

## Contents

Approach and Priorities for Addressing Gender-Based Violence .....	2
Project Overview .....	2
Engagement Overview .....	2
What We Heard.....	3
Guiding principles .....	3
Themes .....	5
1. Prevention: addressing root causes and systemic drivers of gender-based violence .....	5
2. Support: providing direct assistance to survivors and victims of gender-based violence .....	7
A. Intimate partner violence & sexual violence .....	7
B. Youth .....	10
C. Sexual exploitation, missing persons and human trafficking.....	10
D. Access to supports.....	11
3. Intervention: support & supervision for people who have committed gender-based violence.....	14
Impact of COVID-19 .....	16
1. Emerging needs from client (survivor/victim) perspective .....	16
2. Emerging organizational needs/challenges.....	20
Next Steps .....	21
Appendix: Stakeholder profile .....	22

## Table of Acronyms

<b>2SLGBTQQIA</b>	Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual
<b>ASL</b>	American Sign Language
<b>CFS</b>	Child and Family Services
<b>DV</b>	Domestic violence
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>GBVCC</b>	Gender-Based Violence Committee of Cabinet
<b>MMIWG</b>	Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

# Approach and Priorities for Addressing Gender-Based Violence

## Project Overview

The Gender-Based Violence Committee of Cabinet (GBVCC) was established to coordinate Manitoba's response to gender-based violence. This is the first time a cabinet committee has been established to focus on this important issue. The GBVCC recognizes that effectively addressing gender-based violence requires examining what supports currently exist, identifying opportunities for improvement and supporting community efforts.

The GBVCC is developing a framework to communicate how the government is organized to address gender-based violence in the province. The framework will include priority action areas based on input and recommendations from recent engagements and stakeholder meetings, combined with the body of evidence in existing research and reports.

- Improving Access and Coordination of Mental Health and Addiction Services: A Provincial Strategy for all Manitobans (VIRGO report)
- Tracia's Trust: Collaboration and Best Practice to End Sexual Violence and Sex Trafficking in Manitoba
- Winnipeg Safe City Scoping Study
- Pathways to a Better Future - Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action
- Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
- Family Law Modernization Action Plan and Family Law Manitoba Online Hub
- Manitoba's Policing and Public Safety Strategy
- Criminal Justice System Modernization Strategy
- Ongoing collaboration with the Family Violence Consortium of Manitoba and the Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters

In October 2020, the GBVCC launched a targeted engagement process to hear from stakeholders involved in gender-based violence work to help inform the framework.

## Engagement Overview

Departments identified key stakeholders involved in gender-based violence work. Approximately 175 organizations were identified.

In total, 69 people provided feedback through a survey between October 1 and October 15, 2020. The organizations represented provide services throughout the province. They also address various aspects of gender-based violence (See Appendix A: Stakeholder Profile).

## What We Heard

Respondents provided input on guiding principles, topics or actions within three themes (prevention, support and intervention) and the impact of COVID-19.

### Guiding principles

Respondents were asked to review the following list of guiding principles that will guide the work of the GBVCC and all actions within the framework.

Actions and approaches to address gender-based violence should:

- recognize that gender-based violence is rooted in historic global gender inequality and systemic oppression, including colonization and other forms of persistent discrimination
- treat survivors with dignity and respect
- be survivor-centric and trauma-informed
- be rooted in an intersectional approach and understanding
- promote collaboration among survivors, community, service-providers and government
- have a sustained focus on reconciliation and the ongoing process of establishing and maintaining mutually-respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples
- support Indigenous-led solutions
- support the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report and its Calls for Justice
- recognize the role of men and boys in addressing gender-based violence
- promote evidence-based and innovative initiatives, policy, legislation and services that are:
  - responsive to the needs of Manitoba’s diverse populations
  - culturally-safe and culturally-appropriate
  - inclusive of all genders and sexual orientations, ethnicities, races, cultures and abilities
  - established in collaboration with community
  - built on community strengths and capacity
  - trauma-informed and strengths-based
  - designed to include appropriate means of data collection and reporting
  - monitored to determine effectiveness

### Feedback on the guiding principles

A number of respondents expressed support for the guiding principles listed. Feedback on the principles listed and suggestions for additional ones to include is summarized below.

Feedback on the principles listed:

- A survivor-led approach is critical to ensure initiatives are developed, implemented and evaluated by the people who use them. “Nothing About Us Without Us.”

- MMIWG Calls for Justice is critical. The language of “support” is soft. There should be a commitment to “implement” the 231 Calls for Justice.
- Initiatives, policy, legislation and services should be rooted in experiences and knowledge of individuals, communities and populations impacted by gender-based violence.
- Collaboration (co-development) is essential and should be emphasized in the guiding principles: survivors, those perpetrating violence, government, community and other stakeholders need to come together to identify solutions, implement, monitor and evaluate.
- “Recognize the role of men and boys” should go further: men and boys need to be engaged and included in the work of addressing gender-based violence.
- Everyone, including survivors and perpetrators, should be treated with dignity and respect. All Canadians are to be treated with kindness, with respect for their rights, and given equal opportunities regardless of gender, culture, and socio-economic background.
- Recommend including examples of “other forms of persistent discrimination” (e.g., racism, sexism and homophobia).

#### Additional guiding principles:

- Gender-based violence is not limited to one demographic or cultural community; responses to gender-based violence should recognize cultural influences (including cultural heritage) and context.
- A focus on prevention is missing from the guiding principles.
- Approaches to gender-based violence must include supports for children.

#### Suggestions for the framework itself:

- The framework should be grounded in a rights-based approach.
- The language of “at-risk youth” positions youth as the problem, rather than systems surrounding the youth that cause the risk.
- Indigenous culture should not be viewed as homogeneous; it is important to recognize, and have services reflect, the diversity of Indigenous culture.
- 2SLGBTQQIA communities have been left out of this survey and are not accurately identified as a population vulnerable to violence.
- There needs to be a special emphasis on Indigenous women and girls and on 2SLGBTQQIA - their victimization is unique and requires a unique response.
- Indigenous-led community-responses (healing) deserve to have its own category – it spans across the pillars of prevention, support and intervention. Healing is critically important – for individuals and communities.

## Themes

Respondents were asked to rate the level of priority of different topics within three themes: prevention, support and intervention. This feedback will help prioritize actions within the framework and identify areas that are missing or emerging.

### 1. Prevention: addressing root causes and systemic drivers of gender-based violence

Respondents ranked topics based on a high, medium or low priority scale. The majority of respondents ranked all six topics as high priority. The highest ranked topics were: education/training on healthy relationships, consent and healthy masculinity, support for children impacted by intimate partner violence and family violence and support for Indigenous parents.

Rate the level of priority for each topic				
	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority	Not sure
Education/training on healthy relationships, consent, healthy masculinity	88%	7%	4%	0%
Support for children impacted by intimate partner violence and family violence	84%	13%	3%	0%
Support for Indigenous parents	84%	13%	1%	1%
Education/training on sexual harassment	68%	29%	3%	0%
Education/training on technology-facilitated gender-based violence	67%	23%	10%	0%
Education/training on sexual exploitation	65%	25%	10%	0%

### Feedback related to prevention

Respondents were then asked if there are other topics to include under the theme of prevention.

Summarized responses are presented below:

#### Men

- Effective prevention of gender-based violence must include men.
- Some suggestions include: public awareness campaigns to help men understand their own unhealthy or abusive behaviours in relationships; ongoing and aftercare supports for men who have used violence; workshops for men and boys on toxic masculinity; education and healing specific for men.
- Support is needed for men who are experiencing family violence or intimate partner violence.

## Awareness and system change

- Education and training don't necessarily result in changed behaviour. Respondents recommended focusing instead on awareness. Awareness is critically important in terms of describing the reality and also to contribute to greater enforcement of laws and system change.

## Poverty, housing and wrap-around supports

- The link between poverty and gender-based violence was highlighted by many respondents.
- Reducing poverty, unsafe and unaffordable housing, financial inequality, under/unemployment, barriers to education and food insecurity were identified as crucial components to preventing gender-based violence. Cross-sectoral partnerships are key.
- A number of respondents stated that reducing poverty should be the primary goal, and increasing services is more important than education.
- Wrap-around supports, including early prevention social services (e.g., early education programs, literacy, extra-curricular and in-school resources, food programs, harm reduction programs), with Indigenous-led agencies and programming at the forefront of culturally relevant programming, was identified by a number of respondents as key to preventing gender-based violence.

## Indigenous-led solutions

- Support for Indigenous-led responses to gender-based violence was identified by the majority of respondents. Indigenous-led responses span prevention, support and intervention and provide healing for individuals and communities; this type of healing is critically important.

## Parents and families

- Respondents agreed that support for Indigenous parents is an important prevention topic. Respondents stressed that support must happen through a decolonization process that is centred on Indigenous knowledge.
- Many respondents said there was also the need to support other parents, including those who are survivors of gender-based violence and trauma.
- Respondents recommended cultural programming for entire families.

## Mental health supports

- Mental health support was also stressed by a number of respondents, including access to trauma-based and addictions support. Respondents described issues with long wait lists for non-private addictions treatment and professional mental health services and the need for investments into long-term mental health resources and crisis services.
- Grassroots support for survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation was identified as a key need for preventing and supporting survivors.

## Cross-sectoral collaboration

- Enhanced cross-sectoral partnerships was identified as a critical component in all aspects of addressing gender-based violence.
- Support for community-led and locally-based prevention and support efforts was identified by a number of participants, as was support for greater collaboration between agencies within and across the gender-based violence sector broadly (e.g., different types of front line agencies, education, health and justice).

## Education and training for children

- Many respondents stressed the importance of early education for children, including sexual education, which covers healthy relationships, consent, self-worth, self-responsibility, boundaries, gender diversity and domestic violence awareness.
- Respondents also recommended education for older children and adolescent youth about gender-based violence and its legal and social consequences.

## Other types of training

Respondents identified a number of additional types of training topics be included under prevention, including:

- healthy relationship training for newcomers
- training on women’s history and Indigenous history
- training on inequality and its connection to gender-based violence
- training on systemic and structural racism, patriarchy and colonization
- training on emotional regulation and communication
- training on “rape myths” and how they hinder reporting

Respondents stressed that any training must be intersectional. Respondents also recommended that healthy relationship training include support and tools for dealing with abuse.

## 2. Support: providing direct assistance to survivors and victims of gender-based violence

Respondents ranked topics based on a high, medium or low priority scale. The topics were presented in four categories: intimate partner violence and sexual violence; youth; access to supports; and sexual exploitation, missing persons and human trafficking.

### A. Intimate partner violence & sexual violence

Within the category of intimate partner violence and sexual violence respondents ranked more housing supports for victims as the highest priority (94 per cent of respondents ranked it a high priority). The next highest priority topics were trauma-informed training for police and medical professionals (88 per cent of respondents ranked as high priority), enhanced women’s emergency shelters, including better crisis lines and

integrated tracking (83 per cent) and expanded sexual assault supports in rural and northern Manitoba (83 per cent).

Note: among respondents who provide services outside of Winnipeg, 83 per cent rated expanded sexual assault supports in rural and northern Manitoba as a high priority.

Rate the level of priority for each topic				
	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority	Not sure
Intimate partner violence & sexual violence				
More housing supports for victims	94%	4%	0%	1%
Trauma-informed training for police and medical professionals	88%	10%	1%	0%
Enhanced women's emergency shelters, including better crisis lines and integrated tracking	83%	16%	0%	1%
Expanded sexual assault supports in rural and northern Manitoba	83%	17%	0%	0%
Greater understanding about risk factors for intimate partner violence across systems	74%	23%	3%	0%
Accessible and safe ways for victims and perpetrators to seek assistance (e.g., through social media)	74%	25%	0%	1%
Support for families experiencing intimate partner violence going through separation and divorce	72%	25%	3%	0%
Support for victims involved in restorative justice matters, including Indigenous-led and cultural programming	65%	33%	0%	1%
Support for medical professionals to offer intervention options	59%	36%	0%	4%
Expanded use of risk assessment tools	45%	41%	9%	6%

### Feedback related to intimate partner violence and sexual violence:

#### Equitable access to services across Manitoba

- Respondents stressed the importance of equitable access to services for all Manitobans.
- A number of respondents mentioned the need for a coordinated approach to ensure equitable access to services for survivors, including access to forensic examinations after a sexual assault, addictions treatment, mental health support and access to Third Party Reporting.



## Support services

- Overall, there was a general sentiment that more services are needed, particularly for those vulnerable and most impacted by gender-based violence (for instance, due to intergenerational trauma, poverty and intersectional risk).
- Many respondents said there was a need for better access to trauma-informed and long-term mental health and addictions services.
- Support for Francophone and 2SLGBTQQIA members who are impacted by intimate partner and other forms of gender-based violence was mentioned.
- Some respondents noted the need for improved supports for families and friends of people impacted by intimate partner and other forms of gender-based violence.
- Many respondents said training is needed across all systems (e.g., police, victim services, medical services, front line service providers) in trauma-informed care, harm reduction, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices.
- Some respondents identified particular needs for support, for instance to help victims/survivors navigating important systems (e.g., support in making a police statement against a partner; navigating Child and Family Services in situations where a mother is at risk of being homeless).
- Supports are needed for adult victims of technology-facilitated domestic violence.
- There is a significant need for a 24 hour safe space for women and girls. Respondents mentioned Winnipeg is the only city in Canada without one.

## Support for Indigenous-led community-responses (healing)

- Indigenous-led, low-barriers, culturally relevant services that are rooted in Indigenous knowledge.
- Healing for individuals and for communities.

## Shelter system

- A significant number of respondents reported services are needed for women who do not have safe places to live/stay; those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; and those who are most vulnerable and at risk.
- A number of respondents identified concerns with the current shelter system. Concerns mentioned include outdated systems need for increased funding to meet expanding needs and service demands (e.g., protection orders, safety planning, prevention, outreach), not meeting the needs of vulnerable populations (e.g., 2SLGBTQQIA individuals, newcomer women, substance users, individuals experiencing homelessness or those living with complex mental health challenges), partnerships with organizations that work with vulnerable populations could be strengthened.
- Some participants recommended having a police officer available to assist in taking statements and escorting women to gather belongings from their homes.
- A number of participants mentioned the need for more transitional housing supports.
- Shelter spaces could be better designed to include designated safe spaces for children to share, play and have the freedom to be a child. Some suggested support for hiring Early Childhood Educators.

## B. Youth

Within the category of youth, respondents ranked timely access to mental health resources as the highest priority (93 per cent of respondents ranked it a high priority). The next highest priority topics were access to mental health and trauma services for girls and young women (88 per cent of respondents ranked as high priority) and support for youth transitioning out of care (86 per cent).

Rate the level of priority for each topic				
Youth	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority	Not sure
Timely access to mental health resources for youth	93%	6%	1%	0%
Access to mental health and trauma services for girls and young women	88%	10%	1%	0%
Support for youth transitioning out of care	86%	9%	4%	1%
Collaboration with schools and educators to identify at-risk youth	64%	26%	7%	3%

### Feedback related to youth:

#### Access to mental health and trauma services

- Improved access and availability for mental health and trauma services for all youth (especially for boys and young men) was noted by multiple respondents.

#### Youth-led responses

- The importance of youth-led initiatives was emphasized by respondents.

## C. Sexual exploitation, missing persons and human trafficking

Within the category of sexual exploitation, missing persons and human trafficking, respondents ranked improved emergency assessment, treatment and mental health services for high-risk, sexually exploited youth as the highest priority (90 per cent of respondents ranked it a high priority). The next highest priority topics were enhanced collaboration of police agencies with respect to exploited persons, human trafficking, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) (81 per cent of respondents) and coordinated response to sexual exploitation involving community and survivors (77 per cent).

Rate the level of priority for each topic				
Sexual exploitation, missing persons and human trafficking	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority	Not sure
Improved emergency assessment, treatment and mental health services for high-risk, sexually-exploited youth	90%	4%	3%	3%
Enhanced collaboration of police agencies with respect to exploited persons, human trafficking, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls	81%	9%	6%	4%
Coordinated response to sexual exploitation involving community and survivors	77%	17%	1%	4%
Standardized provincial missing persons protocol	67%	23%	4%	6%

**Feedback on sexual exploitation, missing persons and human trafficking**

Supports

- Many respondents stressed the need for culturally safe and responsive healing, including the need for more support to Indigenous-led organizations and services.
- Many respondents also noted the need for more support for local, grassroots responses to sexual exploitation.
- Respondents stressed the importance of survivor-led responses.
- Respondents also stressed the gap in emergency housing for sexually exploited and human trafficking victims. Respondents indicated the province needs to increase efforts to work with shelters to either build their capacity and fund them accordingly or develop other solutions.

Cross-sectoral collaboration

- Respondents identified the need for greater involvement and collaboration across systems within which at-risk youth interact most with schools, youth-serving agencies and child welfare. These systems have an important role to play and are key partners that need to be at the table with respect to violence prevention.

D. Access to supports

Within the category of access to supports, respondents ranked cultural competency among service providers as the highest priority (84 per cent of respondents ranked it a high priority). The next highest priority topic was strategies to address the underreporting of gender-based violence (72 per cent).

Rate the level of priority for each topic				
	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority	Not sure
Access to supports				
Cultural competency among service providers	84%	16%	0%	0%
Strategies to address the underreporting of gender-based violence	72%	22%	4%	1%
Greater awareness of new legislation related to gender-based violence (e.g., time off work legislation for individuals impacted by interpersonal violence, legislation enabling survivors to terminate lease early)	64%	30%	4%	1%
Accessible information available in multiple languages, including American Sign Language (ASL)	61%	32%	6%	1%

**Feedback related to access to support:**

Interpretation and culturally-safe resources at all levels of prevention, support and intervention

- Respondents identified gaps and inconsistencies in services for newcomer and Indigenous populations and recommended more work be undertaken to ensure equitable and consistent access to interpretation and culturally-sensitive resources.
- “Cultural competency” needs to incorporate power and privilege into the conversation.

Transportation

- A lack of safe transportation options was highlighted as a problem by a number of respondents, particularly within the context of COVID-19. Transportation for individuals, for instance individuals who are seeking shelter or safe spaces, is a pressing need, particularly outside of Winnipeg.
- A related need is to support victims who are living in shelters to retrieve belongings from their home, when the abuser is still living there.

Literacy, access to technology

- Another need that has become underscored during the pandemic relates to accessible information. Support is needed to address barriers in providing information and support to individuals with various levels of literacy and various access to technology. For instance, participants recommended providing information by video (with ASL translation) and sharing information online in various languages and formats.
- Respondents also stressed how important it is for front line service providers to explain systems in plain language.

## General feedback on support

In addition to the comments related to the four sections above, respondents identified topics that should be included under the theme of support that were not specifically related to one of the four categories above.

### Supports for men

- Improved mental health and trauma supports for boys and men was mentioned by many respondents.

### Culturally-safe, community-led healing

- Throughout the survey, respondents stressed the importance of low-barrier, community and Indigenous-led support services that are rooted in Indigenous knowledge.
- Indigenous-led responses to gender-based violence provide individual and community healing.
- Respondents stressed the importance of the MMIWG Calls to Justice and the needed funding to implement these Calls to Justice.
- A number of respondents identified the need for a community response to gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation.

### Cross-sectoral collaboration (co-development)

- Enhanced cross-sectoral partnerships was identified as a critical component to addressing gender-based violence. Assisting grassroots support services in establishing those partnerships, especially with larger institutions, is needed.

### Support for Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals

- Respondents stressed the importance of providing unique responses to violence against Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals.

### Legal system and police

- A number of respondents identified the need for improved access to the legal system (e.g., free, low-cost legal counsel, more victim services workers) as well as the need for improved trauma-informed legal services, particularly for those involved in intimate partner violence, sexual violence cases and family law cases.
- A number of respondents expressed concern with current policing practices. While many agreed that trauma-informed training is important, some indicated this would not address the roots of institutionalized police responses or the larger context of policing dynamics. Some stressed the need for police reform (trust and relationship building, training that addresses larger context of policing dynamics and institutionalized police responses).
- Respondents identified the need for reconsideration of bail for violent and sexual offenders.
- Many respondents stressed the need for readily available, culturally appropriate, respectful and safe services (including mental health, harm reduction, wellness and outreach).

- Respondents identified the need for increased financial support for service providers to better be able to retain trained employees and thereby improve their quality of services.
- To prevent violence from continuing, respondents recommended person-centred approaches to wellness that break down barriers to mental health support (e.g., fear/stigma) and change attitudes and understandings (e.g., about relationships, sexuality, identity).
- Overall, respondents pointed to a need for reform and system change to address the significant gaps and weaknesses in various systems (e.g., sexual assault cases, child welfare system).

### 3. Intervention: support & supervision for people who have committed gender-based violence

Respondents ranked topics based on a high, medium or low priority scale. The majority of respondents ranked all five topics as being high priority. The highest ranked topics were greater understanding of the effect of intergenerational trauma with a focus on Indigenous populations (87 per cent of respondents ranked as high priority), trauma-informed addictions services for incarcerated women (83 per cent) and support for initiatives that work with men who use violence (77 per cent).

Rate the level of priority for each topic				
	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority	Not sure
Greater understanding of the effect of intergenerational trauma with a focus on Indigenous populations	87%	13%	0%	0%
Trauma-informed addictions services for incarcerated women	83%	12%	6%	0%
Support for initiatives that work with men who use violence	77%	20%	3%	0%
Culturally-safe healthy relationship training for offenders	71%	26%	3%	0%
Strengthened restorative justice responses	68%	23%	6%	3%

### Feedback related to intervention

#### Alternative interventions (not police; alternatives to jail)

- A number of respondents recommended public safety measures that do not include police and which emphasize de-escalation, harm reduction and basic needs (housing, food, services).
- Some respondents stressed jail should be the very last resort, particularly for youth. If there are no options other than incarceration, respondents said there should be Indigenous schooling, training and supports available within the jails.

## Healing for perpetrators

- Many respondents identified the need for better supports for men who have used violence, including:
  - meaningful restorative justice approaches that include understanding of how perpetrators came to use violence that are rooted in empathy and accountability
  - support for healing, as many offenders have themselves been exposed to violence and abuse
  - support for men to learn and move towards building healthier relationships
- Respondents noted the importance of offering this kind of support immediately to offenders upon their release from jail. Respondents shared concerns about a lack of strategy for the release of incarcerated offenders.
- Some respondents also expressed concern over the availability of programs due to COVID-19.
- Respondents stressed intervention initiatives must treat perpetrators with dignity and uphold them to the acts they have committed.
- A number of respondents said there is a need for more rehabilitation programs.

## Early childhood interventions

- Some respondents highlighted the need for early childhood interventions, including access to daycare, preschool and interventions throughout school. Mental health supports, including increased access to school psychologists was identified as imperative for early interventions on behavioral and mental health concerns.

## Poverty

- Many respondents emphasized the links between poverty, colonization, crime and violence.
- Systems that reduce poverty are considered as constituting a necessary part of the solution to intervening on gender-based violence at a variety of ages.

## Restorative justice

- Some respondents recommended investing in community-led initiatives that provide education on the effect of intergenerational trauma and would identify local needs regarding restorative justice.
- Some respondents recommended "Strengthened restorative justice responses" include law enforcement training.

## Impact of COVID-19

The last part of the survey asked respondents for feedback on the impact of COVID-19 on the populations their organizations serve. Respondents were invited to respond to the following two open-ended questions:

1. Have you identified gaps in programs and services related to gender-based violence since the outbreak of COVID-19? Please explain.
2. Have you identified new or emerging needs of victims, survivors or their families since the outbreak of COVID-19? Please explain.

### 1. Emerging needs from client (survivor/victim) perspective

COVID-19 has created significant risks for individuals who were already experiencing or at risk of experiencing violence within their homes. Isolation, stress, travel restrictions, COVID-19 self-isolation requirements and removal of supports (e.g., access to friends, family and services) have created an increasingly difficult environment for survivors and victims to navigate. In addition, new forms of violence have emerged or increased, such as higher levels of technology-based violence.

#### Impact on women's health

- Many respondents identified increasing stress, fear, anxiety.
- Stakeholders are witnessing increasing self-harm and substance abuse.
- The shifts and changes to services (e.g., cessation of in-person therapy groups, reduction in addictions and other types of services) have significantly impacted people. The lack of opportunity to connect with other people, loneliness, stress and isolation have increased triggers and decreased availability of supports.
- Respondents have witnessed a decrease in availability and quality of prenatal, labour and delivery, and postnatal care.

#### Isolation and vulnerabilities for individuals living in violent situations

- For individuals who are vulnerable or experiencing violence in the home, the pandemic has significantly increased risk as well as removed critical supports. Isolation has created more opportunities for domestic violence to go unnoticed and unreported and has made it more difficult for victims to access supports.
- There are fewer opportunities to leave the house to go to a safe place. Some respondents noted this may be particularly true for children experiencing violence or abuse in the home.
- Individuals experiencing abuse in the home face additional technological barriers (e.g., limited/no access to confidential online communication platforms).
- Some respondents noted isolation has created particular barriers and risks for newcomer women.
- Some individuals are choosing not to come to a shelter out of fear of contracting COVID-19.



- Supports for children have also been impacted (e.g., support workers are not allowed to visit children anymore, lack of in-school support for kids who have experienced violence, limited safe options for where kids can stay, limited ability to provide therapy/service to kids remotely).
- Services for newcomer women have been affected, and as a result, women are not accessing information about systems and services available to them, including services for women who have experienced violence or abuse. This may contribute to women not being aware of support services available to women and their families, as well as changes to services in light of COVID-19.

#### Basic needs: financial stress/poverty/job/childcare

- The pandemic is worsening the poverty gap. People living in poverty have fewer options to get their needs met. Many respondents elaborated on the ways in which the pandemic is making daily life harder for people.
- The pandemic has highlighted and magnified existing inequalities. It has exacerbated existing insecurities including food insecurity, access to safe and stable housing, job insecurity (precarious employment, under/unemployment) and access to child care.
- Lack of access to food and basic items was mentioned by the vast majority of respondents who provided feedback. Service providers have seen significant increases in families that are struggling to meet basic needs like food, baby supplies, cleaning supplies and housing. In addition, the pandemic has deepened the need for internet and phone services and further constrained community access where personal access is not available (i.e., nonprofit organizations and community services are closed or have restricted access). Some respondents mentioned examples of being given iPads for clients, but they are of little use if clients don't have access to data (because they cannot afford it) and there are limited free WiFi options.
- Many respondents described the first impact of the pandemic was on food and income insecurity: individuals and families who had been going to community agencies for services and food were suddenly without access to food. In addition, individuals who did not submit their income tax (which is most likely the case for many individuals living in poverty) they don't qualify for the government benefits that were being distributed.
- A second significant impact described by some respondents was the impact related to how changes in the child welfare system were communicated and implemented. Respondents describe decisions about visitation and family reunifications being made and poorly communicated with agencies that ultimately had significant impacts on children and their families. This increased violence within families and within youth care facilities with young people. Many families have still not recovered from that interruption.
- COVID-19 has also exacerbated vulnerabilities and increased risk of violence against sexually exploited women. Women are experiencing more violence and more factors related to their vulnerability and risk and don't have a 24-hour safe space that will meet their unique needs.
- Respondents described hoping that we will not return to the "normal" that existed before where people lived in poverty and a whole system existed that kept them there. COVID-19 is presenting an

opportunity for us to look at how we want our new normal and it needs to be focused on people who were most impacted and most vulnerable before COVID-19 and even more so now as a result of the pandemic. COVID-19 has illuminated the need for a guaranteed income.

- COVID-19 also provides the opportunity for government to consider how things can look different from a systems-perspective, moving forward (e.g., legal system, education system, health system, child welfare system).

### Service needs

Overall, respondents noted that COVID-19 has made everything harder than it already was for people living in difficult situations: gaps or lack of services have worsened, supports are less accessible, service providers are grappling with adjusting services and internal processes to the pandemic, client needs are increasing and organizations are not able to meet the changing and increasing demands.

Common themes related to service needs are summarized below.

### Safe housing/shelter

- A significant number of respondents described the challenges in accessing safe shelter/housing for individuals experiencing violence.
- The lack of shelter spaces available (reduced shelter spaces, insufficient transitional/second stage options, challenges finding safe and affordable permanent housing) coupled with a lack of safe transportation options for clients to access services, particularly in rural and northern Manitoba, have generated significant barriers for individuals experiencing abuse.
- Many respondents identified the need for a broader range of shelter services, including trauma-informed and Indigenous-led services (e.g., shelter for male victims of violence).

### Accessible, trauma-informed mental health and addictions supports and culturally appropriate supports

- A consistent theme throughout the survey responses is the need for healthy relationship and mental health supports. A number of respondents reported increasing requests for mental health resources, such as culturally appropriate counselling.
- Participants described the need for mental health resources for youth and adults of all genders. In particular, respondents said mental health resources are needed in rural Manitoba.
- Some participants noted particular limitations in being able to provide culturally appropriate care in the current COVID-19 environment, as culturally appropriate care is offered in-person.
- Respondents noted an increase in the need for mental health support for front line workers, and more funding to support agencies to adapt and provide responsive programs to help clients better deal with mental health and drug-related issues.
- Some respondents said addressing root causes of violence is difficult when there is the immediate need to deal with mental health and substance use issues first. Respondents identified the need for training and education for front line workers about alcohol and substance use.

### Other supports needed for people impacted by violence

- Supports for people impacted by technology-based violence.
- Financial support for women trying to escape violence.
- Safe transportation options to access shelter and to pick up belongings.
- New creative and confidential ways to reach people who are isolated at home in abusive/violent situations.
- Culturally appropriate services for different genders, including for two-spirit individuals.
- Community-based responses to violence.
- Education and awareness on safety planning during COVID-19.
- Accessible information about support services for newcomer women.
- A lack of access to legal services was identified by a number of respondents as an emerging challenge related to the pandemic. Respondents described a slow response from the justice system and delays and changes in the court processes that have created difficulties (e.g., clients cannot attend For The Sake Of The Children in-person anymore; phone appearances are not as efficient or effective at resolving matters as in person). Respondents noted the pandemic has also caused confusion around custody and access if one or both households include people with illness.

### Supports for children and youth

- Respondents identified the need for new ways of sharing information and educating children/youth how to recognize abuse or signs of grooming.

### Services for men

- Respondents said the gap for programming and supports for men who have used violence has widened due to the pandemic. Respondents said the only agency that is providing this service is “always at capacity”. There is also a lack of programs and supports for men who have intersectional barriers.
- COVID-19 has disrupted programming and support groups for men who use violence. Respondents described the need to find new ways to support and engage those men who are at home more due to COVID-19 and have reduced or no access to services.
- Participants recommended new awareness campaigns to help men understand the increased challenges of pressures on them due to COVID-19 (e.g., masculinity and the pandemic).

### Services in rural and northern Manitoba

- Many respondents described issues related to inequitable access to services for survivors/victims in rural and northern Manitoba.
- The need for local resources, including community-based interventions in rural communities is a pressing issue. Respondents described the situation not as “gaps in services” but a “lack of programs and services”. The need has deepened as a result of COVID-19.

- For instance, respondents noted that within Winnipeg survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual violence have access to a trauma-informed forensic nursing (who can provide forensic examinations and facilitate connections with police). Outside of Winnipeg, survivors do not have access to this service unless they are under 18.
- A number of respondents spoke of the need for community-based interventions in rural communities, including a community response to safety (e.g., education for the community such as “see something, say something”).
  - To illustrate the desire for community-based responses, a respondent shared the example of communities looking into creating local suicide intervention services because there is a strong desire for local support rather than the centralized support available through the regional health authority or other institutions. While municipal governments and Band Councils see the need, respondents said they are not necessarily equipped to be the responding resource. The same is true for violence prevention, support and intervention: effective solutions must be locally-based. There are large regions of the province that are underserved in this way, even in communities that technically have access to a domestic violence program and shelter service.
- The lack of reliable internet and phone service in rural Manitoba is a significant safety issue right now.

#### Other service needs

A number of respondents also identified other service needs, such as:

- more French language services throughout Manitoba
- training and education for police and RCMP regarding all types of violence

#### 2. Emerging organizational needs/challenges

Respondents also reflected on challenges and emerging needs from an organizational perspective, such as:

- lack of adequate personal protective equipment
- adjusting to and challenges with working from home (e.g., limited or unreliable internet/reception)
- shifting service delivery methods and challenges providing services virtually (e.g., organizing interpreting services for online support difficulty reaching out to clients demand for more counselling and different options such as texting)
- increase in demand for services
- managing risk of COVID-19
- lack of financial resources/compensation to implement the necessary changes to service

In response to the pandemic, many service providers, including shelters, have had to reduce the kinds of services they are providing, but the need continues to exist. As mentioned above, the range of these changes (from closing down washrooms available to the public, to the cessation of services/programs) have had significant impacts on the populations served.

Respondents mentioned that overall, COVID-19 has affected the gender-based violence programming a great deal as the technology is posing challenges in building rapport with the survivors of violence without face-to-face contact. Confidentiality is the greatest concern while providing online support.

## Next Steps

The GBVCC is incorporating this feedback into the framework that will outline how the Manitoba government is responding to gender-based violence in the province. The framework will be released and available online on the Manitoba Status of Women Secretariat website at [www.gov.mb.ca/msw](http://www.gov.mb.ca/msw).

## Appendix: Stakeholder profile



