YWCA CANADA

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COMMUNITY ACTION.

UNE VOIX NATIONALE.
DES ACTIONS LOCALES.

Advocacy Toolkit for the Rose Campaign for Policymakers

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Understanding Gender-Based Violence, Related Key Terms and its Impact

This section provides a shared foundation for understanding key terms and the broader context of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and its impact. When meeting with government officials, it's helpful to ground the conversation in clear, consistent language, especially when levels of awareness or involvement in GBV issues may vary.

That said, this section is not meant to be a script or a formal presentation. A best practice in meetings with elected officials and policymakers is to keep the tone conversational and responsive. You can use this background information as a reference to guide your discussion and clarify concepts when needed. You may not need to walk through every definition or statistic. Feel free to highlight the points that resonate most, depending on the policymaker's interests, knowledge level, or past engagement with GBV. Before your meeting, we encourage you to research the officials and their ridings. This can help you tailor your approach, identify areas of shared interest, and decide which parts of the content below will best support your key messages.

The term **violence against women** (VAW) is often used to describe acts of gender-based violence that specifically target women and girls. Violence against women recognizes the systemic nature of violence rooted in historical and ongoing gender inequalities.

Similarly, **intimate partner violence** (IPV), **also known as domestic or spousal violence and abuse,** refers to violence that occurs within an intimate or domestic relationship, including physical, emotional, financial, and sexual abuse. While intimate partner violence can affect people of all genders, women and gender diverse people face disproportionate rates of violence in these contexts.

When someone faces violence because of their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender, that's called **gender-based violence** (GBV). Gender-based violence is any act of violence based on someone's gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender. While we often think of it as "just physical", GBV typically falls into these four categories: emotional, physical, financial and sexual violence.

Understanding Gender-Based Violence, Related Key Terms and Its Impact

Gender-based violence can affect anyone due to their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender. However, some groups are at higher risk of experiencing GBV, including young women and girls (under 25), Black and racialized women, Indigenous women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, newcomer women to Canada, women with disabilities and women living in northern, rural or remote communities. People who are part of more than one of these communities are at an even higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence. (Government of Canada, It's Not Just Campaign, 2023).

Indigenous women and girls, gender diverse and two-spirited peoples in Canada, are and have been subject to disproportionate violence as a result of gendered-racial discrimination and colonial systems (Razack, 2002). Indigenous women are overrepresented in violent victimization in Canada. Despite accounting for about 5% of all women in Canada, they make up about 26% of all women killed by an intimate partner in 2022. Furthermore, 1 in 6 (17%) Indigenous women have experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence (Government of Canada, 2024). The sexual exploitation of Indigenous women is integrally linked to their economic inequality, devaluation, and lack of political power both in dominant societies and in their own societies (Razack, 2002; Kuokkanen, 2008).

Patriarchal and colonial norms have been entrenched in Indigenous communities. The Indian Act and government treatment of Indigenous women affirmed and perpetuated sexist ideologies, unequal and problematic gendered expectations and entitlements in Indigenous men (Barker, 2008). This, together with persistent economic and social marginalization and political disenfranchisement of Indigenous women, has led to a significantly higher risk of marginalization and violence within their communities (Ristock, 2006).

Facts About Gender-Based Violence

- **1 every 48 hours** – In Canada, a woman or girl is killed every 48 hours.
- Indigenous women are **six times** more likely to be murdered in Canada
- In Canada, a woman is killed by a former or current intimate partner every **4.2 days.**
- At least **119 children** were left without mothers in Canada in 2025 due to femicide.
- The **primary reason** survivors reported staying in unsafe living situations is the lack of financial resources to leave safely.
- **91%** of homeless women report that they have endured some form of violence or assault in their lifetime.

National research shows that, on average, about 1,000 women are turned away from violence against women (VAW) shelters every day in Canada due to capacity issues. Of those who manage to secure a temporary shelter bed, approximately 1 in 5 eventually return to live with their abuser (Statistics Canada, 2019). This often happens because survivors lack the financial resources and social support necessary to find safe and stable housing.

Gender-based violence and violence against women and girls is the only violent crime in Canada that is on the rise (Anthistle & Arella, 2024). Between 2014 and 2022, family violence rose by 14% and intimate partner violence rose by 19% (Anthistle & Arella, 2024). While these numbers are harrowing, we believe them to be far higher, as many do not report their experiences.

Although data from 2024 are limited, the numbers above have not changed based on what we have so far. For example, in Ottawa in 2024, there were 6,636 reports of intimate partner violence, while in 2023, there were 6,547 reports. In 2024, 186 women and girls were victims of femicide (Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability), and specifically in Ontario, there were 42 confirmed femicides in Ontario from the end of November to July of 2024; this is an increase in these numbers with there being 38 femicides recorded in the same time frame in 2023 (Weingarten, 2024).

The Cost of Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence

National Costs

In 2019, gender-based violence cost a total of 14.8 billion dollars in Canada, which is an average cost per victim of 21, 211$ in 2019 dollars. Of these costs, 81.9% are paid for by women. The economic costs sustained include $211.4 million in lost value from incremental medical costs incurred due to the violence (at a per-victim cost of $303), $318.8 million in costs associated with lower productivity ($457 per victim), $640.8 million in property loss, damage, and safety precautions ($919 per victim) and, tragically, $13.6 billion ($19,531 per victim) in intangible costs of pain, suffering, and loss of life to suicide. Each year, violence causes an estimated 4,472 suicide attempts and 313 deaths of sexual assault victims to suicide— the ultimate cost of being victimized.

While these costs capture the reduced economic capacity and suffering of victims of gender-based violence, survivors also bear the cost of $309.6 million of lost current and future income due to victimization. 53% of IPV survivors reported experiencing abuse at or near their workplace. Additionally, 40% reported that IPV made working difficult, and 8.5% lost their jobs (CWF, 2024). This reality effectively reduces a survivor's ability to consume goods and services in their communities. A $309.6 million reduction in household consumer spending would reduce national output (the total value of all sales and production in the economy) by $443.8 million in 2019 constant dollars. For every one dollar of reduced spending by survivors, $1.43 less economic value in sales and domestic production is generated, reducing Canada's GDP by $255 million (ESVA Canada, 2026).

A Province Case Study:

In British Columbia, it is estimated that gender-based violence costs the province $1.12 billion each year. In this case, physical and sexual assault drive 89.9% of total costs, with public services spending totalling $307 million and lost productivity from assault reaching $702 million annually. The costs associated with femicide, including lost human life and public services spending, total $27.6 million. And workplace sexual harassment contributes an additional $86 million each year through reduced productivity and employment turnover.

Altogether, BC governments face at least $295 million in direct service costs and $40 million in foregone income and sales tax, not including costs borne by victims and their families, nor the profound and unquantifiable emotional costs (YWCA BC, 2026)

Eradicating gender-based violence would not only save the Canadian government and population billions of dollars but also increase our economic prosperity by billions. Eradicating gender-based violence saves lives and contributes to a strong economic future.

YWCA Canada and Member Associations: Advancing the Movement to End Gender-Based Violence

YWCA Canada offers programs and services at the local level that ensure women and girls experiencing abuse, poverty, and homelessness can access support when and where they need it most.

- **Emergency Support:** YWCAs meet urgent needs, helping to ensure women and girls can flee unsafe situations, supporting over 14 000 women through our crisis support services.
- **A Safe Place:** We operate the largest network of women's shelters in the country, providing survivors and their children with a safe place to stay. We operate 35 emergency shelters and 2,810 housing units, with 25% of local YWCAs in the process of building, or having just built, new units. Through this work, we provide housing for 4,049 women and girls, as well as shelters for approximately 12,000 women and children every night.
- **Wrap-around support:** YWCA is more than a safe place to sleep. We offer the services and support women and girls need to thrive, including courses and counselling.

YWCA is...

- The largest operator of emergency shelters for women
- The largest provider of employment services and counseling services to women
- The second-largest provider of childcare in Canada

When it comes to experience...

- YWCA Canada has worked in communities across Canada for over 150 years to advance gender equality.
- YWCA Canada represents 29 chapters across nine provinces and two territories.
- Combined, YWCAs serve approximately 600,000 women and girls across 260 communities in Canada every year.
- Given this, we are tuned into the needs of women and girls at a hyper-local level. We understand and see the realities on the ground.

Guide to Government Relations to Support Ending Gender-Based Violence and YWCAs Initiatives for Ending GBV

How to Request a Meeting

- Send an email to your MP, Senator or the other official you wish to meet with. Official email addresses can be found **here**.
- If you are **personally** a constituent of an MP, note this in your email, include your full name, postal code and phone number.
- If your organization works in an MPs riding, be sure to note this in your email and include your organization's address and postal code.

Sample email

Subject: Request to Discuss Addressing Violence Against Women and Intimate Partner Violence in Canada

Dear [Name of Official],

We are requesting a meeting with you to discuss how we can collaborate to address the urgent issue of violence against women and intimate partner violence and its impacts on women, girls, and gender diverse people.

[Organization] is a member of YWCA Canada, the largest shelter, counseling, and support provider for women and girls experiencing violence. We commend the federal government for its ongoing efforts to address violence against women, but the need for coordinated and comprehensive action remains critical.

Recent data shows that violence against women and intimate partner violence continues to rise in Canada, with intimate partner violence increasing by 19% between 2014 and 2022. Tragically, a woman or girl is killed every 48 hours in Canada. Furthermore, the economic cost of violence against women is significant, with intimate partner violence alone costing Canadians over $9 billion ($12 billion in 2025) annually. These statistics highlight the urgent need for sustainable solutions to reduce violence and support survivors.

YWCA Canada and our Member Associations are at the forefront of supporting survivors through emergency shelters, wrap-around services, and long-term advocacy. However, the demand for services consistently outpaces capacity. On average, over 1,000 women are turned away from violence against women (VAW) shelters daily due to a lack of space. Addressing violence against women requires adequate resources, policy action, and community collaboration.

We would greatly appreciate 30 minutes of your time to discuss potential solutions and opportunities for collaboration to enhance safety and support for those affected by violence and intimate partner violence.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding this request.

Sincerely,
[Name]
[Organization]

Suggested Meeting Flow

Before the Meeting

1. Discuss who will attend the meeting amongst the team.
2. Leave early to give yourselves plenty of time to get to the meeting.
3. Provide your name and ID to the security.

During the Meeting

1. Round of Introductions:
    - Introduce your organization: Your work, connection to their riding/region
    - Who are you? What is your role?
    - Why did you request the meeting?

2. Understanding the alarming impact of GBV
    - Provide an overview of the current situation in Canada, highlighting the rising rates of GBV and intimate partner violence.
    - Share why we should act and share key statistics, such as the cost of GBV.
    - Highlight the YWCA's impact, initiatives, and campaigns advancing the movement to end gender-based violence, including what we do in the community, the Rose Campaign, the NESS Fund, and more.

3. The Need for Sustainable Funding to Address GBV
    - Reinstate the cost of GBV
    - Share our Ask
        - Dedicated investment toward the implementation of a nationally coordinated, survivor-centric, comprehensive 10-year National Action Plan to end violence against women.
        - Invest in gender-based violence prevention and Intervention: In 2024, 187 women and girls were killed in acts of gender-based violence – a 26 percent increase since 2018. Violence against women shelters are full, waitlists for affordable housing are stretching years, and survivors are turned away daily due to a lack of space. This escalating crisis demands federal leadership. As a first step in addressing the epidemic of GBV, we call on the government to honour the commitment made in the 2024 Fall Economic Statement of $50 million to accelerate the construction and renovation of women's shelters.

Suggested Meeting Flow (contd.)

4. Ask for Questions/Comments: This is an opportunity to check in and gauge their level of support and address any concerns or needs for additional information. Refer to the commonly asked questions below.

5. Ask for their support: "[Name of Official], thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. We would greatly appreciate your support as we work to address gender-based violence and support survivors. Will you [insert specific ask here, such as advocating for sustainable funding or supporting specific policy initiatives]?"

6. Photo Opportunity [If the meeting was positive and you wish to share the conversation]

After the Meeting

1. Send a thank-you email, including relevant resources such as YWCA Canada reports, advocacy documents, and any sample leave-behind material requested.
2. Post a photo of your meeting on social media, if applicable

Follow-Up Email

Dear [Name of MP]

Thank you once again for taking the time to meet with us. We truly appreciate your willingness to listen to our concerns about the urgent need to address violence against women and support survivors.

We kindly ask for your continued support in advocating for funding and policy changes that will provide immediate and long-term solutions for survivors of violence against women and intimate partner violence. We believe that with your support, we can make significant strides in addressing this ongoing crisis. The rising rates of violence, including intimate partner violence, demonstrate the importance of continued investment and support.

We have attached to this email [name any leave behind material you are sending, or any material they ask you to follow up with]. The documents also highlight the essential role that YWCA Canada and its Member Associations play in providing support and comprehensive services to survivors.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss further, I would be happy to provide more information or meet with you again.

Thank you very much for considering our request and for your support.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Organization]

Sample Language for a Question at Caucus or QP

I recently had the opportunity to meet with [Name of Organization], a member of YWCA Canada, the oldest and largest gender equity organization in the country. They shared with me their work providing critical services to support survivors of gender-based violence and violence against women and empowering women, girls, and gender-diverse people to live lives free from violence.

Gender-based violence and violence against women remain the only violent crimes on the rise in Canada, with devastating impacts on individuals, families, and communities. The financial cost of GBV is significant, costing approximately $334 ($445 in 2025) per person annually, totalling $9 billion ($12 billion in 2025) nationwide. Beyond the economic impact, the trauma and long-term consequences for survivors are profound.

Organizations like [Name of Organization] are on the front lines of supporting survivors and breaking the cycle of violence. They shared with me that a significant step forward to addressing GBV is a dedicated investment toward the implementation of a nationally coordinated, survivor-centric, comprehensive 10-year National Action Plan to end violence against women.

Will the Government commit to dedicating sustainable investment toward ending violence against women and gender-based violence?

Our Asks and Recommendations

From coast to coast, gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) are impacting all members of our communities. For survivors, every day is an emergency. Now more than ever, we must support each other and work together to address GBV and IPV as a public health issue with devastating impacts in Canada.

Frontline organizations are working tirelessly to support women, girls, gender diverse people, and their families by providing programs informed by their unique needs. These include emergency shelters, permanent and affordable housing, childcare, employment, counselling, mental health support, and more. The needs in communities are increasing each day while funding remains stagnant. Survivors and the sectors that support them have spoken, and they demand action. Action that is community-informed and collaborative. Tangible actions that result in meaningful change for the multitude of survivors and service providers who remain closest to this issue.

Ask:

- Dedicated investment toward the implementation of a nationally coordinated, survivor-centric, comprehensive 10-year National Action Plan to end violence against women.
- Invest in Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Intervention: In 2024, 187 women and girls were killed in acts of gender-based violence – **a 26 percent increase since 2018**. Violence against women shelters are full, waitlists for affordable housing are stretching years, and survivors are turned away daily due to a lack of space. This escalating crisis demands federal leadership. As a first step in addressing the epidemic of GBV, we call on the government to honour the commitment made in the 2024 Fall Economic Statement of $50 million to accelerate the construction and renovation of women's shelters.

Rationale:

- Urgent and more significant investment is needed to address the scale of this crisis meaningfully.
- We must address the root causes of violence against women.
- We recognize that this will necessitate action, oversight, and coordination at the federal level in parallel with the work undertaken by provinces and territories.
- It is estimated that the combined cost of domestic and sexual violence to Canada's GDP is $8.4 billion annually.

Other Asks and Recommendations

[Other Asks – Optional to Share or Can be Shared in Another Context]

End anti-Indigenous racism and violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people through:

- Fully implement the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report.
- Fully implement the Calls for Justice in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry Report.
- Fully implement the recommendations of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples' Missing Records, Missing Children Report.

End the gendered housing crisis through:

- Dedicated funding for women's shelters, transitional housing and permanent affordable housing for women, gender diverse people and their families.
- Adequately funding the core operations of women's domestic violence shelters

Responses to Frequently Asked Questions/Concerns

Why should the government make this investment now? It's too expensive, and we need to be fiscally cautious to avoid inflation.

- Gender-based violence (GBV) remains the only violent crime on the rise in Canada, even post-COVID.
- The financial burden of GBV is significant, costing approximately $334 ($445 in 2025) per person annually, totalling $9 billion ($12 billion in 2025) nationwide. Beyond the economic cost, the human cost is immeasurable, as survivors face trauma, displacement, and long-term impacts. Investing in GBV prevention and support services now is essential to breaking the cycle of violence and reducing the financial strain on healthcare, justice, and social services.
- Investing in addressing GBV is not just a social responsibility; it is a sound economic policy. Survivors bear the most significant financial burden, but the costs impact healthcare, justice systems, social services, and workplaces.
- The annual cost of intimate partner violence (IPV) alone is estimated at $7.4 billion ($10.6 billion in 2025), and the productivity losses for Canadian businesses are substantial. It is far more expensive to address the consequences of GBV than to invest in prevention and support now.

Do you have examples of projects that have successfully addressed GBV?

- **Yes!** YWCA Canada and its Member Associations are leading the way in providing emergency shelters, programs, advocacy campaigns, and wraparound support for survivors of GBV.
- You can discuss topics such as the Rose Campaign, NESS Fund, Housing and Shelter in your community, and your efforts to end GBV programs, among others.

The federal government is already making historic investments in violence prevention with the NAP. Why is this needed?

- While the federal government has made commendable investments, GBV requires ongoing, dedicated funding due to its complexity and the rising rates of violence. Women, girls, and gender diverse people continue to experience high rates of violence, particularly among marginalized communities.
- To meet their needs effectively, a dedicated investment toward the implementation of a nationally coordinated, survivor-centric, comprehensive 10-year National Action Plan to end violence against women needs to happen. The creation of an emergency, direct payment to survivors of gender-based violence to allow them to escape unsafe situations on an urgent basis would also make a big difference in women fleeing violence and the situation of survivors.

Why not ask provinces/territories/municipalities for their support?

- This should be a collaborative effort involving everyone. YWCA Canada and its Member Associations work collaboratively with all levels of government to support survivors.
- However, federal leadership is essential in setting national priorities and ensuring that dedicated funding reaches the most affected communities. The federal government's actions can also have a precedent-setting impact on provincial and territorial government bodies to act.

Showcasing YWCA's Initatives to Ending Gender-Based Violence

Initiatives and Campaigns

Week Without Violence

Week Without Violence is part of a global movement with YWCAs across the country and around the world to end violence against women, girls, and gender diverse people. At YWCA, we know that not all violence is acknowledged or responded to equally and that some victims go unrecognized altogether. That is why, for more than 20 years, the YWCA has set aside one week in October as a Week Without Violence.

Each year, during the third week of October, Canadians and people around the world mark YWCA's Week Without Violence, a week-long series of community events promoting diverse approaches to creating a violence-free world.

People in schools, workplaces, and neighborhood organizations throughout Canada recognize this annual violence prevention initiative aimed at making violence a thing of the past.

Rose Campaign

YWCA Canada's Rose Campaign is a national advocacy initiative dedicated to ending violence against women, girls, and gender diverse individuals. Named after the original rose button created to honor the 14 young women murdered on December 6, 1989, at École Polytechnique in Montreal, the campaign seeks to turn a symbol of remembrance into a powerful call for action.

Together, we remember Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte, Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz, Anne-Marie Lemay.

Initiatives and Campaigns

National Emergency Survivors Support Fund (NESS Fund)

YWCA Canada conducted extensive stakeholder consultations with survivors to determine their needs in the National Action Plan. Survivors clearly articulated the need for upfront, material government support. YWCA Canada heard from survivors that not having enough money was one of the primary reasons they stayed in abusive situations.

In response, the creation of a one-time payment providing support to survivors is among the 100 recommendations identified in the Roadmap for the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence.

To address this urgent and unmet need, in July 2022, YWCA Canada launched the National Emergency Survivor Support Fund (NESS Fund) in partnership with twelve of our member associations. This initiative provides women, gender diverse people and their families with immediate financial support to leave unsafe homes or emergency shelters and begin their healing journeys.

Our experience delivering the NESS Fund has highlighted the need for federal government leadership to deliver this program. In the first year of the NESS Fund, we have seen requests for support far beyond what any single non-profit or charity can provide. We have also received many requests outside our twelve catchment areas. Financial support must be uniformly accessible, rapid and available to all survivors. Furthermore, providing this support must be designed with the increased costs and complexities of transportation and accessing services in mind for survivors in rural, remote, and Northern communities.

December 6 Fund

The December 6th Microloan Program offers no-interest-bearing microloans to women, gender diverse, trans, and Two-Spirit individuals who have fled or experienced gender-based violence within the last 12 months. These housing-related expenses include damage deposits, rent/mortgage payments, Power payments, and emergency relocation expenses. The fund is available in Toronto, Halifax and Muskoka.

Power of Being You and Power of Being a Girl

This program is YWCA's signature violence-prevention conference for girls ages 12-17. Several YWCAs across the country proudly hosted this youth conference to support the prevention of gender-based violence and promote discussion and dialogue about the issues youth in our community face, including healthy relationships, self-esteem, inclusion, consent, internet safety, and building confidence.