



# CHANGING ATTITUDES, CHANGING LIVES

Ontario's Sexual Violence Action Plan

March 2011

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the Minister	1
Introduction	2
Vision, Principles and Definition	6
Leadership and Accountability	7
Preventing Sexual Violence	8
Improving Services	11
Strengthening the Criminal Justice Response	18
Moving Forward: Working Collaboratively	21
Conclusion	22
End Notes	23

# MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

I am pleased to present, on behalf of the provincial government and the Ministerial Steering Committee on Violence Against Women, Ontario's Sexual Violence Action Plan.

Many Ontarians don't realize the alarming statistics surrounding sexual violence and its prevalence in the lives of far too many women. One in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in their lifetime. Sexual violence crosses all social boundaries, affects women of every age and cultural background, and has devastating impacts on the lives of victims and their families as well as the well-being of society as a whole.

In Ontario, we are building on the success of our government's Domestic Violence Action Plan because we believe that every woman has the right to be safe and feel safe in her home, her community and workplace.

In developing the Sexual Violence Action Plan, we traveled to communities across Ontario to consult with survivors, front-line service providers, and other experts on key issues related to sexual violence to ensure a diversity of women's perspectives and experiences were heard.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to everyone who participated in our consultations for providing such valuable and insightful information into this complex issue. Your advice and input allowed us to prepare what I truly believe is a comprehensive plan with targeted actions that respond to the many facets of this crime, and what we need to do to prevent it.

Thank you to the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes and those from the violence against women sector. Your constant work and advocacy for the women of Ontario, as well as your guidance and leadership, have helped enormously in the development of this plan.

I would also particularly like to thank the survivors of sexual violence who shared their stories. Your courage is our inspiration, and I very much appreciate your strength and wisdom. We could not have put this plan together without your valued advice.

Finally, many thanks to my former Parliamentary Assistant Maria Van Bommel for her commitment to the consultation process and for leading regional meetings.

As we begin this critically important work, I am confident that we are on the right path. I believe that community by community, we can begin to end sexual violence so each and every woman can live without fear of violence.



**Laurel Broten**  
Minister Responsible for Women's Issues

# INTRODUCTION

Ontario's provincial violence against women organizations have provided leadership in raising awareness of sexual violence and advocating for legal and policy reforms.

Since the early 1970s, community-based, grassroots agencies have led the way in supporting women who experience violence and engaging communities in prevention efforts.

Violence against women is a serious, pervasive problem that affects communities across Ontario. Violence against women devastates lives – it has no place in society and it will not be tolerated.

The government is committed to ending violence against women. In 2004, we launched a Domestic Violence Action Plan for Ontario. This plan presented a comprehensive approach focused on preventing domestic violence and improving supports for abused women and their children when it does happen. By working in partnership with violence against women organizations and professionals in the community, health, education and justice sectors, much has been accomplished.

We are building on the success of the Domestic Violence Action Plan by introducing Ontario's Sexual Violence Action Plan. This Action Plan takes a coordinated and collaborative approach to prevent sexual violence and improve supports for survivors. We will work across ministries and with provincial violence against women organizations to implement public education campaigns, develop and deliver training and enhance the service system response through an investment of \$15 million over four years.

Over the years, our efforts to address violence against women have been guided by the advice we have received from survivors and their advocates, the Domestic Violence Advisory Council, the Safe Schools Action Team and the partners to *A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*, among others. This advice is helping us take concrete steps to make system-wide improvements where gaps exist, while laying the groundwork for the future. We will continue to seek the guidance of violence against women organizations and other experts as we implement the Sexual Violence Action Plan.

## Scope of the Action Plan

Sexual violence can take many different forms. Our Action Plan addresses crimes such as sexual assault and sexual exploitation through human trafficking, as well as other acts including sexual harassment and sexual exploitation through the use of technology and the Internet.



Sexual assault is a gender-based crime most often perpetrated by men against women. Age is also a risk factor for sexual assault with young women being particularly vulnerable. As a result, we have focused our efforts on women and girls who are 16 years of age and older.

The Action Plan addresses the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, sexual, economic, and geographic diversity of Ontario. As we move forward, we will ensure that initiatives undertaken are implemented through a diversity lens that takes into consideration the needs of women throughout the province.

The government is also undertaking separate initiatives to respond to sexual violence against men and children. Province-wide services are currently being developed for male survivors of sexual violence. We are promoting healthy equal relationships and addressing discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence among children and youth through Ontario's Safe Schools Strategy and the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. A number of other initiatives have also been introduced to address the sexual abuse and exploitation of children through the Internet.

### **The Consultations**

Between May and November 2010, the government undertook consultations to support the development of the Sexual Violence Action Plan. In total, 30 meetings were held with more than 350 survivors, service providers and other experts in the community, health, education and justice sectors.

The consultations included regional meetings in communities across the province to discuss prevention, improvement of services and community coordination. Meetings with experts were held to discuss key issues such as public education, training, human trafficking and the criminal justice response. Organizations and individuals also had the opportunity to share their thoughts online. Overall, we heard a wide range of diverse ideas and opinions on how best to move forward.



#### DID YOU KNOW...

- Over a third of women have experienced some form of sexual assault in their life since the age of 16.<sup>1</sup>
- Over 93% of reported adult sexual assault victims are female, while over 97% of those accused are male.<sup>2</sup>
- The victim and the accused are known to each other in 82% of cases – as friends, acquaintances or family members.<sup>3</sup>
- An estimated 15% of female university students experience sexual assault.<sup>4</sup>
- Victims turn to people they know for help. They confide in friends, and turn to family members, co-workers, doctors and nurses.<sup>5</sup>
- Fewer than 10% of sexual assault victims report the crime to the police.<sup>6</sup>
- Studies estimate that the economic cost of violence against women across Canada is in the billions of dollars. This includes the cost of health, criminal justice and social services as well as lost productivity.<sup>7</sup>

An important part of our consultations was hearing directly from women who experienced sexual violence. These meetings provided us with the opportunity to better understand sexual violence through their experiences and to hear their perspectives on how the current system of supports could be improved.

The consultations provided us with critical insight on the impact of sexual violence on survivors and how it is perceived within our society. We heard how to best focus our public education and prevention efforts. Priorities were identified to help improve community services, health care, education and the justice system to better support survivors. Consultation participants emphasized the important role of government leadership in fostering collaboration at the provincial and community level.

#### Why Addressing Sexual Violence is a Priority

Sexual violence is about power and control, not sexual desire. It is about exerting power and aggression over someone else.

Research shows that sexual violence is more common than most people think. One in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in their lifetime. Anyone can be a victim of sexual assault – a daughter, a sister, mother or friend.

Many people only think of sexual violence as a very violent crime that happens between strangers – the perpetrator lurking in a dark alley or in the bushes. In reality, most sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim – an acquaintance, date, friend, colleague or family member – and often it occurs in private places, like the victim's home.

Society's understanding of sexual assault can be influenced by misconceptions and false beliefs (commonly referred to as 'rape myths'). These myths reinforce that the victim is to blame – as if the way she behaved somehow contributed to the assault. This false belief is exemplified in the common myth that women 'are asking for it' by the way they dress, or if they were drinking.



Because of these misconceptions, victims may blame themselves for what happened, wonder if they were in some way responsible, and worry that they won't be believed. Some women may fear the stigma of being labeled a sexual assault victim. Feelings of guilt and shame may be reinforced by the reactions of others.

Other myths may cause people to question whether a crime was actually committed. People may question whether the woman was assaulted, especially if there are no obvious injuries or the woman is not as upset as one might expect. Some survivors spoke of not being perceived as 'legitimate' victims. Their credibility was called into question, particularly if they were using drugs or alcohol, were in a relationship with the perpetrator, or were reporting historic childhood sexual abuse.

These misconceptions and attitudes have serious consequences for the survivor and for society. They take attention away from the fact that the perpetrator is solely responsible for his actions. They may also prevent a woman from seeking help. The trauma associated with sexual assault can be devastating for the survivor, her family and friends. Women who don't get the help they need to recover may suffer longer term physical, emotional and psychological problems.

Our Action Plan aims to promote understanding and prevention through public education and to foster more responsive and supportive environments for survivors.

# VISION, PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITION

## DIVERSITY PRINCIPLE:

Initiatives under the Action Plan will give consideration to the unique needs of the diversity of women across the province, including: Aboriginal, Francophone, newcomer, immigrant, refugee and women of all ethno/cultural and religious backgrounds, women of colour, older women, lesbian, transgendered, transsexual and bisexual, Deaf women, and those with disabilities, women living in rural/remote areas and women living in poverty, amongst others.

The Action Plan recognizes that different women experience sexual violence differently. For example, a woman's race, religion, socioeconomic status, age or sexual identity affects her experience of sexual violence, her level of risk for experiencing violence, as well as resources accessible to her in her healing from sexual violence.

Ontario's Sexual Violence Action Plan is guided by the following vision and principles:

### Vision

Ontario is a place where all women live in safety, and are free from the threat, fear or experience of sexual violence.

### Principles

- Sexual violence is a gendered crime.
- Sexual violence is about power and control and is rooted in inequality between men and women.
- All survivors deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.
- An effective response requires collaboration between survivors, service providers and government.
- Programs, policies and services must be responsive to the needs of Ontario's diverse communities.
- Perpetrators must be held accountable for their crimes.
- Everyone in Ontario shares the responsibility to stop sexual violence by promoting equality and respect.

### Definition

Sexual violence is a broad term that describes any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. This violence takes different forms including sexual abuse, sexual assault, rape, incest, childhood sexual abuse and rape during armed conflict. It also includes sexual harassment, stalking, indecent or sexualized exposure, degrading sexual imagery, voyeurism, cyber harassment, trafficking and sexual exploitation.

# LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

## MEMBERS OF THE MINISTERIAL STEERING COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:

- Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues (chair)
- Attorney General
- Minister of Aboriginal Affairs
- Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
- Minister of Community and Social Services
- Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs
- Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
- Minister of Education
- Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities
- Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
- Minister of Labour
- Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry
- Minister Responsible for Seniors
- Minister of Government Services

The Sexual Violence Action Plan requires a commitment to work in partnership across ministries and at the community level to prevent sexual violence and improve responses to survivors.

The Ministerial Steering Committee on Violence Against Women, chaired by the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, will provide government leadership and accountability by overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan.

The Ontario Women's Directorate will lead an inter-ministry Directors' Working Group to coordinate the implementation of the Action Plan across ministries.

The Directors' Working Group will meet annually with violence against women provincial organizations to report on progress under the Action Plan and identify strategies for moving forward.

The government will publish a report two years after the launch of the Action Plan, and again after four years, to provide an update on progress.

Violence against Aboriginal women is being addressed through a separate process guided by *A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*. A Joint Working Group consisting of Aboriginal and government members will continue to identify priorities for responding to all forms of violence against Aboriginal women, including sexual violence. The Minister Responsible for Women's Issues and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs will continue to co-lead this aspect of the Ministerial Steering Committee's work.

# PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Public education addresses the root causes of violence by changing the social attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate violence against women. To be effective, public education campaigns need to encourage all community members to take an active role in shifting social norms to prevent sexual violence.

Participants at the consultations stressed the importance of shaping attitudes at an early age by promoting healthy, equal relationships among children and youth. We heard about the need to raise awareness among young people about acquaintance rape. Many spoke of the critical role that men play in prevention by taking an active stand against violence and by being good role models for peers, younger men and boys. Others spoke of the need for bystander campaigns to encourage people to speak up against attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate sexual violence.

Through the Domestic Violence Action Plan, the government has supported a number of initiatives to engage communities in preventing all forms of violence against women.

The *Promoting Healthy Equal Relationships* campaign targeted youth and the adults who influence them – parents, educators, coaches, and mentors – to change attitudes to prevent violence from happening in the first place. Through the campaign, tools were developed for elementary school teachers to help them sustain the messages of the campaign in classrooms. The campaign has reached approximately 100,000 children and youth throughout Ontario.

The government is currently supporting public education campaigns that encourage men and boys to play an active role in preventing violence against women. The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres is delivering *Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin: I Am A Kind Man*. The White Ribbon Campaign and Le Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions are implementing an online social media campaign, *It starts with you. It stays with him, Ça commence avec toi. Ça reste avec lui*. These province-wide initiatives are inspiring men and boys to speak up against violence against women.



### TAKING ACTION ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The government declared the first week of June as Sexual Harassment Awareness Week to increase public awareness and promote prevention.

Ontario's *Human Rights Code* prohibits sexual harassment in employment. Last year, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* was amended to strengthen protection for workers from workplace violence and address workplace harassment. Workplace harassment may include bullying, intimidating or offensive jokes or innuendos, displaying or circulating offensive pictures or materials, or offensive or intimidating communications.

Resources are available to help employers develop policies and programs to prevent and respond to workplace violence and harassment, including sexual harassment. These resources are available on the Ontario Women's Directorate and Ministry of Labour websites.

Ontario's Safe Schools Strategy recognizes that violence in schools, including bullying and sexual harassment, is a serious issue.

Through the strategy, students will have the opportunity to learn about gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviours in the classroom. The government has introduced the *Keeping Our Kids Safe At School Act* which requires the reporting of all serious and violent incidents including sexual assault. Each school in Ontario now has a safe schools team working to promote a safer and more welcoming learning environment.

Through the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, important steps are being taken to address discrimination and support diversity in schools. Some students may face barriers like racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination that may prevent them from reaching their full potential. All publicly funded school boards are required to have an equity and inclusive education policy in place. The strategy is helping educators better identify and remove systemic barriers to student achievement.

Launched in 2006, the *Neighbours, Friends and Families* campaign helps people close to a woman recognize the signs of abuse and know what to do to help. The campaign has been adapted for Francophone and Aboriginal communities and is active in over 200 communities across Ontario. During the consultations, participants often highlighted the success of this public education campaign.

### WHAT WE WILL DO

The government will invest over \$5.2 million to develop and implement public education campaigns to prevent sexual violence against women.

These campaigns will help raise awareness and understanding of sexual violence in communities across the province.

As an important first step, we will bring together violence against women organizations, experts in public education and others at a forum to examine best practices in prevention through public education. Participants at the forum will provide advice to government on the strategies and approaches that would work best in Ontario. Based on this advice, we will provide funding support to provincial organizations in developing,



The *Liquor Licence Act* was amended to address the dangers of date rape drugs. Women bar patrons can now carry their drinks with them into washrooms and hallways so that their drinks are not left unattended and exposed to the possibility of being tampered with.

implementing and evaluating province-wide prevention initiatives. These initiatives will reflect the diversity of communities across the province.

At the consultations, we heard of the challenges facing service providers in the North, many of whom are reaching out to communities over vast geographic areas. To help Northern communities, we will provide enhanced funding to sexual assault providers to support their ongoing public education programs.

Young women in colleges and universities are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence – many are away from home for the first time and exposed to new social situations. We heard at our consultations that acquaintance rape on campuses is a concern. We will work in partnership with college and university associations and sexual violence prevention experts to develop resources to increase awareness among students, faculty and administrators on how to prevent and respond effectively to sexual violence.

We heard from survivors that the experiences of older women are not always well understood by the people they turn to for support. To increase awareness about the sexual abuse of older women, the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, together with the Ontario Women's Directorate, will support an international forum on sexual safety for older women as part of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

# IMPROVING SERVICES

## Training

When sexual violence occurs, women need sensitive and compassionate care that is responsive to their needs. Early and effective interventions from front-line service providers and other professionals can help mitigate both short and longer-term trauma for survivors.

Women may turn to different service providers and professionals for support – they may seek help from doctors, nurses, teachers, counselors, or they may report the assault to the police. Throughout the consultations, survivors spoke of how the initial reaction of the people they turned to for support either helped or hindered their recovery. We heard from survivors and others that all service providers and professionals need to understand sexual violence and the experience of victimization in order to provide effective supports and referrals. In addition, practitioners in community, health care, education and justice sectors need access to ongoing professional development and training to stay current with changing practices in their professions.

## WHAT WE WILL DO

The government will support violence against women organizations and professional groups in developing and delivering training and education programs for service providers and professionals in the community, health, education and justice sectors through a \$1.6 million investment. These programs will be evidence-based, reflect current promising practices and tailored to meet the specific needs of different professional groups.

## Sexual Assault Centres

There are 41 government-funded Sexual Assault Centres across the province, including 11 French-language centres, that offer free and confidential specialized support services to survivors of sexual violence. A client-centred approach is used to respond to the many different needs of the women who access these services. Clients are provided with individual and group counselling, hospital, court and police accompaniment, and have access to 24-hour crisis and support lines. These centres have adapted their services to meet the needs of the diverse communities they serve. Staff regularly engage in education and outreach initiatives to raise awareness and understanding of sexual violence.



The government is committed to meeting the needs of Francophone women. Access to French-language services has been improved through the opening of four sexual assault centres:

- Oasis Centre des femmes satellite office in Peel
- Centre Novas – Centre d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel (CALACS) francophone de Prescott-Russell
- Carrefour des femmes du sud-ouest de l'Ontario
- Colibri – Centre des femmes francophones du comté de Simcoe

Throughout the consultations, survivors reinforced the importance of the services provided by Sexual Assault Centres. They spoke of the assistance they received in a supportive, non-judgemental environment. They also emphasized how important it was to be able to connect with peers and share their experiences with other survivors who understood what they were going through.

As Ontario communities continue to grow and become more diverse, Sexual Assault Centres are experiencing new demands on their services. They are responding to newcomer women with specific cultural needs, some of whom have experienced sexual violence during war. They are also assisting women who may require additional help accessing supports, including homeless women, sex trade workers, women with mental illness and/or addictions, women with disabilities and those living in rural and isolated communities. Many centres identified the challenges they are experiencing as a result of service pressures.

#### WHAT WE WILL DO

The government will provide \$3 million to the province's Sexual Assault Centres to support their ongoing efforts to improve services and meet the needs of women in their communities.

The government will also support the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres and Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes to develop and deliver specialized training programs for sexual assault centre staff on supporting women with addictions, mental illness and trauma. These organizations will also develop educational materials for community service agencies on best practices in prevention and supporting survivors coping with trauma.

#### Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres

Across the province, 35 hospital-based Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres provide 24/7 specialized medical care and emotional support to women, men and children who have been sexually assaulted. Staff provide emergency and follow-up care, including the collection of forensic evidence, short-term counselling and referrals to community agencies. They also provide training for other professionals and engage in local public education initiatives.



In 2008, the Provincial Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres collaborated with Women's College Research Institute on a study (2004–2008) that examined the prevalence of drug-facilitated sexual assault (DFSA). The study found that suspected drug-facilitated sexual assault is common. It also found that the use of alcohol, over-the-counter medications and street drugs, alone or in combination, is common in cases of DFSA.

Throughout the consultations, participants emphasized the importance of the services provided by treatment centres. They spoke of the need to raise the profile of these centres and strengthen their capacity to continue to provide high quality and consistent care across the province.

Treatment centre staff also identified specific service challenges including responding to women with disabilities and those who suspect they have been victims of drug-facilitated sexual assault.

#### **WHAT WE WILL DO**

The government will support initiatives to develop and implement standards of care and promote awareness of services provided by the province's Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres.

Echo: Improving Women's Health in Ontario (an agency of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care with a mandate to serve as a catalyst for improving women's health) and the Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres ("the Provincial Network") will partner to develop service standards for hospital emergency departments. They will also refine the current standards used by treatment centres including those for responding to victims of drug-facilitated sexual assault. Through this process, they will explore potential improvements to better address the needs of women with disabilities. Local Health Integration Networks and hospital administrators will be engaged in these efforts.

Echo and the Provincial Network will oversee the development and delivery of training on the standards for staff at treatment centres and hospital emergency departments. This will ensure that sexual assault victims receive a consistent level of care at all hospitals in the province, including those with and without specialized treatment centres.

To raise awareness about drug-facilitated sexual assault and the services available at treatment centres, the Provincial Network and researchers from Women's College Research Institute in collaboration with Echo will develop and distribute education materials to first responders, community agencies, health professionals, universities, colleges, workplaces and the general public.



Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to develop, implement and enforce mandatory accessibility standards that apply to the public and private sectors. Through the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* and the standards, the goal is to make Ontario accessible by 2025.

The government will also be supporting the Provincial Network to train counsellors to provide therapeutic treatment to survivors. This training will help counsellors across the province respond to survivors coping with trauma.

### **Helping Survivors Navigate the System of Supports**

Linking survivors to the services that can best meet their needs is an important part of their recovery.

At our consultations, survivors spoke of the challenges in accessing information on legal issues, counselling and medical services. They spoke of navigating a complex system of services where they had to retell their very personal experiences of victimization multiple times before being connected with the appropriate service. Additional difficulties arose for women who experienced language, cultural and/or accessibility barriers. Some survivors became frustrated with the system and decided not to pursue further help. These challenges were echoed by service providers who spoke of their own difficulties in identifying appropriate services for survivors.

### **WHAT WE WILL DO**

The Ontario Women's Directorate will work with violence against women organizations and service providers in the community, health, education and justice sectors to develop resources to help survivors and others understand the service delivery system. These resources will outline the roles of different services and provide information to survivors on how to access them. Individual communities will be able to adapt these resources to include information on local programs and services. Resources will be available province wide, both online and in print, and translated into multiple languages.

### **Improving Supports for Aboriginal Women**

Aboriginal women experience higher rates of violence, including sexual violence, compared to non-Aboriginal women. In some northern Aboriginal communities, it is believed that 75% to 90% of women experience violence in their lives.<sup>8</sup>



Responding to violence against Aboriginal women requires a collaborative approach across government and with Aboriginal organizations.

The government has endorsed the overall objectives and multi-faceted approach of *A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women* to guide planning and priority setting in Ontario. The *Strategic Framework* was developed following a series of provincial summits convened by Aboriginal organizations. These summits brought together Aboriginal leaders and government representatives to identify ways to prevent and respond to violence against Aboriginal women. The *Strategic Framework* presents a holistic approach and calls for a comprehensive strategy across ministries and communities. A number of initiatives supported by the government and developed by and for Aboriginal women are underway.

#### **WHAT WE WILL DO**

Through the Joint Working Group comprised of representatives from Aboriginal organizations and government ministries, we will continue to identify initiatives and make investments that respond to the *Strategic Framework* and benefit Aboriginal women who are victims of violence, including sexual violence.

#### **Improving Access to Services for Francophone Women**

Francophone women should receive services in their language in accordance with the *French Language Services Act*.

During our consultations, French-language service providers and survivors spoke of the challenges in finding and accessing services in French. Survivors would often turn to English service providers, instead of accessing services in the language with which they were most comfortable. Survivors told us that the ability to talk about their experience in their own language was essential to their recovery.

#### **WHAT WE WILL DO**

Access to French-language programs and services will be addressed within all components of the Action Plan, including public education and prevention, training, community supports and the justice response.



We will convene a joint French-language services working group with representatives from Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes and key provincial ministries to identify priorities and opportunities to improve policies, programs and services to better address the unique needs of Francophone women.

#### **Improving Access to Language Interpretation**

Many women who are victims of sexual violence face language barriers when coming forward for help. During the consultations, we heard about the need to improve access to services for women whose first language is not English so that they may access the community, health and justice supports they need.

The government funds the Language Interpreter Services program to provide interpreter services at no cost to women who experience domestic violence. These services are offered in more than 60 languages and are available to women regardless of their immigration status. Each year, nearly 6,000 victims use these services to access health care, legal and social services.

#### **WHAT WE WILL DO**

The government will invest over \$3.7 million to expand the Language Interpreter Services program for women who have experienced sexual assault as well as those who have been sexually exploited through human trafficking.

This expansion will give service providers and frontline responders access to the Language Interpreter Services program when assisting survivors of sexual violence. Survivors of sexual violence will now have the ability to communicate and be understood in their language at a time of crisis. We will be examining ways to incorporate sign language interpretation into the program. We will also work with sexual assault services to develop a training program on sexual violence for language interpreters.

#### **Responding to Victims of Human Trafficking**

The sexual exploitation of women and girls through human trafficking is a crime that knows no borders and exploits the most vulnerable members of our society. Victims are trafficked both domestically and internationally and the vast majority are women and girls.



At our consultations, we heard that victims of human trafficking have very specific needs. These women are often isolated, controlled by elements of organized crime and fear for their personal safety. Some may have been trafficked far from their country of origin and may not speak English. Participants spoke of the need for a more coordinated response to human trafficking. A number of different sectors need to be involved in order to assist victims with everything from safe housing to navigating immigration processes.

The government has been working across ministries and through the Federal-Provincial-Territorial (FPT) forums to improve local, national and international collaboration to address human trafficking. FPT Status of Women Ministers are exploring measures to address human trafficking across Canada. FPT Justice Ministers are developing resources to assist with investigating and prosecuting human trafficking cases.

#### **WHAT WE WILL DO**

The government will provide \$1.95 million to launch a number of anti-human trafficking initiatives to prevent victimization, enforce human trafficking laws, vigorously prosecute alleged offenders and ensure victims have the supports and services they need.

The government is also establishing a human trafficking advisory committee made up of survivors, police services representatives, victim service providers, and other experts. The committee will provide advice on future programs and initiatives, including training for service providers and supports to address the unique needs of victims.

# STRENGTHENING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSE

## Responding to Sexual Assault

Sexual assault crimes present challenges to the criminal justice system. These offences often occur in private settings, with no witnesses and little definitive physical evidence. In many cases, sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows.

Of all violent crimes, sexual assault is the least likely to come to the attention of the criminal justice system. At the consultations, we heard that women are often reluctant to report sexual assault to the police. Some women may fear that they will not be believed or that their sexual and personal lives will be publicly judged and scrutinized in court. Others may not realize that a crime has been committed. Many women who went through the criminal justice system indicated they felt “re-victimized” by the process. The public nature of the trial and reliving the assault to provide testimony contributed to significant distress for women.

Over the past number of years, changes have been made to the *Criminal Code of Canada* to help ensure that cases of sexual assault are addressed by the courts in a manner that is more responsive to the victim. At the same time, practices are emerging here in Ontario and elsewhere to inform more appropriate approaches to sexual assault investigations. Part of an effective criminal justice response requires that police and justice personnel have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to conduct effective investigations and prosecutions.

### WHAT WE WILL DO

The government is committed to taking action to ensure that police responses to women who have been sexually assaulted are sensitive and effective. Police services across the province are supported in their investigative work through the Sexual Assault Investigation Guideline. The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services will work in consultation with the Policing Standards Advisory Committee and violence against women organizations to review and update this guideline.

The Ministry is also working with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and the Policing Standards Advisory Committee on the review of the Victim Assistance Guideline, which provides guidance to police on how to best support victims.



The government will also take action to improve the response of the criminal court system to sexual assault. The Ministry of the Attorney General will provide enhanced training for justice personnel to improve their understanding of the impact of sexual assault on victims. Training will also focus on legal issues, including the appropriate use of evidence, testimonial aids and expert witnesses. Initiatives will include:

- Joint training for Crown counsel and Victim/Witness Assistance Program staff on understanding sexual violence in intimate relationships.
- Engaging sexual violence experts to provide training for Crown counsel.
- Joint training for Crown counsel, police and Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centre coordinators on best practices in the collection and use of evidence.
- Developing education materials on the prosecution of sexual assault for Crown counsel to use in training sessions for police.

The National Judicial Institute (NJI) is an independent, not-for-profit institution committed to building better justice through leadership in the education of judges in Canada and internationally. Alone or in partnership with courts and other organizations, NJI is involved in the delivery of the majority of education taken by judges in Canada. The Ontario Women's Directorate is providing financial support to NJI for the development of educational modules and resources on sexual violence for the judiciary.

### **Holding Offenders Accountable**

Perpetrators of sexual violence need to be held accountable for their actions. They also need access to supports and programs that will help them end their violence.

Currently, specialized programming targeting sexual offending is available to sexual offenders in provincial custody. Ontario Correctional Services staff who conduct risk assessment for sexual offending are educated to ensure appropriate measures are in place when offenders are under community supervision. The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services conducts regular reviews to ensure offender programming and staff training align with current research and professional best practices.



The Partner Assault Response Program (PAR) is a specialized intervention program for perpetrators of domestic violence. Specialized counselling and educational services are offered by community-based agencies to enhance victim safety and hold offenders accountable for their behaviour. Through the program, offenders have the opportunity to examine their beliefs and attitudes towards domestic abuse, and to learn non-abusive ways of resolving conflict.

#### **WHAT WE WILL DO**

The Ministry of the Attorney General will expand the PAR program curriculum to include a mandatory component that addresses sexual violence in intimate relationships. This new mandatory focus will make perpetrators aware that sexual violence in intimate relationships is a form of abuse and is illegal.

#### **Legislative Reform**

While the growth of technology has been beneficial to society, it is also being used to perpetrate acts of sexual exploitation and harassment. Social networking sites, mobile phones and other forms of on-line communication are being used in new ways to bully, harass and threaten others.

#### **WHAT WE WILL DO**

The Attorney General will request that the Federal Minister of Justice seek amendments to the *Criminal Code of Canada* that will make it an offence to distribute intimate visual recordings of a person without that person's consent. This includes the distribution of photos via mobile telephones, the Internet, social networking sites and other electronic media.

This legislative reform would address a current gap in existing *Criminal Code* provisions by holding criminally responsible those who use technology to sexually exploit and harass others. These proposed amendments would complement our public education initiatives by reinforcing that these kinds of behaviours are harmful, unacceptable and criminal.

# MOVING FORWARD: WORKING COLLABORATIVELY

Taking action on sexual violence is a shared responsibility.

The government recognizes the importance of collaboration among ministries, community organizations, service providers, professionals, violence against women organizations, survivors and their advocates to develop an effective response to sexual violence.

To foster information sharing and collaboration, the Ontario Women's Directorate will work with ministries to convene a series of meetings with local service providers. These meetings will create a forum for community partners to build relationships, share information and engage in discussions about opportunities to work together.

At the provincial level, ministries will continue to consult with the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes and provincial organizations to make sure we are moving forward in the best possible way. As well, we will continue to consult with Aboriginal organizations through the Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women.

By working collaboratively, we will further our mutual goals to foster a more responsive and supportive environment for women who have experienced sexual violence, promote understanding and prevention through public education and work towards ending sexual violence in Ontario.

# CONCLUSION

Sexual violence in all of its forms is a devastating social problem that has a long history and very real consequences for the women who have experienced it.

Ending sexual violence is a shared responsibility that will require the efforts of all Ontarians. It starts with changing attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs. It requires a commitment to ensure that survivors are treated with respect and dignity and receive the supports they need to recover and change their lives.

When we went out to communities and began our conversations with survivors, service providers and other experts, our goal was to collect ideas, seek advice and generate solutions.

Our Action Plan builds on what we heard and on the ongoing efforts of individuals and institutions across the province committed to ending sexual violence. It lays out concrete and pragmatic steps to prevent sexual violence and improve supports to survivors in the short term, while working together on longer term solutions.

Through our collective efforts, our Action Plan will lay the groundwork for an Ontario where all women live in safety, and are free from the threat, fear or experience of sexual violence.

## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006. 2006. Statistics Canada. pg. 24.
- <sup>2</sup> Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006. 2006. Statistics Canada. pg. 37.
- Brennan, Shannon and Andrea Taylor-Butts. 2008. Sexual Assault in Canada 2004 and 2007. Statistics Canada. pg. 13.
- <sup>3</sup> Brennan, Shannon and Andrea Taylor-Butts. 2008. Sexual Assault in Canada 2004 and 2007. Statistics Canada. pg. 13.
- <sup>4</sup> Newton-Taylor, B., D. DeWit, and L.Gliksmann. 1998. "Prevalence and Factors Associated with Physical and Sexual Assault of Female University Students in Ontario." *Health Care for Women International* 19: 155–164.
- <sup>5</sup> Brennan, Shannon and Andrea Taylor-Butts. 2008. Sexual Assault in Canada 2004 and 2007. Statistics Canada. pg. 14.
- <sup>6</sup> Brennan, Shannon and Andrea Taylor-Butts. 2008. Sexual Assault in Canada 2004 and 2007. Statistics Canada. pg. 8.
- <sup>7</sup> Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006. 2006. Statistics Canada. pg. 35.
- <sup>8</sup> Ontario Native Women's Association and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. 2007. A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women. pg. 3.

