

New Brunswick Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Sector Recommendations for the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence

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New Brunswick South Central
Transition House and
Second Stage Coalition, Inc.

Introduction

The New Brunswick Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence (DIPV) Sector is pleased to see the development and implementation of a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. As stakeholders with experience and expertise in the field, we would like to submit our recommendations for each pillar of the New Brunswick plan for consideration. We feel that the recommendations included in this document will help to eliminate barriers, fill gaps, provide victims and their families with much-needed support, and progress prevention for a New Brunswick free of gender-based violence (GBV).

Pillar 1 – Support for victims, survivors, and their families

Increase Core Funding of GBV Services – As stated in the [National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence](#), “GBV services provide critical, life-saving support and safe spaces”. In New Brunswick, Transition Houses, Second Stage Facilities, and the Outreach program are key GBV services. These services require an increase in funding for operational and program costs to continue to provide essential services to victims of GBV.

A crucial piece of providing essential services is maintaining the number of staff required to meet the demand for service. Increased funding is needed for Transition Houses, Second Stages, and Outreach programs to offer appropriate wages and benefits to achieve high staff retention.

Furthermore, victims seeking services from Transition Houses, Second Stages, and Outreach present complex cases of trauma, and often mental health concerns and additions. Children exposed to GBV require a high degree of support to cope and heal. Increased funding is necessary to hire skilled professionals to provide onsite wrap-around services that address victims’ unique sets of needs, help them to meet their goals, and break the cycle of violence. This includes social workers or social work technicians, clinical case managers, counsellors, and child guidance workers.

For further details on the necessary increases in funding, please refer to our document, “Summary and Recommendations from the New Brunswick Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Sector”, submitted via email in January 2023.

Increase Financial Supports for Victims – A huge barrier to women and children leaving abusive situations is the associated financial cost. Starting a new life, even with the support of a Transition House or Second Stage, is costly and difficult. This barrier is a factor in victims returning to the abusive situation and continuing in the cycle of violence.

To address this barrier, current Social Development programs should be expanded. Additional funds could be used to help victims with alternative accommodations, like hotels, if they cannot be housed at a Transition House or Second Stage. Allowances to cover the number of start-up costs, such as moving, first month’s rent, damage deposits, fees and deposits to set up utilities, and materials used to increase safety (locks, outdoor lights, cameras, etc.), could also be increased. Offering the funds to victims through GBV services directly would help to facilitate the process.

Invest in the Provincial Organizations Coordinating the DIPV Sector – Transition Houses, Second Stages, and Outreach Workers are providing critical frontline support to victims of GBV. While different from frontline work, the work of the two provincial DIPV associations, the Coalition and the Réseau, is also important in addressing the issue of GBV. The Coalition and the Réseau support their member organizations and facilitate exchange among them, provide

training, undertake research that progresses knowledge on the subject, and create public awareness and education. The Coalition and the Réseau work together to address the issues of the DIPV sector, as well as to identify and work to eliminate barriers experienced by victims. They are also well-connected to diverse GBV networks within and beyond New Brunswick. We recommend investing in the Coalition and the Réseau with ongoing core funding, so that they can continue to strengthen the DIPV sector and address the issue of GBV.

Given the DIPV sector's expertise in identifying and responding to the needs of victims, we also recommend allowing the DIPV sector to have autonomy in determining our policies, best practices, and how funds are spent within the sector.

Pillar 2 – Prevention

Early Education – Education on topics such as healthy relationships, personal safety, boundaries, and consent should be integrated into school curriculums for all age groups. Children and adolescents with knowledge and skills in this area are better equipped to navigate personal relationships without using violence. Consider expanding existing programs like the Fourth R Healthy Relationships Plus Programs.

Early Intervention – It is well known that children and adolescents exposed to domestic violence have a higher likelihood of using violence in their own intimate relationships later in life. To disrupt this pattern and prevent further violence from occurring, programs that intervene early when violence has or is likely to occur in the home, especially for vulnerable and at-risk families, are required.

Programs for Perpetrators – To prevent further GBV from occurring, individuals who use violence in their intimate relationships and against women and gender-diverse people need to be provided with tools to help them refrain from doing so. This could include educational programs that extend beyond the anger management programs and the court-mandated programs currently used, as well as more direct measures like the tracking bracelet program being used with perpetrators and victims in Quebec. These programs will help to protect potential victims. We recommend investing in programs for perpetrators that are offered through Justice and Public Safety and through community organizations.

Training for Professionals - Many professionals outside of the DIPV sector interact with the issue of GBV through their work. GBV is a complex issue that requires specialized knowledge on the dynamics of abuse, power and control, trauma-informed approaches, and appropriate responses, referrals, and interventions. By ensuring that professionals in sectors such as education, healthcare, justice and public safety, and social services have thorough training in GBV-related topics, we can increase their ability to respond effectively when experiences of GBV initially become known, which can prevent further violence from occurring. We recommend creating training materials and increasing training opportunities on GBV for professionals and exploring opportunities to collaborate with community organizations in doing so.

Addressing Norms and Attitudes – Current societal norms and attitudes, such as traditional gender roles and victim-blaming for example, contribute to the perpetuation of GBV. As a privileged group within a patriarchal society, and representing a high percentage of perpetrators of GBV, men have an important role to play in addressing GBV. We recommend creating and supporting activities that engage men and boys in challenging and changing societal norms and attitudes.

We also recommend increasing public awareness and understanding of the issue of GBV and the services available in the province. This could be achieved through partnerships with

feminist organizations like the Coalition, the Réseau, Transition Houses, and Second Stages, and investing our marketing materials, including websites and social media accounts.

Pillar 3 – Responsive justice system

Increase Access to Legal Representation – Legal advice and representation are a common need for victims of GBV, however, there are barriers to accessing legal services such as limited capacity and eligibility criteria of programs and the high expense of private lawyers. Victims of GBV should be prioritized for immediate legal representation. If support cannot be provided through Legal Aid, victims should be provided financial aid for a private lawyer. In criminal court cases, victims should be able to have access to their own legal representation, as opposed to being represented by the crown, when requested.

Fast-track Court Processes – Lengthy court processes are a barrier to victims and their family members leaving abusive situations quickly and allow for continued experiences of violence to occur. Victims of GBV should be given priority in family, civil, and criminal courts.

Coordination Between Court Systems – Going through the court process can be confusing, overwhelming, and re-traumatizing. Victims of domestic violence often have ongoing court cases in both family and criminal courts, which are kept separate. To simplify the process for victims and to ensure judges have a holistic view of cases that considers all factors, matters related to domestic violence should be handled within one court system. To do so, consider expanding the Domestic Violence Court program in Moncton throughout the province.

Training for Justice System Professionals – As previously mentioned in Pillar 2, GBV-related training materials and opportunities for professionals are necessary for responding to GBV and preventing future violence from occurring. Professionals in the justice system have an especially important role in responding to and preventing GBV; police and RCMP are often initial and recurring points of contact for victims seeking help, lawyers directly impact how victims and cases of GBV are represented in court, and judges make decisions that can be life-altering for victims. Therefore, we recommend specialized GBV training for justice system professionals.

Increase Resources for the EIO and CCR Programs – The Emergency Intervention Order program and the Coordinated Community Response program are much-needed for helping victims of DIPV to break the cycle. The DIPV sector largely supports these programs. However, the resources required to complete EIOs and participate in CCR have not matched the increased amount of work. Staffing for the delivery of regular services has been impacted. While committed to assisting with EIOs and participating in CCR, the DIPV sector needs an increase in funding to hire additional staff to ensure other regular services are maintained while someone is busy with an EIO, and to compensate the additional time that CCR coordination tasks and meetings take. For further context on this matter, please refer to Section 4 of our document, “Summary and Recommendations from the New Brunswick Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Sector”.

Pillar 4 – Implementing Indigenous-led approaches

Culturally Appropriate Services – A higher percentage of Indigenous women and children experience violence compared to non-Indigenous women and children. Indigenous peoples have their own cultural practices for responding to trauma, for example healing ceremonies like cedar baths. Resources for implementing these practices at all Transition Houses and Second Stages throughout the province must be increased, so that Indigenous victims can heal from their experiences of violence in a way that centers their Indigenous identity. This includes costs for delivering programming as well as creating or converting physical spaces that can accommodate these practices.

Furthermore, funding is required to create more Indigenous positions at Transition Houses and Second Stages, such as Indigenous Crisis Interveners, Outreach Workers, Clinical Case Managers, Child Guidance Workers, and so on. Investments could also be made in the services of Elders to provide case-by-case support to Indigenous victims of GBV around the province. Services led by Indigenous persons will be delivered in culturally appropriate ways and help Indigenous victims to feel understood and validated.

For non-Indigenous staff in Transition Houses and Second Stages, training on historical events and the roots of violence in Indigenous communities is needed. This training will increase awareness and lead to better serving Indigenous persons.

Pillar 5 – Social infrastructure and enabling environment

Increase Financial Programs for Victims – Earlier in this document, under Pillar 1, we spoke to the high start-up costs that act as a barrier to victims leaving abusive situations. The high cost of living is another barrier to victims leaving and staying out of abusive situations. Victims may have their own barriers to gaining and keeping employment, or may not be able to obtain a job with high enough pay to achieve economic independence for themselves and their family. For these reasons, we recommend increasing social assistance levels and adopting a living wage for all New Brunswickers. Additionally, providing victims of GBV with portable rent subsidies would help to offset the cost of housing. The reason that we ask these be portable is so that victims have the freedom to move should the space become unsafe for them to stay in, for example, if their abuser were to discover where they were living.

Create More Housing Options for Victims – High housing costs present a significant barrier to victims of GBV trying to start a new life. What is deemed as affordable housing is often not actually affordable to victims, who as mentioned in our previous point, may have low income. New Brunswick's definition of affordable housing should be reassessed based on incomes compared to the market for each area of the province and applied to create more housing options for victims and their families.

Investments should be made in renovations to existing Transition House and Second Stages, as well as new builds, to increase the amount of space and units available, based on the demand for the region. Spaces in Transition Houses are limited which can present a barrier to serving victims, especially during public health crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, and Second Stages have long waitlists. However, increased opportunities to stay in or live in a facility with onsite, wrap-around supports would increase victims' outcomes in healing and living a life free of violence. To that effect, victims should also have access to more long-term supportive housing, which could be achieved by creating Third Stage Housing throughout the province.

Resources for Rural Communities - Access to social systems, programs, and resources can be limited for people living in rural communities, which is a pertinent issue in New Brunswick. This can be a barrier to victims seeking and receiving help and can contribute to keeping them isolated in abusive situations. Some solutions that we would recommend are expanding social programs offered in urban areas to rural areas (some Transition Houses and Second Stages are already doing so with their Outreach programs, however the cost of mileage can add up quickly), compensate victims for transportation into urban areas to obtain services, and increase technological resources for victims in rural communities, such as devices and high-speed internet, as well as for services so they can connect with victims. Furthermore, improving public transportation throughout the province would benefit all victims by providing more opportunities to leave abusive situations, travel to access services, and increase their independence.

Summary

Thank you for considering the New Brunswick Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Sector's recommendations for each pillar of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. Our recommendations are based on the barriers to victims of GBV living free of violence and what we believe would help to eliminate those barriers, fill gaps, provide victims and their families with support, and prevent GBV in New Brunswick. We look forward to reviewing and providing feedback on the draft plan developed for New Brunswick when it is available.