**ACWS Keeping Women Safe**

**Systems Leaders Interview – Overview and Summary**

**October 10, 2016**

**Participants**

* 19 individuals participated in the interviews, they represented:
	+ Victim Services
	+ Justice/Legal Services
	+ Police/RCMP
	+ Community Services
	+ Human Services
	+ Child and Family Services
	+ Health and Mental HHHesdfdServices
	+ Indigenous Supports and Service Providers
	+ Research and Academia

**The Role of the Government**

* There is an overall lack of standards and accountability guiding service delivery. There is also not a consistent understanding of what those standards should be and how they should be enforced and government has a role in developing and enforcing these standards. Government departments should work together to coordinate funding, and enabling the community to provide wrap around services grounded in consistent standards.

**Funding and Resources**

* Shortage of resources is a concern in every system, as a result of lack of sustainable (and coordinated) funding, increased administrative requirements and bureaucracy, lack of skilled staff and reliance on volunteers.

**Training**

* Training is described as a major gap in service delivery in the sector, and particularly as part of a collaborative response. Training as it is currently delivered in various areas is inconsistent, is not prioritized or mandatory, is not grounded in clear understanding of issues, and does not target all levels of service delivery. Groups that have been particularly highlighted as needing training include judges, police supervisors and generalist practitioners. The elements that have been highlighted as important to be included in the training include gendered perspective, cross-sectoral approach, focus on intersectionality (with respect to Indigenous, newcomer and other diverse populations), safety planning and accountability.

**Collaborative Response**

* Collaborative response is essential in order to address currently fragmented and siloed service delivery approach. Important considerations in developing a collaborative response include: regional differences; establishing a connection between community and the justice sector; funders having a role in encouraging partnerships; addressing and understanding professional differences; and designating dedicated persons to represent each system. Collaborative response should place victims and victim serving organizations in the centre, designed around client needs, and involving systems that are not necessarily IPV-focused.

**Rural and Remote Communities**

* There are significant issues with service access in rural and remote communities – impacted by long distances, lack of transportation and lack of services in the area. Oftentimes police is the only service available to respond to VAW. Access to mental health and addiction services were particularly highlighted, and suggestions were made to consider innovative long-distance approaches.

**Screening, Assessment and Safety Planning**

* Effective assessment is important in order to prevent low risk cases from escalating. However, assessment approaches are not consistent among different systems, in terms of assessment tools, assessment scope as well as knowledge of resources to which to refer.
* Health organizations (and some others) have an important responsibility for screening for VAW.

**Gendered Response**

* There was inconsistency among interview participants with respect to their understanding or valuing of the gender-based approach to VAW. Some were very clear that VAW is a gendered crime and has to be addressed as such; others understood the value of it but felt constrained by their position in the government in fully supporting this perspective; and some others believe that a gender-neutral approach is more effective in bringing people to work together.
* Prevention initiatives targeting men and boys are very important – the system leaders highlighted the focus on bystander responsibility, working with fathers, dating violence, focus on the whole family, and addressing violence in the workplace.

**Offender Treatment**

* There is a need to develop practice standards that focus on woman safety and linkages with women and women’s organizations, offender accountability, and comprehensive risk assessment informing modality of treatment. On-going treatment evaluation is essential to ensure program accountability, and it should consider treatment as part of the overall collaborative response. Feedback from women and their continued safety is one of the most important measures of treatment effectiveness.
* There are discussions about broadening the focus of the treatment to include the focus on the whole family and the community, looking at couples counseling and potential for using a diversion approach.
* Voluntary use of treatment is on the increase. Treatment availability and the need to hold offender accountable are key considerations here.

**Legal and Justice Response**

* There are significant barriers for access to legal supports both for the women and the offenders, primarily due to under-resourced systems and bureaucratic requirements. A court navigator position has been proposed to ensure that women’s legal needs can be addressed in a timely manner as well as changes in the Legal Aid system to make it more responsive.
* More work can be done with respect to appropriate use of the Protection Against Family Violence Act and particularly the use and enforcement of protection orders, which currently appears to be inconsistent. Better training re: PAVA is recommended at all levels.
* There are challenges associated with how courts function in addressing violence against women, including contradictory orders in family and criminal courts, disconnection between some courts and the victims, inconsistent administration of orders (e.g., Peace Bonds) and in general, challenges for the criminal justice system in handling complex cases. Diversion courts are being considered as one solution.

**Police Response**

* Police response has improved significantly over the last two decades by focusing on victim support and offender treatment. Police response is also most effective when it is delivered in a coordinated approach with the community and within different police forces across the province. There continues to be some inconsistency across the province in police response, particularly with respect to use of EPOs, laying of charges (e.g., dual charges), access to weapons and use of assessment tools.

**Keeping Aboriginal Women Safe**

* Keeping Aboriginal women safe requires a culturally-appropriate approach, including a long-term investment, looking at root causes, focus on healing and addressing cultural biases. It is also important to ensure that Aboriginal women have a variety of options if they don’t wish to remain in their communities.
* There is generally an acknowledgement among the systems leaders of the bias that exists in the systems resulting in overrepresentation of Aboriginal people. However, that acknowledgment does not necessarily extend to the on-the-ground services or training initiatives.
* Multiple initiatives have been developed by various systems to reach out to the Aboriginal peoples, through direct engagement with the communities and development of policies and frameworks guiding culturally appropriate services.

**Keeping Newcomer Women Safe**

* More newcomers are coming to the attention of the system due to the issue of domestic violence. Lack of knowledge about Canadian laws is one of the barriers for the newcomer community and it is best addressed in an indirect ways, without being labeled as a domestic violence program. Reaching out to the multicultural communities through immigrant serving organizations also appears to be an effective way of keeping newcomer women safe.
* The leaders would also like to strengthen their investment in culturally safe organizations, by recruiting multicultural staff, developing policies and hiring interpreters. However, more can be done in the justice system with respect to deportation.

**Considerations with Respect to Intersectionality**

* More services, and a wide array of services, are needed to support women with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, and marginalized women in general. There is also a major gap in resources for women who are not poor.

**Working with Children**

* Greater focus on children is required, both to address the impact of trauma and exposure to adverse experiences and to prevent their experience of domestic violence in adulthood.
* A significant proportion of children involved with Children’s Services is exposed to domestic violence, suggesting that more collaborative and training efforts including Children’s Services staff are needed.
* Of particular concern is the lack of communication between the criminal and family court systems and child access decisions in family court that may jeopardize the safety of both the mother and the child.
* There are few services available for children exposed to domestic violence and more are needed. Access to supervised visitation, while important, is challenged by costs, service availability and effectiveness. Child Advocacy Centers that provide counselling to children and that are involved with families for as long as they need is one example of a promising practice approach in keeping children safe.