



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 15.1.2
Halifax Regional Council
April 28, 2026

TO: Mayor Fillmore and Members of Halifax Regional Council

FROM: Brad Anguish, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 20, 2026

SUBJECT: **The Municipality's Role in a Society-Wide Response to Gender-based, Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence**

ORIGIN

June 4, 2024, Regional Council motion (Item No. 15.1.3 Alignment of Public Safety Reports):

MOVED by Councillor Lovelace, seconded by Councillor Mason

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare a staff report with respect to the municipality's role in providing a meaningful and sustained society-wide response to gender-based, intimate partner and family violence, including reviewing the municipality's internal policies and identifying any gaps

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

This report includes discussion of gender-based violence (GBV), intimate partner violence (IPV), and domestic violence (DV). Please take care of yourself while reading.

Support for individuals affected by GBV, IPV, and DV is available through visiting 211.ca or calling 211, the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia's toll-free line at 1-855-225-0220 or the Nova Scotia Association of Black Social Workers toll-free line at 1-855-732-1253.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

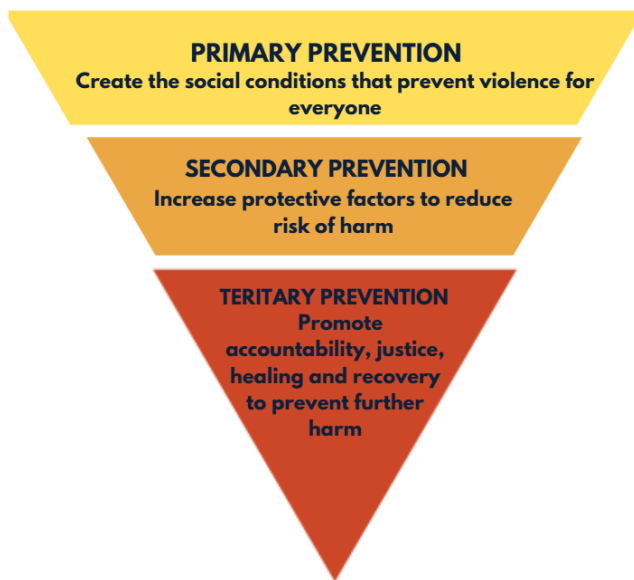
Across Canada, municipalities, including Halifax, have declared gender-based violence as an epidemic to reinforce the need for a society-wide response to this longstanding and growing problem. The Canadian Government understands GBV to be 'one of the most pervasive, deadly, and deeply rooted human rights violations of our time'.¹ In Halifax, police reported statistics demonstrate high and persistent rates of IPV and DV, with non-police sources indicating that the true prevalence is much higher, given that most

¹ Government of Canada (2022) [National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence](#)

incidents are never reported. GBV is also a significant contributing factor in other forms of violence, including gun-related violence and mass casualties.

Since Regional Council unanimously approved the municipality's first [Public Safety Strategy](#) in 2018, it has recognized that violence prevention, including GBV, is a shared responsibility and that every Business Unit has an important role to play. In response to the above Regional Council motion, staff conducted 1) a survey of Business Units to understand how they viewed their role in GBV prevention, 2) a survey of GBV service providers on their experiences with municipal services and 3) a jurisdictional scan of leading practices across Canada's municipalities. The report's research builds upon previous learnings and engagements that have been foundational to the continued development, implementation and refinement of many municipal initiatives described in the body of this report.

The findings of this research provide an overview of the municipal role in a society-wide response to GBV. Collectively, the municipality's work fully crosses the spectrum of violence prevention through:



Primary prevention. Examples include Gender Based Analysis + informed policy, laws, infrastructure and service design; training; public education and awareness. It includes creating and maintaining welcoming places, programs, and services.

Secondary prevention Examples include Youth Advocate Program, Youth Worx Program, Crisis Assistance and Response (CARE, the municipality's alternative crisis response program), and the Affordable Access Program.

Tertiary prevention Examples include Victim Services, Specialized Policing Units, and Community Mobilization Teams.

Many core municipal services play multiple roles across the spectrum of GBV prevention. HRM's **social and transportation infrastructure** is a core protective societal factor that crosses the spectrum of approaches to addressing GBV. Transit, for instance, enables residents to reduce social isolation and access primary and secondary violence prevention programs and services in recreation centres, libraries, parks and public spaces. Service providers surveyed for this report also identified transit as an essential service for victims and survivors. When home is not a safe space, the ability to move through the city becomes even more essential. Libraries, recreation centres, and parks also serve as vital safer spaces in such contexts.

One of the most impactful findings of this research is that while every Business Unit, in delivering the programs and services they provide, contributes to the prevention of GBV, not every business unit recognizes the direct role they play in a society-wide response.

Accordingly, staff recommend developing a strategic, coordinated approach to addressing this issue that supports each Business Unit in recognizing their contributions through shared outcomes. Helping each Business Unit to build on foundational strengths described in this report can facilitate the creation of

monitoring tools and reporting mechanisms aligned across the prevention spectrum. From there, capacity building and coordinating efforts, both internally and externally, can enable existing resources to be utilized to their maximum benefit, while identifying areas that could benefit from additional resources and support. The upcoming renewal of the municipality's Public Safety Strategy is an opportune period to collaborate on the design of this approach and will provide impetus for goal setting and ongoing improvement.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Direct the CAO, as part of the upcoming renewal of the municipality's Public Safety Strategy, to incorporate a focus area on Gender-based Violence, Intimate Partner Violence and Domestic Violence, with a goal of improving the municipality's internal strategic coordination so that the municipality may better define common outcomes for monitoring and reporting on its role in a society-wide response.

BACKGROUND

Definitions of Key Terms

Gender Based, Intimate Partner, Domestic and Family Violence

Gender Based Violence is inflicted on a person or people because of their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender.

It is rooted in the systemic oppression and discrimination of women, girls trans, and gender diverse people. The Government of Canada recognizes Gender based Violence as one of the most pervasive, deadly, and deeply rooted human rights violations of our time.

It can happen within **intimate partnerships** or **domestic and familial relationships**. It can include **human trafficking** and **child and youth commercial and sexual exploitation**.

It may take the form of harassment; physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, spiritual and financial abuse; coercive control; technology facilitated violence and abuse by immigration status.

The Canadian Government understands GBV to be 'one of the most pervasive, deadly, and deeply rooted human rights violations of our time'.² Nova Scotia has high and persistent rates of IPV and DV, with non-police sources indicating that the true prevalence is much higher, given that most incidents are never reported. In the wake of Nova Scotia's Mass Casualty event, rates of IPV and DV have spiked. In a period

² See footnote 1

of only seven months last year, seven women were killed in Nova Scotia in acts of IPV, in addition to a father of one of those victims.³ The prevalence of human trafficking in Nova Scotia is also among the highest in the country. Nova Scotia's rate of human trafficking has been consistently higher than other provinces (4.1 incidents per 100,000 population in 2024, compared to national average of 1.2 incidents across Canada).⁴ Among Census Metropolitan Regions, Halifax human trafficking rates are only second to Thunder Bay, Ontario 6.4 and 8.0 respectively. Like IPV and DV, human trafficking disproportionately and overwhelmingly impacts women and girls.

GBV impacts are much deeper than what the statistics show. Eradicating GBV would result in substantially safer communities for *everyone* because:

- children exposed to physical abuse or domestic violence are significantly more at risk for engaging in serious violent behavior later, such as gun violence. They are also at more risk for drug and alcohol dependency later in life, which in turn is also a risk factor for GBV;⁵
- engaging in GBV is the most common attribute, after being male, for committing acts of mass violence and the growing problem of violent extremism, as documented in the Mass Casualty Commission's report, among other research.⁶

A Whole-of-Society Approach

It was the mass casualty event in Nova Scotia in April 2020 that marked a significant growth in awareness and action on the insidious and longstanding problem of GBV. In March 2023, the Mass Casualty Commission (MCC) released their final report "[Turning the Tide Together](#)". The report captures the Commission's learnings from the inquiry and provides recommendations to make communities safer. Through submissions and testimonies from individuals, organizations and service providers, the inquiry process highlighted the linkages between GBV, coercive control, abuse, power and privilege, and the mass casualty event.

The 2019 [Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#) (MMIWG) Calls to Justice and [2024 Fatality Inquiry \(Tracadie, NS\)](#) recommendations⁷ also highlight the need for the sustained, meaningful, whole-of-society approach, in particular addressing the systemic inequities and violence experienced by, and perpetrated against, Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities in Nova Scotia and the barriers to accessing safe, culturally appropriate supports for people impacted by violence.

³ Armstrong, L. and MacDonald, M. [Gender-based violence spikes five years after Nova Scotia mass shooting](#) *CityNews Halifax*, April 17, 2025; Board of Police Commissioners [Halifax Regional Police – Gender-Based Violence Information Report](#), Halifax, Sept 4, 2024; Adsum for Women and Children: [Intimate Partner Violence An Epidemic in Nova Scotia](#), Sept 16, 2024.

⁴ Sutton-Preddie, D. [Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2024](#). Juristat, Statistics Canada,, December 8, 2025; YWCA: [Understanding Human Trafficking in Nova Scotia: Safer Spaces White Paper #2](#), 2020.

⁵ Importantly, *most* children exposed to violence *do not* engage in violence or substance use later in life. Rather, it increases their risk for this behaviour. See: van Baak, C., Eichelsheim, V. Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence: Type of Exposure, Coping Responses and Consequences. *Journal of Family Violence*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00832-1>; Donnelly K, Goyal M., The Epidemiology of Violence Exposure in Children *Pediatric Clinics*, 2023; 70, 1057-1068 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2023.06.005>

⁶ MacDonald, M; Fitch Leanne; Stanton. K, [Turning the Tide Together: Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission: Volume 3: Violence](#), March 2023; Donnelly K, Goyal M., The Epidemiology of Violence Exposure in Children *Pediatric Clinics*, 2023; 70, 1057-1068 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2023.06.005>;

⁷ The 2024 Fatality Inquiry (Tracadie, NS) refers to the inquiry into the deaths of Shanna, Aaliyah, Brenda and Lionel Desmond in 2017. The Province of Nova Scotia continues to use the full title of Desmond Fatality Inquiry, noting the Desmond family's request to honour the family's name and memory. Some community members and organizations refer to the inquiry as the DFI or Fatality Inquiry (Tracadie, NS), noting that naming the inquiry after the Desmond family, rather than the systemic injustices that led to their deaths, has had negative impacts on the family and broader African Nova Scotian community.

Halifax, along with many other Canadian municipalities, has declared gender-based violence (GBV) an epidemic and is implementing measures within municipal jurisdiction to strengthen its contribution to a society-wide approach to prevention. In November 2023, Regional Council directed staff to review areas of alignment and identify related recommendations and actions across three key documents: the [Halifax Street Checks Report](#), [Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for HRM Report](#), and the [Mass Casualty Commission Final Report](#).

A subsequent staff report—also the basis for the motion to which this report responds—identified areas of alignment between actions and recommendations in these reports and the municipality's *Public Safety Strategy* and *Police Transformation Study*. Following that [staff report](#) Council endorsed the Mass Casualty Commission's (MCC) recommendation V. 14 "Mobilizing a Society Wide Response" and declared GBV, IPV, and DV an epidemic that warrants a meaningful and sustained society-wide response. As part of that declaration, Council directed staff to return with a report to assess the municipality's role in addressing GBV including reviewing the municipality's internal policies and identifying any gaps.

DISCUSSION

To assess the municipality's role in a meaningful and sustained society-wide response, staff undertook the following actions:

- 1) a survey of Business Units to understand how they viewed their role in GBV prevention,
- 2) a survey of GBV service providers on their use and experiences with municipal services and
- 3) a jurisdictional scan of leading practices across Canadian municipalities.

Staff also built upon previous learnings and engagements that have been foundational to the continued development, implementation and refinement of many municipal initiatives described in the body of this report.⁸

The remainder of this report details the findings of this research, and the opportunities to enhance municipal efforts arising from intersection of these findings.

Municipal Efforts to Address Gender Based Violence: Business Unit Survey

Staff surveyed Business Units (BUs) to understand how municipal teams understand their role in preventing GBV. BUs responded with initiatives that support and protect employees experiencing violence, equip staff to recognize and respond to GBV through policies and programs, help residents access timely and trauma-informed resources; provide core services that contribute to safety and violence prevention, such as transit, libraries, recreation and community safety programming; and take upstream approaches to violence prevention through supporting the development of affordable housing, food programs and inclusive urban design. Several BUs also stated that they work with other municipal teams, community partners and levels of government to align and coordinate supports, services and responses. Survey respondents pointed to strong team relationships, open communication, and service delivery as HRM's key strengths.

For example, Legal and Legislative support for the Women and Gender Equity Advisory Committee helps embed gender considerations into municipal policies and practices. The maintenance of parks and other

⁸ These include engagements and research that informed the [Safe City & Safe Public Spaces Scoping Study](#), the municipality's forthcoming [Dismantling Racism and Hate Strategy](#), reports to Council regarding the impact of [Anti-Asian hate on Asian women and non-binary residents](#) and [Islamophobia on Muslim women and girls](#) and reports led by YWCA Halifax on the municipality's role in addressing commercial sexual exploitation, broadening the spectrum of responses to GBV and developing the municipality's Crisis Assistance and Response (CARE) team.

public spaces helps visibility, social presence, and perceptions of care and accountability—factors that strongly influence both actual and perceived safety for everyone, especially for those more at risk for sexual harassment. Reliable, affordable and accessible Transit helps victims and survivors reach the services they need to overcome violent and threatening behaviours.

The North American Indigenous Games, hosted by Halifax in 2023, stood out as a successful example of what an intentional, adequately resourced, societal approach to GBV prevention can look like in HRM.

Spotlight on the 2023 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) in Halifax: A societal approach to preventing Human Trafficking

International youth sporting events increase risks for human trafficking. HRM, in collaboration with NAIG partners, took a successful, society-wide and culturally grounded approach to preventing this form of GBV.

Ahead of NAIG, HRM's prevention preparedness focused on integrating measures into existing public-safety and operational planning, supported by strong inter-agency and Business Unit (BU) collaboration. HRM leveraged established structures to ensure community readiness and victim-centred response pathways. Internally, municipal departments facilitated situational awareness and bystander training for venue staff, Transit operators, volunteers and guardians. Inter-agency collaboration included alignment with the NAIG 2023 Host Society, Indigenous communities, provincial partners, and community service organizations, ensuring culturally informed, youth-focused safety planning. HRM amplified existing reporting mechanisms and 24/7 referral options, reflecting a preparedness model grounded in reducing stigma, while amplifying mechanisms for prevention, interagency and BU coordination, and survivor safety.

Overall, the survey with BUs provides a high-level overview of the municipality's current role in addressing GBV, as seen in the table below, organized according to outcomes each aims to achieve. (The full results of the survey can be found in Attachment 1)

Employees experiencing GBV are supported, protected, and able to navigate work safely

Human Resources develops and implements workplace policies and supports that address violence in the workplace and support employees experiencing GBV, including the **Domestic Violence Leave Policy**, **Respectful Workplace Policy** and **Workplace Violence Prevention Corporate Procedure**. They also provide training to employees and managers on policies and procedures and track and report on attendance in corporate training sessions.

Workplace policies and practices create a culture of respect, safety, and equity for all, regardless of gender identity or expression

The **Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Gender and 2SLGBTQIA+ Services Team** works closely with **Halifax Regional Fire** to support recruitment of women and gender diverse candidates and establish respectful workplace practices, safety and gender inclusion. They also collaborate with **Corporate Communications** to create internal and external communications that promote safety, inclusion and recognition of women and gender diverse people.

The **Indigenous Relations Team** supports culturally responsive municipal practices and strengthens municipal employees' understanding of the impacts of colonialism, MMIWG, the Calls to Justice and reconciliation through lunch and learns with community experts and the Indigenous Blanket Exercise training.

Residents who may be at risk of, or experience, GBV can access, safe, appropriate, and trauma-informed services and pathways to support

Halifax Regional Police (HRP) Victim Services is a civilian and volunteer unit that provides support to survivors/victims of serious crimes, including domestic and sexualized violence. The team has extensive training in trauma- and violence-informed approaches to GBV, IPV and DV. Victim Services also leads training and initiatives that increase police officers' awareness of the issues victims face and helps victims by connecting them to community agencies and services.

HRP's IPV and Hate Crime Units and **HRP and RCMP's Integrated Criminal Investigation Division** (including the Sexual Assault Investigative Team and Special Victims Section) are resourced and trained to investigate and respond to GBV.

RCMP Special Units & Victim Services provide the first point of contact for local community supports that residents experiencing GBV, IPV, or DV can access. The role is centred on early referral and navigation and creates response pathways and strengthen coordination links. All HRD watch members receive training to proactively offer Victim Support and referrals to 211. They are also trained in a trauma informed, victim centered approach, the use of ODARA (Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment Training Program) for risk assessment, and the operational guidance provided by the IPV Unit.

Community Safety, Parks and Recreation, and Halifax Libraries provide GBV-related training to municipal employees, volunteers and community organizations.

Community Safety supports residents experiencing GBV directly through divisions and programs including training in non-violent crisis de-escalation, bystander intervention, mental health first aid among others; housing and homelessness outreach and service navigation; the community based alternative to police Crisis Assistance Response (CARE); Community Mobilization Teams and the Collaborative Community Response Plan.

The Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC) receives presentations and statistics on gender based violence, domestic violence and intimate partner violence. The BoPC recently adopted, in principle, police performance metrics, which include two metrics on domestic violence. The BoPC can also request more detailed information from the police services, such as the data included in [this report](#), which can be used to guide decision making by the BoPC and Regional Council.

Children, youth, and families are supported through prevention, education, and early intervention

Parks and Recreation provide support, resources and capacity building to youth and families through the various community-based programs they offer, as well as programs for those more at risk through **Youth Worx, Youth Advocate Program** and **Multi-Service Youth Centers**.

Halifax Public Libraries offer a wide range of programs across branches – including many for parents, children, youth and families that increase well-being, connection, parenting support, youth development and more. Library branches are a safe, affordable, trusted space for everyone, creating social connectedness. Library branches are also a trusted space for supervised family visits and a gathering place where families can engage in a variety of programs increasing social, health and well-being outcomes.

Community Safety's JustFOOD, Child, Youth and Family Response Table and Preventing Violent Extremism initiatives increase protective factors against violence through programs that increase access to affordable, culturally appropriate food and increase social connectedness; strengthen system alignment in support of children, youth, and families; and support youth centered workshops and multisectoral partnerships to create safer communities for youth and address social polarization and hate that can lead to violent extremism.

The **Community Grants** and **Tax Relief for Non-Profit Organizations Programs** provide financial support to various community organizations that support survivors of violence, provide basic needs to vulnerable populations, offer child and family programming, affordable housing and other programs and services that increase protective factors against violence.

The **Affordable Access Program** provides subsidized municipal programs for eligible residents, including a discounted transit pass, recreation access and property tax exemption and deferral, increasing protective factors for residents experiencing economic barriers to participation in and access to municipal services.

Planning & Development supports the development of non-profit affordable housing projects focused on safe and affordable housing for women and children through the **Rapid Housing Initiative** and **Affordable Housing Grants Program**, with a further focus on housing for Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities through the **Rapid Housing Initiative**.

Municipal public spaces and services are safe and inclusive for everyone, regardless of gender identity or expression

Community Safety's Safe City & Safe Public Spaces Program supports policies, programs and practices to address sexual harassment and other forms of GBV in municipal public spaces.

The Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs supports Business Units with community engagement and partnership development to advance gender and 2SLGBTQIA+ equity and inclusion and safety, respect and visibility for the urban Indigenous community in municipal spaces and services. They provide trainings and educational resources to municipal employees on Gender Based Analysis Plus, 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion and important days of recognition such as Red Dress Day.

The Women and Gender Equity Advisory Committee (WGEAC) advise the Municipality on the impact of municipal policies, programs and services on women and gender diverse individuals and make recommendations to address gender equity in the municipality.

Halifax Transit created the **2022 Transit Code Anti-Sexual Harassment public education campaign**, increasing awareness of sexual harassment in municipal public spaces and information and resources for reporting incidents.

Planning and Development play a role in applying a Gender Based Analysis+ lens to assess project viability and approvals where applicable.

Halifax Public Libraries provide resources all branches. Staff are trained in trauma- and violence-informed resource navigation and support customers to access GBV supports in the community, as well as broader supports like housing, food and parenting programs.

Gaps and Opportunities for Improvement

A key finding from the survey is that while each BU contributes to GBV prevention through their programs and services, not all BUs see their work as part of a broader, society-wide response. Accordingly, there are significant opportunities to amplify awareness of a society-wide response from a municipal standpoint. Amplifying awareness can also help generate and test designs for a more coherent and, coordinated approach across the municipality and with external parties, identify avenues for training enhancement, and develop more coherent response pathways for leaders and employees in responding to, or renouncing, GBV.

Strengthening internal awareness of the municipality's role can also help identify existing structural barriers impeding the municipality's role. For instance, a notable barrier highlighted during this review was the legislative requirement for public disclosure of the names and addresses of recipients of the municipal Tax Relief for Non-Profits Program. Some service providers, for reasons of client safety, do not publicly disclose their location. Recognizing this barrier in September 2024, the Mayor of Halifax formally requested the Province consider a legislative change to HRM's charter that would enable it to protect the identification of properties serving victims and survivors of abuse that are in receipt of discretionary municipal tax relief. The receipt of this request was acknowledged by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in October 2024, but to date, no legislative changes have been forthcoming including from the recent Spring session.

Service Provider Engagement Survey

While the survey of Business Units provided a high-level overview of work underway within the municipality, it was important to also gain insight into how community-based service providers interact with municipal programs, services, and infrastructure.

With the support of YWCA-Halifax's Hub for Education Research and Evaluation (HERE) Services, the Community Safety Business Unit designed and launched a survey with a particular focus on strengths, gaps, and barriers to cross-sector collaboration, coordination, accessibility and safety outcomes.

Thirty service providers from community-based organizations and post-secondary institutions were individually invited to complete the survey. Seventeen service providers responded to the survey with their insights and perspectives on working with HRM services. The survey did not engage those in private practice.

HRM Services Frequently Engaged:

Survey respondents state that they most frequently connect with Victim Services and Police, which underscores the seriousness of cases arising within the HRM, across the province, and nationally. This aligns with other findings from the Mass Casualty Commission report and the University of Calgary's [SHIFT](#)

project which states that 73% of men who faced a criminal charge involving domestic violence had already been involved in an incident with police beforehand.

Service providers also note that Transit is another frequently accessed service, and a critical part of the exit strategies of victims and survivors fleeing GBV. Without Transit, victims and survivors may struggle to find affordable and accessible transportation to safe spaces.

Service providers also added that Halifax Public Libraries were a resource they often refer clients to as safe, barrier-free spaces where clients can access some basic needs like food, free menstrual products, internet access, public washrooms, and a warm and secure place to rest. Identification clinics at libraries are also a valuable resource for those who have had their identification stolen, destroyed, or altered through abuse or exploitation.

The Offices of Diversity & Inclusion and African Nova Scotian Integration Affairs were also frequently mentioned as places that service providers referred their clients who experience multiple intersections of marginalization for additional supports. Community Mobilization Teams were noted for their work providing healing spaces and addressing trauma as a root cause of violence. The Youth Advocate Program and Parks & Recreation's preventive focus on well-being, social connection and healthy development were noted as helpful for youth in particular. To a lesser degree, service providers also connect with more infrastructure and regulatory-focused services like Planning & Development, Public Works, and Compliance & Community Standards.

Identified Gaps, Barriers, and Opportunities for Improvement:

The research identified several themes in gaps and barriers outlined in survey responses. In general, service providers indicated they would like to see better response times for emergency services; more culturally safe and gender-inclusive services for youth; more consistent accompaniment practices when victims/survivors retrieve their belongings; increased non-policing responses like CARE; stronger relationships with HRM services; established points of contact; and adequate funding.

In addition to addressing the gaps and barriers identified above, respondents highlighted opportunities to strengthen system navigation to increase the overall impact of existing services. Improvements could include clearer, centralized pathways for accessing municipal supports; more consistent and publicly available information across service areas; and navigation supports designed around the needs and experiences of victims and survivors. Currently, service providers often rely on self-maintained contact lists, informal knowledge, and word-of-mouth communication to navigate HRM services and mitigate accessibility and safety challenges. While adaptive, this approach places significant pressure on individual relationships and informal networks. Strengthening system navigation would reduce reliance on these informal mechanisms and establish more predictable, coordinated, and accessible points of entry into municipal services.

Survey respondents also provided suggestions to improve prevention programs and strategies, with a particular focus on reducing barriers to affordable access programs that provide geared-to-income services in transit, recreation, and housing. Alongside these suggestions, service providers note the need for greater investment in GBV services and programs that remain under-resourced despite increasing demand.

A briefing note on the overall survey findings can be found in Attachment 2.

Jurisdictional Scan: Canadian Municipal Approaches

Across Canada, municipalities have declared GBV an epidemic and are implementing various measures and initiatives within municipal jurisdiction to contribute to addressing these forms of violence.

To better understand actions being taken by other Canadian municipalities, staff conducted desktop research on initiatives across the country. The scan included jurisdictions that met one or more of the following criteria:

- Comparable population to Halifax Regional Municipality
- Recognized leaders in municipal approaches to GBV
- Cities involved in UN Women's Safe Cities & Safe Public Spaces Global Flagship Initiative

Building on existing internal knowledge of the GBV response landscape, staff researched publicly accessible reports and websites to gather information on other municipal operations, policies and programs. The scan is not exhaustive; however, it represents staff's best attempt at providing a high-level overview of the breadth of Canadian municipal initiatives that address GBV and provides a solid foundation for future inquiry for local strategy design.

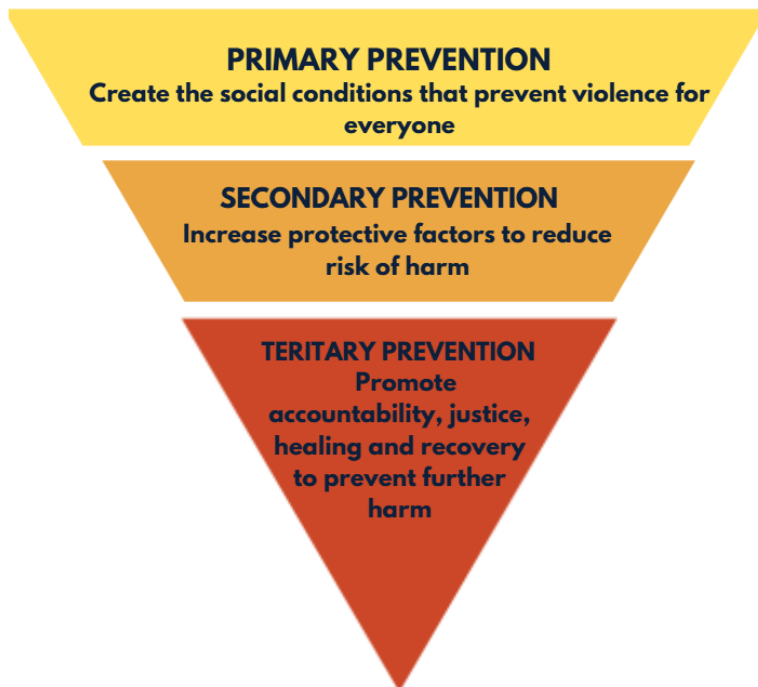
The scan demonstrates that, like HRM, other municipalities are addressing GBV through: human resources policies and supports, internal and external training and public awareness initiatives, upstream/preventative youth and family programming, grants and other funding mechanisms, public space bylaws and codes of conduct, safety features in municipal public spaces, partnership models, and embedding GBV and specific action plans to address the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice for municipalities.

While approaches differ across municipalities, the scan indicates a significant shift on how this work is organized, specifically in relation to modernizing policies and programming to build local and system-wide capacity for a whole-of-society response to GBV. This includes clearer policy direction, stronger coordination, and greater use of training, funding, and public space tools to support prevention and response. Municipalities are moving toward explicitly integrating and naming GBV into core municipal systems, policies, and internal operations, such as mandatory employee trainings for front-line staff and leaders. Municipalities are using policy tools that explicitly mention violence/harassment in by-laws, and or explicitly include wording on the need for a coordinated municipal response to GBV, IPV, and DV as a core focus area in policy documents.

Attachment 3 provides more details on the jurisdictional scan of Canadian municipal initiatives to address GBV.

Opportunities for HRM strengthen its contributions toward a Meaningful, Sustained and Society-Wide Response

Since Regional Council unanimously approved the municipality's first [Public Safety Strategy](#) in 2018, it has acknowledged that violence prevention—including gender-based violence—is a shared responsibility and that every Business Unit has a role to play. The findings of this research reinforce the municipality's role in a society-wide response to GBV, as reflected in the breadth and depth of practices identified through both internal and external survey responses. Taken together, these efforts span the full continuum of violence prevention, from investments in promoting safety and wellbeing for all, to supporting those who have experienced violence through accountability, healing, and recovery. For instance:



Primary prevention within a GBV framework focuses on addressing the social, structural, and systemic conditions that contribute to violence before it occurs. This includes HRM's GBA+-informed policies, bylaws, infrastructure, and service design; workforce training; and public education and awareness initiatives aimed at shifting norms, reducing inequities, and promoting safety and wellbeing. It also includes the creation and maintenance of welcoming, inclusive places, programs, and services that enable women and gender-diverse people to safely and equitably access public space and municipal supports.

Secondary prevention focuses on early intervention and targeted supports for populations at increased risk of experiencing

GBV in HRM. Within the municipal context, this includes programs and services designed to reduce risk, interrupt escalation, and address underlying vulnerabilities, such as the Youth Advocate Program, Youth Worx Program, Crisis Assistance and Response (CARE, an alternative crisis response program), crisis de-escalation skill development, and the Affordable Access Program.

Tertiary prevention addresses response and mitigation after violence has occurred, with the goal of preventing further harm, by promoting accountability and justice, and supporting healing and recovery for victims and survivors. This includes coordinated responses through Victim Services, Specialized Police Services, Community Mobilization Teams, as well as partnerships that support access to justice, stabilization, and longer-term recovery (see Attachment 1 for addition context).

Many core municipal services play more than one role in the spectrum of GBV prevention. HRM's **social and transportation infrastructure** is a core protective societal factor that crosses the spectrum of approaches to addressing GBV. Transit, for instance, enables residents to reduce social isolation and access primary and secondary violence prevention programs and services in recreation centres, libraries, parks and public spaces. It also stood out for service providers surveyed for this report as an essential service for victims and survivors. When home is not a safe space, the ability to move through the city becomes even more essential. Libraries, recreation centre, and parks also serve as vital safer spaces in such contexts.

One of the most impactful findings of this research is that while every Business Unit, in delivering the programs and services they provide, contributes to the prevention of GBV, not every business unit recognizes the direct role they play in a society-wide response.

Accordingly, staff recommend developing a strategic, coordinated approach to addressing this issue that supports each Business Unit in recognizing their contributions. Building upon these foundational strengths could facilitate the creation of a shared set of outcomes, monitoring tools and reporting mechanisms that are aligned across the prevention spectrum. From there, capacity building and coordinating efforts, both

internally and externally, can enable existing resources to be utilized to their maximum benefit, while identifying areas that could benefit from additional resources and support.

In 2025, the Department of Justice established a new Gender Based Violence (GBV) Division. There is potential to collaborate with the GBV Division to develop an intentional and strategic society-wide approach that aligns with provincial goals and outcomes, including opportunities to collaborate on systems mapping initiatives, system changes and strategic planning.

Thus, HRM has an opportunity to both deepen contributions that address this issue already underway, while also improving coordination, internal awareness, and a more consistent and outcome-driven corporate approach aligned with provincial partners. The newly established Commissioner of Public Safety Office is well positioned to enhance strategic and horizontal alignment across Business Units, building upon foundational work underway in BU's and Divisions such as Community Safety, Libraries, Parks and Recreation, Police, Diversity and Inclusion, among others.

A renewed Public Safety Strategy will identify ways to further cross-BU collaborations, create more accessible and easily digestible resources and enhance capacity for training and skills development. Improving organizational awareness on the role each of us play in preventing GBV can support not only the structural, but cultural, shift required for change: from senior leaders embracing the value of denouncing harmful gender norms and stereotypes, to front line employees feeling empowered to recognize signs of GBV and safely respond.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this time.

If Council accepts the recommendation to include GBV as a focus area in the renewed Public Safety Strategy, staff will return with a more detailed plan, including financial implications, at that time.

RISK CONSIDERATION

Regional Council declared GBV an epidemic, recognizing the magnitude of the risks posed to the health, well-being, connectedness and safety of residents and communities in HRM. This report demonstrates that municipal actions are contributing to a society wide approach to reducing the risks associated with GBV. The recommendation in this report aims to further mitigate these risks through a more comprehensive, strategic approach to addressing GBV across municipal Business Units, and with key collaborators and partners.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Community Safety Business Unit engaged YWCA's HERE program's services to support a survey of community service providers. Thirty service providers from a range of community-based organizations and post-secondary institutions across HRM were individually invited to complete the survey due to their extensive experience supporting victims and survivors of GBV as well as their work with people who cause harm and their expertise in navigating crisis-response systems. Seventeen service providers completed the survey which ran from February 20th – 27th, 2026.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

As stated by United Nations (UN) Women, climate change has devastating social, cultural, economic, health and human rights impacts that disproportionately impact women and girls, especially those who are most marginalized. Their research shows that during climate events and natural disasters women, girls and gender-diverse residents who are already more likely to be subjected to violence are at a heightened risk.

Preventing and responding to gender-based and other intersecting forms of violence is necessary to ensure greater equity and safety for women, girls and gender-diverse residents in times of heightened vulnerability caused by climate events.

Simultaneously, HalifACT climate prevention, mitigation and response efforts that take into consideration the experiences of diverse women, girls and gender-diverse residents can, by extension, prevent further violence.

ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council could choose not to approve the recommendation. This alternative is not recommended because Gender-based violence (GBV) has serious consequences for the health, safety, and well-being of individuals and communities in HRM. The recommendation in this report aims to reduce these impacts and support the municipality in creating safer, more inclusive, and more connected communities.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39 as amended

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to:

- (a) provide good government;
- (b) provide services, facilities, and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and
- (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities

Administrative Order Number 2020-002- GOV, the Social Policy

4. Council hereby endorses the following Social Policy Vision: "HRM is a safe, healthy, and welcoming community where everyone is able to participate fully in their community."

5. Council hereby endorses the following Social Policy Goals:

- (a) Strengthen community health and wellbeing;
 - (i) HRM citizens and visitors are safe where they live, learn, work, and play;
 - (ii) HRM shall be an active partner in supporting community wellbeing programs
- (b) Enhance equity and inclusion;
 - (i) HRM is a leader in building an accessible community where everyone can participate fully in life;
 - (ii) HRM is a diverse and inclusive community that supports everybody;
- (c) Build on social assets and community capacity;
 - (i) HRM communities, families, youth and seniors have access to social infrastructure that enables them to participate fully in their community;

8. The Social Policy Working Group shall meet at least quarterly to:

- (d) develop and guide the implementation of social policy tools and resources for HRM staff.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Summary of Findings from Business Unit Survey

Attachment 2: HRM's External Service Provider Engagement Survey on GBV

Attachment 3: Summary of Jurisdictional Scan of Canadian municipalities' efforts to address GBV

Report Prepared by: Amy Siciliano, PhD, Public Safety Advisor 902.201.0102

Attachment 1: Summary of Findings from Business Unit Survey

Intended Outcome	HRM Policies, Practices & Services
<p>Employees experiencing GBV are supported, protected, and able to navigate work safely</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources (HR) develops and implements the following workplace policies and supports that address violence in the workplace and support employees experiencing GBV: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Domestic Violence Leave Policy supports employees who are experiencing IPV or DV or whose child (under age 18) is experiencing IPV or DV by providing approved paid and unpaid leave as per the Nova Scotia Labour Standards Code. HR provides accompanying resources about how to support employees through this policy. ○ The Occupational Health and Safety Policy seeks to minimize/eliminate the risk of harassment and violence in HRM workplaces. ○ The Respectful Workplace Policy aims to establish a culture of shared responsibility and cooperation in promoting a positive work environment free from all forms of disrespectful behavior, harassment, discrimination and violence; prevent and promptly resolve concerns through early intervention; and outline reporting and response processes for employees and the Municipality. ○ The Workplace Violence Corporate Procedure aims to minimize the risk of violence in municipal workplaces and provide guidance on handling violent situations should they occur. ○ The Guidelines for Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Employees provide information and resources to municipal employees on promoting a workplace culture in which transgender and gender diverse employees feel supported, fully included and safe (including fostering an harassment-free work environment). ○ The Duty to Accommodate Policy provides a framework for reasonable workplace accommodations for employee safety. Though not GBV specific, it is a relevant policy for survivors seeking accommodations to return to work. ○ The Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP) provides confidential access to counselling, crisis support and referral services, which can support employees who may be experiencing and impacted by GBV. It allows employees to seek help discreetly. • HR also delivers instructor-led and self-guided training to staff on the above policies. • The Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Gender and 2SLGBTQIA+ Services Team works closely with Halifax Regional Fire to support

<p>Employees experiencing GBV are supported, protected, and able to navigate work safely (continued)</p>	<p>recruitment of women and gender diverse candidates and establish respectful workplace practices, safety and gender inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They also collaborate with Corporate Communications to create internal and external communications that promote safety, inclusion and recognition of women and gender diverse people, including campaigns for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, which help build awareness and support culture change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Indigenous Relations Team supports prevention and early intervention by building municipal staff awareness through internal education. This includes annual lunch and learn sessions led by community experts on MMIWG, the Calls for Justice, and reconciliation, as well as Indigenous Blanket Exercise training to strengthen understanding of the impacts of colonialism and support culturally responsive municipal practices. ● Halifax Public Libraries’ Workplace Violence Prevention, Respectful Workplace, Ethical Conduct, Conflict of Interest, and Youth Conduct and Safety in the Library policies support a safe work environment and address violence in the workplace.
<p>Residents who disclose experiences of GBV and/or seek help through municipal services can access, safe, appropriate, and trauma-informed responses and pathways to support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community Safety’s Training Program and Safe City & Safe Public Spaces (SCSPS) Program provide training to municipal employees on important topics related to GBV: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The SCSPS Program has worked with YWCA Halifax and Transition House Association of Nova Scotia to offer training to municipal staff and residents on issues of sexual exploitation and understanding and responding to GBV. ○ Community Safety’s Education Program offers Non-Violent Crisis Intervention, Mental Health First Aid and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills to municipal employees, equipping employees with skills, knowledge and confidence to recognize and respond to well-being concerns and crisis situations from a trauma informed perspective within the scope of their roles—skills that are directly related to supporting people who might be experiencing GBV. ○ The Community Safety Education and SCSPS Programs are collaborating with community partners to develop a Bystander Intervention Training for municipal staff and residents. ● Community Safety’s Community Standards & Compliance team support investigations into reports of GBV that occur within the municipally regulated taxi and limousine industry. Further, as on-the-ground municipal staff supporting residents with various bylaw concerns,

Community Standards/Compliance Officers are sometimes a first point of contact for someone experiencing GBV and seeking resources and support in the community.

- **Halifax Public Libraries (HPL)** provides training for frontline staff on supporting youth, navigating community resources, non-violent crisis intervention, GBV awareness and Duty to Report and tracks participation through their internal learning management system. HPL staff support the information-seeking needs of people experiencing IPV and regularly connect people in need with relevant services and Community Navigators connect people to a broad range of resources such as housing and parenting supports.
- **Parks and Recreation's Youth Programs & Services section** provides staff training on understanding indicators of GBV, reporting pathways and supporting people experiencing GBV.
- **The Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC)** receives presentations and statistics on gender based violence, domestic violence and intimate partner violence. The BoPC recently adopted, in principle, [police performance metrics](#), which include two metrics on domestic violence. The BoPC can also request more detailed information from the police services, such as the data included in [this report](#), which can be used to guide decision making by the BoPC and Regional Council.
- **Halifax Regional Police's [Victim Services Unit](#)** assists victims of IPV, DV and sexual violence. The unit is comprised of civilian employees and volunteers who work collaboratively with police members to assist with non-policing issues such as emotional support and referral information. Victim Services screens and reviews all IPV and sexual violence calls to police. They also provide crisis intervention and support to victims at a scene, case coordination with primary service providers, safety planning, and information to victims identified as being at high risk. Any person, regardless of gender or age, who has been the victim of a crime, may use the services of the Victim Services Unit.
- **HRP Victim Services** also designs and facilitates the following **training programs** for Victim Services staff and volunteers, police officers and recruits, employers in HRM and the community at large:
 - **Trauma-Informed Approach to Policing** delivered to police officers and recruits. Focuses on the impact of trauma on victims of IPV, examining how trauma can affect

decision-making, personal safety, and victims' responses—or lack of responses—to police intervention.

- **ODARA (Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment)** delivered to police officers and recruits. Focuses on the ODARA risk assessment tool to evaluate the likelihood of serious harm or death in DV cases.
 - **SafePlace–SafeSpace** offered free of charge to workplaces in HRM in partnership with Silent Witness Nova Scotia. This training helps employers to develop workplace safety plans and create safe, supportive environments where individuals experiencing IPV can disclose their situation and seek help.
 - **IPV Training for Police Recruits** is a five-day course that includes a trauma-informed approach to policing, ODARA, and an overview of IPV within the context of Domestic Violence Court and Provincial Court. It also addresses the seriousness of strangulation in IPV cases in collaboration with the Nova Scotia Medical Examiner's Office, available community supports and the various units within Halifax Regional Police that work with victims of IPV.
 - **Community Presentations** on GBV, IPV and sexualized violence upon request to community groups throughout HRM. These presentations offer general information, safety planning strategies, guidance on how to report incidents to police, and an overview of the support available through Victim Services.
- **HRP's IPV and Hate Crime Units and HRP and RCMP's Integrated Criminal Investigation Division** (including the Sexual Assault Investigative Team and Special Victims Section) are resourced and trained to investigate and respond to GBV.
 - **RCMP HRD Special Units & Victim Services** provide the first point of contact for local community supports that residents experiencing GBV, IPV, or DV can access. The role is centred on early referral and navigation and creates response pathways and strengthen coordination links.
 - As part of the 2026 HRM resource ask, the HRD IPV Unit has requested two additional sworn police officer positions and one Public Service Employee (PSE) position. These resources will strengthen our current efforts to provide enhanced IPV investigative support, strengthen offender management, and ensure Victims/Survivors receive the highest level of care and assistance with resources from Victim Services units.
 - In addition, all HRD watch members receive training to proactively offer Victim Support and referrals to 211. They are also trained in a trauma-informed, victim-centered

	<p>approach, the use of ODARA for risk assessment, and the operational guidance provided by the IPV Unit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Safety supports residents experiencing violence through the following initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Housing & Homelessness team works with other agencies within the sector to find ways to best support clients facing issues related to GBV. The team uses a trauma informed approach and do everything they can to support clients to find stable solutions within the scope of their roles and external resources available. ○ The Crisis Assistance and Response (CARE) Team was developed with the recognition that intake and response staff will encounter people experiencing crisis who are also experiencing GBV. CARE staff receive training on understanding GBV and providing a safe and appropriate pathway for people to seek further support. GBV service providers and individuals with lived and living experience shaped the program’s design and continue to guide adaptations to the CARE program. CARE provides safe and anonymous transportation to people experiencing GBV. ○ Community Mobilization Teams (CMTs) support the response and recovery from the experience of a traumatic incident. They are made up of a partnership among residents, community organizations and the Municipality. CMTs strengthen community access to resources and networks and work toward preventing violence by reducing distress, restoring unity and building resilience. ○ The Collaborative Community Response Plan (CCRP) addresses trauma as a root cause of violence by providing healing spaces for youth, families, and communities impacted by critical incidents.
<p>Children, youth, and families are supported through prevention, education, and early intervention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and Recreation’s Youth Programs & Services division provides various services and programs that support the development and well-being of youth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Youth Worx offers up to 24 weeks of paid job and life skills training for youth between 16-24, increasing youth’s employment readiness and skills ○ The Youth Advocate Program (YAP) works with youth ages 9-15 engaging in or at high risk of engaging in criminal activity. YAP increases the capacities of youth, families, and communities through advocacy, connections to community resources, and service provision and offers intensive and integrated interventions to prevent youth from being charged with future crimes. ○ The Girls United Program (offered only periodically, as it relies on external operating funds) is a peer-led program for female-identifying youth ages 13 to 15

who may be at high risk of criminal involvement. The program focuses on educating, engaging, and raising awareness about the supports and services available to female-identifying youth in the municipality. Through this building positive relationships and helping participants build strength, resilience, and support networks. It includes weekly sessions with structured and unstructured activities such as recreation, arts and crafts, photography, life skills programming, and cooking. The program is on pause this year.

- **Multi-Service Youth Centers (MYSC)** are dedicated spaces for youth to find support and services, build community and spend time with peers. MSYCs take a collaborative approach to the delivery of youth programs and services and seek to remove barriers to mental and physical health, provide drop-in programs, create inclusive youth services, provide physical spaces that are open and welcoming to youth, implement best practices for delivery of youth programs and establish partnerships to deliver non-HRM programs and services.
- **Halifax Public Libraries** offer a wide range of programs across branches – including many for parents, children, youth and families that increase well-being, connection, parenting support, youth development and more. Library branches are a safe, affordable, trusted space for everyone, creating social connectedness. Library branches are also a trusted space for supervised family visits and a gathering place where families can engage in a variety of programs increasing social, health and well-being outcomes.
- **Community Safety** has several programs/areas of work that aim to remove systemic barriers and address structural conditions that contribute to GBV including initiatives that focus on youth and family development, healthy relationships, mental health and trauma literacy, providing basic needs, reducing social isolation and increasing connection in and across communities:
 - **JustFOOD** Action Plan initiatives fund community-led food programming that increases food skills, promotes sharing of resources & knowledge, and increases social connectedness. These programs include the Community Kitchen at Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, the African Nova Scotian & Black Youth Food Leaders through One North End, and the Social Supermarkets at Spencer House. These and other JustFOOD programs increase protective factors against violence through increasing access to nourishing, affordable, and culturally appropriate food and building community resilience through working together to create programs tailored for unique community needs.

- **The Child, Youth and Family Response Table (CHART)** brings together partners from education, health, and community services to strengthen system alignment in support of children, youth, and families. CHART members help to identify barriers to service access, identify intersecting risks to youth such as housing instability, mental health and sexual exploitation, and promote more response and inclusive service delivery.
- **The Office of Diversity & Inclusion and Community Safety** host workshops and trainings that provide a youth-centered and safe space for young people, community partners, and local actors to explore how to better support youth and remove barriers for a safer community. This partnership also informs Halifax's participation in the [Project UPSTREAM](#) pilot with the Canadian Centre for Safer Communities. This project focuses on strengthening multisectoral partnerships and expanding preventative efforts to address issues of social polarization and hate that can lead to violent extremism.
- **Planning & Development's [Affordable Housing Grant Program](#)** prioritizes projects using various criteria, including projects' focus on priority populations within the [National Housing Strategy](#) (survivors of GBV, seniors, Indigenous Peoples, young adults, people with disabilities, people dealing with mental health and substance abuse issues, veterans, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, racialized groups, including Black Canadians, recent immigrants, including refugees and people experiencing homelessness). Past recipients of Affordable Housing Grants include Adsum for Women and Children, YWCA Halifax, and The Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia.
- **Planning & Development** has also supported the development of several non-profit affordable housing projects focused on safe and affordable housing for women and children through the [Rapid Housing Initiative](#). Three projects awarded funding focus solely on providing housing for women and children and one prioritizes at least 25% of units to women and children. Three projects focus on providing housing to African Nova Scotian and Indigenous residents.
- The **Community Grants Program** provides financial support to various community organizations that support survivors of violence, provide basic needs to vulnerable populations, offer child and family programming, affordable housing and other programs and services that increase protective factors against violence. While there isn't a specific GBV stream within HRM's [Community Grants Program](#), in [2024](#) and [2025](#), many grant recipients

	<p>used funds to do work that supports broader protective factors against GBV, such as food security, basic needs provision, poverty alleviation, housing, family and child programming and social connectedness within the Emergency Assistance & Public Safety and Diversity and Inclusion categories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tax Relief for Non-Profit Organizations Program helps eligible non-profit and charitable organizations reduce the amount of property tax they pay each year. The program has provided tax relief to organizations that support survivors/victims of violence, provide basic needs to vulnerable populations, offer child and family programming, affordable housing and other community benefits. • The Affordable Access Program provides subsidized municipal programs for eligible residents, including a discounted transit pass, recreation access and property tax exemption and deferral, increasing protective factors for residents experiencing economic barriers to participation in and access to municipal services.
<p>Municipal public spaces and services are safe and respectful for everyone</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Safety's Safe City & Safe Public Spaces Program supports the development of policies, programs and practices to address sexual harassment and other forms of GBV in municipal public spaces. Halifax joined on to the UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Flagship Initiative in 2019—an important milestone in the implementation of the 2018-2022 Public Safety Strategy. • The Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs supports Business Units with community engagement and partnership development with community partners focused on gender equity and provides training and resources on Gender Based Analysis Plus and 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion to municipal employees. • The Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Indigenous Relations team promotes safe and respectful municipal spaces by advancing awareness the MMIWG Calls to Action through internal education initiatives, including Red Dress Day promotion and educational webinars. The team also supports Business Units through Indigenous-focused community engagement and partnership development to enhance safety, respect, and visibility for the urban Indigenous community within municipal spaces and services. • The Women and Gender Equity Advisory Committee (WGEAC) advises the Municipality on the impact of municipal policies, programs and services on women and gender diverse

individuals. WGEAC's objectives are to support full participation of all women and gender diverse individuals in municipal civic and community affairs, advise on barriers to participation, monitor municipal policies, programs and services and make recommendations to address gender equity in the municipality.

- **Halifax Transit** ran a public education campaign on anti-sexual harassment and Transit Code in July 2022. The campaign's core message was that sexual harassment, and unwanted sexual behavior will not be tolerated on transit. This campaign was designed in collaboration with local community groups, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion and the Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Program and based on feedback received through Talk Transit surveys, Operators' experiences, resident reports through 311 and social media.
- **Planning and Development** play a role in ensuring a Gender Based Analysis Plus lens is used to assess project viability and approvals where applicable.
- Every **Halifax Public Libraries** branch has information and resources (such as pamphlets, posters and signage) on GBV posted in accessible locations around the library. Resources and information are also posted in more discrete locations, like washrooms and private areas, supporting people experiencing GBV to safely access information away from the eyes of a person causing harm.
 - Further, customers can use their preferred name and do not need to disclose their living situation or other personal information when obtaining a library card or accessing library resources, increasing safety for the customer.

Attachment 2: HRM's External Service Provider Engagement Survey on GBV

Purpose

To outline Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM) recent research on the experience of service providers when interacting with municipal services on issues of gender-based violence (GBV), intimate partner violence (IPV), and family violence/domestic violence (DV), and what the municipality can do within its scope to contribute to the whole-of-society response to gender-based violence.

Background

On June 4, 2024, Regional Council passed a motion to direct the CAO to "prepare a staff report with respect to the municipality's role in providing a meaningful and sustained society-wide response to gender-based, intimate partner and family violence, including reviewing the municipality's internal policies and identifying any gaps." (Item No. 15.1.3 Alignment of Public Safety Reports).

In preparation for the staff report, the Community Safety Business Unit engaged YWCA's HERE program's services to support a comprehensive engagement survey of community service providers. The need for a review of external service providers' experience interacting with municipal services and supports had become clear through the recommendations emerging from the Mass Casualty Commission's [Turning the Tide Together: Final Report](#), the 2024 [Fatality Inquiry \(Tracadie, NS\)](#), as well as the HRM initiated *Alternative Response to Intimate Partner Violence in HRM Key Findings Report* by YWCA. The report produced from the survey is titled, "Service Provider Engagement Survey to Inform HRM's Public Safety Strategy."

Findings from this report help guide the discussion in the staff report requested by Regional Council. The report also provides valuable information to better understand the interaction between service providers and the municipality in this focus area and identifies both strengths and weaknesses in the municipality's efforts to respond to gender-based violence.

Survey Highlights and Identified Challenges:

Survey scope & invitations:

- Thirty service providers from a range of community-based organizations and post-secondary institutions across HRM were individually invited to complete the survey due to their extensive experience supporting victims and survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), intimate partner violence (IPV), and domestic violence (DV), as well as their work with people who cause harm and their expertise in navigating crisis-response systems. Since invitations went out through community-based organizations and post-secondary institutions, the experiences of private practice service providers are not reflected in survey responses.
- The following community-based organizations and post-secondary institutions were contacted to complete the survey: Adsum for Women & Children, Akoma, Alice Housing, Avalon Sexual Assault Centre, Bryony House, Chebucto Connections, Coverdale Courtwork Society, Diverse Roots Therapy, Elizabeth Fry Society of

Mainland NS, Family Service Nova Scotia, ISANS, Laing House, Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, New Start Counselling, Nisa Homes / Ummah Mosque, Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, Shelter Nova Scotia (Barrie House & Nehiley House), The People's Counselling Clinic, THANS, The Youth Project, YWCA Violence to Resilience Team, Dalhousie University, NSCAD University, Nova Scotia Community College, Mount Saint Vincent University, Saint Mary's University, The Atlantic School of Theology, University of King's College .

- The survey was not intended to be an evaluation of HRM services, but rather an examination of service provider experiences to strengthen coordination, accessibility, and safety outcomes.

Demographics of survey responders:

- Seventeen service providers completed the survey. Service providers reported working in a wide range of roles, reflecting both the multidisciplinary nature of GBV/IPV/DV services and the reality that many service providers “wear multiple hats” within their organizations due to resource and capacity restraints. Most identified as front-line staff and nearly half were involved in crisis response, indicating frequent engagement with urgent, high-risk situations. Many also worked in counselling or other specialized roles, with additional representation from public safety and security positions.
- More than half of service providers relied heavily on HRM services over the past year, indicating that municipal programs and facilities play a consistent and ongoing role in a whole of society approach to supporting victims and survivors of GBV/IPV/DV. A small number (2) have not used HRM services to date, indicating an opportunity for connection and knowledge sharing.
- The most common ways that service providers indicated they learnt about municipal services were: HRM website, 211 Nova Scotia, word of mouth from other service providers and colleagues, and professional development opportunities.

Engagement with HRM services:

- Survey respondents indicated that the HRM services they most frequently access are Victim Services and Police, Transit, Public Libraries, D&I and ANSIAO, and the Youth Advocate Program, Community Mobilization Teams, and Parks & Recreation. Other services, like Planning & Development and Public Works, were also mentioned, but are less frequently accessed.
- When asked what tools help them navigate HRM systems, responders noted that 211 Nova Scotia was particularly useful. Other tools mentioned include web searches and the Break the Silence website run by the province. Informal knowledge sharing was also discussed as extremely impactful, particularly for marginalized youth and communities that have had historical and ongoing experiences of unjust/excessive force by law enforcement.

Gaps and barriers to working with HRM services:

- Service providers identified several systemic gaps that limit the safety, accessibility, and effectiveness of HRM services for people affected by GBV/IPV/DV.
- Key concerns centered on cultural safety, responsiveness during crises, and inconsistent practices across systems. Providers reported that many clients, especially marginalized youth and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, experience discrimination, re-traumatization, or a lack of understanding when seeking support, which reduces trust and their ability and willingness to reach out for help.
- Serious issues were also noted in emergency response, including slow communication, unclear follow-up, and safety risks in shelters. Inconsistent accompaniment for high-risk survivors retrieving belongings from unsafe homes was highlighted as a major gap. Providers emphasized the need for expanded non-policing crisis responses, noting that many communities face barriers to engaging with law enforcement.
- Service providers also stressed that effective client support depends on strong relationships and clear points of contact within HRM services, as well as collaboration across community organizations.
- Finally, chronic underfunding across the GBV/IPV/DV sector reduces organizational capacity and deepens inequities, especially for rural communities with fewer accessible supports.

Next Steps:

To address gaps and challenges identified through this research, the following recommendations were identified in the survey report:

- Increase capacity of supports provided by Victim Services and Police
- Expand non-policing responses (including CARE)
- Improve access to safe and reliable transit
- Invest in Public Libraries as safety hubs
- Increase cultural safety and equity across HRM services
- Enhance system navigation and youth friendly tools
- Prioritize relationship building and cross-sector partnerships
- Prioritize deeply affordable housing
- Increase public education and awareness

Alignment with Strategic Goals:

In response to a May 2024 [staff report](#) on this motion, Council endorsed the Mass Casualty Commission's (MCC) recommendation V. 14 "Mobilizing a Society Wide Response" and declared GBV, IPV, and DV an epidemic that warrants a meaningful and sustained society-wide response.

Conclusion:

The municipality offers a broad spectrum of services and supports across sectors that respond directly and indirectly to issues of GBV, IPV, and DV (including but not limited to community

safety and recreation programming, parks, community spaces and transit).

The responses and findings outlined within the *Service Provider Engagement Survey* provide helpful context for collective action to address GBV, IPV, and DV across sectors, including actions the municipality can take. Ongoing reflection, adaptation, and collaboration will be essential to ensuring that future municipal action to respond to these issues is captured in the upcoming Public Safety Strategy.

Attachment 3: Summary of Jurisdictional Scan of Canadian Municipalities’ efforts to address GBV, IPV and DV

The following chart summarizes the results of staff’s desktop research and existing knowledge of municipal GBV, IPV and DV prevention and response initiatives across Canada.

How to read this chart: The first column outlines the outcomes the municipalities aim to achieve and municipal the actions that support these outcomes; the second and third columns give examples of notable initiatives from jurisdictions across Canada.

Outcomes	Notable Canadian Municipal Policies, Practices & Services	
<p>Employees experiencing GBV, IPV or DV are supported, protected, and able to navigate work safely</p> <p><i>These are supports to ensure people experiencing GBV can remain safely employed and supported at work, with clear protections, accommodations, and confidential pathways to help.</i></p>	<p>The City of Charlottetown’s Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Policy explicitly names the responsibility of the municipality as an employer to “take every reasonable precaution to protect its employees when it has become aware or ought reasonably to be aware that domestic/intimate partner violence is occurring and would likely expose an employee to physical injury in the workplace”.</p> <p>The City of Charlottetown collaborated with the Mayor’s Purple Ribbon Taskforce and the organization Family Violence Prevention Services to create the “Make It Your Business” video series, focused on IPV/DV in public spaces and work environments. The video series provides employees with practical approaches to recognizing and safely supporting someone experiencing violence that might be witnessed or experienced in public spaces and workplaces, including sexual assault, abuse of older adults, child abuse, online harassment, or verbal abuse.</p>	<p>Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Montreal, Ottawa and London participate alongside Halifax in the UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Flagship Initiative and have dedicated initiatives focused on addressing sexual harassment and other forms of GBV in public spaces.</p> <p>Quebec’s Municipalities Allied Against Domestic Violence support IPV/DV shelters’ training and awareness activities, including free loan of municipal rooms and equipment and posting resources in town hall and other public places. They also host awareness sessions on domestic violence for municipal staff and the public.</p>

Residents who disclose or seek help through municipal services can access safe, appropriate and trauma-informed responses and pathways to support.

HRM staff and leaders are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and guidance needed to provide such responses

[Niagara Region](#), [Region of Waterloo](#), [City of London](#), [City of Ottawa](#) and [City of Toronto](#) are some of the many municipalities/regions in Ontario that include GBV, IPV and DV as a priority focus in their Community Safety and Well-being plans and frameworks.

In 2024, the **City of Winnipeg** [formalized its commitment to the MMIWG2S+ Calls for Justice](#) and formalized these priorities in core municipal functions, including transit, safety and urban planning. Through the work of its [Indigenous Relations Division](#), the city takes a structural approach to accountability on supporting Indigenous community safety.

All current and new employees of the [City of London](#) are required to participate in responding to DV and understanding human trafficking trainings. Similarly, [the City Of Ottawa](#) have an initiative to develop a toolkit of GBV resources for volunteers and organizations.

The City of London's Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Program, [ANOVA](#) and [Changing Ways](#) have trained over 600 staff on bystander intervention, with a particular focus on equipping municipal frontline employees with skills and tools to safely intervene when they witness public harassment.

In Calgary, the [Calgary Police Service Community Safety Dashboard](#) and they [Community Safety & Wellbeing Indicator Report Dashboard](#) are platforms that track indicators linked to social disorder and crisis response. The intent is to provide city-wide visibility into conditions associated with public-space safety. The dashboard notably tracks social disorder, crisis response, and wellbeing indicators to inform coordinated public-space safety and prevention efforts.

Further, [the Downtown Safety Leadership Table](#) was established in September 2023 as a representative group of downtown leaders convened to help identify opportunities, solutions, and strategies to address safety issues in downtown Calgary. The group's mandate is to advise on proposed actions to address safety concerns in downtown Calgary.

Through the [OUR DWTN Ideas Fund](#), The **City of Victoria** provides funding to Good Night Out Victoria to operate weekend Street Teams on Fridays and Saturdays from 11:30 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. These teams provide de-escalation, bystander support, and a visible, inclusive safety presence in downtown entertainment areas. This is a strong example of how smaller municipal grants can support on-the-ground prevention and community-based safety.

Children, youth, and families are supported through prevention, education, and early intervention through collaboration

Municipal actions that help reduce risk factors for violence by strengthening families, supporting youth development, and investing in prevention and early intervention before harm escalates.

The City of Victoria's [Sparks Program for Enhanced Youth Safety and Wellbeing](#) is a multi-partner initiative designed to prevent crime and violence and support increased safety and wellbeing of children and youth under the age of 30. The program distributes funding to local partners for parenting education and counselling for children and youth healing from family violence. Through the Public Safety Canada's Crime Prevention Action Fund, the city was awarded \$750,000 for this program.

In Calgary, [the Community Safety Investment Framework](#) redirects funding to community partners to fill gaps in crisis response, outreach, and emergency system support.

In 2024, **Calgary** provided the [Civic Partner Community Safety Grant](#) that was aimed at providing support to partners operating in the downtown core as they respond to safety incidents in and around their facilities.

[The Beyond Belonging Grant Program](#) by the **City of Edmonton** provides funding for inclusive education and awareness initiatives for children, youth, and families. Through training, collaboration, and resource distribution, the program is designed to promote safety and belonging, support resilience, and instigate placemaking.

Governed by the *Creating a Safe London for Women and Girls* strategic pillar under the Community Safety and Well Being Plan and as part of a proactive preventative measure, **The City of London**, in collaboration with [London Housing Development Corporation and London Middlesex Community Housing](#) is working collectively to build more accessible safer and supportive housing options for women and girls, including those who have experienced GBV, IPV, DV.

City of Toronto's [SafeTO Plan](#) includes GBV and IPV in their priority action areas and goals, stating the importance of program specific development for capacity building and coordination of supports.

In collaboration with provincial partners, **The City of Charlottetown** has a seat at the PEI [Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention](#)

Through the coalition "[Municipalities Allied Against Domestic Violence](#)", **municipalities across Quebec** are supporting GBV, IPV and DV organizations through:

- Providing property tax exemptions
- Offering financial and fundraising support
- Providing free boarding for pets of people experiencing GBV through municipal Animal Services
- Free storage space for IPV/DV shelters' residents' belongings
- Supporting the construction of second-stage housing
- Free access for women and children to cultural and leisure activities

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reimbursement of transportation between shelters and the homes of people experiencing IPV/DV.
<p>Municipal public spaces and services are planned and maintained in ways that are safe, welcoming, respectful, and inclusive.</p> <p><i>Public spaces and services are designed, regulated, and operated to reduce harassment, intimidation, and violence, and to promote safety, dignity, and belonging for everyone.</i></p>	<p>Ottawa Victim Services has a bilingual city-funded public education campaign that helps residents and front-line workers recognize signs of GBV and take safe and trauma-informed action to support people experiencing GBV.</p> <p>In 2022, the City of Calgary amended the Public Behavior Bylaw 54M2006 to include street harassment as an offence with an associated fine. Reports of street harassment in municipal public spaces can be made through 311. The City of Calgary paired this bylaw change with initiatives to raise awareness of street harassment and how Calgarians can contribute to supporting safety in municipal public spaces.</p> <p>The City of Edmonton's Public Spaces Bylaw includes harassment as a standalone offence and as a form of the inappropriate behavior offence, with fines attached.</p> <p>The Region of Waterloo amended its Code of Conduct Bylaw to prohibit harassment on regional property. The bylaw change came into effect in January 2024 and included an implementation plan, training, and communication about the changes.</p> <p>In 2023, the City of Ottawa Council passed a motion that directed Crime Prevention Ottawa and the Community and Social Services Department to work with community partners to address GBV in Ottawa. This work led to an advisory process in 2024 that has led to community feedback sessions</p>	<p>City of Edmonton's #OneStrongVoice Bystander Awareness Campaign aims to reduce GBV in transit and other public spaces by educating and empowering Edmontonian to intervene in situations of public harassment in ways that are safe for themselves and the person being targeted.</p> <p>The City of Montréal, Montréal Police Service and the Société de Transport de Montréal partnered to create a similar bystander intervention campaign "Street Harassment: Stop It. Witnesses Take Action", which is displayed in public spaces across Montréal.</p> <p>The City of Winnipeg in cooperation with the Community Safety Team and Winnipeg Transit have a Transit Violent Crime Intervention Strategy The initiative focuses on high-visibility policing, targeted enforcement, and proactive presence on buses, in transit corridors and at bus stops.</p> <p>The City of Vancouver, through a review of the MMIWG Inquiry Calls to Action identified 284 of the 431 recommendations they are to implement. In 2022, a report was reviewed and accepted by Council that outlined the collaborative efforts staff took in ensuring the implementation of the outlined recommendations.</p> <p>Edmonton's MMIWG2S+ Action Plan is the City of Edmonton's municipal action plan responding to the crisis affecting Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit people, and other Indigenous relatives. The plan explicitly</p>

	<p>to help inform Ottawa's response to GBV within the CSWB plan.</p> <p>The City of London works with the London Transit Commission to provide subsidized transit passes for low-income residents, reducing financial barriers to mobility and access to employment, services, and support. Framed as a well-being and safety intervention, this transit-based safety work aligns across other business units to provide extra support that includes safety audits, staff training, and collaboration with gender-based violence service networks. A component of the broader CSWB plan this specific initiative highlights specific programming as a preventative measure.</p>	<p>mentions support for survivors and connects its MMIR work to its broader Community Safety and Well-being framework.</p>
--	--	--