

**FEDERAL STRATEGY ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE  
BRIEFING NOTES FOR STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA AND THE DEPARTMENT  
OF JUSTICE CANADA**

**ISSUE: Specialized Support for Victims/Survivors of Gender-Based Violence**

Current specialized support services for women who are victims/survivors of gender-based violence must be maintained, and significant gaps in service specified and then met.

**KEY POINTS**

- Services responding to gender-based violence report increasing caseloads, increasing levels of violence being perpetrated, increasing complexity of client needs, increasing waitlists and other stressors on programs and staff. This in turn increases victims/survivors vulnerability. Levels of funding must be increased across Canada so that victims/survivors can get immediate help.
- Services are uneven, and clustered in urban centres. Most rural and reserve communities have no specialized GBV services - this is a pressing gap.
- Some other urgent and significant gaps in services for victims/survivors of violence include:
  - Specialized counselling services for young women who are victims of sexual assault or dating violence, especially those who are under 18.
  - Services for marginalized and particularly vulnerable women such as Indigenous women (particularly those living on reserves) immigrant and refugee women, Trans women, young women, women living with disabilities, and women with substance use and mental health issues.
  - Specialized hospital-based responses to domestic violence and sexual assault in partnership with community-based programs, particularly in smaller communities.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

While we realize that that services for survivors of violence are a provincial/territorial responsibility, we urge the federal government to use their power to influence the provinces and territories to do more. For those provinces and territories who have services, many haven't received funding increases in over 20 years. In many provinces and territories, large geographic regions – particularly in northern and remote areas – remain unserved. While services to address gender-based violence are relevant to the mandates of several government ministries, many are funding services and supports for survivors out of only one or two ministry budgets.

To help to address the disparity in specialized services to address gender-based violence across Canada, the Federal Government could:

- “Tag” transfer payments to the provinces/territories specifically for prevention, education and services for survivors of gender-based violence.
- Provide funding to existing intermediary provincial and territorial organizations to help them track emerging issues and assist them in supporting the frontline agencies.
- Mandate every federal institution, such as the RCMP, to refer survivors of gender-based violence to the appropriate community-based services. Supports, services and referrals for survivors are uneven across the country. The 2016 Macdonald-Laurier Institute *Report Card on the Criminal Justice System*, which assessed each province and territory’s criminal justice system based on five major objectives, gave three territories a failing grade, one territory and one province a “C”, and two provinces a C+ when it came to support for victims.
- Ensure culturally and linguistically appropriate services are present wherever survivors are – including reserve communities, post-secondary institutions, friendship centres, settlement and English language programs, and services accessible to those with a range of disabilities. Rather than developing new agency infrastructure in these areas of need, our strong suggestion is adapting and expanding existing community based anti-violence services to provide service in these settings.
- Ensure every hospital has a specialized response for sexual assault (in BC, there are only 14 specialized programs at 110 hospitals in the province with a full-fledged emergency department).
- Foster multi-disciplinary coordination and information sharing, including consistent risk assessment and coordinated safety planning. This requires coordination from senior levels of government to the local community level. Risk-related information sharing in accordance with federal and provincial privacy legislation is the key to success in this area.
- Work with RCMP subject matter experts to develop nation-wide sexual assault and domestic violence policies that strongly discourage the use of alternative measures for domestic or sexual violence, unless there are specific training, safeguards and survivor supports in place.
- Ensure adequate legal aid for victims/survivors of gender-based violence – including sufficient coverage for legal representation for both family law and immigration matters.
- Ensure offender accountability – including more effective enforcement of protection orders by police and Crown, and effective treatment for both court-mandated and voluntary offenders that is closely linked to services for victims/survivors and coordinated with anti-violence services at the local level.

- Promote and ensure the effective use of specialization in the field of gender-based violence – including use of highly trained and experienced personnel and teams across all sectors to provide a specialized approach and specialized resources to assist generalist responders.
- Resource and support training (also see Briefing Note on Training) in domestic and sexual violence issues – including training for all generalists and specialists in all sectors.
- Resource, support and promote comprehensive prevention efforts (also see Briefing Note on Training) – including more coordinated public education, such as bystander training, which does not place the onus for crime prevention on the victim.
- Resource, support and promote system accountability – including systematic data collection, public access to data, and nation-wide monitoring.

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