim Services to meet current and growing service pressures, and funding should be provided for additional Community-Based Victim Services in communities without such a program. This would include lowering the community population requirement (currently at 20,000) to be eligible for a Community-Based Victim Service program.
- Special efforts should be made to address the needs of young women under 18 who are victims of violence, including funding to existing Stopping the Violence Counselling programs to provide services to these young women and training for service providers on the needs of these young women.
- Adequate funding should be provided for interpreter services to facilitate immigrant women's and disabled women's access to appropriate victim support services.
- Funding should be provided to increase the number of Multicultural Outreach programs and to fund Outreach programs for aboriginal women who are victims of violence.

- Ministries should encourage and fund innovative approaches to specialized hospital-based responses to domestic and sexual violence, based on existing models in BC, as well as research and evaluation to guide their development.
- Funding to existing provincial organizations should be increased and be ongoing to provide critical support, resource development and training to frontline programs.
- Consideration should be given to funding these initiatives from the Victim Surcharge Special Account earmarked for initiatives addressing needs of victims of crime.

CONTACT: Tracy Porteous, Executive Director
BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs
Tel: 604-633-2506
Email: porteous@endingviolence.org

Mary Clifford, Executive Director
BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses
Telephone: 604-669-6943
Email: maryclifford@bcysth.ca

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References

Ericksen, J., C. Dudley, G. McIntosh, L. Ritch and S. Shumay. 2002. "Clients' experiences with a specialized sexual assault service." *Journal of Emergency Nursing* 28: 86-90.

Notes

Provincial organizations with proven track records in providing support to community-based anti-violence services include: BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs and its program, Community Coordination for Women's Safety; BC Institute Against Family Violence and BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses.

See also ISSUES AND ACTIONS: *Addressing Gaps in Services for Marginalized Women*