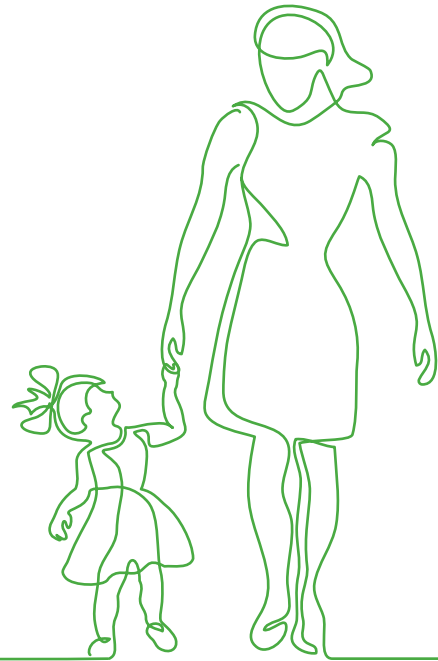


Minister's Committee on Violence Against Women and Girls.

Making Newfoundland and Labrador a safer place.



Overview

On October 18, 2017, the Honourable Andrew Parsons, Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General, announced an initiative to help make Newfoundland and Labrador a safer place for women and girls through the creation of the Minister's Committee on Violence Against Women and Girls (Committee).

Minister Parsons, alongside Linda Ross, President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, co-chair the Committee. The Committee represents a group of government and community representatives who have experience and knowledge of issues surrounding violence against women and girls, as well as individuals with lived experience. The goal is to share information, exchange ideas, and come up with actions to support an end to gender-based violence in Newfoundland and Labrador.

First meeting

The Committee held its first meeting on December 8, 2017, at Easter Seals House in St. John's. At that meeting, participants engaged in deliberative dialogue to discuss the areas that need to change, both within the justice system and elsewhere, in order to end violence against women and girls. Participants were also asked to identify challenges and solutions to ending that violence as well as to identify the roles that can be played by organizations and individuals in implementing solutions. The participants were asked to determine the top four priority issues, which they identified as:

- Education and Awareness
- Restorative Justice
- Re-victimization of survivors
- Indigenous Communities

For the remainder of the day, the participants discussed the priority areas and approximately 2,000 thoughts and ideas were recorded by volunteers. An analysis of those raw comments

and ideas reveals several key themes that cut across the priority issues. Although these themes emerged, the inclusion of a theme below does not necessarily mean that every participant agreed with each of these items:

- **Enhanced education and awareness targeted to various groups:**

General public – A need was identified for public education and awareness regarding matters including gender equality, gender issues, cultural sensitivity, the types of abuse that women and girls can experience, escalation of violence, healthy relationships, males as victims, duty to report, and sexual harassment.

Men/boys – A need was identified for education and awareness specifically targeted to men and boys regarding issues of the types of abuse that women and girls can experience, escalation of violence, healthy relationships and sexual harassment.

Judiciary and lawyers – A need was identified for trauma-informed and cultural sensitivity education and awareness for judges and lawyers who encounter victims of violence through the justice system.

First responders and frontline workers – A need was identified for comprehensive and ongoing training, both trauma-informed and cultural sensitivity education, for professionals working in roles where they are the first point of contact for victims and working directly with victims of violence. This includes, but is not limited to, emergency room staff, nurses, sexual assault nurse practitioners, police, educators, and social workers.

- **Re-victimization**

Participants highlighted that, in many cases, the survivors of violence feel the entire criminal justice process re-

victimizes them. Some key issues were the requirement for victims to repeat the traumatic events over and over to different professionals and the approach to cross examination often used in court settings. Many victims feel they are treated as witnesses only and that there is no recognition that they are victims who have experienced trauma. The removal of children from Indigenous communities by child protection services, as well as the custody implications of children in all families where violence is being experienced, was identified as a process that re-victimizes the survivors of violence.

- **Integrated and holistic services**

Participants identified that services require more collaboration and coordination within the justice system and across government departments and services and community supports. This included the need for community organizations to learn to share resources and work more collaboratively.

- **Culturally-appropriate responses (Indigenous and multicultural)**

Participants identified the need for justice system responses that are sensitive to the cultures of various Indigenous peoples present in the province, as well as sensitivity to the growing multicultural population.

- **Alternative dispute resolution processes**

Participants noted a requirement for alternative dispute resolution processes and approaches that incorporate restorative justice as other ways to deal with problematic behavior beyond the traditional criminal justice system approaches. Participants also identified that such alternatives should be tailored specifically to Indigenous cultures. While there was considerable support for the need for alternatives, some participants

expressed concern at the notion of using alternative dispute resolution processes to deal with persons who commit acts of violence against women and girls.

- **Resource issues**

Participants identified the need for more financial and others resources to address the problem of violence against women and girls. Many community groups identified the need for multi-year funding to provide stability in their operations. Wait times for counselling and other services was also identified as an indication of the need for more resources in specific areas. As well, a need for additional and different resources for victims was identified. Specifically, participants identified that they would like to see justice system navigators implemented.

- **Legislative changes**

Participants identified the need for legislation to enable and guide alternative dispute resolution and restorative justice processes. Additionally, participants identified the need for legislation to require mandatory training for all professionals who interact with victims of violence and that all legislation needs to be reflective of Indigenous culture and other cultures. Additionally, there were comments that mandatory reporting of family violence should be legislated.

- **Focus on prevention**

Participants suggested that more resources (financial and human) need to be focused on prevention, not just reacting. The K-12 education system was identified as a key area that needs to be engaged in prevention.

- **Emergency Protection Orders**

Concerns were raised that Emergency Protection Orders issued under the Family Violence Prevention Act are not working as effectively as intended and that there are challenges with the enforcement of those orders.

Next steps

Minister Parsons and Ms. Ross, as Co-Chairs of the Committee, will select a sub-group of the participants who met on December 8, 2017 to form a Steering Committee. The purpose of this Steering Committee will be to thoroughly review all data gathered on December 8, 2017 and determine concrete actions, including how best to engage all other members of the committee to collectively address this very serious issue.

A website will be launched to serve as a knowledge exchange forum where the Committee can communicate progress and where the general public will have an avenue to share their ideas on how to address intimate partner violence in Newfoundland and Labrador.