



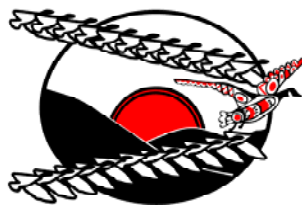
BC Friendship Centres Action Plan to  
End Violence Against Aboriginal  
Women and Girls



BC Association of  
Aboriginal Friendship  
Centres

2014

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*BCAAFC Taking Action to End Violence*

# Overview

Violence against Aboriginal women and girls continues to be a disturbing reality across Canada. Aboriginal women experience the highest rates of violence, including extreme, life-threatening violence, in our country. The almost 1200 cases<sup>1</sup> of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada is our national tragedy.

The causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls are rooted in historical factors including colonialism, racism, isolation and residential schools. The impacts of these historical factors have resulted in profound harm to Aboriginal communities including loss of culture and language, alienation, poverty, unemployment, lack of life skills, and an erosion of traditional knowledge, values and skills, including parenting skills<sup>2</sup>.

There is an immediate need for a province-wide strategy to end violence against Aboriginal women and girls. The strategy must focus on recognition, responsibility and cooperation to acknowledge the root causes and intergenerational nature of violence, and support the holistic healing of whole families and communities in a way that is based in Aboriginal culture and tradition.

In BC, Friendship Centres (FCs) provide a wide range of support and prevention programs and services to urban Aboriginal people. The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) presents this Action Plan, as a strategy to end violence against Aboriginal women and girls in the communities served by the 25 BC Friendship Centres.

Recognizing the urgency of this issue, the BCAAFC prepared this Action Plan through a two stage engagement process with the 25 BC Friendship Centres. The BCAAFC Action Plan to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls leads in the spirit of both the February 2014 Provincial 3 year Domestic Violence Plan and BC's Speech from the Throne, where the Government of BC committed to the following *"...Over the past year, government has taken significant action on domestic violence and on missing and murdered women. That's why, this year we will introduce a long-term, comprehensive strategy to move towards a violence-free B.C. and ensure women, including Aboriginal and vulnerable women, have the supports they need to help prevent violence, to escape from violent situations, and to recover if they have been victims of crime."*

<sup>1</sup>RCMP Report: - *Murdered and missing Aboriginal women: A National Overview*, <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/mmaw-faapd-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup>*Understanding the Roots of Interpersonal Violence*; [www.thehealingjourney.ca](http://www.thehealingjourney.ca)



*When a man chooses to use  
violence towards a woman,  
he is de-spiriting her.  
He is changing the very spirit she  
entered the world as."*

## This Action Plan:

- ◆ **Reviews** the background and engagement with Friendship Centres that is the backbone of this work;
- ◆ **Summarizes** key themes from the engagement process and outlines three Strategic Directions: Raise Awareness, Expand Programs and Services and Change Policy
- ◆ **Identifies** goals, objectives and **priority actions** for each of the Strategic Directions

The BC Association of Friendship Centres calls upon all levels of government and community to support this Action Plan in partnership and collaboration.

## Structure of Action Plan:

- Section 1:** Background
- Section 2:** Guiding Principles and Themes
- Section 3: Action Plan to End Violence**
  - Strategic Direction #1—Raise Awareness
  - Strategic Direction #2—Expand Programs and Services
  - Strategic Direction #3—Change Policy
- Section 4:** Partnership and Collaboration
- Section 5:** Summary

## Background

In June 2011, BC's Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and the Native Women's Association of Canada co-hosted the *Collaboration to End Violence: National Aboriginal Women's Forum*. The Forum was preceded by a series of regional focus groups across BC that brought Aboriginal women and service providers to the table to make recommendations toward action to stopping the violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

In response to a request from BCAAFC participants at the National Aboriginal Women's Forum, the BCAAFC developed an inventory of the current programs and services at BC Friendship Centres that address violence against Aboriginal women and girls. The inventory was developed through an initial engagement process with the 25 BC Friendship Centres in 2011/2012.

The inventory provided a deeper understanding and appreciation for the scope of work that is occurring across the province at BC Friendship Centres to address this issue. However, this engagement also identified the barriers, gaps and further areas of action needed to fully address the issue of violence against Aboriginal women, and promote healing and healthy family life in the urban Aboriginal communities served by BC Friendship Centres.

Three key areas of strategic direction emerged from engagement with Friendship Centres:

- ◆ Raise Awareness
- ◆ Expand Programs and Services
- ◆ Change Policy

A second engagement process followed and is the basis for this Action Plan. During the second engagement process, Friendship Centres provided more specific detail about the priorities for action in each strategic direction that will address violence against Aboriginal women and girls in the communities served by the 25 BC Friendship Centres.



## Guiding Principles and Themes

BC Friendship Centres provide a wide range of support and prevention programs and services to urban Aboriginal people in their communities. BC Friendship Centres are located in 25 communities of varied size and population, and have varied sizes of staff and program/service offerings. Each Friendship Centre is woven into the fabric of its community in its own way, often with many community-specific partnerships and connections.

Despite variations in size and capacity, Friendship Centres identified similar guiding principles and themes when identifying priorities for action to end violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

### These principles include:

- ◆ Violence against Aboriginal women and girls is not acceptable; those who have experienced it in the past will have opportunities to heal from the harm and may serve as role models for others;
- ◆ Perpetrators will be held accountable for their actions, but will have an opportunity to heal as they themselves were often victims;
- ◆ The intergenerational cycle of violence will be broken through effective, culturally appropriate initiatives grounded in traditional Aboriginal values, with a focus on women, men, children, youth and the development of healthy relationships.
- ◆ Recognize the interrelationship between the many factors contributing to violence against women
- ◆ Respect the cultural diversity, traditions and realities of various communities
- ◆ Consult with those who have been affected by violence in developing programs and services
- ◆ Maintain focus on present community, building connections, partnerships and networks
- ◆ Ensure that all initiatives undertaken are culturally appropriate and acceptable, and incorporate Aboriginal traditional ways and culture
- ◆ Be aware of the language used for programs and positions – i.e. would you prefer to go to a Family Violence Worker or a Men’s Health and Wellness Worker? Would you rather attend a Family Violence Program or a Woman’s Healing Circle?
- ◆ There is a need for programs for men (over two-thirds of FCs included development of a men’s program in their Action Priorities). This need is well expressed in this quote from a Friendship Centre Executive Director: *“How do we heal a family if we don’t work with the man? Why aren’t we looking at helping the men so the family can heal? Otherwise the cycle of violence continues. What is missing? The healing and helping for men – men’s program with healing.”*

### Guiding themes included:

- ◆ Focus on the healing of the whole family, without judgment

# Friendship Centres

Friendship Centres are the first point of contact for many urban Aboriginal people. They also provide an open door policy offering programs and services to all Aboriginal people including Metis women and Aboriginal women leaving violent relationships in their home communities (on-reserve) and those living on-reserve with a Friendship Centre nearby.

With the range of activities, programs and services that happen at each FC; no one knows if a person is participating in an Elders Council, cooking in a Community Kitchen, attending a training program, picking up a child from a preschool program or attending a Healing Circle because of a personal experience with domestic violence.

With the multi-dimensional activities, programs and services available at Friendship Centres, there is no stigma attached to accessing services. Offering programs and services to end violence at Friendship Centres will reduce barriers to healing that many Aboriginal people experience. Barriers are removed by having all services under one roof, and in many Friendship Centres people are able move to their “next step” in healing through other programs and services available within the same Friendship Centre.





## BCAAFC Action Plan to End Violence

Friendship Centres are clear about what needs to be done at FCs and in communities to address violence against Aboriginal women and girls. Friendship Centre Executive Directors and staff identified priority actions in the three Strategic Directions: **Raise awareness**, **Expand programs and services**, and **Change policy**. Some actions are specific to certain Friendship Centres, or may be already accomplished by another Friendship Centre. This Action Plan includes the Strategic Directions, goals and objectives, and priority actions.



Figure 1. Strategic directions of the BC Friendship Centre Action to End Violence against Aboriginal Women and Girls

## Strategic Direction 1:

## Raise Awareness



### GOAL:

By 2015 there will be increased public awareness, education and information focused on the issues related to violence against Aboriginal women and girls in the 25 communities served by BC Friendship Centres.

### OBJECTIVE 1.1:

Increase knowledge and understanding of community resources and the programs and services available at Friendship Centres that address violence against Aboriginal women and girls

### ACTIONS:

- ◆ Develop an up-to-date community directory of programs and services that speak directly to Aboriginal women and girls experiencing or at-risk of violence that is visible and available at each FC and in every related community service agency.
- ◆ Develop and distribute information posters, brochures and calendars about Aboriginal healing and family violence programs that are available in each community throughout each FC and in every related community

- ◆ service agency.

### OBJECTIVE 1.2:

Champion information activities and events to make communities-at-large more aware of violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

### ACTIONS:

- ◆ Plan or partner with other organizations to provide one community activity each year, such as a rally, forum, vigil, walk or march where people can participate as well as gather information.
- ◆ Join the “Moose Hide” campaign<sup>5</sup>, and help make it a provincial/national campaign for Aboriginal men to stand up against violence.

<sup>5</sup>Inspired by the White Ribbon campaign, the Executive Director of the BCAAFC initiated the “Moose Hide” campaign, where men wear a piece of moose hide as a

symbol for Aboriginal men “speaking out and standing up against violence toward women.” The “Moose Hide” campaign was repeatedly cited throughout interviews

- ◆ Join in a way that reflects the culture of your community e.g. a lower mainland FC obtained a bear hide that an Elder blessed and smudged with an honoring song – the “I can’t bear to hurt you” campaign will be launched in 2012.
- ◆ Enlist women to be part of the campaign, with a Moose Hide “Heart,” building on the traditional way of being in Aboriginal culture and tradition.
- ◆ Host a weekly Aboriginal radio show, run by Elders and supported by youth and guest speakers, promoting awareness of anti-violence and bullying.
- ◆ Openly support movements such as Peace and Dignity Journeys, Sisters in Spirit, Take Back the Night, and become involved through participating, hosting, meals etc.
- ◆ Initiate the “Walking the Prevention Circle” capacity building process through the Canadian Red Cross. This process includes a workshop exploring the root causes of abuse and neglect in Aboriginal communities, as well as empowering community members to begin the transition from the cycle of violence to the circle of healing.
- ◆ Contact university graduate programs in counseling psychology (and other programs that train school guidance counselors) to advise/ promote the inclusion of information about domestic violence and Aboriginal communities in curriculum and in-service training.

### OBJECTIVE 1.3:

Support in-depth training and education to community members on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual abuse, the cycle of abuse, and the root causes of abuse and neglect in Aboriginal communities including the intergenerational impact of residential schools.

### ACTIONS:

- ◆ Hold one community education event each year on a domestic violence topic at each FC and invite/ include police, RCMP, physicians, nurses, social workers teachers, school guidance counselors and staff from community organizations involved with Aboriginal people.

## Strategic Direction 2: Expand Programs and Services



### GOAL:

By 2015 there will be additional programs and services at Friendship Centres that support and promote holistic healing and wellness of families and communities, and are based in Aboriginal culture and traditions.

### OBJECTIVES 2.1:

Develop programs that address current gaps and barriers in services for Aboriginal women who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence.

### ACTIONS:

- ◆ Develop a program specifically for women who have experienced violence, developed by women who are survivors of violence and who will be “role models” and ongoing resource persons for this program. Programming will include traditional supports, life skills, food security, family gatherings, and “how to be a mom in a healthy way.”
- ◆ Start a weekly women’s sharing and healing circle, targeting women in abusive relationships or addictions, guided by an Aboriginal woman counselor. Out of the healing circle offer and connect with other
- ◆ FC programs such as life skills, empowerment, etc.
- ◆ Develop a specific “healing” room at the FC with components of cultural traditional healing, incorporate crafts, cedar, water and other elements for a healing journey, a place to smudge – a comfortable place to share and heal.
- ◆ Start a women’s support group – with education around lateral violence (threats, hurtful language),
- ◆ Rent or lease or buy a home specifically as a Safe House for Aboriginal women, in partnership with local First Nations.
- ◆ Design Transitional Housing for Aboriginal women experiencing abuse, involving women who have experienced the current available support system in the planning of how services should be delivered – “What

has been their experience? What would they change? What would they add? What was positive about their experience? What would they feel more comfortable accessing?”

- ◆ Develop Second Stage Housing (a supported living environment) for Aboriginal women who are leaving abusive relationships; with programming for women and children in a cultural context and advocacy support to help women navigate family courts, MCFD, legal aid, housing
- ◆ Establish and promote a toll free 1-800 number specific to domestic violence, where women phone and are referred to safe and transition houses in their community and become connected with Victim Services.
- ◆ Conduct a community campaign to collect old cell phones that Victim Services will re-distribute to women at risk of violence so that these women have a way to call 911 if needed.

### OBJECTIVES 2.2:

**Advance holistic family healing and wellness programs at FCs, based in cultural values and teachings, increasing numbers of education programs about healthy relationships, parenting, life skills, communication**

### **ACTIONS:**

- ◆ Build a family development program, programming that addresses family violence on all levels – children, grandparents, parents - with specific staff who can offer sessions to deal with pain, lashing out, counseling, therapy, groups for men, women and children; providing both old and young with the healing required.

- ◆ Offer family sensitive sessions and programs to deal with stress in the family e.g. traditional reconciliation programs, using non clinical indigenous models, e.g. through ceremonies
- ◆ Develop an Elder’s Council that will offer mentorship to support women experiencing violence.
- ◆ Offer “Parenting after Separation” course, a course that is often ordered by the Court, but is not available in all communities

### OBJECTIVES 2.3:

**Develop programs for Aboriginal men at FCs, both intervention and prevention**

### **ACTIONS:**

- ◆ Provide courses for men (such as Anger Management, Stress Management) for both mandated and volunteer clients
  - ◆ Establish a program for men who have been violent towards their partner and/or who have experienced violence, with specialized counselors who are sensitive to First Nations issues, specifically sexual abuse. Enable men to take responsibility, recognizing their own patterns, and developing skills to end violence.
  - ◆ Create “space’ at the FC for men to learn about indigenous laws, a safe space for men to reclaim their masculinity
- Develop “Regaining My Power” workshop to provide teachings and education for men who have been or might be violent with their partners. Go to women and men who have experienced being abused and the former abuser for their life experiences – a better place of healing and success.

- ◆ Partner with a local organization (that currently offers a mandated men’s program, for men who have been to court and charged) to offer the “ Building Respectful Relationships” program as a “voluntary” men’s program, using indigenous models and Elders – to give men tools to use before they get into situations leading to violence.
- ◆ Offer an “aftercare” or maintenance support group for men who complete court-ordered programs such as Anger Management, Respectful Relationships, etc.
- ◆ Pilot a “restorative justice circle,” with a trained facilitator, as an alternative to court for first time offender, first time charged. As a more traditional way of resolving conflict, the offender will face the community, everyone who has been affected by the event, say “this is what I did,” with others saying “this is how it affected us.” Victim and offender will agree on “healing.”
- ◆ Offer an “Awakening the Warrior Within” program for Aboriginal men on their healing journey (currently being piloted at Victoria Native Friendship Centre) that offers men the opportunity to gain an understanding of generational violence and its impact, family violence, racism, keeping children safe, healthy and unhealthy relationships, self-care, stress and anger management and other topics of choice.
- ◆ Develop and offer a Men’s Health Program, with a focus on prevention, education and culture. The Program includes an outdoor component, talking circle, social support network, physical recreation, weekly smudging, skill building, one-on-one sessions and traditional hunting and fishing, facilitated by a “Men’s Health Worker.”

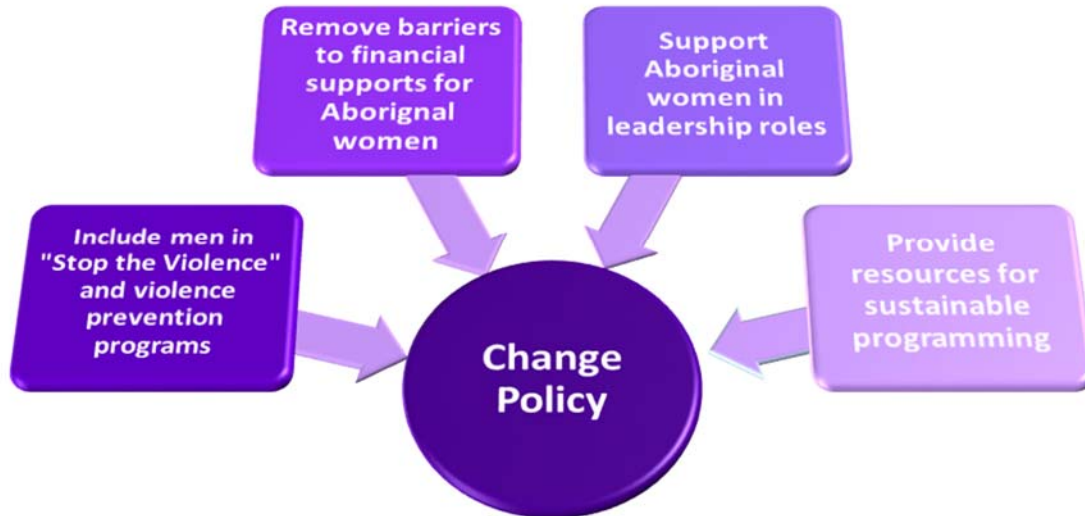
### OBJECTIVES 2.3:

#### **Develop children and youth wellness programming, both intervention and prevention**

#### **ACTIONS**

- ◆ Provide education program in schools (partnering with RCMP and school districts) targeting girls/women at risk of trafficking: “I’m Not For Sale.”
- ◆ Provide a children’s healing program to address the anger, pain and feelings about what is happening at home. Address the cycle of violence, intergenerational impacts and experiences of grief and loss. Include a focus on developing healthy relationships.
- ◆ Establish an Aboriginal Youth and Family Support Worker, who can build relationships with families who are experiencing violence, working in-depth with complex situations, through family group meetings, developing case plans, working with other staff and community organizations
- ◆ Develop a Youth Program for youth ages 10 – 24 (separate groups for pre teen, teens and young adults) where youth can talk about what violence is to them, define lateral violence, intergenerational transmission, bringing in people who have experienced violence, led by facilitators and Elders, followed by a self-esteem workshop
- ◆ Support youth groups that are rooted in culture, respecting traditional values and learning about healthy relationships
- ◆ Initiate a “Rights of Passage” program for young women and men, “honoring” with a coming of age ceremony, traditional “naming,” to share knowledge across generations

## Strategic Direction 3: Change Policy



### GOAL:

By 2015, there will be submissions and discussions with government identifying policies to support developing healthy relationships, while promoting holistic healing for families dealing with violence.

### OBJECTIVE 3.1:

Include men in “Stop the Violence” and violence prevention programs.

#### ACTIONS

- ◆ Advocate and make the case for men’s programming at Friendship Centres and in community with information gathered through pilot projects, interviews, and project reports.

### OBJECTIVE 3.2:

Remove barriers to financial supports for Aboriginal women leaving abusive relations

#### ACTIONS

- ◆ Advocate and make the case for changing income threshold policies for women

coming out of abusive relationships with minimal financial resources, so they can access Legal Aid and Income Assistance

- ◆ Advocate and make the case for specific Legal Aid services for women coming out of abusive relationships
- ◆ Work with Ministries of Social Development and Children and Families (government ministries dealing with income assistance, child care subsidy and transportation) to advocate and make the case for supporting women with these programs as they leave abusive relationships

- ◆ Work with Employment and Labour Market Services in the Ministry of Social Development, to advocate and make the case for “approving” community programs at Friendship Centres, so women leaving abusive relationships can access supports while taking these programs.

### OBJECTIVE 3.3:

**Support Aboriginal women in leadership roles for policy and program work**

#### **ACTIONS**

- ◆ Advocate and make the case for including Aboriginal women and men who have been affected by violence in developing programs and services that promote healing and healthy family life.

### OBJECTIVE 3.4:

**Provide sufficient resources to achieve sustainable programs and services to address ending violence**

#### **ACTIONS**

- ◆ Advocate and make the case for long-term multi-year funding programs that will support relationship building, healing and ending violence programming at FCs.





## Partnerships and Collaboration

This Action Plan initiates the BCAAFC strategy to address violence against Aboriginal women and girls in the communities served by BC Friendship Centres.

There are many sectors and jurisdictions involved when dealing with violence, e.g., health, social services, income assistance, daycare, school districts, employment and training, education, housing, justice, policing and governance. Many of these sectors and jurisdictions are included in the action plan outlined above.

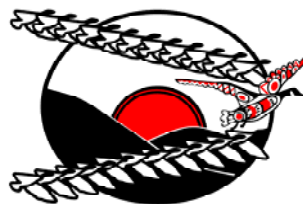
A long-term integrated effort will be required to address the multidimensional nature of violence against Aboriginal women and girls. Support from provincial, federal, municipal and First Nations governments, as well as the agencies working in the fields of violence against women, will be required to end the violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

## Summary

This Action Plan initiates the BCAAFC strategy to end violence against Aboriginal women and girls in communities served by BC Friendship Centres. Through a process of engagement with the 25 Friendship Centres in BC, this Action Plan presents priority actions identified by FCs in three Strategic Directions: **Raise Awareness, Expand Programs and Services** and **Change Policy**.

BC Friendship Centres uniquely respond to the community needs of their urban settings. Friendship Centres are often the first point of contact for women in violent situations, especially because of relationships the women have developed through the programs and services offered by the FC. Friendship Centres have identified the priority actions needed in their communities to end the violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

Now the BC Association of Friendship Centres calls upon all level of government and community to support and enable this Action Plan, in partnership and collaboration.



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