

# Making a Difference: Ending Violence Against Aboriginal Women



September 2012

## Progress Report of the Joint Working Group on Violence against Aboriginal Women

### MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

On behalf of the members of the Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women, we are pleased to provide this progress report to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the leadership of the Aboriginal partners.

As co-chairs, we recognize the progress that has been made since the Joint Working Group was convened in 2010. In recognition of the stark rates at which Aboriginal women and girls experience violence, the Joint Working Group was established to identify priorities and policies, programs, and services that prevent and reduce violence against First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and their families. All partners on the Joint Working Group agree that violence against Aboriginal women and girls is a complex problem that requires dialogue and a coordinated effort from all partner ministries and partner Aboriginal organizations in the province. As it evolves, the Joint Working Group will continue to serve as a venue for open dialogue and collaboration on initiatives that will have a significant impact on First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities across Ontario.

The foundation for this work is the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women. The Strategic Framework is guiding the Joint Working Group in setting priorities and examining initiatives to end violence against Aboriginal women from a community-based, cultural and wholistic perspective.

This progress report highlights our accomplishments to date as a working group and looks at some of the challenges we have faced in these early stages of our work. As we reflect on our accomplishments, we look forward to continuing our efforts towards our common goal of ending violence against Aboriginal women.

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## Violence Against Aboriginal Women

The landscape in Ontario depicts a shocking disparity in the level of violence experienced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit women when compared to non-Aboriginal women. Statistics clearly indicate that Aboriginal women are significantly over-represented as victims of assault, sexual assault, spousal abuse and homicide. First Nations, Métis and Inuit women are three and a half times more likely to experience spousal violence than non-Aboriginal women.<sup>1</sup>

One key factor contributing to the high rates of family violence experienced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit women is the residential school system. The cycle of intergenerational trauma resulting from a legacy of mistreatment and systemic abuse continues to further exacerbate the situation, leaving generations of Aboriginal women particularly vulnerable to acts of violence and crime. Intergenerational trauma increases the likelihood that children are exposed to family violence, which in turn perpetuates the cycle of violence experienced within the family.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to violence experienced within the context of family, Aboriginal women are too often the victims of racialized, sexualized violence, a fact highlighted by the report of the Sisters in Spirit initiative developed to address the alarmingly high numbers of missing, murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, sexual assaults account for more than one-third of violent incidents involving an Aboriginal victim, at a rate of 70 incidents per 1000 Aboriginal people versus 23 per 1000 non-Aboriginal people.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Aboriginal women are also seven times more likely than the non-Aboriginal female population to be victims of homicide.<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal women are also the most vulnerable population in Ontario in terms of poverty and unemployment—key factors that contribute to violence in Aboriginal communities. A shortage of affordable housing, limited access

to treatment programs and supports in remote and rural communities, and the continued existence of racism and discrimination against Aboriginal women further compounds their vulnerability to violence. Young women who must travel to larger communities to attend secondary school or to seek employment are particularly at risk. Examining and addressing these issues in a relational context is necessary if the staggeringly high rates of violence against Aboriginal women are to be reduced.

## Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women

To address the unacceptably high rates of violence against Aboriginal women and the lack of progress in ending violence, the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) convened a strategy meeting on March 20–22, 2007, entitled *A Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women* (the Summit). This inaugural Summit was funded by the Ontario Women's Directorate and over 120 participants, including officials from both the provincial and federal government, attended. The intent of the Summit was to bring together community leaders and government representatives to develop a framework for a strategy to end violence against Aboriginal women.

The OFIFC and ONWA partnered with the Ministry of the Attorney General to convene a second summit in September 2007. The focus of this summit was on the justice system and the critical role it plays in responding to violence against Aboriginal women. The Ministry of Community and Social Services provided financial support for the third summit, held in February 2009, which explored how community-based programs and services could be improved to support Aboriginal women and families who are working to end violence in their lives. In March 2011, the OFIFC, ONWA, the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and the Independent First Nations (IFN) partnered with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to convene a fourth summit, which focused on the impact of family violence on children and youth. The Aboriginal partners on the Joint Working Group recently collaborated to host a fifth summit in June 2012. Working with the Ministry of Education, this summit examined youth at risk of violence and disengagement from school.

It was the first summit, along with work from previous gatherings and research, which contributed to the development of *A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women* released in

1 Brennan, S. (2011) "Violent Victimization of Aboriginal Women in the Canadian Provinces, 2009" *Statistics Canada*. Juristat 85-002-X.

2 Canada. National Clearinghouse on Violence (2008) "Aboriginal Women and Family Violence" Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.

3 Native Women's Association Sisters in Spirit Initiative, 2005-2010.

4 Perreault, S. (2011) "Violent Victimization of Aboriginal People, 2009" *Statistics Canada*. Juristat 85-002-X.

5 Health Canada. (2009) "Our Voices: First Nation, Inuit and Metis GBA." Centre of Excellence for Women's Health.

September 2007. The *Strategic Framework* provides guiding principles and eight strategic directions to end violence against Aboriginal women, with goals and specific actions proposed for each strategic direction. It also provides four overall target outcomes and four major recommendations to be achieved through implementation of the *Strategic Framework*.

Since its release, the IFN and the MNO have partnered with OFIFC and ONWA to end violence against Aboriginal women under the umbrella of the *Strategic Framework*. As of November 2011, the Chiefs of Ontario (COO) has been a partner on the Joint Working Group. COO has formed an Indigenous Women's Caucus that will act as an advisory body to the approach it should take in regards to this complex issue. As part of the Joint Working Group, the Indigenous Women's Caucus will offer any recommendations for COO to bring forward at meetings.

The findings and recommendations emerging from the discussions at the provincial summits have helped inform and focus efforts in response to the strategic directions of the *Strategic Framework*, and have made a significant contribution to a shared understanding of violence against Aboriginal women.

### **Mandate of the Joint Working Group:**

**“To identify priorities, and opportunities for support, development and implementation of policies, programs and services that prevent and reduce violence against Aboriginal women and their families”**

## **The Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women**

In October 2008, members of the government's Ministerial Steering Committee on Violence Against Women, which was established by the Ontario government and currently consists of 12 Ministers, endorsed the overall objectives and multifaceted

approach of the *Strategic Framework* as a useful tool for planning and priority setting. The Ministers committed to using the *Strategic Framework* to plan and establish government priorities, recognizing that certain recommendations require further work and a longer-term approach. The Ministerial Steering Committee agreed that the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs would co-lead the government's response to the *Strategic Framework*.

The Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women was convened in 2010 with a mandate to: “identify priorities and opportunities for support, development and implementation of policies, programs, and services that prevent and reduce violence against Aboriginal women and their families.” The Joint Working Group consists of representatives from ten ministries and five Aboriginal organizations working collaboratively to advance the goals of the *Strategic Framework*. The Terms of Reference and list of current members are attached in Appendix A.

### **Progress Report: Working Together to Achieve Change**

The purpose of this report is to provide Ministers and Leaders with an update on the activities of the Joint Working Group since it first met in 2010.

Since its first meeting, the members of the Joint Working Group have been working collaboratively to develop specific activities and deliverables on priority issues identified under each of the eight strategic directions of the *Strategic Framework*. Accordingly, this Progress Report is organized to report on activities and accomplishments under these eight strategic directions:

1. Comprehensive Research and Data Collection
2. Legal Reform and Legislative Change
3. Policy Development
4. Program Development
5. Public Education and Awareness
6. Community Development (Capacity Building)
7. Leadership
8. Accountability

Along with highlighting the Joint Working Group's accomplishments and activities, this progress report also presents promising initiatives and leading practices that have been undertaken by Ontario ministries and Aboriginal partners. These efforts could inform and guide future work and, therefore, should be brought to the attention of Ministers and Leaders. This progress report also identifies common challenges that have arisen in the work of the Joint Working Group and looks at opportunities for addressing these challenges moving forward.



# 1. COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Aboriginal-led research for ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls continues to be a priority for the Joint Working Group. Research and data collection are seen as essentials for tracking progress against the *Strategic Directions* by: building knowledge of the underlying social dynamics and determinants of violence against First Nations, Métis and Inuit women; evaluating the impacts of interventions designed to reduce the level of violence; and, reinforcing the value and effectiveness of participatory approaches and Aboriginal research methodologies. Culture-based tools for identifying prevalence, as well as strategies for sustainable change, will provide a means to more concretely measured impacts and contribute to knowledge-based decision-making as well as help build a stronger understanding of both the determinants and impacts of violence against Aboriginal women and their families.

## Activities

### **Improving Data Collection and Information Sharing**

To address the significant gaps in our current understanding of violence against Aboriginal women, in the spring of 2012 the Joint Working Group established a Data and Information Sub-committee. The Data and Information Sub-committee members have a high degree of knowledge and expertise in research and data collection. They are working together to identify ways in which to improve the availability of data and information on violence against Aboriginal women in Ontario.

The sub-committee includes representation from several ministries and Aboriginal partners (specifically MNO, OFIFC and ONWA). The sub-committee is working to identify:

- the information the Joint Working Group is interested in collecting;
- what information on violence against Aboriginal women is currently being collected by organizations and ministries;
- recommendations for improving the way data and information is collected and any potential projects; and,
- funding opportunities.

To date the sub-committee has identified a number of indicators relevant to measuring violence against Aboriginal women as well as data sources that support the collection of this information. The sub-committee is currently examining the relative strengths and limitations of the available data and is preparing a report to be submitted to the Joint Working Group in fall 2012.

The sub-committee is also looking at potential lessons to be learned in terms of data collection being undertaken in other jurisdictions outside Ontario as part of the intergovernmental processes, aimed at responding to violence against Aboriginal women.

The Data and Information Sub-committee is already having a positive impact on collaborative efforts to improve data collection on violence against Aboriginal women. In summer 2012, the Ontario Women's Directorate invited the Aboriginal partners to provide feedback on consultations undertaken by Statistics Canada in preparation for the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization. This advice was incorporated into the comments that the Ontario Women's Directorate provided to Statistics Canada and included over-arching concerns with the survey methodology used in the GSS, as well as comments related to the importance of understanding residential school experiences and the links between victimization and housing.

### **Undertaking Targeted Research in Priority Areas**

Aboriginal partners are undertaking innovative and culturally relevant research projects and have identified several priority research areas to improve understanding of violence in Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal partners presented the results of these projects to the Joint Working Group to raise awareness and build capacity. Supported by funding from the Ontario Women's Directorate and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, the following projects have been completed:

- Discussion paper on women's experience of abuse (OFIFC)
- Research into the experience of Aboriginal women who are survivors of the sex trade and recommendations to guide policy and program development (ONWA)
- Discussion paper on the impact of prescription drug abuse on violence against Aboriginal women (ONWA).

OFIFC has received funding from the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs to develop the research design for *Breaking Free: Phase Two*, which explores research design elements for updating ONWA's *Breaking Free*. The research partnership between ONWA and OFIFC will lead the way for knowledge generation

on safety for women's disclosure of violence and healing. This research partnership allows for research that is culturally relevant, while satisfying the requirement for academic rigor.

### **Women's Policy and Research Project**

ONWA's Women's Policy and Research Project, which was funded by the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, supported primary research to better understand how to support Aboriginal women in Ontario to build their research and policy capacity. A secondary function was to create an information clearinghouse of literature relevant to violence against Aboriginal women. The clearinghouse would make relevant information readily available to service providers, researchers, students, or Aboriginal women experiencing violence. Funding ended prior to implementation, and funds would be needed to finalize and maintain the clearinghouse and to implement the findings from the research project.

## **2. LEGAL REFORM AND LEGISLATIVE CHANGE**

The *Strategic Framework* emphasizes the need for culturally relevant supports for Aboriginal women to reduce the trauma and victimization they face when accessing services. The Joint Working Group's development of a culturally relevant gender-based analysis tool will help government ministries develop more inclusive policies.

### **Activities**

#### **Developing a Culturally Relevant Gender-based Analysis**

With funding from the Ontario Women's Directorate, the OFIFC has developed a *Culturally Relevant Gender-based Analysis* (GBA) document. This document will help establish guiding principles for evaluation of programs and policies related to the *Strategic Framework*. Once the Aboriginal partners have finalized the culturally relevant GBA, the Joint Working Group will work to promote its application across provincial ministries.

The Aboriginal partners are engaging in promising work in the area of legislative analysis that moves beyond the current activities of the Joint Working Group. Both ONWA and OFIFC have modeled the use of culturally relevant GBA in response to recent initiatives of government. For example, in their submission to the *Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario*, ONWA put forward recommendations to ensure the unique needs of both rural and urban Aboriginal families are addressed. The

OFIFC put forward recommendations at Commission-led consultations, which were informed by community consultations with Friendship Centres and the discussions at the third provincial summit to end violence against Aboriginal women (that focused on social assistance).

### **The Aboriginal Justice Strategy**

The Aboriginal Justice Strategy sets out principles and key objectives to inform and guide the work of the justice sector as it strives to reduce overrepresentation of Aboriginal people as both victims and offenders in the criminal justice system. Aboriginal women continue to experience violence, whether at the hand of an intimate partner or a stranger, at significantly disproportionate rates. In recognition of this reality, the Aboriginal Justice Strategy has made the issue of violence against Aboriginal women a key priority and will continue to explore opportunities for innovative partnerships and renewed policy development to address violence against women within the Strategy's work in the justice sector.

The Ministry of the Attorney General will seek to coordinate so that the Joint Working Group and Aboriginal Justice Strategy initiatives are mutually supportive. In partnership with the federal government, Ontario funds the Aboriginal Court Worker Program which provides critical court worker services in 43 family and criminal courts across the province to help Aboriginal persons navigate the justice system. For a woman experiencing domestic violence, access to supports to assist her through the courts can be critical in her ability to move beyond the violence. There are six Gladue Courts in Ontario providing services to Aboriginal people including offenders, some of which provide services to women who are victims of violence. Many of the offenders have themselves been victims of violence. By dealing with cases in a culturally appropriate way, these Courts are working to break the cycle of violence within Aboriginal communities.

The Aboriginal Justice Strategy is mindful of the importance of training to ensure that persons working in the administration of Criminal Law understand the unique circumstances of Aboriginal people. Towards that end, the Criminal Law Division offers a five day annual course for prosecutors. This course includes sessions which assist prosecutors to better understand the challenges facing Aboriginal women who have experienced violence and thus provide more effective supports.

### 3. POLICY

As described in the *Strategic Framework*, there are many complex, interrelated factors and issues that result in higher rates of violence against Aboriginal women. The Joint Working Group continues to work at identifying and increasing opportunities to develop a comprehensive, multi-faceted policy approach that can effectively respond to violence against Aboriginal women and the *Strategic Framework*.

#### Activities

##### **Developing and Implementing Responses to the Aboriginal Sexual Violence Action Plan**

In March 2011, with funding support from the Ontario Women's Directorate, the MNO hosted a consultation session involving all Aboriginal partners to the *Strategic Framework* and other experts on sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. This consultation was designed to provide the foundation for developing a collaborative *Aboriginal Action Plan on Sexual Violence* that focused on:

- identifying priority issues related to sexual violence facing First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities;
- identifying innovative approaches and best practices for addressing sexual violence among Aboriginal communities; and,
- developing strategies for raising awareness of prevention, support services and healing strategies for those at risk of sexual violence.

The resulting report prepared by the MNO provided the basis for the *Aboriginal Sexual Violence Action Plan* subsequently developed jointly by MNO, OFIC, ONWA and IFN.

The *Aboriginal Sexual Violence Action Plan* was developed as an integrated component of the *Strategic Framework*. It takes an integrated and wholistic approach to addressing Aboriginal sexual violence, while providing tools for both immediate responses and long-term support. A Joint Working Group sub-committee has been established to respond to the action plan. The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs provided initial funds in 2011–12 to support the Aboriginal partners to undertake foundational work, such as the development of training modules for community workers, to support this broader project. Aboriginal partners are now collaborating to develop a funding proposal to the Ontario Women's Directorate for 2012–15, which would address priorities identified in the *Aboriginal Sexual Violence Action Plan*.

##### **Community-based Approaches to Combat Human Trafficking**

With funding from the Ontario Women's Directorate, ONWA undertook research into the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women through human trafficking. Their resulting report, *Sex Trafficking of Aboriginal Women and Girls*, recounts the experience of women in Thunder Bay who are survivors of the sex trade and presents recommendations to guide policy and program development. In response, the Joint Working Group established a Sub-committee on Human Trafficking to look at the issue of human trafficking and its impacts on Aboriginal women. As a first step, the sub-committee is creating an inventory of current programs and initiatives being undertaken by Aboriginal partners and government. It will also undertake a review of promising practices for addressing human trafficking in an Indigenous context. The sub-committee is co-led by ONWA and the Ontario Women's Directorate.

With \$60,000 in funding from Ontario Victim Services, Ministry of the Attorney General, ONWA also piloted a one year human trafficking project to provide culturally relevant outreach, support and health care services for Aboriginal women in Thunder Bay.

Joint Working Group partners are currently engaged in community-based initiatives that could serve as promising practices approaches to address human trafficking:

- ONWA currently co-chairs the *Aboriginal Women Involved in the Sex Trade* committee for the Thunder Bay region, which includes Aboriginal service providers in the Thunder Bay area. At this table, ONWA is able to raise awareness and bring greater understanding of the underlying issues of violence against Aboriginal women and facilitate coordinated responses better suited to meet the needs of those involved or at risk of involvement in the sex trade.
- The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services' Anti-Human Trafficking grant program supported a comprehensive approach to fight human trafficking through enforcement, prosecution, and victim services. Funding from this program enabled the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) to partner with the Anishinabek Police Service, Nishnawbe-Aski Police Services, and Treaty Three Police Services, on *Project Lookout*. *Project Lookout* was a detailed examination and analysis of police reports over the past five years involving elements of human trafficking. The information was analyzed to determine trends in Ontario.



- The OPP held free presentations on human trafficking throughout the province. While geared to the justice sector, the sessions were open to the general public and over 1000 people attended, including Aboriginal organizations, Aboriginal victims services and First Nation police services. As part of *Project Lookout*, the OPP conducted training sessions in London, Kingston, Orillia, and Thunder Bay.

#### **Mental Health and Addictions Service Collaboratives**

Aboriginal partners on the Joint Working Group have been invited to participate in the Provincial Collaborative Advisory Group, which has been established to provide strategic advice on implementation of the Service Collaboratives initiative.

#### **Housing Services Act, 2011, Special Priority Policy, and the Ontario Housing Policy Statement**

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing introduced the *Housing Services Act, 2011* (HSA), which reaffirmed the Special Priority Policy that gives victims of domestic violence priority access to social housing. The HSA regulations also require that local housing and homelessness plans include a section focused exclusively on victims of domestic violence, including an assessment of their current and future housing needs, objectives and targets, and proposed measures of progress. This legislation also led to the creation of the Ontario Housing Policy Statement, which further ensures that the needs of victims of domestic violence as well as those of Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve are identified and considered in the creation of local housing and homelessness plans.

## 4. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The *Strategic Framework* recommends that fiscal resources be dedicated on an ongoing basis to policy and programs designed specifically to address violence against Aboriginal women. Joint Working Group partners have undertaken several activities to increase the number of Aboriginal-specific initiatives available for victims of violence.

### Activities

#### **Trauma Training**

Supported by funding from the Ontario Women's Directorate, the MNO led an initiative on behalf of the Aboriginal partners to develop and deliver specialized training to front line staff working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit women who have experienced sexual violence. The purpose of this training was to increase their knowledge, skills, and awareness on ways to effectively support survivors of intergenerational as well as personal trauma.

Front-line workers identified by MNO, ONWA, OFIC and IFN participated in two training sessions held in December 2011 and May 2012 in Toronto. Targeted training is critical in helping front line workers acquire culturally based skills that will improve their ability to support Aboriginal clients who have experienced trauma while gaining important insight on resiliency and resource-building for Aboriginal people.

#### **Piloting Culturally Relevant Services for Victims**

Ontario Victim Services, Ministry of the Attorney General, has provided resources to support the design and delivery of culturally relevant victim services. Through its *Ending Violence Against Aboriginal Women Fund*, the four signatories to the *Strategic Framework* were provided \$1.6 million over two years (2011–12 and 2012–13) for projects that will benefit Aboriginal women, children, and youth who are victims of violence.

- The MNO victim services pilot project engaged two coordinators, one in northern and one in southern Ontario, to develop and deliver culturally relevant victim services training. This is allowing the Métis Nation to integrate victim services into all of its programs and services throughout the province thus improving client-based victim services. In addition, increased awareness of Métis culture will support the provision of culturally supportive mainstream victim services beyond the pilot project.



Aboriginal youth discuss the importance of appropriate programming and resources within the education system at the 2012 Summit V.

- ONWA is piloting culturally relevant victim services to Aboriginal women and girls who are victims of sexual assault in two centres in northern Ontario. It is also undertaking sexual violence outreach and education activities.
- OFIFC is piloting culturally relevant victim service programs in two Friendship Centres for Aboriginal children who have experienced violence. The goal for the programs is to mitigate impacts on urban Aboriginal children with tools to support positive development. A broad aim is to provide victims and Aboriginal women/caregivers, plus community partners and organizations with tools to design effective community responses to ending violence against Aboriginal women and children.
- IFN is supporting community-based, victim service projects in each of its member communities. It is also convening two capacity-building sessions for front-line workers who work with victims, one in northern Ontario and the other in southern Ontario. These capacity building sessions will be followed by a conference. The goal is to build capacity, individually and collectively, in addressing victim service issues in IFN communities.

Ontario Victim Services, Ministry of the Attorney General has also provided funding over three years (2011–12 to 2014–15) to establish a new, integrated victim service in remote Aboriginal communities on the James Bay/Hudson Bay coast. OVS partnered with the Mushkegowuk Council on the development of a culturally relevant victim service.

With funding from the Department of Justice Canada, the Nishnawbe-Aski Legal Service Corporation (NALSC) expanded its Victim Witness Liaison Program. This funding will allow victims in 34 First Nations in northwestern Ontario to receive culturally relevant, court-based support services. Aboriginal women who are victims of violence are a focus of service delivery.

Ontario Victim Services also secured \$1.11 million over five fiscal years (2011–12 to 2015–16) from the Department of Justice Canada. With this support, ONWA has established culturally relevant victim services in northwestern Ontario for the families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and for Aboriginal women who have experienced violence. They have also piloted culturally relevant victim services to Aboriginal women and girls who are victims of sexual assault in two centres in northern Ontario.

Ontario Victim Services also worked with the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority to secure funding the Department of Justice Canada to undertake foundational work towards the establishment of a child advocacy centre serving First

Nations in northwestern Ontario. Aboriginal girls who are victims of sexual abuse will be a focus of service delivery.

In 2010–11, the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services funded the Anishinabek Police Service and Lac Seul Police Service to implement crime prevention projects. Under the Safe Schools Grant, Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services has provided funding to five police services to implement projects that focused on: the establishment and enhancement of multi-disciplinary teams to address the risk factors associated with crime and violence among school-aged children and youth; the enhancement of police service community engagement; and reducing the risk of young people engaging in anti-social behaviour. The five police services worked with students and community partners from Aboriginal communities.

### ***Developing Mechanisms and Improving Processes for Victim Safety and Security During Court Proceedings***

Ontario Victim Services, Ministry of the Attorney General has established an inter-ministerial working group including representatives from the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Input on the court safety/security issue has been gathered from knowledgeable organizations such as the Nishnawbe-Aski Police Service.

Ontario Victim Services has joined the recently established Ontario Court of Justice and Ministry of the Attorney General Fly-In Court Working Group. OVS will work to resolve court safety and security issues through this permanent body. Several Aboriginal organizations are also represented on the Working Group.

### ***Aboriginal-specific Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committee***

The Ministry of Community and Social Services provides annualized funding to an Aboriginal-specific Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committee in Thunder Bay to support their continued work. This committee brings together Aboriginal survivors of domestic violence and representatives from the violence against women, justice and broader social services sector to address violence against Aboriginal women.

### ***Aboriginal Women's Helpline Pilot Project***

Aboriginal communities have highlighted the need for an Aboriginal-specific crisis line to increase access to culturally appropriate services. The Ministry of Community and Social Services is supporting Beendigen Inc., a native family healing agency, to partner with ONWA to pilot a helpline for Aboriginal



women in northern Ontario. The helpline is scheduled to launch in late 2012 and will be available toll-free, 24-hours a day, 7-days a week, 365-days a year with support available in a number of Aboriginal languages. Through the helpline, Aboriginal callers impacted by violence will receive reliable and confidential crisis support, information, and referral services. The helpline will make counseling available to Aboriginal women in remote and isolated communities with limited access to local services. The helpline has been named "Talk 4 Healing" with the guidance of Elders.

### **Renewing the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy on Ending Violence Against Aboriginal Women**

The Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy (AHWS) combines culturally appropriate health and family healing programs and services with a shared commitment by Ontario and Aboriginal partners to improve Aboriginal health and healing outcomes. In 2011, AHWS Overarching Agreements were signed with MNO, OFIFC, ONWA, IFN, and Grand Council Treaty #3. These agreements strengthen relationships and guide the effective delivery of AHWS programs through the establishment of new collaborative forums. The agreements with MNO, OFIFC, ONWA and the IFNs include a renewed emphasis on reducing family violence and violence against Aboriginal women and children. In 2011, the government committed a further \$1.5 million annually to support AHWS programs and services.

With the support provided by AHWS, MNO has been able to incorporate violence against Aboriginal women awareness and educational components in all its healing and wellness activities. The MNO will further develop and tailor violence against Aboriginal women initiatives to meet the unique needs of the Métis community, including in the areas of prevention, education, and the protection of women and their families. Through AHWS funding, OFIFC and ONWA have increased awareness and provided preventative programming in regards to violence against Aboriginal women.

### **Aboriginal-specific Children and Youth Programs**

Aboriginal-specific programs are important for addressing the unique needs of children and youth. Examples of initiatives supported by ministries and Aboriginal partners include:

- The OFIFC prepared a position paper entitled *Our Sacred Responsibility—Protecting Aboriginal Children & Youth from Family Violence* (2011). The foundation principles as outlined in the *Strategic Framework* set the framework for the development of an approach to address family violence and its affect on children and youth.

- ONWA recently completed a paper exploring the connections between child welfare and violence against Aboriginal women and an accompanying family guide. ONWA has also created a community guide for families that is specific to violence against Aboriginal women. This guide discusses violence, outlines best practices, and community responses in a cultural context.
- Through funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, ONWA is working to develop a provincial model for child welfare advocacy and programming based on consultations with Aboriginal families involved in the child welfare system and service providers.
- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services is working with the Tripartite Technical Table on Child Welfare to address First Nations child welfare issues, including increasing understanding and use of formal customary care as a placement option for First Nation children.
- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services and Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs funded the Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council through the Chiefs of Ontario to develop a policy on the engagement of First Nations youth. The Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council held five regional forums since 2011 and will release a policy report on engaging First Nations youth in 2012.
- The Ontario Women's Directorate funded the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies to work in collaboration with an Aboriginal Steering Committee to develop an Aboriginal practice guide and training curriculum. These learning resources will help child protection workers across the province provide an effective response to Aboriginal women and children affected by family violence.

### **Adequate, Safe Housing for Aboriginal Women**

Ensuring adequate and safe housing for Aboriginal women is important to responding to victims of violence. ONWA's *Nihdawin* program works with Aboriginal women throughout their interactions with the criminal justice system. The program puts a specific focus on Aboriginal female youth in Thunder Bay who are, or at risk of being, homeless. The *Nihdawin* program offers services such as counseling, cultural teachings, advocacy, and employment assistance.

Under the Investment in Affordable Housing Program, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services has identified Aboriginal women who are victims of domestic violence as a target group within their affordable homeownership component. The Investment in Affordable Housing Program has an Aboriginal

component for the construction of new rental units, homeownership and for repairs to existing units. Through the Aboriginal Housing Trust, 57 affordable rental housing units have been committed to vulnerable Aboriginal women and for Aboriginal women fleeing violence. Approximately \$6.2 million has been allocated to their construction.

### **Culturally Responsive Institutional, Probation and Parole Services**

The Ontario Parole Board (OPB) began an Aboriginal Circle Hearing pilot in December 2008. The purpose of an Aboriginal Circle Hearing is to create an environment that facilitates a culturally sensitive hearing process for Aboriginal offenders, and one that will allow board members to gain a better understanding of the offender and their circumstances. OPB has now expanded the pilot to the Vanier Centre for Women, and plans to further expand to the Central North Correctional Centre in 2012.

Aboriginal Orientation Programs *Understanding the Journey* for women and *Eastern Door* for men are currently being offered regularly in various institutions and through probation services around the province. Wherever possible, partnerships with Aboriginal community-based agencies are established to deliver programs to Corrections' clients.

Native Inmate Liaison Officers (NIOs) are in place in 21 of 29 institutions and Community Correctional Workers (CCWs) number 43 throughout the regions, with the majority in the northern region. Elder services are available at most institutions. Nine institutions have tipis, eight institutions have sweat lodges, which includes a new sweat lodge in the Thunder Bay Correctional Centre's women's unit, two institutions have teaching lodges and one has a sacred fire arbour. A Drug, Education, Alcohol, and Lifeskills (DEAL) worker addresses specific needs primarily related to substance abuse in Kenora Jail.

### **Staff Training Curriculum for Corrections Workers**

The Offender Programs Unit is continuing to liaise with OFIFC on the development of an Aboriginal-specific e-learning module that would contain cultural information about Aboriginal people and domestic violence. The development of an e-learning module will allow staff who provide services to Aboriginal clients access to training that is specific to Aboriginal domestic violence.

### **Northern Region Institutional Services Superintendent Advisory Committees**

The Northern Region has established Institutional Services Superintendent Advisory Committees, which includes members from local Aboriginal communities. These committees help to inform and direct the

services for Aboriginal offenders, and are currently in place at five sites, including the Central North Correctional Centre and the North Bay Jail.

### **Moosonee Cultural Exchange**

This is a pilot project whereby Probation Officers from southern regions of Ontario have an opportunity to work in the Moosonee Probation office for a period of time, providing services in the remote Aboriginal communities.

## **5. EDUCATION**

The *Strategic Framework* recognizes effective education as fundamental to efforts to end violence against Aboriginal women and girls. It also acknowledges the importance of public education in changing attitudes and behaviours towards ending violence against Aboriginal women. Education efforts should be designed to support the meaningful participation of people in this dialogue, acknowledging that some are just beginning to have this discussion while others have a greater level of awareness. Education needs to be grounded in research that supports the development, implementation and evaluation of a range of tools, from curriculum to targeted marketing.

### **Activities**

#### **Developing Education Resources**

Aboriginal-specific education resources are important to develop culturally appropriate community response. Examples of initiatives supported by ministries and Aboriginal partners include:

- With funding from the Ontario Women's Directorate, ONWA developed and piloted a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) curriculum and training for its front line staff. The purpose of this training was to build the capacity of workers to understand and identify signs or symptoms of PTSD in order to better assist and support Aboriginal women and their families.
- ONWA, in partnership with Contact North, has created an e-learning portal to provide education and training to Aboriginal women across the province.

#### **Expanding Public Education Campaigns**

The *Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin—I am a Kind Man* initiative inspires Aboriginal men and boys to help stop all forms of abuse against Aboriginal women and girls, and to treat them with equality. The *Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin* program was in five correctional

facilities. The pilot was designed to raise awareness for Aboriginal inmates' successful and safe reintegration back into their communities. The OFIFC will launch the Healthy Indigenous Male (HIM) Curriculum as a companion to the *Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin* correction facilities pilot.

The *Kanawayhitowin—Taking Care of Each Others Spirit* campaign is raising awareness about the signs of abused women and what to do to help victims and prevent abuse. In response to the first Summit, the Ontario Women's Directorate provided funding to the OFIFC to develop two public education campaigns—*Kanawayhitowin* and *Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin*. Recently, the Directorate provided \$1.6 million in funding for continuation of the campaigns in dozens of communities.

OFIFC has introduced a *Kanawayhitowin* youth initiative and is training Aboriginal youth facilitators to deliver successful workshops focusing on identifying and ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

#### **ONWA First Annual Honouring Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women Traditional Pow Wow**

In September 2012, ONWA will host the first *Honouring Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women Traditional Pow Wow* in Thunder Bay to honour those who have gone missing or have been murdered. The event will also provide support to the families and over the long term, it is hoped that it will raise and maintain awareness of this issue at a local, regional, and provincial level.

#### **Activities within the Provincial School System to Support Student Success**

To assess Ontario's progress in helping more Aboriginal students reach their full potential, it is necessary to have accurate and reliable data. In October 2009, the ministry implemented the collection of Aboriginal student self-identification data. This information will assist school boards in improving programs and supports for Aboriginal students, and will enable boards to focus their efforts on effective student achievement strategies.

One of the Ministry of Education's commitments in the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* is as follows: "in collaboration with school boards, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and organizations, develop innovative approaches to meet the needs of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students living in large urban centres." In November 2007, the Ministry of Education's Aboriginal Education Office (AEO) launched a pilot project that involved the development of three urban Aboriginal education models for First Nation, Métis and Inuit student/family/community engagement

that would be applied in different urban settings based on varying geographical and demographic circumstances.

The Ministry of Education and the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) have developed a strong working relationship since the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in August 2009. The Ministry of Education provided support to MNO for research on best practices in Métis student success.

## 6. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT / CAPACITY BUILDING

The *Strategic Framework* identified the need to build and sustain Aboriginal community and organizational capacity, as well as government capacity, to end all forms of violence and abuse against Aboriginal women and girls. The Joint Working Group has initiated activities to help raise ministries' awareness of issues and to strengthen the Aboriginal partners' capacity in the area of violence against Aboriginal women.

### Activities

#### **Building Aboriginal Partner Organizational Capacity**

In response to the *Strategic Framework*, the Ontario Women's Directorate has funded the Building Aboriginal Women's Leadership program, which supports initiatives aimed at increasing Aboriginal women's full participation in leadership roles in their communities. The program has enabled women to participate in training programs and information sessions on leadership development. Since 2007, more than 380 program participants have provided leadership in their communities by leading community events and programs, becoming board members and being elected to positions on band councils. For 2011–15, just over \$970,000 has been provided.

In early 2011, the Ontario Women's Directorate provided funding to help MNO and IFN increase their capacity in the area of violence against Aboriginal women. MNO prepared a discussion paper and a policy paper on violence against Métis women, which improved understanding of the unique needs of Métis women experiencing violence. The paper identified key concerns, gaps, and made recommendations. IFN held focus groups in select Independent First Nations and prepared a discussion paper on the forms and impact of violence against First Nation women. These papers will support MNO and IFN as they work to collaborate with other Aboriginal partners to advance the *Strategic Framework*.



In November 2011, COO became a partner on the Joint Working Group. The main priority for COO at the current time is to strengthen an internal response to the violence against First Nation women and girls through the creation of a work plan and a community-focused strategy. In September 2011, COO was mandated to form an Indigenous Women's Caucus that will act as an advisory body to the approach COO should take in regards to this complex issue. As part of the Joint Working Group, the Indigenous Women's Caucus will offer any recommendations for COO to bring forward at meetings. Some of the objectives that come out of the plan will require partnership between COO and parties on the Joint Working Group. The initiatives proposed within the plan will be subject to available funding and resources.

Since 2010, the MNO has taken steps to build organizational capacity and to address violence within communities through activities such as *The Strong Women Forum* (March 2011) and *Finding Your Voice Summit* (September 2011). The *Finding Your Voice Summit* gathered women from Métis communities across Ontario to begin a dialogue about violence and Métis-specific needs as well as priority activities for ending violence.

### **Building Government Partner Capacity**

The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs has provided funding to OFIFC for the development and delivery of cultural competency training modules for ministries' staff throughout the province. A cultural training session has been held for staff of ministries participating on the Joint Working Group. In addition, the Joint Working Group continues to act as an important platform to increase knowledge and awareness, with Aboriginal partners presenting in areas of sexual violence against Aboriginal women, human trafficking, prescription drug abuse, and Indigenous research methodologies among other related topics.

In 2012, the OPP ran a series of lunch time learning sessions for employees. Topics covered included: Prescription Drugs in First Nations Communities; The Far North Act and the Ring of Fire; Drug Awareness for Youth, First Nation Community Profile (Rama First Nation); Aboriginal Gang Awareness; and Pikangikum Pediatric Death Review: Suicide Factors in The North. There were a total of 693 participants and the sessions are available electronically for employee viewing.

### **Information Sharing and Knowledge Exchange**

Aboriginal partners and ministries have identified priorities for presentations and discussions at the Joint Working Group meetings. The Joint Working Group has already had presentations from the Ministry of the Attorney General's Aboriginal Justice Strategy,

and from a new provincial organization, Aboriginal Shelters Ontario. Representatives of Ontario Works and the Ontario Native Welfare Administrators Association have also presented on initiatives to support Aboriginal women who are victims of abuse and actions that have been taken to respond to recommendations that resulted from Summit III on social assistance held in February 2009. These presentations have provided an opportunity for the Joint Working Group members to raise key issues of concern, as well as learn about progress being made in addressing these issues.

## **7. LEADERSHIP**

The *Strategic Framework* articulated a vision of positive leadership that actively works to end violence against Aboriginal women. The Joint Working Group is helping to foster that leadership and is working to support Aboriginal partners as they develop strategies to address violence against Aboriginal women.

### **Activities**



Sylvia Maracle (OFIFC Executive Director and JWG Co-Chair), Sheila McMahon (OFIFC President), Premier Dalton McGuinty, Dr. Dawn Harvard (President) & Betty Kennedy (Executive Director) of Ontario Native Women's Association, Juliette Nicolet (OFIFC Policy Director), Minister Kathleen Wynne —Premier Meeting at Queen's Park, May 17, 2012.

### **Summit IV (Children and Youth)—Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women**

Since the inception of the Joint Working Group, OFIFC, ONWA, MNO and IFN, partnered with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to deliver the fourth Summit: *Protecting our Children from Violence: Our Sacred Responsibility*. The three-day forum took place in March 2011 and had 150 participants in attendance, representing a cross-section of stakeholders including Aboriginal community-based organizations, Aboriginal service providers and

government representatives. There were 25 youth participating in this Summit including representatives from the Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council. The Summit was designed as an opportunity for dialogue between members of the Aboriginal community, Aboriginal youth and staff from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The Summit provided an opportunity to have a better understanding of the issues Aboriginal women are dealing with when family violence occurs. Keynote speakers, panel, videos and presentations and facilitated sessions engaged participants in the further implementation of the *Strategic Framework* with specific focus on Ministry of Children and Youth Services programs for children and youth.

### **Developing Summit V (Education)—Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women**

In June 2012, ONWA, in partnership with the Aboriginal partners on the Joint Working Group, hosted the fifth Summit: *For Generations to Come: A Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*. This event was funded by the Ministry of Education and was focused on supporting youth at risk of violence and disengagement from school. Discussions at the Summit supported the Ministry of Education's work in fostering safe, inclusive and accepting schools and building healthy, respectful relationships. The Summit was well attended, with 160 participants representative of provincial ministries, educators, Aboriginal service providers and stakeholders. Both Minister Wynne and Minister Broten presented remarks at the event. A final report of the discussions and recommendations will be made available to the Joint Working Group and other provincial ministries.

### **Sharing of Best Practices, including the Joint Working Group Model**

In June 2011, Ontario sent a delegation comprised of representatives of the Joint Working Group Aboriginal partners, the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and the Ontario Women's Directorate to the National Aboriginal Women's Forum in Vancouver. This three-day forum provided an opportunity for Joint Working Group co-chair, Sylvia Maracle, to present on best practices from Ontario, as well as for delegates to hear about promising initiatives from other provinces and territories.

Following the National Aboriginal Women's Forum, the government and Aboriginal co-chairs shared information about the Joint Working Group with the Government of British Columbia. B.C. has had the opportunity to learn from Ontario's work as they establish their own Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women. This information sharing culminated with the participation of a representative of B.C.'s Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation at Summit V.

### **Preparing for the Third National Aboriginal Women's Summit (NAWS III)**

In April 2012, the Aboriginal Affairs Working Group, chaired by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, communicated its support for a third National Aboriginal Women's Summit (NAWS III), which will be held in Manitoba in November 2012. Ontario's preparation for the June 2011 National Aboriginal Forum in Vancouver was a successful example of the role the Joint Working Group can play in coordinating the selection of delegates and the identification of initiatives to be presented. Moving forward with the preparations for NAWS III, Aboriginal partners and ministries will continue to work collaboratively in selecting delegates and in developing common priorities and messaging.



Dr. Dawn Harvard (President) and Betty Kennedy (Executive Director) of the Ontario Native Women's Association with Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, Laurel Broten, and Jeanette Corbiere-Lavell (President) of the Native Women's Association of Canada at the Summit V – Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women.

**Summit IV and V “have provided an opportunity to have a better understanding of the issues Aboriginal women are dealing with when family violence occurs.”**

## **8. ACCOUNTABILITY**

The final direction in the *Strategic Framework* speaks to the importance of accountability to ensure that commitments remain legitimate and relevant. The Joint Working Group helps provide accountability for actions under the *Strategic Framework* through regular discussions between Aboriginal partners and ministries. Annual meetings with the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Leadership will further ensure that the highest levels are engaged in the response to the *Strategic Framework*.

## Activities

### **Deliver on the Joint Working Group Terms of Reference Accountability Commitments**

As directed in the Terms of Reference, the Joint Working Group has developed this progress report to report on accomplishments that will be shared with the Ministerial Steering Committee on Violence Against Women and with the Aboriginal leadership of the five partners to the Joint Working Group. The Aboriginal leadership of the Joint Working Group will also meet with Minister Broten and Minister Wynne in September 2012 to discuss progress and joint commitments.

### **Identifying Funding Opportunities (within existing resources)**

The Joint Working Group has provided a forum for ministries to discuss funding opportunities in support of priorities identified in collaboration with Aboriginal partners.

### **A Meta-Analysis of Community Recommendations for the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women**

The OFIC has prepared a meta-analysis document, which provides the Joint Working Group with a detailed analysis and evaluation of over 350 community recommendations from the Summits to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women. The meta-analysis identifies benchmarks for success and key components that can be used to assess *Strategic Framework* implementation. Moving forward, the meta-analysis will help inform the work of the Joint Working Group.

## MOVING FORWARD

The Joint Working Group has developed and agreed to a work plan that outlines priority initiatives that it will undertake. Some of these have been completed, and the remainder are well underway and include the following:

- development of recommendations to improve data collection and information sharing;
- identification of opportunities for actions to address human trafficking of Aboriginal women and girls;
- providing advice on the implementation of the new Aboriginal Women's Helpline;
- completion of a culturally relevant gender-based analysis tool and applying it to any new, relevant legislation/policy;

- development and implementation of initiatives to respond to sexual violence;
- creation of a safer environment for victims and their families during court proceedings;
- providing advice on reconceptualizing the Aboriginal Justice Strategy's continuum to better reflect Aboriginal perspectives;
- building Aboriginal partner organizational capacity through research/discussion paper initiatives and ministries' capacity through training;
- finalizing the report on Summit V and examining opportunities for addressing the recommendations;
- developing priorities and identifying Ontario's delegation to the third National Aboriginal Women's Summit (NAWS III);
- identifying opportunities for funding Joint Working Group priorities;
- ongoing information sharing, identifying emerging issues and providing advice on broader government activities/strategies that have an impact on violence against Aboriginal women.

The Joint Working Group will adjust its work plan as new issues and opportunities emerge, and is committed to a formal review of the work plan every six months.

As the Joint Working Group moves forward, continuing to raise the profile of ending violence against Aboriginal women, we recognize a number of areas that need to be addressed in order to respond to the *Strategic Framework* and improve our efforts. Moving forward, we are committed to building on our collective strengths and promising initiatives, while addressing the concerns and opportunities that arise from the complex issues involved in ending violence against Aboriginal women.

The Aboriginal partners have identified a number of challenges that have emerged since the inception of the Joint Working Group. One of the most pressing issues to date has been in increasing accountability for commitment and involvement of all relevant parties to ensure that responses to the *Strategic Framework* remain legitimate, open to pursuing the interests of Aboriginal peoples and that it is ongoing. Of particular concern is the lack of coordinated and integrated approaches in longer-term infrastructural supports, integrated policy approaches and raising awareness more broadly on violence against Aboriginal women.



The Aboriginal partners have indicated that:

- A coordinated, integrated approach requires realignment of government apparatus and mechanisms. From the perspective of the Aboriginal partners, the government representatives on the Joint Working Group should consist of the highest-level decision makers possible, inclusive of all relevant ministries so that the function of the Joint Working Group can expand beyond information sharing to more substantial policy discussions and resource commitments. This forum has the potential to address cross-government policy matters but that is contingent upon decision-making capability, financial commitments and a 'whole of government' approach to supporting the overall agenda.
- There is need for a more coordinated approach to the implementation of shelters for Aboriginal women in Ontario. This needs to be addressed through further research in identifying geographical gaps, service needs depending on the population profile, outreach approaches and an increase in funding. Also, culturally-relevant, wholistic programming for women, girls, children, youth, men and families that have been affected by violence is needed alongside restorative justice practices and education that is based on an Aboriginal approach to learning.
- In the area of research, Aboriginal partners promote the use of community-based research techniques that follow the principles of OCAP (ownership, control, access and possession) and Aboriginal methodologies. These types of projects adhere to the Aboriginal right of self-determination and more often lead to outcomes that are proactive in the immediate sense as well as in policy development.
- While the Joint Working Group has provided a venue for ministries to deepen relationships with the Aboriginal partners, fostering a number of innovative and promising initiatives, dedicated sources of funding to sustain longer-term activities are lacking. Dedicated sources of funding would enable the Joint Working Group to be more responsive to community needs and to have the flexibility to respond to emerging issues. Over time, funding for longer-term initiatives should be considered in order to sustain interventions and develop prevention strategies that address the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women. Moving forward, more coordinated approaches to sustaining longer-term funding is an important consideration.
- Closely related to funding infrastructure, progress on achieving integrated policy approaches to ending violence against Aboriginal women has become an issue of concern due to a number of key policy areas not fully engaged or accountable at the table. By increasing engagement with priority policy and program areas involved in addressing the factors contributing to violence against Aboriginal women (particularly poverty, education reform, municipal involvement, and youth engagement), these issues could be better addressed through inter-ministerial information sharing, infrastructural support, and inclusion of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal knowledge in decision-making processes for violence against Aboriginal women. At the same time, improved engagement with priority policy areas would increase the potential for achieving quality data on violence against Aboriginal women—an area that is severely lacking. Moving forward, ministries should engage more senior level representatives and more consistent participation in order to address cross-ministry policy approaches to ending violence against Aboriginal women.
- Finally, a persistent lack of awareness and knowledge about violence against Aboriginal women in the broader community and among key stakeholders continues to limit efforts to prevent and address violence against Aboriginal women. Moving forward, a broadly-based, culturally appropriate awareness campaign focused on violence against Aboriginal women would help ensure effective dissemination of messaging. Knowledgeable Aboriginal representation must be a part of the design of this campaign to ensure there are no inaccuracies and misrepresentations of Aboriginal peoples. Also, importance is placed on demystifying and accurately representing Aboriginal history, culture and contemporary issues in the Ontario education system. A goal that is aimed at improving relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

Achieving meaningful success in addressing violence against First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in Ontario requires a full commitment of leaders and decision-makers at all levels.

The Joint Working Group is pleased to report to the Ministers and Aboriginal leadership on progress on its progress to date and is hopeful that the report will inform the collective moving forward agenda.

### Background

The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), along with the Ontario Women's Directorate (OWD) as the lead funding source, established a partnership to hold the first of three summits on violence against Aboriginal women in March 2007. The second summit was held in September 2007 and OFIFC and ONWA partnered with the Ministry of the Attorney General to focus on the justice system as a key mechanism to address violence against Aboriginal women. The Ministry of Community and Social Services was the provincial partner for the third summit, held in February 2009, and the focus was on how its programs and services could be improved to support Aboriginal women and families who are working to end violence in their lives.

The first summit, along with the work from previous gatherings and various research reports prepared by the OFIFC and ONWA, all contributed to the development of *A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women* released in September 2007 with a recognition that there had not been sufficient engagement with respect to issues related to violence against Aboriginal women.

Since the release of the *Strategic Framework*, the Independent First Nations (IFN) and the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) have partnered with the OFIFC and the ONWA to improve coordination of services and end violence against Aboriginal women under the umbrella of the *Framework*. The IFN membership passed a resolution to officially support the *Strategic Framework* in February 2009.

The *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women* provides guiding principles and eight strategic directions to end violence against Aboriginal women, with goals and specific actions proposed for each strategic direction. The report also provides four overall target outcomes, and four major recommendations to be achieved through implementation of this strategy.

The OWD and MAA co-lead the process to coordinate the government's response to the *Strategic Framework*. The overall objectives and multifaceted approach of the *Strategic Framework* were endorsed by the members of the Ministerial Steering Committee on Domestic Violence in October 2008 as a useful tool for planning and priority setting. The Ministers committed to using the *Framework* to plan and establish government priorities, recognizing that some of the specific recommendations required further work and could not be supported at that time.

Ministers also agreed that the Ministerial Steering Committee on Domestic Violence would take responsibility for leading and tracking the government's response to the *Framework* and that this aspect of the Committee's work would be co-led by the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. It is expected that co-lead Ministers will work collaboratively with the leadership of Aboriginal organizations represented at the Joint Working Group to continue to advance progress made towards the goals of the *Strategic Framework*.

### Mandate

**The Joint Working Group (JWG) on Violence Against Aboriginal Women** will identify priorities and opportunities for support, development and implementation of policies, programs and services that prevent and reduce violence against Aboriginal women and their families.

This key goal will be achieved by:

- Providing guidance to advance the *Strategic Framework* and monitoring progress
- Providing advice and guidance to government on broader issues related to violence including but not limited to mental health, child welfare, and other related issues
- Knowledge exchange and information sharing within the government and between ministries and Aboriginal organizations, and sharing promising practices in program and policy development to improve outcomes for Aboriginal women
- Improving alignment of initiatives and programs that cut across ministries
- Identifying opportunities to respond to *Strategic Framework* priorities through better and/or more innovative use of existing resources and programs
- Identifying effective processes to respond to issues and priorities in a timely, coordinated manner
- Acting as a catalyst for continuous improvement, in collaboration across respective ministries and organizations
- Providing input with respect to federal/provincial/territorial activities related to violence against Aboriginal women
- Recognizing and taking under consideration cultural, gender and geographic differences between and amongst First Nations, Inuit and Métis, as well as different community strengths, needs and circumstances.

## Goals and Specific Outcomes

A work plan will be developed to include specific activities and deliverables. The goals and specific outcomes will be derived from Joint Working Group agreement on priority activities to advance the recommendations and/or actions identified during the summits and those contained in the *Strategic Framework*.

## Membership

The Executive Director of the Ontario Women's Directorate, and the Director of the Aboriginal and Ministry Relationships Branch – Social/Education, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, will alternate as government Chair. The Aboriginal organizations will appoint a Co-Chair(s).

Membership of the JWG will be determined by each member ministry and Aboriginal organization which will appoint one senior level member and a delegate. Members and delegates may bring supporting staff as needed.

The JWG will seek advice and input through various forums from Elder(s) and youth.

- **Ontario Women's Directorate:** related to its co-lead role in responding to the *Strategic Framework* and its coordination role for violence against women programs across government, as well as its role in providing grants for public education and training.
- **Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs:** related to its co-lead role in responding to the *Strategic Framework* and the ministry's mandate to promote collaboration and coordination across ministries on Aboriginal policy and programs.
- **Ministry of the Attorney General:** related to its role in ensuring that victims of crime can access a network of coordinated, victim-centred support services, and given its lead in the implementation of Ontario's Aboriginal Justice Strategy.
- **Ministry of Children and Youth Services:** related to its role in the provision of services in the areas of child welfare, Aboriginal children, children's mental health, and children and youth at risk and their families.
- **Ministry of Education:** related to its role in upholding the *Keeping our Kids Safe at School Act* and Ontario's Aboriginal Education Strategy, which includes initiatives that support learning and achievement for Aboriginal students.
- **Ministry of Community and Social Services:** related to its role in funding of shelters and counseling agencies to provide services to women and their children who have experienced abuse and/or sexual assault, as well as social assistance, dedicated supportive housing and homelessness programs, and as Ministry lead of the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy.
- **Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services:** related to its role in overseeing the policing services throughout Ontario, including the OPP, and working with Aboriginal communities to address their correctional and community safety service delivery needs.
- **Ministry of Health and Long-term Care:** related to its role in policy development and the establishment of LHINs, which are responsible for managing the local health system (including hospital-based Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres (SADVTs), and mental health and addictions programs for women.
- **Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing:** related to its role in the provision of social and affordable housing to women who are victims of domestic violence, as well as, special priority policy for victims of domestic violence.
- **Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities:** related to its role in developing policy directions for employment and training and delivering employment and training services to the public, including Aboriginal women.
- **Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres:** related to its role in ensuring that Aboriginal women and children experiencing violence are receiving the services and programs that they need and its contribution to the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy.
- **Ontario Native Women's Association:** related to its role in promoting the betterment and equality of Aboriginal women through programs and advocacy and its contribution to the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy.
- **Independent First Nations:** related to their role in improving the health and well-being of their member First Nation citizens and their contribution to the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy.
- **Métis Nation of Ontario:** related to its role in identifying existing and emerging healing and wellness concerns, providing community-level health programs and its contribution to the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy.



- **Chiefs of Ontario:** related to its role as an advocate for the 133 First Nations in Ontario. Participating as a full member since November 17, 2011.
- **Federal Government:** may be invited to participate as needed/appropriate in relation to its role in addressing violence against Aboriginal women and girls.
- Additional JWG members may be added as agreed upon by the JWG.

## Responsibilities of the Co-Chairs

- The Co-Chairs will work cooperatively and respectfully with the JWG members and provide leadership in guiding the JWG and coordinating its activities. They will foster these relationships in the best interest of the partners.
- Ensure that agendas are drafted, meetings scheduled, members advised of meetings, seeking input from members on issues requiring discussion
- Ensure all required material is provided to members to support their participation in the meeting discussion
- Chair meetings in an objective manner, working to develop consensus of the JWG membership
- Ensure minutes are taken and provided to members in a timely manner
- Take follow-up actions as recommended by the JWG membership
- Advise JWG membership of the results of all actions taken
- Provide periodic reports a minimum of two times per year on the deliberations and any advice from the JWG to Deputy Ministers of the Ontario Women's Directorate and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and to Boards of Directors, respectively.
- The Co-chairs will review the Workplan every six months to add and update initiatives as required commencing November 2011.

## Responsibilities of Joint Working Group Members

- With respect to violence against Aboriginal women, members are expected to be competent in Aboriginal cultures, history and present-day realities and to seek available resources to further their knowledge and understanding.
- Work cooperatively and respectfully with the JWG membership.

- Actively participate in the work of the JWG for a four-year time period
- Attend each meeting or send an alternate with working knowledge of the JWG prepared to actively participate at the meeting.
- Members are expected to seek direction and / or approvals on decision items prior to attending meetings.
- Members must disclose any conflicts of interest
- Review and comment on draft documents and supporting materials
- Liaise with their respective organizations/ministries to coordinate approval of recommendations
- Provide periodic reports and regular communication as defined by the JWG
- Identify potential policy/program areas for change and improvement
- Participate in planning activities
- Provide input on draft recommendations and other materials prepared for the JWG
- Serve as advocates for relevant issues to senior management of their respective organizations/ministries
- Keeping their respective organizations informed of progress

## Sunset Provision

The Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women will sunset in four years, Spring 2015, at which time the Terms of Reference will be re-evaluated.

## Reporting and Accountability

- The JWG Work Plan will outline the priorities, deliverables and timelines for the JWG initiatives.
- Each ministry and organization to provide periodic reports to their senior management, official, or appropriate political leader(s).
- An Annual Report will be developed by the JWG and submitted to the Co-leading Ministers with the expectation that it be shared with the Ministerial Steering Committee on Domestic Violence and associated Deputy Ministers.
- The JWG will request to meet with the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs on an annual basis to discuss progress and joint commitments.

## Meetings

The JWG will convene a minimum of four times a year, or as deemed necessary by its membership. Schedules for meetings are to be determined on an annual basis.

Sector/issue-specific sub-groups may convene as required at the direction of the JWG.

## Attendance at Meetings

In the event that a JWG member misses two consecutive meetings, a letter will be issued from the JWG Co-chairs acknowledging their absence and confirming their commitment to the working group.

## Timeframe

JWG members will review the terms of reference on an annual basis, to determine if changes are required.

JWG members will keep apprised of the development of the framework for the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy (AHWS) and other related initiatives to identify and consider opportunities for collaboration and alignment.

## Issue Resolution

JWG members will work to resolve issues by consensus.