

EDMONTON: SAFE CITY

**The Community Response
to Preventing and Addressing
Sexual Violence Against Women
and Girls in Public Spaces**

**COMMUNITY COLLABORATION
COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS
TO THE CITY OF EDMONTON AND
CULTURE, MULTICULTURALISM
AND STATUS OF WOMEN**

February 20, 2020

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and are honoured that Edmonton is Treaty 6 traditional territory, a traditional meeting ground, gathering place, and travelling route to the Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Métis, Dene and Nakota Sioux. We also acknowledge that the Metis also share a deep connection with the land. We acknowledge all the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries.

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Overview

The Issue

Sexual violence against women and girls is a serious problem in Edmonton and across Canada. In 2017, the Gender-based Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention Initiative sponsored by Councillors Bev Esslinger and Scott McKeen at the City of Edmonton commissioned a research study on sexual and gender-based violence. The study found that there was a need to promote the prevention of gender-based violence, and to make public spaces safer for women and girls.

United Nations (UN) Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative

In 2016 the City of Edmonton, in partnership with Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, joined the United Nations (UN) Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative to build safe and inclusive public spaces for women and girls in Edmonton. In 2017, a scoping study was conducted which identified three priority areas of focus: responding to and reporting sexual violence; transportation as a site where sexual violence occurs; and Indigenous women and girls as a group who have been made more vulnerable to sexual violence.

Collaborative Response

In 2018, community groups, Indigenous organizations, academia, corporate partners, and government representatives came together as the Edmonton: Safe City Community Collaboration Committee (Collaboration Committee) to recommend strategies that were evidence-based, actionable and sustainable which would make public spaces safer for women and girls.

Gathering International Evidence-Based Solutions

In October 2018, the City and partners, along with UN Women, co-hosted the fourth Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Leaders' Forum. Delegates shared successful evidence-based solutions which augmented the expertise of the Collaboration Committee when developing local solutions for Edmonton.

Recommendations

This report is a summary of the Collaboration Committee's recommendations to the City of Edmonton and the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women to reduce sexual violence and make public spaces safer for women and girls. The actions will be reviewed by partners to determine who is responsible for each action, based on scope, expertise, financial and human resources required.

The Need to Address Sexual Violence in Public Spaces

Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, continues to undermine the health, social and economic well-being of women and girls in Edmonton. Sexual violence in public spaces reduces freedom of movement; hinders the ability to participate in school, work and public life; limits access to essential services; and affects participation in, and enjoyment of, cultural and recreational opportunities.

The disproportionately high rates of sexual violence against Indigenous women and girls further reinforces the urgency of addressing this problem. In 2014, Alberta had the second highest number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada.¹ According to the federal Department of Justice, in 1980 Indigenous women accounted for nine percent of female homicide deaths in Canada, while in 2014, they accounted for 21 percent, despite the fact that Indigenous women represent only four percent of Canadian women. The number of

Indigenous women killed was six times higher than non-Indigenous women.²

Sexual violence remains a highly unreported crime in Canada. It is estimated that 95 percent of sexual assault incidents are not reported to the police.³ Although Edmonton had one of the highest rates of self-reported sexual assaults in the country (74.2 reported assaults for every 100,000 people), survivors need to be encouraged to report so that they can be supported, and perpetrators can be held accountable for their actions.

Vision For Edmonton: Safe City Project

In Edmonton, women and girls in all their diversity, participate freely and fully in public spaces without fear or experience of sexual violence.

¹ Native Women's Association of Canada, *Fact Sheet: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls*. Retrieved from https://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Fact_Sheet_Missing_and_Murdered_Aboriginal_Women_and_Girls.pdf, 2015.

² Department of Justice. *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/jf-pf/2017/july04.html>, 2017.

³ Rotenberg, C. *From arrest to conviction: Court outcomes of police-reported sexual assaults in Canada, 2009 to 2014*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/54866-eng.htm>, 2017.

Joining a Global Movement

United Nations (UN) Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative

In July 2016, the City of Edmonton became the 25th member city of the United Nations (UN) Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative (UN Women Safe Cities Initiative).

The United Nations Women's Safe Cities Initiative supports comprehensive approaches to the prevention of, and response to, sexual violence in cities around the world. The global initiative focuses on the unique role that cities can play in violence prevention and the ways that city programs, services and planning can contribute to the creation of safe public spaces.

Member cities begin their work by conducting a scoping study to develop a clear picture of sexual violence in their city. Working closely with key stakeholders, cities then build strategies to address sexual violence in the priority areas identified in the scoping study. These strategies are based on local contexts and include responses such as strengthening laws and policies, investing in safety of infrastructure, changing social norms, and ensuring evidence-based models are utilized to provide appropriate support to survivors of sexual violence.

UN Women Safe Cities Initiative plays a supporting role, linking cities to information, best leading practices and other resources.

Scoping Study

In Spring 2018, the City of Edmonton and Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women released a scoping study to better understand sexual violence in Edmonton's public spaces.

The study was executed in two phases. Phase 1 looked at developing a picture of sexual violence against *women and girls in all of their diversity* in Edmonton. This began with a literature review on sexual violence in Edmonton's public spaces, followed by engagement with organizations and individuals with specific expertise in, and lived experience of, sexual violence. The research consisted of nine focus groups, eight interviews, four meetings with stakeholder organizations and 10 written submissions. In Phase 2, additional research was conducted on the priority areas identified in Phase 1.

What We Found – Literature Review and Stakeholder Data

A qualitative thematic analysis of the findings of the literature review and the stakeholder data collection revealed that:

- The most frequent types of sexual harassment that occurs in public spaces include:
 - verbal harassment
 - unwanted sexual remarks
 - unwanted sexual touching
 - other forms of unwanted touching
 - repeated following and stalking with sexual aggression
- The public places in which women and girls are subjected to sexual violence include:
 - transitional space (to and from school, work and home)
 - public transit
 - taxis
 - ride-sharing services
 - central areas of Edmonton
 - indoor public spaces such as malls and recreation centres
 - bars and restaurants
- Some groups of women and girls have been made more vulnerable than others, including Indigenous women and girls, girls between the ages of 13 and 18 years, young women ages 18 to 25 years, racialized women, and gender minorities.
- The most common reason women do not report incidents of sexual violence is the fear they will not be believed or that they will be blamed.
- Sexual violence is seen as a 'normalized', 'everywhere', 'expected' part of everyday life, and as being endemic in our society. Persistent fear of sexual violence affects the way Edmonton women use or avoid public spaces, as well as their participation in community and civic life.

Areas of Focus

Based on the literature review and stakeholder engagement three priority areas for further research were identified:

- Responding to and reporting sexual violence
- Transportation as sites for sexual violence
- Indigenous women and girls as a group who have been made more vulnerable to sexual violence

Reporting and Responding

Reporting refers to providing a formal account or statement about an incident of sexual violence to an organization or institution that has the authority to take action to address the incident. Responding refers to the various processes of providing support to women who have experienced sexual violence, including investigations that hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. The most common reason for women not reporting incidents of sexual violence is the fear that they will not be believed. Victims of sexual violence who do report often get blamed and their experience is attributed to multiple factors such as where they live, being in the wrong place, and/or what they were wearing. Overall reporting of sexual violence in Canada is low, and survivors need to be encouraged to report incidents. However, the rate of police-reported sexual assaults in Edmonton is higher than the Canadian average. Initiatives to encourage reporting, as well as the impact of the #MeToo movement may have contributed to Edmonton's increase of reported assaults.

Transportation

Transportation includes, but is not limited to public transit, taxis, and ride-sharing services. More broadly, transportation encompasses the movement to and from sites of transportation, along with the various modes people use to get from one place to another. The most frequent types of sexual violence experienced by women and girls on public transportation, in taxis and in ride-sharing services, were verbal abuse, unwanted sexual touching, stalking, followed by sexual aggression (after a woman/girl leaves public transport).

Indigenous (Aboriginal) Women and Girls

Indigenous women experience significantly higher rates of violence than non-Indigenous women. Indigenous women are nearly three times more likely to report being violently victimized and are more likely to experience multiple forms of violence than non-Indigenous women. Additionally, the majority of violent acts towards Indigenous women are often not reported to the police. These challenges are further compounded by a lack of culturally appropriate resources to prevent and address sexual violence. Across Canada there is a heightened awareness of the need to respond to the serious and prevalent issue of violence against Indigenous women and girls. A number of strategies and actions led by orders of governments, municipalities, and non-governmental organizations including community and grassroots organizations are underway, including governments' responses to the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report.

Recommendations

The Edmonton: Safe City Community Collaboration Committee has recommended prevention and intervention strategies based on the three priority areas identified in the scoping study. The first three themes under the prevention strategies have been identified as priorities.

Guiding Principles for Actions

- Communities need to be safe places for women and girls.
- Survivors should be able to access timely culturally appropriate services and supports.
- All partners must be intentionally engaged and take responsibility to create and implement evidence-based solutions that result in positive change.
- Prevention and intervention strategies to reduce sexual violence must be data informed. Data collection should include intentional consideration of, and engagement with, individuals made more vulnerable to sexual violence.
- Colonization should be recognized as the root cause of sexual violence against Indigenous women. Colonization is perpetuated through historical and contemporary discriminatory policies and practices which result in the marginalization and violence against Indigenous women.

Implementation

Some of the actions can be implemented in the short term, while others address more complex, systemic challenges, and are long term. Recommended actions will require collaboration (between community as well as between orders of government), and the responses need to be innovative and adequately resourced (human and financially). Implementation should be aligned with other relevant reports such as the Final Report of *National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, as well as City of Edmonton and Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women initiatives and commitments, such as the Alberta Commitment to End Sexual Violence.⁴

⁴. Government of Alberta Commitment to End Sexual Violence. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/commitment-to-end-sexual-violence.aspx>

Prevention of Sexual Violence In Public Spaces

Inclusion of Indigenous Perspectives in Developing Interventions

Indigenous leaders, women and youth need to be included, heard, and their perspectives reflected in government decision-making to ensure supports are available to Indigenous survivors of sexual violence.

Recommendations:

1. When responding to sexual violence against Aboriginal/Indigenous women and girls, implement Indigenous-led justice response models, preferably with Indigenous representation in order to provide culturally appropriate supports.
2. Enhance and support ongoing relationships between sexual assault support organizations, Indigenous organizations and police services to improve service delivery to sexual violence survivors for service delivery to support women and girls.

Policy Amendment

City bylaws and policies may support a reduction of sexual harassment in public spaces.

Recommendation:

1. Amend bylaw 14614 to include prohibiting sexual harassment in public spaces.

Education and Awareness

Raising awareness and public education can shift attitudes and behaviours to prevent sexual violence in public spaces.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a bystander-focused social marketing campaign on sexual violence in public spaces which is prevention-focused, coordinated, evidence-based and adapted for different spaces. Ensure that this campaign embraces an Indigenous lens.
2. Provide support and enhancement of effective, ongoing campaigns such as the I Believe You⁵ and Moose Hide Campaigns⁶.

Ensure Safety of Public Infrastructure

Use a gender-based plus analysis⁷ in the planning and ongoing maintenance of public infrastructure to ensure the safety and well-being of Edmonton women and girls.

Recommendations:

1. Leverage relationships with City of Edmonton departments to ensure that a gender-based plus analysis is used in the planning of new public facilities and infrastructure.
2. Conduct safety audits of existing public infrastructure to identify where improvements can be made.

⁵. #IBelieveYou. Retrieved from <https://www.ibelieveyou.info/>, 2019.

⁶. Moose Hide Campaign – Standing Up Against Violence. Retrieved from <https://moosehidecampaign.ca/>, 2019

⁷. GBA+ is an analytical process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and non-binary people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. Status of Women Canada, *What is GBA+?*, <http://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-acis/index-en.html>

Intervention in Sexual Violence in Public Spaces

Training for First Responder/Justice Roles

Ensure evidence-based, trauma-aware, ongoing and coordinated training is available for those in key first responder and justice roles.

Recommendations:

1. Identify training programs for first responders that provides skills to support women from culturally diverse backgrounds and to ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect.
2. As a primary response to effectively support survivors of sexual violence, Edmonton Police Service should participate in effective ongoing cultural- sensitivity training to ensure survivors are appropriately supported.
3. Train and provide educational materials to Crown prosecutors on a trauma-informed approach to sexual violence prosecutions.
4. Support, where appropriate, the continuous review and evaluation of training.

Connecting Survivors to Support Services

Ensure survivors are connected to supports which are survivor-focused and led.

Recommendations:

1. Implement the donation of phones with emergency calling capabilities from public and private organizations to individuals who have self-identified, or been identified by agencies to be at a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence.
2. Install new and additional emergency phones or buttons in high-risk areas identified through available data that connect directly to the police or Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services (AASAS) One Line.

3. Explore alternative reporting options such as online, formalized third party and Edmonton Transit Services specific reporting line.
4. Support the Edmonton Transit Services initiative to have wifi available at all transit locations to ensure users can access support as needed.

Reporting Sexual Violence

Continue to encourage survivors to report sexual violence which can increase accountability of perpetrators and deter them from continuing to offend others.

Recommendations:

1. Promote the use of Edmonton Police Service's new online police reporting tool and encourage survivors to report sexual assault.
2. Support Edmonton Police Service in their ongoing efforts to foster relationships with community-based sexual assault centres.

Safety Protocols on Public Transportation

Implement appropriate safety protocols and standards for various modes of publicly accessible transportation.

Recommendations:

1. Edmonton Transit Service and Community Standards should continue to evaluate security at transit centres and LRT stations to ensure that the security concerns of women and girls are being proactively addressed.
2. Enhance formal protocol and training for Edmonton Transit Service and local Peace Officers' response to sexual violence.
3. Share recommendations on safety features and training incorporated by public transportation service providers with taxi and ride-sharing services.

Relationship Building

Establish or leverage existing Collaboration Committee to advise on implementation of recommendations and share information.

Recommendation:

1. Invite community organizations and academia to be ad-hoc or full members of relevant committees and working groups.

Next Steps

The City of Edmonton, in collaboration with Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, will determine which recommendations can be addressed in the short and long term based on the financial and human resources available. They will then work with community partners to implement the recommendations.

Glossary

First Responder

Professionals in a position of authority who are first approached by, or respond to survivors, to provide safety, support and guidance.

Gender-based Plus (GBA+) Analysis

An analytical process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and non-binary people may experience policies, programs and initiatives.

Public Spaces

Public spaces are the focus of the UN Women Safe Cities Initiative. The City of Edmonton and Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women recognize that sexual violence can begin in public spaces and move into private spaces, or begin in private spaces and move into public spaces. The initiative will include spaces that are publicly accessible to the majority of people.

Scope

The Edmonton: Safe City Initiative partners will identify the extent of work to be implemented and decide which partner is responsible for the action items.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a broad term that refers to any non-consensual activity of a sexual nature that violates a person's sexual integrity. It is characterized by a continuum of aggression, harassment and violence. Sexual violence includes sexual assault; sexual harassment; sexual intimidation; threats; stalking; indecent exposure; voyeurism; cyberstalking and cyber harassment; non-consensual dissemination of sexual imagery; sexual extortion; online luring; and sexual exploitation.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual comments, attention, actions or gestures. As is the case for other forms of sexual violence, a key component to sexual harassment is that someone does these actions without consent, permission, or agreement of the person or persons they are targeting. Sexual harassment includes non-contact forms, including sexual comments about a person's body parts or appearance, whistling while a woman or a girl is passing-by, demands for sexual favors, sexually suggestive staring, following, stalking, and exposing one's sexual organs to someone. Sexual harassment also includes physical contact forms, such as purposely brushing up against a person on the street or on public transportation; or grabbing, pinching, slapping, or rubbing against a person in a sexual way.

Survivor

A survivor is a person who has been victimized and copes with the trauma, while working on getting beyond the traumatic event. Survivors of sexual violence often experience short and long term physical and psychological impacts based on their experience of sexual violence.

Women and Girls in All Their Diversity

The UN Women Safe Cities Initiative is focused on women and girls in all their diversity because sexual violence is rooted in discrimination, structural and gender inequality. Particular groups of women and girls, such as Indigenous, newcomers, and LGBT individuals, experience higher levels of sexual violence than the general population. Furthermore, to successfully prevent and address sexual violence, there must be acknowledgement of the power differential that exists between men, women, and people of diverse identities and expressions.

Contributors and Acknowledgement

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