

Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes Against Aboriginal Women and Girls



Government
of Canada

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du Canada

Canada

**Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes
Against Aboriginal Women and Girls**

Also available in French under the title: *Plan d'action pour contrer la violence familiale et les crimes violents à l'endroit des femmes et des filles autochtones*

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PDF - English

Cat No. : SW21-161/2014E-PDF

ISBN: 978-1-100-24770-0

**Action Plan to Address
Family Violence and Violent Crimes Against
Aboriginal Women and Girls**



The Honourable
Dr. K. Kellie Leitch,
P.C., O.Ont., M.P.
Minister of Labour and
Minister of Status of
Women

Foreword

The Government of Canada is deeply concerned about the high incidence of family violence and violent crime against Aboriginal women, and the number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Far too many families have been affected by violent crime and its aftermath. I have met personally with many affected families and communities, listened to their stories, and witnessed their pain.

Violent crime committed against Aboriginal women and girls must be strongly denounced – by the communities in which it occurs, and by all Canadians. We must prevent such violence, and ensure a strong law enforcement and justice system is in place to support victims and bring those who commit these acts to justice.

The many studies and reports on this issue have increased our knowledge and understanding of the nature and causes of these crimes, and our ability to prevent violence and apprehend those who perpetrate it. We need to do more than commission another report. What is needed is action.

As part of our Government's longstanding commitment to protect the vulnerable and safeguard Canadians, my colleagues – the Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Justice, Public Safety and Canadian Heritage – and I are releasing this *Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes Against Aboriginal Women and Girls*. This Plan is the Government's response to the Report of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women.

The Action Plan will consolidate and build on existing Government initiatives, and ensure that we are using the best tools at our disposal to prevent violence, support victims, and protect Aboriginal women and girls from these crimes. Through Economic Action Plan 2014, the Government of Canada has devoted \$25 million over five years to this Action Plan. This is in addition to other investments, including ongoing funding for shelters on reserve, violence prevention and deterrence activities, and the creation of a DNA Missing Persons Index.

As we implement the plan, we remain committed to working with all levels of government, police, the justice system, and with Aboriginal communities and organizations to address this critical issue. By working together, we are sending a strong message that these abhorrent acts of violence will not be tolerated in our society.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'K. Leitch', written in a cursive style.

The Honourable Dr. K. Kellie Leitch, P.C., O.Ont., M.P.
Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This five-year *Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes Against Aboriginal Women and Girls* brings together actions the Government of Canada will take under three pillars:

- **Preventing Violence** by supporting community level solutions.
- **Supporting Aboriginal Victims** with appropriate services.
- **Protecting Aboriginal Women and Girls** by investing in shelters and continuing to improve Canada's law enforcement and justice systems.

This Action Plan is the Government of Canada's response to the recommendations of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women, and reflects that this is a serious issue that requires coordinated and multi-faceted action.

Building on the Government's 2010-2015 initiative to enhance the justice system and law enforcement response and promote community safety, the Government of Canada will invest \$25 million, over the next five years, as part of our continued commitment to tackle crime and ensure justice for all Canadians. The Government of Canada is taking action by supporting:

- the development of more **community safety plans** across Canada, including in regions identified as high risk through the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's recent operational overview (\$8.6 million over five years)
- projects to **break intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse by raising awareness and building healthy relationships** (\$2.5 million over five years)
- projects to **engage men and boys and empower women and girls** in efforts to **denounce and prevent violence** (\$5 million over five years)
- **victim services and assistance to victims and families** (\$7.5 million over five years)
- actions to **share information and resources** with communities and organizations, and **report regularly** on progress made and results achieved under the Action Plan (\$1.4 million over five years)

In addition to the \$25 million investment from 2015 to 2020, the Government of Canada is taking action to protect Aboriginal women and girls by:

- funding **shelters and family violence prevention activities**, at a level of \$31.74 million annually (\$158.7 million over five years)
- supporting the **creation of a DNA-based Missing Persons Index** to help bring closure to families of missing persons, with an investment of \$8.1 million over five years and \$1.3 million in ongoing funding
- continuing to support police investigations through the **National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains** and dedicated **RCMP Project teams**.

This Action Plan, together with other federal support for shelters, family violence prevention, and increasing economic and leadership opportunities for Aboriginal women, will result in an investment by the Government of Canada of nearly \$200 million over five years, starting in 2015-16 and 2016-17.



INTRODUCTION

Violent crime against women and girls continues to be an issue in our country. According to Statistics Canada, on average, a woman in Canada is killed in a domestic homicide every five days.¹ On any given day, over 6,000 women and children are living in emergency shelters to escape abuse.²

Aboriginal women and girls are at significantly higher risk of violence – a 2009 Statistics Canada survey found that Aboriginal women are almost three times more likely to be violently victimized than non-Aboriginal women. The majority of those victims are between 15 and 34 years of age.³ This violence is often not an isolated event; many Aboriginal women have reported experiencing repeated episodes of violence.

We know that family violence often escalates over time – and Aboriginal women are also over-represented as victims of homicide. A recent comprehensive review of police records conducted by the RCMP found that, despite the fact that Aboriginal women make up four percent of Canada's population, they represented 16 percent of all murdered women (between 1980-2012) and 12 percent of all missing women on record.⁴

¹ Statistics Canada. 2012. *Homicide in Canada*, 2011. Ottawa: Minister of Industry, p.11. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11738-eng.pdf>

² Statistics Canada. 2011. *Shelters for Abused Women in Canada*, 2010. Ottawa: Minister of Industry, pp. 11 & 22. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2011001/article/11495-eng.pdf>

³ Statistics Canada. 2011. *Violent victimization of Aboriginal women in the Canadian provinces*, 2009. Ottawa: Minister of Industry, p. 7. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2011001/article/11439-eng.pdf>

⁴ RCMP. 2014. *Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview* <http://www.rcmp-grc.ca/aboriginal-autochtone/noommaw-ronfada-eng.htm>

RCMP's Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview

In order to better understand the nature and extent of police-reported cases involving missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, the RCMP recently conducted an analysis of files from police organizations from across the country of all historical female missing persons, as well as female homicide cases between 1980 and 2012. The data confirms the over-representation of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, and sheds greater light on the circumstances of these deaths and disappearances.

According to the report, police recorded 1,017 incidents of Aboriginal female homicides between 1980 and 2012 and 164 missing Aboriginal female investigations dating back to 1952. The “solve rates” for homicides involving Aboriginal women (88%) are consistent with those for homicides involving non-Aboriginal women (89%). There are currently 225 unresolved cases: (i) 120 unsolved murders of Aboriginal women and (ii) 105 missing Aboriginal women.

The data shows that a large majority of female Aboriginal homicide victims (92%) were murdered by acquaintances or family members. Aboriginal women are also twice as likely as non-Aboriginal women to die as a result of physical beating – the cause of death for one third of Aboriginal victims. Approximately three quarters of all female victims were killed in a residence.

In cases where homicides involved a familial relationship between victim and offender, investigators were more likely to cite a known history of previous family violence for Aboriginal victims than for non-Aboriginal victims.

Through the RCMP and Statistics Canada’s work with police agencies, the Government will continue to take action to support the collection of complete and reliable data.

The Special Committee Report on Violence Against Indigenous Women

In 2013, Parliament established the Special Committee of the House of Commons on Violence Against Indigenous Women. This committee was mandated to conduct hearings into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. It was also asked to propose solutions to address the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls. The Special Committee released its final report, *Invisible Women: A Call to Action*, in March 2014.

The Committee heard testimony from numerous witnesses, including representatives of national and regional Aboriginal organizations, government officials, front-line service providers, and the family members of missing or murdered Aboriginal women. Based on the testimony they heard, the Committee made a number of recommendations, calling for federal action to increase awareness, support communities and families, improve police services and address related issues. The Committee’s specific recommendations are set out in the Annex to this Action Plan.

Taking Coordinated Action

As noted in the Committee report, the causes of the high levels of family violence and violent crime against Aboriginal women and girls have been well established in a number of previous studies and reports.⁵ This is why we continue to focus our efforts on taking concrete action.

The Government of Canada recognizes that no organization or level of government alone can eradicate this violence. This work must be done in partnership across federal organizations, with provinces and territories, and through the leadership of Aboriginal communities and organizations.

Communities are in the best position to lead in developing solutions to violent crime, by taking measures to ensure the safety of women and girls, providing access to services for victims, and raising awareness within communities that violence is unacceptable.

Provinces and territories play a key role in our collective efforts to eradicate violence against Aboriginal women and girls, through their responsibility for providing a range of services that support the safety and well-being of all Canadians. These include health care, social services (such as shelters), child protection, education and the administration of justice, including civil and criminal courts.

The federal government's role is to support and coordinate efforts, share information and best practices, and continue to strengthen the law and the criminal justice system.

⁵ See, for example, Lane, Phil Jr. et al. 2002. *Mapping the Healing Journey: The final report of a First Nation Research Project on Healing in Canadian Aboriginal Communities*. Available at: http://www.fourworlds.ca/pdf_downloads/Mapping.pdf; Bopp, Michael et al. 2003. *Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada*. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Available at: <http://www.ahf.ca/downloads/domestic-violence.pdf>; Pacific Association of First Nations Women et al. 2005. *Researched to Death: B.C. Aboriginal Women and Violence*. Available at: http://www.endingviolence.org/files/uploads/Researched_To_Death_Final_2005.pdf; Lheidli T'enneh First Nation et al. 2006. *The Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report*. Available at: <http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/files/PDF/highwayoftearsfinal.pdf>; Byrne, Tracy et al. 2011. *Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women: A Summary of Root Causes, Vulnerabilities and Recommendations from Key Literature*. Intergovernmental & Community Relations and Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. Available at: http://www.gov.mb.ca/msw/resources/docs/violence_against_aboriginal_women.pdf; Native Women's Association of Canada. 2011. *Collaboration to End Violence: National Aboriginal Women's Forum*. Department of Justice Canada. Available at: <http://www.nwac.ca/sites/default/files/imce/2011%2008%2019%20Project%20Report%20for%20DOJ%20BC%20Forum.pdf>; Oppal, Wally T. (Commissioner). 2012. *Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, Executive Summary*. Available at: http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/public_inquiries/docs/Forsaken-ES.pdf; Assembly of First Nations. 2013. *A National Action Plan to End Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls (Updated Draft – For Full Discussion and Input)*. Available at: <http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/aga2013/nap-endviolence.pdf>

PREVENTING VIOLENCE

Special Committee Recommendations

The Committee recommended that the federal government continue to take direct action to support community-led programming and awareness campaigns, as well as action to address the underlying factors (such as lower educational achievement and poverty) that make Aboriginal women and girls more vulnerable to violence.

Building on Results

The Government of Canada recognizes that responding to family violence and violent crimes against Aboriginal women and girls starts with a strong focus on prevention. This means identifying and addressing the factors that put individuals at greater risk of violence by intervening early with children and youth, providing supports for education and training, and sending a clear message that violence is unacceptable.

Since 2010, the Government of Canada has increased its support for measures designed to improve the safety of Aboriginal communities, through support for the Aboriginal Community Safety Planning initiative. The goal is to support communities to develop local inter-agency collaboration, take ownership of local safety issues and develop appropriate solutions. Early evaluations point to positive results of this approach in terms of better leveraging access to resources.

The *First Nations Policing Program* (FNPP) has also had a significant measurable impact on the safety and security of Aboriginal communities. Since 2004, communities with First Nations Police services report a 19% decrease in violent criminal activities. In March 2013 the Government of Canada renewed its support to the *FNPP* with \$612.4 million in funding over five years.

The Government of Canada supported the development of tools, including an online searchable database identifying promising prevention programs that communities can use. The *Compendium of Promising Practices to Reduce Violence and Increase Safety of Aboriginal Women* includes programs across Canada showing promising results in reducing violence and increasing the safety of Aboriginal women and girls. (See: www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/comp-recu/index.html).

In addition to these targeted violence-prevention actions, the Government delivers a range of programs to provide at-risk children and parents with the support they need to lead healthy lives. For example, the *Aboriginal Head Start* on-and-off reserve program nurtures the healthy growth and development of children in First Nations communities across Canada. Evaluation results indicate that this program improves Aboriginal children's school readiness, which contributes to improved health and education outcomes over the life course.

Preventing violence is also about individual empowerment. The Government of Canada has a number of programs to help Aboriginal women and girls develop the education, skills and experience they need to achieve independence. Other programs address specific risk factors related to violence, including mental health supports, addiction and suicide prevention, addictions treatment, and crisis response services. Health Canada is working with key partners to strengthen existing programming through a *First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework*.

Moving Forward

Building on these efforts, the Government of Canada will invest in targeted violence prevention. It will support communities to:

- Develop **community safety plans** that bring partners together to implement local solutions.
- **Break intergenerational cycles of violence** and abuse by raising awareness and engaging men and boys in denouncing and preventing violence against Aboriginal women and girls.
- **Enhance skills development and training** to help Aboriginal women increase their autonomy and financial independence, as well as to promote their participation in leadership and decision-making roles.

Creating Safe Communities

By involving local agencies and various levels of government, the community safety planning initiative allows communities to take ownership of issues and develop locally appropriate solutions. Preliminary evaluation results show that this approach has had a positive impact supporting communities to build new partnerships, and find better ways to access and utilize federal resources.

Building on the success of this model, Public Safety Canada will enhance funding for community safety planning by investing \$1.72 million each year to support more Aboriginal communities to develop community safety plans. Focus will be on regions where there are high rates of violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

Community Safety Plans at Work

Community members come together with a trained facilitator to talk about their history, identify community needs and available resources (e.g., programs and services) and to define a roadmap for positive change.

Participants work together to develop a detailed plan to address specific community safety problems, including violent criminal activity. The community then works with the various local agencies and all levels of government to implement the plan.

Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Violence and Abuse

Evidence shows that working with children and youth, especially those who have experienced or witnessed violence in the home or in the community, is effective in reducing future violence.

Justice Canada will invest \$500,000 per year to support Aboriginal communities to break intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse by raising awareness and creating tools, activities and resources to build healthy relationships. These projects will be based on Indigenous knowledge and culture and put an emphasis on including youth as partners.

Over the next five years, a total amount of \$158.7 million has been secured for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's *Family Violence Prevention Program*. Of this total, \$13.24 million annually (or \$66.2 million over five years) will be invested to expand its support for family violence prevention projects that respond to needs and gaps identified by Aboriginal communities.

Status of Women Canada will invest a new \$5 million over five years to work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and stakeholders to denounce and prevent violence against Aboriginal women. Projects will raise awareness through education and related activities to increase understanding about the impacts of violence; engage Aboriginal men and boys to prevent violence; and empower Aboriginal women and girls to speak out about violence and to seek support from service providers and law enforcement officials.

Enhancing Skills and Job Opportunities

The Government of Canada is helping Aboriginal peoples, including women, to acquire the skills and training they need to secure meaningful employment and build better futures.

In June 2013, the Government of Canada announced an investment of \$241 million in new funding over four years to improve the *On-reserve Income Assistance program*. This program provides on-reserve Income Assistance clients between the ages of 18 and 24 with personalized supports to help them find meaningful employment. From this investment, \$109 million is dedicated for skills development and training.

This is in addition to ongoing investments in the *Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy*, *Skills and Partnership Fund*, the *First Nation and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy*, and the *First Nations Job Fund*, which aim to increase the participation of all Aboriginal people in the economy.

Through its *Women's Program*, Status of Women Canada will complement these efforts by investing a minimum of \$1 million per year to support initiatives focused on improving the economic security of First Nations, Inuit and Métis women (e.g., entrepreneurship strategies, financial planning) and to promote their participation in leadership and decision-making roles. These projects will aim to help Aboriginal women to acquire economic independence, which empowers them and reduces their vulnerability to violence.

SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL VICTIMS

Special Committee Recommendations

The Committee recommended a number of actions to respond to the needs of victims and families, in particular, the need for appropriate services and supports for victims and families.

Building on Results

Since 2006, the Government of Canada has worked to ensure that our justice system holds offenders accountable for their actions and to give victims an effective voice in the justice system. This has been achieved by securing passage of key Bills, such as the *Tackling Violent Crime Act* and the *Safe Streets and Communities Act*, which strengthen the *Criminal Code*, mandate tougher sentences for violent offenders, and provide the police with the tools they need.

Most recently, the Government introduced the *Victims Bill of Rights* to establish statutory rights at the federal level for victims of crime.

The *Victims Bill of Rights Act*

On April 3, 2014, Prime Minister Harper announced legislation to create a *Victims Bill of Rights* that would establish, at the federal level, clear rights for victims of crime— a first in Canadian history.

The legislation would establish statutory rights to information, protection, participation and restitution, and ensure a complaints process is in place for breaches of these rights.

- **Right to information:** Victims would have the right to general information about the criminal justice system and available victim services and programs, as well as specific information about the progress of their case.
- **Right to protection:** Victims would have the right to have their security and privacy considered at all stages of the criminal justice process, to have reasonable and necessary measures to protect them from intimidation and retaliation, and to request their identity be protected from public disclosure.
- **Right to participation:** Victims would have a right to convey their views about decisions to be made by criminal justice professionals and have them considered at various stages of the criminal justice process, and to present a victim impact statement.
- **Right to restitution:** Victims would have the right to have the court consider making a restitution order for all offences for which there are easy-to-calculate financial losses.

The legislation would also make the harm done to victims and the community a key consideration in determining the sentence of an offender, ensuring an emphasis on community safety and the protection of women and children.

The Government of Canada has increased support for Aboriginal victims of crimes and their families. The *Victims Fund* (Department of Justice) supports a number of projects for Aboriginal victims of crime, as well as specialized assistance for families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. For example, the *Victims Fund* works with victim services and police organizations to staff police/family liaison contact workers. These individuals work directly with family members of missing and murdered Aboriginal women to provide ongoing support in navigating the criminal justice system. This includes accessing information on investigations, obtaining referrals to appropriate services, and building trust in order to facilitate the disclosure of information.

The Government supports *Child Advocacy Centres* to coordinate the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse and provide a child-friendly setting. Funding is available through the *Victims Fund* to organizations seeking to develop or enhance child advocacy centres. One organization is currently receiving funding to explore developing a child advocacy centre to meet the needs of young Aboriginal children and youth.

The Government has established the *Federal Income Support for Parents of Murdered or Missing Children*. The grant is available to eligible parents of children under the age of 18 who are taking time away from work because their child is missing or deceased as a result of a probable *Criminal Code* offence. It acknowledges that the loss of a loved one represents a deep emotional hardship that makes it extremely challenging to work.

Moving Forward

Based on the Committee's recommendations, past studies and building on our previous efforts, the Government of Canada will invest in targeted actions to support Aboriginal victims and their families. It will:

- Enhance victim services and support, including through:
 - ◇ Family / police liaison positions to ensure family members have access to timely information on cases;
 - ◇ Specialized assistance for victims and families; and
 - ◇ Fostering positive relationships and facilitating the sharing of information with families and criminal justice professionals.

Enhancing Victim Services and Support

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women are supported to access and navigate the justice system, including receiving updates and information on cases involving their loved ones.

Justice Canada will invest an additional \$1.5 million each year to build on successes in supporting services for Aboriginal victims and families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women through the *Victims Fund* and the *Policy Centre for Victim Issues*.

The *Victims Fund* is part of the Federal Victims Strategy, which coordinates all federal government work related to victims of crime, with the objective of giving victims a more effective voice in the criminal justice system.

Funding is available to encourage the development of approaches that meet the needs of victims of crime. Projects that could receive funding include those that may:

- Increase awareness of and access to victim services;
- Enhance the capacity of victim service providers;
- Set up and implement public-education projects and training on services for victims of crime; and/or
- Engage in research or evaluation intended to benefit victims of crime.

The Government of Canada has heard the call from Aboriginal families and communities and will support these and other new opportunities to help bring them closure.

PROTECTING ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

Special Committee Recommendations

Throughout its study, the Committee heard about the critical role shelters play in supporting Aboriginal women and their children in times of crisis. They heard about the need to continue to strengthen laws to protect women from being re-victimized, and to improve the police response to cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

Building on Results

Governments have an important role to play in protecting citizens and communities, especially those who are most vulnerable. The Government of Canada recognizes that protecting Aboriginal women and girls from family violence and violent crime means both providing a safe place to go in a time of crisis, as well as ensuring that police are responsive and equipped to investigate cases and to work with victims in bringing violent offenders to justice.

Shelters provide a safe haven for women escaping violence, and help protect them from further harm. While the provinces and territories are responsible for providing shelter services in their jurisdictions, the federal government supports shelters for women, children and families living on-reserve through a network of 41 shelters across the country. In addition, the *Shelter Enhancement Program* provides assistance for victims of family violence on-reserve, supporting new shelters and second stage housing, as well as the repair and improvement of existing shelters.

The Government has also secured passage for the *Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act*. It ensures that people living on First Nation reserves have access to similar matrimonial real property rights and protections to those living off reserve. Under the new provisional federal rules, people living on reserve may not be forced to leave their homes in the event of a relationship breakdown, upon the death of a partner, or in situations of family violence.

The RCMP Operational Overview has assisted the RCMP and policing partners in identifying the risk and vulnerability factors associated with missing and murdered Aboriginal women. This information will provide guidance in the development of prevention, intervention and enforcement initiatives. The RCMP will work in partnership with communities and stakeholders to target prevention and public awareness efforts in communities where higher risks exist, in order to build resilience and enhance safety for women and girls.

The RCMP has been a long-standing law enforcement partner of Aboriginal communities, and currently serves more than 600 communities.⁶ All newly engaged regular members of the RCMP receive coaching and training to increase their understanding of the communities they serve, and to foster positive community relations.

In order to ensure the thorough investigation of violent crimes against Aboriginal women, the RCMP has created dedicated homicide review teams, in collaboration with provincial and municipal police services, in areas where crimes have been clustered.⁷ These teams investigate unsolved homicide and missing persons cases where foul play is suspected and exploited or at-risk persons are involved. These teams have been successful in advancing and resolving numerous homicides and missing persons cases involving Aboriginal women.

Established in 2011, the RCMP *National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains* provides law enforcement, medical examiners and chief coroners with specialized investigative services in cases of missing persons and unidentified remains. The Centre has assisted the police in responding to cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls by:

- Maintaining a national public website (canadasmissing.ca) to inform and seek tips from the public;
- Developing a database to coordinate investigative efforts on missing persons and unidentified remains, resulting in greater analysis of trends and the sharing of best practices across police services;
- Raising public awareness through targeted media and social media campaigns, including a specific campaign for missing Aboriginal women, created in consultation with the Native Women's Association of Canada; and
- Connecting unidentified remains for a missing Aboriginal woman from one jurisdiction to another, helping to resolve an outstanding case.

The Government of Canada is committed to protecting the most vulnerable in Canadian society from violence and exploitation. This includes targeted efforts to respond to sexual exploitation and human trafficking. On June 6, 2012, the Government of Canada launched its *National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking*. With participation from 18 federal departments, the Plan is a comprehensive blueprint to combat this crime, whose victims are most often vulnerable women and girls.

⁶ Royal Canadian Mounted Police. 2013. *Serving Canada's Aboriginal People*.
<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/aboriginal-autochtone/index-eng.htm>

⁷ These include Project Evenhanded (focused on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside), Project KARE in Edmonton, Project E-PANA in the North and Central British Columbia, and Project Devote in Winnipeg. In Alberta, the RCMP has formed the Alberta Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains (AMPUHR) team, which works with First Nations communities.

Most recently, the Government of Canada has taken action to protect victims and communities from prostitution's harms. Bill C-36, the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* was introduced on June 4, 2014 and would: protect those who sell their sexual services from exploitation; protect communities from the harms caused by prostitution; and reduce the demand for sexual services. These objectives would be achieved through the enactment of new, and modernization of existing, *Criminal Code* offences. The Government has also announced \$20 million in new funding to support organizations assisting individuals to exit prostitution.

Moving Forward

Based on the Committee's recommendations, past studies and building on our previous efforts, the Government of Canada will invest in targeted actions to protect Aboriginal women and girls from family violence and violent crimes. It will:

- Ensure that First Nations women and their children have a safe place to go in times of crisis by **supporting shelters on reserve**.
- Enable Aboriginal communities to take greater responsibility for the administration of justice and for **holding offenders accountable** to their communities.
- Provide police with additional investigative tools, including by investing in the creation of a new **DNA-based Missing Persons Index**.

Providing Access to Safe Shelters

The Government of Canada has secured funding in the amount of \$158.7 million over five years for the *Family Violence Prevention Program* (FVPP) of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, of which \$18.5 million (or \$92.5 million over five years) directly supports shelters. This will provide essential front-line services to women, children and families living on reserve who are victims of family violence. The Program supports a network of 41 shelters in the provinces and in the Yukon. It also funds the *National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence*, which provides training forums, tools and resources for shelters and their staff.

Enabling Aboriginal Communities to Hold Offenders Accountable

The Government of Canada, through Economic Action Plan 2014, will invest \$22.2 million over two years in the *Aboriginal Justice Strategy*. Currently, the Aboriginal Justice Strategy funds approximately 275 community-based programs, serving over 800 communities across Canada by holding offenders accountable, and giving victims and communities the tools they need to fight crime. Evaluations point to decreasing rates of re-offending among Aboriginal persons participating in programs under the Strategy.

The *Aboriginal Courtwork Program* provides services in over 435 communities. Evaluations identify this Program's role in providing Aboriginal offenders, witnesses and victims with information, support and referrals to appropriate services and programs.

Policing and Investigative Tools

Developing strong police-community relations is vital to ensuring that all Canadians, including Aboriginal women and girls, are empowered to report the crimes committed against them, and to assist in the investigative process. The Government of Canada will continue to ensure the police have the tools they need to enforce laws and investigate cases.

The RCMP and its partners will continue to take action to solve cases of violent crimes committed against women and girls, including the 225 unsolved cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. This will ensure that new cases are thoroughly examined and that previous investigations are revisited for new leads, with the aim of bringing violent offenders to justice.

The *National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains* will continue to provide law enforcement, medical examiners and chief coroners with specialized investigative services in support of missing persons and unidentified remains investigations. The Centre will continue to work with investigators from across Canada to ensure coordinated and consistent sharing of information related to missing persons.

In 2016-17, the Government will enhance this Centre with the creation of a *DNA-based Missing Persons Index*. The Index will receive initial funding of \$8.1 million over five years, as well as \$1.3 million in ongoing funding, and will allow police forces and coroners to submit DNA samples from unidentified remains and the personal effects of missing persons. DNA profiles from these samples can then be compared with those from the National DNA Data Bank. The Index, once created, will help bring closure to the families of missing persons through DNA matching.



A COMMITMENT TO REPORT ON RESULTS

This Action Plan highlights actions the Government of Canada will take, over the next five years, to prevent violence, support victims, and protect Aboriginal women and girls from family violence and violent crimes.

As the Action Plan is implemented, the Government of Canada is committed to coordinating our efforts with all partners. We will work in close partnership across federal organizations, with provinces and territories, and with Aboriginal families, communities and organizations.

As part of this work, we will establish a secretariat to ensure close coordination at the federal level, provide Aboriginal families and communities with information on the resources available to them to address this issue, and prepare regular progress reports on the status of these Government initiatives.

The Government of Canada will continue to work with provinces and territories to ensure that our actions are mutually reinforcing. This includes FPT Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women and the work being done by the FPT Ministers Responsible for Justice and Public Safety to coordinate actions across law enforcement and justice systems to address violent crime against Aboriginal women and girls.⁸

This Action Plan demonstrates the Government's commitment to addressing the violence perpetrated against Aboriginal women and girls. Working together, and through the leadership of communities, we can ensure that these women and girls are no longer victims, but can reach their full potential as mothers, daughters, sisters, community members and Canadians.

⁸ Draft Justice Framework to Address Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls, FPT Ministers Responsible for Justice and Public Safety. Available at <http://www.scics.gc.ca/english/conferences.asp?a=viewdocument&id=2119>



ANNEX

Recommendations of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women

Awareness Campaign

Recommendation 1

That the federal government learn from the stories of the families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls and work with the provinces, territories and municipalities to create a public awareness and prevention campaign focusing on violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

Support for the families of victims

Recommendation 2

That the federal government continue strengthening the criminal justice system to ensure, among other things, that violent and repeat offenders serve appropriate sentences.

Recommendation 3

That the federal government maintain its commitment to develop the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights including initiatives aimed at making the criminal justice system more responsive to the needs of victims, such as keeping them informed and providing them with appropriate standing, access and assistance throughout the process.

Recommendation 4

That the federal government implement a national DNA-based missing person's index.

Support for communities

Recommendation 5

That the federal government continue to support K-12 education on-reserve as an important tool in combating the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

Recommendation 6

That the federal government continue to support programming and legislation that allow Aboriginal communities to respond to violence.

Recommendation 7

That the federal government examine options to address poverty as a root cause of violence against Aboriginal women and girls by empowering Aboriginal people through economic development opportunities and jobs and skills training.

Recommendation 8

That the federal government engage First Nation communities to examine how to improve supports for shelters and front-line services on reserve for victims of violence.

Recommendation 9

That the federal government support provincial, territorial and First Nation childcare agencies in their responsibility to ensure effective and accountable service delivery.

Police services

Recommendation 10

That the federal government in cooperation with municipal, provincial and territorial governments examine the possibility of collecting police data on violence against Aboriginal women and girls that includes an ethnicity variable.

Recommendation 11

That the federal government engage Aboriginal communities and municipal, provincial, and territorial governments to examine options to improving procedures among police services to facilitate multipartite investigations.

Recommendation 12

That the federal government encourage Aboriginal organizations, the Canadian Police College and municipal, provincial and territorial governments to improve police officer training, including continuing education, to foster cultural understanding and sensitivity.

Violence against women and girls

Recommendation 13

That the federal government continue to take appropriate action to reduce human trafficking and to reduce the violence and harm associated with prostitution.

Other supports

Recommendation 14

That in implementing the public awareness strategy on substance abuse, the federal government target support to Aboriginal communities.

Recommendation 15

That the federal government examine opportunities to improve the incorporation of best practices into existing programs and services available to Aboriginal women and girls.

Moving to action

Recommendation 16

That the federal government implement all of the recommendations above in a coordinated action plan.