

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

UPDATE MAY 2012

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

On behalf of my colleagues on the Ministerial Steering Committee on Violence Against Women, I am pleased to provide this update on the province's Domestic Violence Action Plan.

With the launch of the Domestic Violence Action Plan in 2004, our government took important and necessary steps towards ensuring that women live without fear of violence at home, at work and in their communities.

Thanks to the dedication of community leaders and front-line workers from across Ontario, the Action Plan has achieved many successes. Through our collective efforts, more front-line professionals know how to recognize the signs of domestic violence and how to provide the most appropriate supports to women who have experienced violence. In addition, access to a range of vital community supports has been improved to help women and their children be safe, heal and live independently.

Our government continues to build on the solid foundation put in place by the Domestic Violence Action Plan by working with survivors, advocates and service providers to make improvements based on the advice of our Domestic Violence Advisory Council, the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*, the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, and other violence against women experts. Ensuring that our programs and policies also address the unique needs of women from diverse communities is essential so that all women in Ontario are able to live without fear or threat of violence.

Last year, we reaffirmed our commitment to end violence against women with the launch of Ontario's Sexual Violence Action Plan, a four-year strategy that includes \$15 million in funding. In total, the government now invests \$220 million in violence against women programs and services.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the hundreds of individuals and organizations in the community, health, education and justice sectors who have worked so closely with our ministries to implement new programs, policies and legislation that are fundamental to the success of our Action Plan.

I look forward to continuing to work with you, and all Ontarians, towards our goal of ending violence against women.



Laurel Broten
Minister Responsible for Women's Issues
Minister of Education

INTRODUCTION

All women have the right to live in safety and with dignity, free from intimidation and the threat of violence. In 2004, our government launched a Domestic Violence Action Plan for Ontario, a comprehensive approach to preventing domestic violence and improving supports for abused women and their children when it does happen.

By working in partnership with violence against women organizations and other professionals in the community, health, education and justice sectors, the Domestic Violence Action Plan set out a collaborative approach to:

- Provide better community supports for victims, including enhanced counselling services and transitional and housing supports
- Support training of front-line workers and professionals across sectors
- Promote public education and prevention to change attitudes and mobilize communities to stop violence before it happens
- Improve Ontario's criminal and family justice systems to better protect women and their children and hold abusers accountable for their behaviour.

Since 2009, this work has been informed by the Domestic Violence Advisory Council. The Council was appointed by the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues to provide advice on how to improve the existing system of violence against women services to better meet the diverse needs of abused women and their children. Their final report, *Transforming our Communities: Report from the Domestic Violence Advisory Council for the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues*, was released in July 2009. It contains recommendations in five priority areas: access and equity, education and training, legal system response to abused women, child welfare, and threat assessment and risk management. A copy of the Council's report can be found at www.ontario.ca/owd

Since receiving the Council's report, our government has worked to implement many of its recommendations and build on the progress achieved through the Domestic Violence Action Plan.

This report highlights actions that we have taken in response to the Council's recommendations as well as other key accomplishments since the last update on the Domestic Violence Action Plan in 2007.

BETTER COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORTS FOR VICTIMS

A responsive community is fundamental to supporting abused women and their children. The Domestic Violence Advisory Council recognized the need to strengthen community services and enhance policies to support women escaping domestic violence. Our government has increased funding for community services and implemented policies and legislation to improve supports for abused women and their children.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Shelters, counselling services and other community agencies play a critical role in helping women and their children create a new life free of violence.

Since 2003, funding to violence against women agencies has increased by 49 per cent, to \$143 million. This funding helped add 248 new shelter beds across the province. Each year, Ontario's shelters serve approximately 12,600 women and 8,500 children.

This funding increased the base budgets, salaries and wages for shelters and counselling agencies across the province. It also enhanced annual funding to the Transitional and Housing Support Program (THSP) to over \$14 million. The THSP program helps abused women find secure housing and connect with counselling, job training and other services. Since 2003, the number of women served annually through this program has increased by about 12,000 to over 20,000 women each year.

As well, in 2009, six additional Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees began receiving annualized funding. Throughout the province, 48 Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees bring together partners from the community, health, education and justice sectors to improve the community's response to violence against women.

The Internet is a great resource for finding information that can help women make decisions about their personal situations. Relevant Government of Ontario ministry websites now provide information to help women take precautions to hide their Internet activities. By clicking on the "Hide Your Internet Activities" link, women will be able to take steps to improve their safety while visiting websites that are helpful for abused women.

SAFE, SECURE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Leaving an abusive relationship can have significant economic hardships for victims of domestic violence. The Poverty Reduction Strategy highlights the importance of breaking the cycle of poverty for women and their children. Safe, secure and affordable housing serves as a foundation for securing employment, education, health services and child care.

Our government's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy – *Building Foundations: Building Futures* – was announced in November 2010. It is the first of its kind in Ontario, setting a strong foundation for a more efficient, accessible system for those who need safe, affordable housing. The Strategy includes the Special Priority Policy that gives victims of domestic violence priority on the social housing waiting list.

In 2010, 4,743 victims of domestic violence received housing assistance under the Special Priority Policy, representing a quarter of all households to receive rent-geared-to-income assistance. The province works closely with service managers, housing providers, and the violence against women sector to ensure this policy continues to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence.

In November 2011, the provincial and federal governments announced a combined investment of \$481 million under the Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario (IAH) program, which will help build or repair approximately 7,000 affordable housing units and create over 5,000 jobs in Ontario over four years.

The IAH program builds on our record of providing more funding for affordable housing than any previous government - \$2.5 billion towards building and repairing more than 270,000 units and providing 35,000 rent supplements.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Women leaving an abusive relationship need financial security to help build a better life. Policies and programs that support the participation of women in the workforce include:

- Increasing the minimum wage from \$6.85 to \$10.25 an hour. This increase is critically important to women who make up two-thirds of minimum wage earners in Ontario.
- Establishing the province's *Employment Training for Abused/At-Risk Women Program* to assist women in finding jobs and increasing their employment potential. This program has served more than 1,800 women and over 80 per cent of participants have found jobs or pursued additional training within six months of graduation.
- Creating 22,000 new child care spaces and implementing full-day kindergarten across the province.

Income support can also be an important source of temporary assistance for women fleeing abuse.

- Social assistance regulations have been amended to allow women living in interval or transitional housing to continue to receive a shelter allowance beyond the three months previously allowed. This change provides support beyond basic personal needs and helps a woman maintain her principal residence while ensuring her safety in the shelter.

- Acknowledging that it can take a number of attempts to leave an abusive situation, Ontario Works introduced policy revisions to provide better supports to abused women in emergency situations. Before the policy revisions, emergency assistance could not be provided more than once in a six-month period. Now, women fleeing domestic violence can access emergency assistance more frequently.
- In the fall of 2011, social assistance rates increased by another one per cent. This is the seventh rate increase since 2003, bringing the total increase to 13.7 per cent. The government has also ended the deduction of the federal National Child Benefit Supplement from social assistance.
- The Ontario Child Benefit was accelerated by two years and now provides up to \$1,100 annually per child. This is an 83 per cent increase in the maximum benefit compared to 2008.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

When domestic violence follows a woman into the workplace, it impacts the victim, her co-workers and the workplace. The Domestic Violence Advisory Council recognized the need to support workplaces to address domestic violence.

- The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* now requires employers to develop and implement policies and programs to help prevent workplace violence and workplace harassment. Employers also have a duty to take reasonable precautions to protect a worker when they are aware, or ought reasonably to be aware, that domestic violence may occur in the workplace, and it would likely expose a worker to physical injury.
- Resource materials on these requirements have been developed by the Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario's Steering Committee on Workplace Violence, with advice from violence against women experts. Copies of this material are available at: <http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/topics/workplaceviolence.php>
- The *Neighbours, Friends and Families* domestic violence awareness campaign has expanded into the workplace and employers and co-workers can now access information online and through in-person training. So far, more than 430 workplaces have embraced the campaign across the province.

CHILD WELFARE

The Domestic Violence Advisory Council highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration between the violence against women and child welfare sectors.

- In March 2010, over 500 child welfare, shelter, government and justice sector workers attended the symposium, *Critical Connections: Where Woman Abuse and Child Safety Intersect*, to learn about the impact of woman abuse on the safety and well being of children. A practice guide on domestic violence for Children's Aid Society workers was

launched at the symposium. The practice guide and accompanying training curriculum were developed by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies in collaboration with a Woman Abuse Advisory Committee.

- In November 2010, the Ministries of Community and Social Services and Children and Youth Services held consultations with representatives from the violence against women and child welfare sectors to examine strategies to promote more meaningful collaboration between these two sectors. Forty-four communities across the province have local collaboration agreements that describe how the Children's Aid Society and violence against women agencies will collaborate when the work of the two sectors intersect.

SURVIVOR ENGAGEMENT

The Domestic Violence Advisory Council highlighted the benefits of engaging survivors in the development of programs and policies that respond to violence against women.

- The Women's Centre for Social Justice (also known as WomenatthecentrE), a provincial organization led by survivors for survivors, is receiving funding to help build provincial and regional networks of survivors. To date, WomenatthecentrE has facilitated over 25 training and information sessions across the province and developed orientation materials, handbooks and a website www.womenatthecentre.com/.
- In communities across the province, Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees are engaging survivors in policy and program development and supporting survivor-led initiatives. For example, the Temiskaming Domestic Violence Coalition recruited survivors to participate in various levels of the local coordinating committee. Survivors were provided training and support for costs, such as child care and travel, which can be a barrier to their participation.

IDENTIFY WOMEN AT RISK AND INTERVENE EARLY

The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee has repeatedly cited the need for training of front-line workers and other professionals to improve responses to victims of domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Advisory Council also underscored the importance of educating professionals so that they have the knowledge, attitudes and skills to most effectively help abused women and their children.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION FOR FRONT-LINE PROFESSIONALS

To date, over 28,000 professionals working in the community, health, education, and justice sectors have received training to detect domestic violence and support victims. This includes training for:

- 3,500 health care providers to identify and support women and children who are exposed to domestic violence. Women's College Hospital is continuing to promote this training with healthcare professionals across the province.
- More than 7,500 educators in English and French elementary schools to recognize and support children who may be witnessing domestic violence.
- 1,200 legal aid workers, including front-line staff in legal clinics, duty counsel, family law lawyers, and refugee lawyers to identify and respond to women who have experienced abuse.
- More than 275 staff from 45 municipal and First Nations police services and from all six OPP regions to enhance police communicators' knowledge about the dynamics of domestic violence, related medical issues, and practical guidelines for identifying and documenting evidence when responding to domestic violence calls.
- More than 1,400 representatives of municipal housing agencies, non-profit housing corporations, co-operatives and housing access centres on how to support women experiencing domestic violence obtain and maintain housing.

The Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children is coordinating a *Learning Network* of professionals working to improve training and public education on the prevention of violence against women. To support this *Learning Network*, the Centre will develop an electronic clearinghouse for training and public education materials, host knowledge exchange forums on emerging issues, develop and distribute summaries of research on public education and training, and provide advice and supports to professionals across Ontario on evidence-based training and public education approaches. Over time, this

will improve the quality and consistency of training and public education material resulting in improved service for women experiencing violence.

THREAT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee and the Domestic Violence Advisory Council both recognize threat assessment and risk management as effective tools to help address violence against women.

- The Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children received funding to host two threat assessment/risk management forums in 2010. Over 350 professionals, including representatives from the Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees and provincial violence against women umbrella groups, learned about the benefits of collaboration, clear communication and mutually agreed upon protocols and had the opportunity to share challenges and promising practices. As follow-up, the Centre has been funded to develop online training and best practice community protocols which will be rolled out in fall 2012.
- Domestic Violence High Risk Committees have now been established in each of the province's court jurisdictions. These committees provide additional monitoring and proactive management of domestic violence cases identified as high risk. Membership on these committees varies in accordance with local needs, practices, and available resources. In recent years, four educational programs have been convened to provide information to Crown attorneys and Victim/Witness Assistance Program staff on the implementation of Domestic Violence High Risk Committees and on research relevant to domestic violence risk factors and threat assessment tools and practices.

CHANGE ATTITUDES TO PREVENT VIOLENCE FROM HAPPENING IN THE FIRST PLACE

Changing attitudes about gender inequality can help break patterns of violent behaviour and victimization. The Domestic Violence Advisory Council highlighted the important role public education plays in shifting attitudes to recognize our collective responsibility for preventing violence against women and supporting abused women and their children.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

The government recognizes the critical role that both communities and individuals can play in preventing and responding to domestic violence.

- Launched in 2006, the province-wide *Neighbours, Friends and Families* public education campaign helps those closest to an abused woman recognize early the signs of abuse and understand what they can do to help. This campaign has been taken up by more than 220 communities, with over four million copies of material distributed across Ontario. The campaign has also been adapted for Francophone and Aboriginal communities (*Voisin-es, ami-es et familles* and *Kanawayhitowin – Taking Care of Each Others Spirit*), and immigrant and refugee communities. More information can be found at: www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca
- The White Ribbon Campaign and Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions have developed the bilingual campaign, “*It starts with you – It stays with him / Ça commence avec toi – Ça reste avec lui*”. Launched in 2009, this campaign encourages men to act as role models for boys and to educate boys about gender equality and relationship skills. The campaign can be found at: www.itstartswithyou.ca / www.commenceavecstoi.ca

The *Promoting Healthy, Equal Relationships* program supported community-based initiatives targeting children, youth and the adults who influence them – parents, educators, coaches, social workers and mentors – to change attitudes to prevent violence from happening. These community activities have reached approximately 100,000 children and youth throughout Ontario. Select initiatives include:

- The “*Girl EmPower*” achievement badge developed by the Girl Guides of Canada. Close to 8,000 girls have earned the badge through the completion of activities fostering healthy, equal relationships.
- The *STEPS Program* (Sisters in Truth, Equality, Power and Strength), delivered by the YWCA of Toronto engaged more than 400 girls aged 8 to 14 through workshops that taught respectful relationships, communications skills, violence prevention and coping strategies.

- *Roots of Equality*, developed by Springtide Resources, in partnership with the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, for students in grades 1 to 8 to help foster healthy, equal relationships and raise awareness of violence against women. Over 1,140 teachers participated in the program and nearly 105,000 copies of the materials were distributed.

STRENGTHENING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM RESPONSE

An effective justice system response is critical to protect women and their children from domestic violence and hold abusers accountable. The Domestic Violence Advisory Council made several recommendations to improve access to information, supports and services to help abused women safely navigate the justice system.

FAMILY LAW REFORM

Increasing access to justice for Ontarians is a priority for the province. Significant reforms to the family justice system are based on four pillars:

- Providing more information to families up front about the steps they need to take and the impact on children when relationships break down
- Identifying cases that are appropriate for mediation and other means of alternative dispute resolution, as well as cases that require immediate judicial attention so those cases have faster access to the courts
- Improving access to legal advice as well as less adversarial means of resolving issues
- Streamlining and simplifying the steps involved for those cases that must go to court.

Since 2008, the government has worked with experts in the violence against women community to introduce initiatives to better support abused women and children within the family court system. These changes involve both legislative reform and enhanced services for women as they navigate the family court process.

- The restraining order reforms contained in Ontario's family law reform legislation (the *Family Statute Law Amendment Act, 2009*) came into force on October 15, 2009. These changes better protect women by making them eligible to apply for a restraining order regardless of how long they have lived with their partner. Breaches of the new restraining orders will be prosecuted as an offence under the *Criminal Code of Canada*, which contains stricter bail conditions. In addition, the legislation includes provisions to improve protections for children in times of family breakdown and distress. These measures are expected to help ensure judges have all of the relevant information necessary to make decisions in the best interests of children.
- The Family Court Support Worker program helps victims of domestic violence across Ontario navigate the family court system during the difficult process of separation and divorce. These community-based support workers provide victims with information about the family court process, refer them to specialized services and supports in the community, help with safety planning, including that associated with court appearances, and accompany victims to court, where appropriate.

- The Ontario Court of Justice, in partnership with the Ministry of the Attorney General, has launched a specialized court to hear cases in which there are both criminal charges and family law matters where domestic violence is the underlying issue. In June 2011, Canada's first Integrated Domestic Violence (IDV) court was opened in Toronto as a two-year pilot project. Ordinarily, people must appear in different courts, before different judges to have their legal issues heard. The IDV court will allow families to appear before a single, dedicated judge for both their family and criminal matters. The "one family, one judge" approach allows the judge to have more complete information about the families and to monitor them more effectively.
- Finding and filling out the appropriate court forms can be a daunting task. To make that task easier for families, we introduced the Ontario Court Forms Assistant. This interactive online tool helps people fill out some of the most commonly used family and small claims court forms. The tool can be used to help fill out forms to get a restraining order, apply for custody of a child or change a child support order, and start a case in family court or respond to a family law case. The goal is to make it easier for Ontarians to understand, fill out and submit forms to the court and get their matter heard more quickly.

LEGAL AID ONTARIO

The Domestic Violence Advisory Council recognized the importance of legal aid to women fleeing abuse and made several recommendations to reduce barriers to legal supports.

- In September 2009, the government increased access to legal aid by investing an additional \$150 million over four years in Legal Aid Ontario. Since the province's investment, Legal Aid Ontario has transformed its family law service delivery model, making basic legal advice available by telephone, and increasing access to duty counsel for family law clients.
- More information is being provided to families to help them make more informed decisions about legal issues that often arise at the end of a relationship. Legal Aid Ontario has made this information available online through the Family Law Information Program. Opportunities to ensure early disclosure of abuse and help facilitate community referrals to better support families in reaching resolutions are being enhanced through these improvements.
- Where appropriate, lawyers who have been duty or advice counsel can now be retained with a Legal Aid Certificate when it is in the best interest of the client.
- In 2008, Legal Aid Ontario established a domestic violence protocol that includes two-hour emergency authorizations, quick turn-around time for applications, and less stringent eligibility rules to recognize that abused women may not have access to documents, bank records and funds. An additional eight hours is provided on certificates in cases of domestic violence, which helps by providing additional time to cover issues such as restraining orders. Callers to Legal Aid Ontario's toll-free phone number who identify

themselves as victims of domestic violence are placed in a priority queue to ensure minimal wait time.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT PROGRAM

Victims of domestic violence can count on a more effective response from Ontario's criminal courts.

- Domestic Violence Court Programs are now operating in each of the province's 54 court jurisdictions. In every site, specially trained police, Crown attorneys and Victim/Witness Assistance Program staff work together with community partners to keep victims safe while holding offenders accountable. An independent evaluation of the Domestic Violence Court Program showed that it was achieving its goals. Specifically, victims felt their safety was considered during the criminal justice process, having specialized Crown attorneys has improved the way domestic violence cases are managed and police are collecting more evidence in domestic violence cases.
- The Bail Safety program has now expanded to ten sites and receives annual, on-going funding. The improved information gathering practices of the Bail Safety program allow Crown attorneys and police to better identify and address safety issues at the bail stage. In addition, the Bail Safety program offers victims of domestic violence immediate support and referrals.
- Since 2008, the government has invested \$1.7 million annually for the Early Victim Contact initiative to provide same-day help for victims. Twenty-three new Victim/Witness Assistance Program staff have been hired across the province to support this initiative.
- The government has increased annual funding for the Partner Assault Response (PAR) program to \$10.6 million, an increase of over 40 per cent since 2003. The PAR program provides specialized counselling and educational services to court ordered offenders who have assaulted their partners. An evaluation found positive changes in offenders who complete a PAR program. For example, acceptance of personal responsibility for abusive behaviour grew, while negative and blaming attitudes towards their partners diminished.

TRAINING

Both the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee and the Domestic Violence Advisory Council highlight the importance of education for justice professionals as they provide important services for women who have experienced violence.

- In conjunction with the Ontario Bar Association, the Ministry of the Attorney General organized seminars on the intersection between the family and criminal courts. These seminars examined how each court system deals with domestic violence and issues associated with clients who have contact with both systems. Domestic violence prosecutors received training on family law and crossover issues at Crown education sessions.

- The Law Commission of Ontario is developing course modules for Ontario law students on issues relating to violence against women to promote skills development for effective case management of domestic violence cases in law practices.
- In 2009, staff from all Family Law Information Centres received training on domestic violence. Staff from Luke's Place Support and Resource Centre for Women and Children helped to facilitate the training.

All Ontario judges now have access to educational resources on domestic violence in the context of family law, criminal law, Aboriginal culture, immigration and cultural issues, child protection and several other subjects. The National Judicial Institute developed these resources in consultation with judicial leaders and violence against women experts, and delivers them through in-person learning and an online library available to the judiciary.

Currently, all police services in Ontario have designated a Domestic Violence Coordinator to provide a consistent approach for responding to domestic violence incidents. The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services hosted its first annual Domestic Violence Coordinators' Training in 2006. Topics for annual training are identified by Domestic Violence Coordinators (specially trained police officers). The purpose of hosting an annual training is to ensure that all Domestic Violence Coordinators receive a consistent message regarding domestic violence investigations, which will translate into a province-wide approach.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Community-based legal services help abused women access information about court processes and services to help them navigate the family and criminal justice system. In their report, the Domestic Violence Advisory Council recommended continued investment to build on innovative community models of legal advocacy.

- In 2011, the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic received funding to examine the impact of recent justice system reforms and the practice of mandatory charging on victims of domestic violence. The Clinic established an advisory committee comprised of front-line service providers, academics, lawyers and other professionals, held a provincial forum and prepared a report identifying best practice guidelines and models of service delivery, as well as the need for further change. Recommendations resulting from this project are being used by the Clinic to improve its services and have been disseminated to other service providers. The Clinic also receives ongoing funding to provide specialized legal services for victims of domestic violence.

IMPROVED ACCESS AND EQUITY

Domestic violence affects all communities in Ontario. The violence against women system is intended to provide a comprehensive response to all women experiencing violence. As the Domestic Violence Advisory Council noted, the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and geographic diversity of Ontario requires focused and sometimes unique responses.

The Ontario government is committed to embedding diversity objectives and outcomes in all policies, programs and services. Staff in the Ontario Public Service now have tools and resources to help them assess and integrate diversity, equity and accessibility into program and policy development and implementation. Representatives from the violence against women sector were consulted in the development of these resources.

Individual ministries are engaging in training and other activities to raise diversity awareness among their staff. At the request of the Ontario Women's Directorate, the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres provided training to staff working in ministries that fund violence against women programs on an intersectional approach to understanding diversity, equity and access. The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to understand the systemic and structural barriers affecting diverse communities of sexual violence survivors in accessing programs and services.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public education initiatives have focused on raising awareness of domestic violence in diverse communities across Ontario. Current and recent initiatives include:

- Expanding the *Neighbours, Friends and Family* campaign to meet the needs of immigrant and refugee populations. Facilitators familiar with the cultures and languages of immigrant and refugee populations are being trained to raise awareness about domestic violence in communities across the province. This work is being supported by the expertise of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants and nine other community-led agencies across the province.
- Establishing the *Family Law Education for Women* campaign to help newcomer and vulnerable women understand their rights and options under family law and how to exercise them. A series of booklets, available province-wide in 14 languages, provides information on a range of legal topics, such as marriage, divorce and child custody and access. The material has been adapted for women of various faiths and communities, and is available in accessible formats. More can be found on this campaign at: www.onefamilylaw.ca/
- Supporting a number of ethnocultural community organizations to develop and deliver workshops to promote healthy, equal relationships among youth aged 8 to 14 and the adults who influence them. Innovative projects like *Equality Rocks* for Afghan youth in Toronto,

the *Riverdale Muslim Youth Project*, also in Toronto, and *Everyone Counts* in Kitchener-Waterloo supported diverse communities as they developed and implemented tools to promote healthy equal relationships.

TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Our government has invested in training programs and other resources to increase service providers' skills, knowledge and sensitivity to help women from diverse communities receive the support they need.

- The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants developed and delivered province-wide training to 900 settlement workers to recognize the signs of abuse and provide women and children at risk with appropriate support.
- Women's College Hospital is developing training for mental health, addiction, and violence against women workers across Ontario to help them better support abused women with concurrent issues.
- The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses has created accessible education and training tools for shelter workers across Ontario. A new course on how to incorporate anti-racist/anti-oppressive practices within shelter programs has been introduced to help promote the development of inclusive services.
- The South Asian Women's Centre conducted focus groups with police, shelter workers, Victim/Witness Assistance Program staff and others to develop resources to help South Asian communities respond to domestic violence. A training guide will be translated into five South Asian languages and made available online.
- Springtide Resources delivered its training program, *Breaking New Ground*, to increase the sensitivity of service providers who deal with women who have intellectual disabilities and are at risk of abuse.
- The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration is helping families that have re-located to London from international conflict zones. They are coordinating resources from a number of local service providers such as police, hospitals and child welfare services, in order to best respond to these victims' unique needs. Tools and resources developed from this project will benefit other social service agencies that are working to address family violence within immigrant and refugee communities in London.

BETTER ACCESS TO FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

Francophone women should receive services in their language in accordance with the *French Language Services Act*. The Domestic Violence Advisory Council called on the government to support the development and implementation of women-centred French-language services, so that French-speaking women can find the support they need to escape violence and rebuild their lives.

It is critical to engage Francophone women, and the organizations that serve them, in the development of policies, programs and services to ensure that their unique needs are addressed. A joint French-language services working group has been convened with representatives from Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes and key provincial ministries to identify priorities and opportunities for improvement within existing policies, programs and services.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

French-language community services are essential to helping women find solutions to move out of a crisis situation and begin to heal.

- A new 10-bed Francophone shelter in Timmins, Centre Passerelle pour femmes du Nord de l'Ontario, is the first shelter in northern Ontario offering services completely in French. It is fully accessible to people with disabilities and provides a safe and secure play area for children.
- A new Francophone shelter in Toronto, targeted for completion in 2012, will help meet the needs of the growing population of French-speaking immigrant women.
- Colibri: Centre des femmes francophones du comté de Simcoe in Barrie is the fourth Francophone sexual assault centre to open since 2006, following Oasis Centre des femmes in Peel region, Centre Novas – CALACS francophone de Prescott-Russell, and Carrefour des Femmes du Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario in London. There are now 11 Francophone sexual assault centres in Ontario.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public education initiatives developed by Francophone organizations are helping to prevent domestic violence in Ontario's Francophone communities.

- The *Voisin-es, ami-es et familles* campaign is raising awareness about the signs of woman abuse in Francophone communities across the province. Action ontarienne contre la

violence faite aux femmes is leading this campaign that has reached over 23,000 community members through presentations, workshops, and training.

- The Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions has created French-language resources encouraging men to act as positive role models for boys and young men. The online campaign, *Ça commence avec toi. Ça reste avec lui*, emphasizes the ability men have to make a difference in the journey toward building healthy, equal relationships.
- The Centre culturel de ressources francophones pour les communautés ethniques' project *Nouvelle convention Hommes/Femmes (A New Agreement Between Men and Women)* is raising awareness and mobilizing men around the issue of violence against women. A group of 30 French-speaking men from ethnic minorities has received training to identify and respond to violence against women. These volunteers are now able to help abusers take responsibility for their own actions and help them change their behaviours.
- Through their project *Jeunes filles avisées (Girls Who Are Aware)*, Femme en Action brought together 50 immigrant girls from ethnocultural minorities at workshops on skills to identify acts of violence in relationships. Further training included an in-depth focus on identifying the factors at the root of violence.

TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Training initiatives supported by the government and delivered by Francophone organizations are improving the capacity of service providers to respond to the unique needs of Francophone women across the province.

- Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes continues to build on the success of their French-language Training Institute on Violence Against Women program. Since 2007, this virtual institute has provided training to approximately 1,350 Francophone workers in shelters, counselling agencies, sexual assault centres, women's centres, and other community agencies that provide support to Francophone women who are victims of violence. By 2013, it is anticipated that the Institute will train an additional 1,845 Francophone service providers.
- The Ministry of Community and Social Services hosted forums in 2008 and 2010 that brought together representatives of the Ontario government and the violence against women sector to discuss French-language services. Forum participants gained a better understanding of their roles in the active offer of French-language services and had an opportunity to take stock of the progress that has been made in improving access to French-language violence against women services. Participants learned about new tools and initiatives and shared ideas on how to address the sector's challenges and needs.

RECOGNIZE THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Aboriginal women experience higher rates of violence than non-Aboriginal women. Responding to violence against Aboriginal women requires a collaborative approach across government and with Aboriginal communities and organizations. Our government has endorsed the overall objectives and multi-faceted approach of the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women* to guide planning and priority setting in Ontario.

The *Strategic Framework* was developed by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and the Ontario Native Women's Association following a provincial summit convened in 2007 to explore issues and possible solutions to violence against Aboriginal women. Three subsequent summits have focused on justice issues, the community service response and the impact of violence on Aboriginal children and youth.

A Joint Working Group comprised of representatives from five Aboriginal organizations and ten government ministries has been convened to continue to identify initiatives that respond to the *Strategic Framework*. An Aboriginal organization and government co-chair the Joint Working Group, which submits annual reports to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Ontario Native Women's Association, the Métis Nation of Ontario, the Independent First Nations and the Chiefs of Ontario are members of the Joint Working Group.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

Aboriginal-specific front-line community services respond to the unique challenges faced by Aboriginal women and their communities. The government is working with Aboriginal organizations and communities to support services that help Aboriginal women take steps towards building a life free of violence by:

- Supporting initiatives that respond to violence against Aboriginal women and children. Through its *Ending Violence Against Aboriginal Women Fund*, the government is assisting the signatories to the *Strategic Framework* to undertake various community-specific initiatives related to violence against Aboriginal women, including violence that affects children and youth.
- Establishing an Aboriginal Women's Help Line pilot project for women in isolated and northern communities to receive culturally appropriate support. The Aboriginal Women's Help Line is expected to be operational in 2012.
- Supporting the *Building Aboriginal Women's Leadership* program. Delivered by the Ontario Native Women's Association, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and Equay-wuk

(Women's Group), close to 1,300 Aboriginal women have participated in leadership development training sessions. Over 180 women have secured leadership positions within their communities, including two women who became Band Chiefs and one who became a Deputy Chief.

- Creating an Aboriginal-specific Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committee in Thunder Bay to bring together Aboriginal survivors of domestic violence and representatives from the violence against women, justice and broader social services sector to address violence against Aboriginal women.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Our government continues to support Aboriginal organizations in their efforts to promote public education about family violence in Aboriginal communities.

- The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres is delivering the *Kanawayhitowin – Taking Care of Each Others Spirit* campaign to raise awareness about the signs of woman abuse in Aboriginal communities. The campaign reflects traditional and cultural approaches to community healing and wellness. More than 650 facilitators have been trained and the campaign has reached thousands of people across the province.
- The *Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin: I am a Kind Man* initiative inspires Aboriginal men and boys to help stop all forms of abuse toward Aboriginal women and girls, and to treat them with equality. A project of the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, the campaign supports 55 trained facilitators to deliver educational workshops across the province. The *Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin* program is now reaching out to Aboriginal men involved with the corrections, probation and parole system.
- The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres' Aboriginal Youth Media Strategy aims to raise awareness of violence against Aboriginal women among Aboriginal youth. Consultations with Aboriginal youth helped define a public education campaign that is currently underway across Ontario.
- Minwaashin Lodge Aboriginal Women's Support Centre held a Youth Challenge to create educational products to promote healthy, equal relationships. Two music videos were produced by and for Aboriginal youth: *Love You Give*, a dynamic hip hop video with original lyrics based on the seven grandfather teachings; and *Time to Shine*, an original song and video produced by Inuit youth in Ottawa.

TRAINING AND RESOURCES

The *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women* recognizes the impact of training on building strong community capacity. Training initiatives funded by the government

and developed by Aboriginal organizations are improving the response of service providers to the unique needs of Aboriginal women.

- The Ontario Native Women's Association is designing and pilot testing training for Aboriginal front-line workers to help improve their skills in supporting women with post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of violence.
- The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies worked in collaboration with Aboriginal partners and service providers to develop an Aboriginal practice guide and training curriculum. These learning resources will help child protection workers across the province provide an effective response to Aboriginal women and children affected by domestic violence.

Aboriginal organizations are providing culturally sensitive training for front-line service providers and other professionals across the province. These programs are designed to enhance participants' skills, knowledge, attitudes and understanding of the values of Aboriginal cultures and histories as they relate to violence against Aboriginal women. For example,

- Equay-wuk (Women's Group) provided training to service providers to build community capacity to respond to the unique needs of abused women from northern and remote First Nations communities.
- The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres delivered the "*Mamo-Nikaniskeywin: All Together, Moving Forward*" training program to over 200 front-line community-based professionals including staff from shelters, counselling agencies and provincial crisis lines.
- The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres has also provided cultural competency workshops for staff from the Ontario government. Ministry participants gained a greater understanding of how to consider Aboriginal cultures and histories in policy and program development.

CONCLUSION

Through the tireless work of individuals, communities and organizations across the province, the Domestic Violence Action Plan has made a difference in the lives of abused women and their children.

Together we have made great progress in many areas, from family law reform to addressing the unique needs of women from diverse communities. We've begun work on threat assessment and risk management, are responding to domestic violence in the workplace and providing opportunities for survivors to have a voice in the violence against women system of services. Public education efforts have helped change the attitudes that can lead to domestic violence and have made Ontarians more aware of the signs of domestic violence.

Moving forward, we will continue to be guided by the principles and recommendations of the Domestic Violence Advisory Council and the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*. We will continue to build on the Domestic Violence Action Plan's strong foundation by working collaboratively with survivors and professionals in the community, health, education and justice sectors towards an Ontario where all women live free from the threat, fear or experience of violence.

These initiatives are making a difference in the lives of women. Together we have made great progress and we are committed to do more.