

# A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women

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## Introduction

While reliable, evidence-based, recent statistics on violence against Aboriginal women in Ontario are currently lacking, some statistics point to significantly high rates of violence experienced by Aboriginal women, compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

- According to the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS), Aboriginal women experience spousal violence from either a current or previous marital or common-law partner at a rate that is three times higher than that for non-Aboriginal women, nationally.
- In some northern Aboriginal communities in Ontario, it is believed that between 75% and 90% of Aboriginal women are battered.
- Children witness more than half of the violence that occurs between the adults in the home and are also targets for abuse, especially sexual crimes, with up to three quarters of Aboriginal girls under the age of 18 having been sexually assaulted.
- A study by the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) entitled *Breaking Free* found that 8 out of 10 Aboriginal women in Ontario had personally experienced family violence.
- Aboriginal women are 8 times more likely to suffer abuse than non-Aboriginal women, and of those women, 87% had been physically injured and 57% had been sexually abused (Health Canada, 1997).



3. Violence against Aboriginal women is always done within the context of a community, and as such, the community as a whole has a central role to play in addressing the issue.
4. Violence against Aboriginal women is rooted in systemic discrimination, and consequently, issues of gender, race and cultural exclusion must be considered as contributing factors.
5. A social health determinants model must be applied to ensure that the causal issues of violence are addressed.
6. Flexible, evolving and ongoing efforts must ensure government and Aboriginal community co-ordination and collaboration.
7. To be effective, all activities required to address violence against Aboriginal women must be directed, designed, implemented and controlled by Aboriginal women.
8. Recognition and implementation of a framework will involve changes in research, legislation, policy, programs, education, community development, leadership, and accountability.
9. Gender-based analysis must underlie all work involved with this strategy.
10. The capacity of Aboriginal communities and governments to respond to violent crimes committed against Aboriginal women must be strengthened.
11. All perpetrators of violence against Aboriginal women must be held accountable and be offered culturally based healing programmes to prevent future incidents.

### **Flexible Framework**

The Framework is proposed on a medicine wheel design, to provide a continuum of approaches to address the problem, and will require strategies at many different levels and around different issues to successfully deal with violence. Each aspect may be developed separately but must be integrated and consistent with the overall approach. In order to be successful in this initiative, a community based,

cultural and wholistic healing approach, focused on ending violence will have to be established. This cannot be done if all levels of government do not provide supportive policies, legislation, and resources for it to occur.

In order to ensure that a medicine wheel approach can be pursued it will be necessary not only to involve the individual, but the family, the community and ultimately the territory/nation. This process cannot be one where representation, rights, blame, or resources are permitted to thwart the outcome of ending violence against Aboriginal women.

The Framework must be designed so that there is accountability and reviews of progress at regular intervals by leadership, government and others engaged in the Framework.

### **Areas for Change: The Issues Framework**

The Framework addresses eight specific areas for change: research, legislation, policy, programs, education, community development, leadership, and accountability.



# Strategic Direction 2

## *Legal reform and legislative change.*

The current criminal justice system re-victimizes and re-traumatizes Aboriginal women within the context of addressing issues of violence. This is, in part, due to ongoing historical experiences of colonization, the cyclical impacts of residential schools and the many other negative experiences with dominant institutions, structures, processes and procedures. In addition, the current criminal justice system requires women to recount, and therefore recreate and relive traumatic, violent experiences in order to effectively participate in the necessary trials and hearings. Although this is the experience of all women, the lack of cultural relevance and appropriate supports within the current system serves to further victimize and marginalize Aboriginal women, and in many instances discourages their participation, thereby allowing the perpetrator to go free and the victimization to continue.

Additionally, various pieces of legislation may currently act as either systemic barriers or operate as contributing factors to violence against Aboriginal women. All relevant legislation must be reviewed within this context, and subsequent recommendations for legislative changes must be considered in order to effectively reduce the role of legislation as a contributing factor to this violence.

**GOAL 2.1 That specific legislation be created that expressly prohibits violence against women, with a particular focus on violence against Aboriginal women, and recognizes and enables Aboriginal women's rights to respectful, informed and judicious treatment under the law.**

### SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- The requirement for governments to evaluate periodically the effectiveness of federal,

provincial, First Nation and local responses to offenses against Aboriginal women.

- Recognition and differentiation between different communities which have a strategy to address violence against Aboriginal women, as opposed to those who do not, in the legislation and accompanying funding formulae.
- The inclusion in legislation of a response for habitual offenders.
- The creation of specialized courts to deal with violence against Aboriginal women.
- Culturally specific and sensitivity specific training for judges, police officers, and court officers.
- Review of relevant legislation from an Aboriginal-specific and gender-based analysis, and consideration of recommended reforms.
- Establishment of a working group comprised of Aboriginal representatives to specifically review relevant legislation.
- Addressing the issue of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the Children's Aid Society, some of which is a result of abuse Aboriginal women may be experiencing. [Thirty to 40% of all children in care in Canada are Aboriginal while only 5% of the child population in Canada is Aboriginal. (Attributed to Cindy Blackstock, First Nations and Family Caring Society of Canada). See <[www.adoption.ca/news/050101edabo411.htm](http://www.adoption.ca/news/050101edabo411.htm)>.]

**GOAL 2.2 To ensure that the Aboriginal Justice Strategy makes the issue of violence against Aboriginal women a specific priority, and that a specific strategy that addresses violence and Aboriginal women be developed, with dedicated resources attached.**

While the AHWS has been successful in its approach on health-related aspects, there is a clear need for further direct interventions in the manner set out within this document.

**GOAL 3.1 That ongoing intergovernmental policy coordination will be proactively pursued for the purposes of innovative and comprehensive policy development and integration.**

**SPECIFIC ACTIONS**

- Provincial and federal governments should establish inter-ministerial and inter-departmental working groups to specifically coordinate around the issue of violence against Aboriginal women.
- Establishment of ongoing policy discussions to understand the interconnection of the issues and the importance of an integrated strategy. This can be done through an annual re-visioning and realigning of the strategy.
- Jurisdictional issues between governments must be worked out in a timely manner and mechanisms must be in place for all levels of government to work collaboratively and resolve issues.
- Relationships, protocols, MOUs and service agreements that create culturally appropriate partnerships must be established.
- Resourced and comprehensive housing policy approach that includes shelters, second stage housing and permanent housing for women who have experienced violence must be implemented.
- Creation of policies and programs aimed at addressing Aboriginal men's healing in the context of violence against Aboriginal women.
- Creation of policies and programs aimed at addressing Aboriginal children's healing in the context of violence against Aboriginal women.

**GOAL 3.2 That an Aboriginal-specific strategy is included in all provincial and federal government policies designed to address violence against women.**

**SPECIFIC ACTIONS**

- A review of relevant federal and provincial policies will be conducted to ensure that issues of Aboriginal women and violence are considered.
- The Domestic Violence Action Plan (DVAP) would be redesigned to include a specific element to address issues of violence against Aboriginal women.
- A review of federal and provincial policies will be conducted to ensure that issues surrounding violence and Aboriginal women are addressed.

**GOAL 3.3 That Aboriginal organizations and communities are directly involved throughout the process of policy planning and development on every matter of concern or interest to Aboriginal women.**

Simply adapting mainstream policies and programs has not proven effective in addressing violence against Aboriginal women. The current process in which policies and programs are developed must be transformed to include the direct involvement of Aboriginal people, and specifically Aboriginal women, in the policy planning and development process from the onset.

**SPECIFIC ACTIONS**

- Undertake a province-wide, community-based consultation and needs assessment to identify key issues and priorities.
- Aboriginal people will design, develop and deliver Aboriginal policies and programs, and will be included in all decision-making processes that impact Aboriginal people and communities.

#### SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Funding provisions for communications liaison staff specific to ending violence against Aboriginal women thereby increasing capacity in Aboriginal organizations.
- The development of culturally respectful educational resources and programming.
- Create culturally appropriate programming for men and encourage men to speak out against violence in the community.
- Focusing resources on preventative strategies to stop the cycle of violence before it begins. (e.g. Youth Culture Camps, integration of traditional teachings in school curriculum that educates all students about the traditional equal roles of women and men in communities).
- Development of a role modeling program.

#### **GOAL 5.2 Development of a province-wide media strategy and social marketing plan.**

##### SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Creation of social marketing campaigns (e.g. Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin) that blankets the public and Aboriginal communities

with consistent anti-violence and healthy relationships messaging, utilizing all available media. (e.g. web based, radio, television, print, multi-media).

- A targeted approach to educate large regional media outlets about the realities and scope of violence against Aboriginal women and what communities are undertaking to address the issue.
- Creation of youth specific media training supports. (e.g. film and video editing, screenplay development, website development).
- Development and implementation of a media relations curriculum for Aboriginal organizations.

#### **GOAL 5.3 Strengthen public knowledge and understanding of the historical context of violence against Aboriginal women.**

##### SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Government in particular needs to initiate internal knowledge and capacity to understand the historical context and the traditional roles of women in Aboriginal society.

## Strategic Direction 6

***Build and sustain Aboriginal community and organizational capacity, as well as government capacity to end all forms of violence and abuse against Aboriginal women.***

In order to end violence against Aboriginal women a multiplicity of capacities need to be strengthened.

#### **GOAL 6.1 Government to increase its staffing to work with Aboriginal organizations and communities, to act as interface, to develop and maintain relationships, etc.**

##### SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Dedicating resources to adequately staff Aboriginal policy and program positions and teams or divisions.
- The Ministries responsible for the comprehensive policy to address violence against Aboriginal women will undertake annual consultations to

# Strategic Direction 8

## *Ensuring accountability for broad commitment to the strategy.*

It is critical to the success of the strategy that there be a broad commitment to this strategy by all parties involved and that such commitment be beyond mere lip service. Accordingly it is critical that measures of accountability be considered at all stages of the strategy to ensure that commitment remains legitimate and ongoing.

### **GOAL 8.1 Commitment and Involvement of all relevant parties**

#### SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Involvement and commitment of First Nations and Métis leadership.
- Involvement and commitment of Aboriginal service providers.
- Involvement and commitment of federal government.
- Involvement and commitment of provincial government.
- Demonstrated commitment of mainstream organizations and service providers to support the strategy to end violence against Aboriginal women.

- Dedicated resources tied to the strategy to end violence against Aboriginal women.

### **GOAL 8.2 Creation of mechanisms to ensure the ongoing accountability of all relevant parties**

#### SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- The accountability mechanisms must be built in to the very design of the strategy.
- Gender balance and analysis inherent in all aspects, throughout the process.
- Monitoring and reporting of such activities as:
  - longitudinal evaluation;
  - impact assessment;
  - processes; and
  - performance.
- Restoration and encouragement of traditional approaches, traditional social norms/mores and the reassertion of the high esteem in which Aboriginal women were held in Aboriginal communities.