

What We Heard:

Survivor-Led Strategies to Inform the Implementation of Canada's National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence

Background & Key Learnings
February 2023



Land Acknowledgement

The work that informs this report takes place on and across the traditional territories and current homes to many Indigenous nations. YWCA Canada recognizes that preventing and responding to gender-based violence requires us to confront the ongoing cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples and systemic violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples. As an institution that benefited from and contributed to colonial policy, we are committed to continuous learning, advocacy, and action to dismantle deep-rooted systems of oppression, dispossession, extraction, and racism. Through our work on gender equity and gender justice, our objective is to affirm and advance the leadership, safety, and self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

About YWCA

YWCA Canada is a leading voice for women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people. For over 150 years, we've been at the forefront of a movement: to fight gender-based violence, build affordable housing and advocate for workplace equity. We work to advance gender equity by responding to urgent needs in communities, through national advocacy and grassroots initiatives. Today, we engage young leaders, diverse communities, and corporate partners to achieve our vision of a safe and equitable Canada for all.



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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

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Background

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an issue that affects every jurisdiction, every riding, and every community in what is currently called Canada. This kind of violence is rooted in gender inequity and directed towards individuals or communities based on their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender. However, the dire – often deadly – consequences of GBV can impact anyone regardless of gender, age, sexuality, religion, geographical location, ethnicity, or socio-economic position. Women, girls, and gender diverse people are at heightened risk of experiencing GBV, even more so if they are women, girls, and gender diverse people with disabilities, or belong to Indigenous, Black, racialized, rural, 2SLGBTQIA+ or other equity-deserving communities.



For people that experience gender-based violence (GBV), every day is an emergency.

For over a decade, civil society organizations in Canada, including Indigenous and feminist groups and anti-violence agencies, have been calling for urgent action to address and prevent gender-based violence in all its forms.

This advocacy for a violence-free future resulted in the Joint Declaration for a Canada Free of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), endorsed in January 2021, that laid out the high-level framework for joint action – identifying the vision, goals, pillars, and foundation for a ten-year National Action Plan. During the first quarter of 2021, communities across Canada had an opportunity to provide input into Canada's development of a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence.

Background

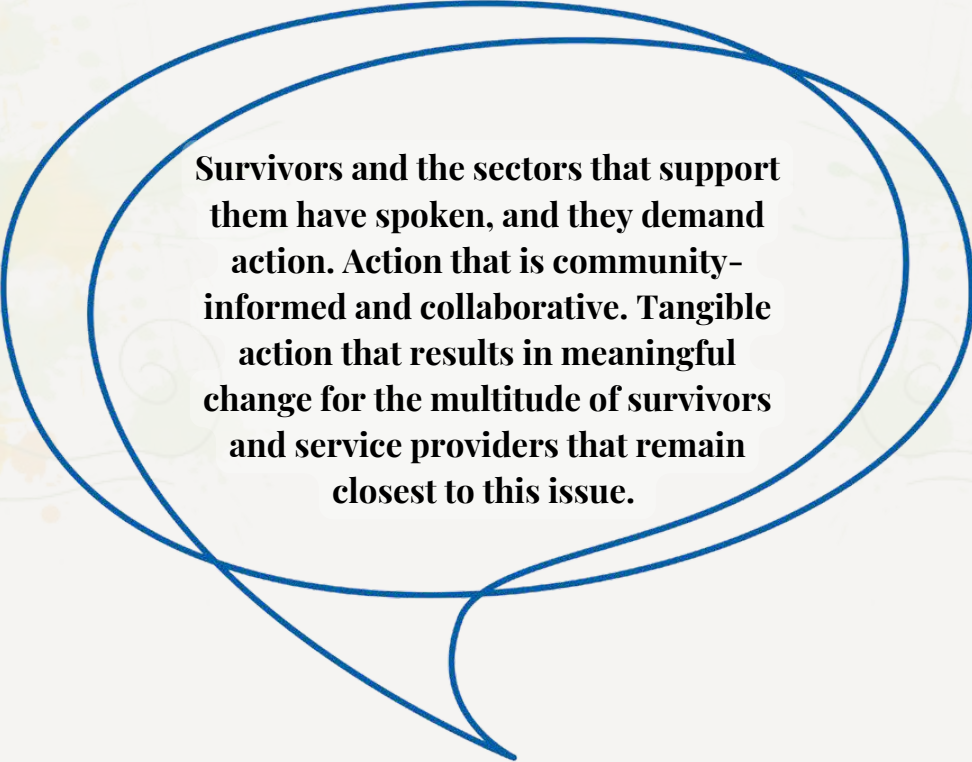
In November 2022, the federal government released the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

This document builds on the core concerns and priorities identified by community actors and advocates and incorporates attention to complexity and context. However, in outlining broad opportunities for action, the plan falls short of demonstrating guaranteed actionable commitment towards program, policy, and financial shifts needed to end and prevent GBV by addressing both its causes and effects nationwide. The framework communicates intention without adequately charting implementation and commitments to funding.

As a part of a national Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) funded by Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada, YWCA Canada coordinated consultations with civil society organizations and grassroots groups to ensure community insight and expertise was considered and incorporated into the creation of a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence.

These Community Engagement Sessions culminated in the ‘Not One More’ – Informing the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence: What We Heard Report, presented to the Government of Canada in April 2021. These national conversations took place in early 2021, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic that exacerbated gender-based violence and disproportionately impacted equity-deserving groups and the sector that serves, supports, and works alongside them. Even amidst the staggering personal and institutional toll of the pandemic, survivors and service providers clearly articulated the need for urgent and immediate action.

Background



Survivors and the sectors that support them have spoken, and they demand action. Action that is community-informed and collaborative. Tangible action that results in meaningful change for the multitude of survivors and service providers that remain closest to this issue.

As the National Action Plan (NAP) to end Gender-Based Violence is being phased in, and over the course of the ten-year commitment, it is necessary to keep our collective attention on survivor-led recommendations for systems level change. This report draws from the cornerstone community engagement work that YWCA Canada coordinated at the onset of the pandemic and highlights concrete calls to accountability and action co-developed by 60+ civil society organizations and the communities across Canada they engage and represent. They shared the solutions, so we must now act on their expertise and experiential learnings.



Key Learnings

Key Learnings

To achieve the objective of a GBV free Canada, the outcomes and indicators included in the National Action Plan need to be specific, measurable, and adequately funded.

Tangible and time-bound targets are necessary in order to assess and demonstrate the impact of the plan and ensure accountability and oversight through independent monitoring and evaluation. Accountability mechanisms that are transparent, evidence-informed, and intentionally include the various ministries, agencies and organizations involved in this work will enable successful implementation. Crucially, allocation of robust and ongoing funding is essential to meet these objectives.

GBV cannot be addressed without a holistic approach to healing and harm reduction that involves multi-sectoral coordination.

We need a systemic approach to systems change. This would require the various types of social infrastructure and institutions in our society to work in concert to ensure a coordinated response system that considers the multiple needs of those harmed by gendered violence. The current “organization silo” effect is re-traumatizing survivors and impacting service providers; it is fundamental to have a framework of engagement between federal government, provinces, territories, and national and local organizations at the forefront of this work.

Key Learnings

The cornerstone of a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence must lie in commitment to feminist intersectionality, respect for human rights, and decolonial action.

An intersectional feminist framework with a focus on substantive equality and human and Indigenous rights and an understanding of overlapping oppressions, intersections of harm, and the workings of systemic power is imperative to implement effective prevention and support strategies geared towards decolonization and ending gender-based violence for all. This includes demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion and making our workplaces, communities, and online spaces safer for everyone, especially those most impacted.

Key Learnings

The strategy must fully consider and respond to the many ways violence manifests in different contexts and communities.

A comprehensive response must include all forms of gender-based violence and abuse that survivors, frontline anti-violence and GBV workers and researchers know to be a reality – including colonial violence, coercive control, systemic violence, economic violence, emotional violence, technology-facilitated violence, intimate partner violence, familial violence, sexual violence, spiritual abuse, workplace violence, elder abuse, intergenerational violence, GBV against people with disabilities, and gendered violence outside of family, romantic or sexual relationships. The implementation of the NAP to end and prevent GBV must be harmonized with the 2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People NAP and the development of a national strategy for sexual violence that is specialized and distinct from a gender-based violence strategy.

Key Learnings

Contributions of community and civil society organizations are critical to societal transformation.

While the NAP intentions include community insight at every level, its implementation must be driven by the directives and direct participation of community and frontline staff of the anti-violence sector and Indigenous and feminist movements that have been tackling the complex, nuanced and systemic root causes of GBV. A robust strategy to confront GBV cannot be actualized without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) advocating for and affected by the plan. Comprehensive training should be provided to align national, provincial, and local service provider and civil society mandates and social infrastructure with NAP priorities.