



Ontario's Seniors Strategy Consultation
Seniors Policy and Programs Division
Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
777 Bay Street, Suite 601C
Toronto, ON M7A 2J4

July 9th, 2019

Re: Consultation submission on Ontario's Seniors Strategy

Recommendations submitted by The Aging Without Violence Project on behalf of the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) is a 77 member-based coalition of first stage women shelters, second stage housing programs, and community-based women's organizations; Together, we work towards eliminating violence against all women in Ontario. Our initiatives include training and resource development, advocacy, public awareness, and government relations to improve social policies that impact women and their children. Central to OAITH's work is to bring attention to our community, researchers, policy makers and government officials, that femicide is a public issue requiring a public response. In 1995, OAITH started The Femicide List ⁱ, to capture the stories of women's lives lost to gender-based violence, (specifically Intimate Partner and Known Relationship Femicide) as reported on by the media. In 2018, women who were over the age of 55 made up 45% of those murdered, with charges laid against men closest to them. This work isn't solely about demonstrating the staggering numbers, but more importantly, to understand the context in which femicide occurs; Women's risk of lethality is highest among men closely known to them. ⁱⁱ Women who are over 55 have steadily increased on OAITH's Femicide List over the last few years.

In January 2018, OAITH received funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to lead a 4-year province-wide training and resource project focused on ending violence against older women (VAOW) by increasing the capacity of all professionals in Ontario providing support, services, or care for older women experiencing violence. Please visit [Aging Without Violence](http://www.agingwithoutviolence.ca) to learn more about our resources, training opportunities and campaign materials.

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The Aging Without Violence Project appreciates the opportunity to consult on Ontario's Seniors Strategy, and broadly recommends the strategy employ an *intersectional framework* to consider systemic oppression, including: ageism, racism, sexism, poverty, colonialism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia. The AWV project also recommends usage of the term *Violence Against Older Women (VAOW)* within the strategy, rather than usage of the gender-neutral term, "elder abuse" or the age-neutral terms, "violence against women" or "family violence"; The term, *Violence Against Older Women*, recognizes the context of gender and the implications of aging related to women's experiences of violence.ⁱⁱⁱ

We also suggest identifying seniors as adults aged 55 and older, in alignment with AWV project research, while recognizing the unique needs of older women on the highest end of the age spectrum.^{iv}

The AWV project recommends inclusion of the following principals within the strategy, which align with AWV project approaches:

- ✓ Inclusion
- ✓ Choice and & Self Determination
- ✓ Diversity
- ✓ Safety and Security

Recognizing the Scope of Violence Against Older Women and Unique Barriers to Services and Supports

Violence against older women has a broad scope, as do the perpetrators of violence against older women which may include (ex)partners, family members, caregivers, neighbours, acquaintances, and service providers. Older women may experience a variety of forms of violence from multiple perpetrators at the same time, for example, an older woman may experience emotional, sexual, and physical abuse from her partner at the same time as emotional and financial abuse from her adult son. Although older men also experience violence, abuse, and neglect;

"because older women make up a higher proportion of the frail elderly, they are more likely to experience certain kinds of abuse. Women are also more frequently the victims of violence at the hands of family members than are men. Accordingly, issues regarding elder abuse are a concern for both male and female victims, although the particular vulnerability of women in the context of elder abuse must be recognized."^v

Compared to women below age 55, older women often face additional barriers to accessing violence, abuse and sexual-assault services. These barriers can include: a distrust of services, believing it is a personal matter and feeling there is no purpose in getting help as the abuse has occurred for so long. ^{vi}

Older women experiencing abuse or violence are more likely to be financially dependent on their abuser(s) than younger women. Financial dependence is even higher for newcomer women. Marginalized older women (older women who are gender-diverse, Indigenous, racialized, and/or differently abled) often feel invisible within systems and services and face even greater barriers to connecting with the help they need following violence.

Enhancing Coordination between Abuse Services and Regulated Health Services for Older Women Experiencing Violence

Healthcare professionals are a key bridge to many older women experiencing abuse. The AWW Project supports the expansion of the scope of practice for health professionals as outlined on page 21 of the 2019 Ontario Budget. To compliment enhanced access to services and patient experience, the AWW Project recommends development, delivery, and government support of targeted, sector-specific training for pharmacists, nurse practitioners, dental specialists, and optometrists, focused on *violence against older women*.

Promoting Transparency of Services and Accessibility of Information

The AWW project recommends the Strategy promote new training opportunities for police services led by VAW and elder abuse experts and create resource to explain to older women when charges can be laid in relation to abuse/violence from a friend, caregiver, (ex) partner, family member, service provider, or acquaintance, as well as a review of the impact of mandatory charging policies on older women experiencing violence in Ontario.

We also recommend that all provincial services and resource materials targeted towards older adults, including: health, social services, recreation, financial, employment, education etc., contain information about supports for older women who have experienced violence, and that the materials are available in large print and are made linguistically and culturally relevant to the population they are targeting.

Promoting employment opportunities for older women with Ontario's workforce

Over the past 20 years, older adults have nearly doubled their participation in Canada, with 1 in 3 persons aged 60 and older working, or wanting to work. ^{vii} Older women are a vital part of Ontario's workforce, but often struggle to find employment opportunities and employment supports which meet their needs. For immigrant and refugee older women in Ontario who are financially dependent on abusive family members, employment assistance may play a particularly vital role in increasing safety. ^{viii}

Increased access to transportation

Limited access to transportation is significant barrier for many older women experiencing abuse in Ontario, especially older women living in remote, rural, or Northern communities and those with decreased mobility. Without access to affordable, accessible transportation older women may be dependent on abusive partner(s), family members, and/or caregivers for transportation to vital services such as violence against women services, healthcare appointments, social supports, and training opportunities. ^{ix}

Increase to affordable, accessible housing for older women and reduced wait times for long term care

We recommend Ontario's Seniors Strategy align with the forthcoming Housing Supply Action Plan and both documents consider the unique barriers faced by older women in relation to access to affordable, accessible ' housing, especially following abuse. Particularly in rural areas, housing options for older adults are extremely limited, especially, culturally relevant housing for older Indigenous women and residential space within long term care services.^x

Overall, we recommend the Strategy address the following recommendations which were submitted by OAITH to the Status of Women in March 2019 ^{xi}:

- Increase in accessible, affordable housing for older women;
- Improvement in access and livable increases to income support and benefits programs for older women;
- Increase in accessible transportation, especially in Northern, Remote, and Rural communities, including community-driven solutions where public transportation is limited or non-existent;
- Development of resources and services specific to marginalized, LGBTQ+, racialized and Indigenous women and women living in Northern, remote, and rural communities, including culturally specific resources in a variety of languages;
- Advocacy, training, and awareness building across social, health, legal and community services to reduce the invisibility of older women experiencing violence;
- Training for all sectors in the unique needs of older Indigenous women;
- Explore Resource, Training, and Knowledge Hub models that can share and cross fertilize existing services;
- Promotion of intergenerational mentorship programs;
- Promotion of trauma-informed, client-centered approaches across sectors which recognize the autonomy of older women;
- Consideration of the recommendations made by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee in relation to cases of domestic homicide of older women; and
- Increased collaboration across ministries funding services vital to the health and wellbeing of older women.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our submission with the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility and are available to answer any questions or share the data we have been collecting through our Aging Without Violence project, and look forward to continued development of Ontario's Seniors Strategy

The Aging Without Violence Project

Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

ⁱ Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Femicide List](#) (2018).

ⁱⁱ Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Aging Without Violence Word to the Wise Issue 5](#). (December 2018).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Aging Without Violence Word to the Wise Issue 1](#). (September 2018)

^{iv} Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Aging Without Violence Gap Analysis](#) (2018).

^v Ontario Human Rights Commission. [Time for Action: Advancing Human Rights for Older Ontarians](#) (June 2001).

^{vi} Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Aging Without Violence Gap Analysis](#) (2018).

^{vii} Statistics Canada. Labour Statistics at a Glance. [Reasons for working at 60 and beyond](#). (December 2018).

^{viii} Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Aging Without Violence Word to the Wise Issue 8](#). (March 2019).

^{ix} Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. Aging Without Violence [Word to the Wise – Issue 7](#). (February 2019.)

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Aging Without Violence on behalf of Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Challenges Faced by Senior Women Submission](#). Prepared for the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. (March 2019).