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THE PROJECT TO END
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK

A recommendation to the Government of Canada on
**how to engage more men
and boys in the prevention
of gender-based violence
and advancing the gender
equality movement**

preventdomesticviolence.ca

Submitted to: The Honourable Minister Monsef
Minister for Women and Gender Equality
and Rural Economic Development

Submitted by: Prof. Lana Wells and Dr. Caroline Claussen
January 2021





**Shift empowers
others to create
the social conditions
that stop the
perpetration of
violence before it starts.**

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January 2021

Dear Minister Monsef:

On November 25, 2020, you hosted a meeting with key leaders on advancing and engaging men and boys in violence prevention and gender equality. You asked us two questions:

1. Based on your expertise and experience, what actions do you recommend that the federal government undertake to address gender-based violence, such as best practices, effective interventions and programming related to your work with men and boys?
2. How can the federal government support the work that you do? What results should we be working towards?

At that meeting, you inspired my team to consolidate our 10 years of research in this area to try and answer your questions. To that end, we have created one over-arching recommendation, along with related goals and tactics for you and WAGE to consider as you develop a national strategy to engage men and boys.

My primary prevention research initiative aims to dismantle the systems that support gender-based violence, but we are equally qualified to suggest quick wins, as per your request. The quick wins outlined below can act as solid jumping-off points for systemic change, because they center around men and boys. As you stated in the meeting, if we want to advance gender equality and stop gender-based violence before it starts, we must invest in, and partner directly with, men and boys. I hope some of our learning and insights can support you and WAGE to identify investments and initiatives that will engage more men and boys in this important work.

As always, thank you for your leadership and time. We would be happy to meet with you and your staff to advance the work.

With kind regards,



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A recommendation to the Government of Canada on *how* to engage men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence and advancing the gender equality movement

We recommend that Canada develop a sustainable, evidence-informed funding model that supports innovative ways to get more men and boys involved in this movement. By targeting men and boys wherever they live, work and play,¹ we can foster change that is immediate and profound. The goals and tactics below provide a foundation on which to build the national strategy.

For 10 years, through my University of Calgary initiative called Shift (www.preventdomesticviolence.ca), we have been conducting research and supporting advocacy efforts related to engaging and mobilizing men as allies, leaders, partners, stakeholders and co-beneficiaries to achieve gender equality and prevent gender-based violence. Our researchers have focused on advancing primary prevention approaches, which means targeting the cultural, material and

structural conditions that drive gender-based violence, with the goal of preventing initial perpetration and victimization.² In effect, we are trying to transform the ground in which gender-based violence thrives. During this time, we have produced over 100 research reports, publications, papers, presentations and briefs focused on engaging men and boys in primary prevention of gender-based violence and promotion of gender equality.

Right now, it's clear why we need more non-violent men and boys to be our allies and advocates, but it's less clear how to build those alliances: not one government in Canada or in the global north has designed, developed or implemented a comprehensive strategy to mobilize men and boys in violence prevention and gender equality. This means there is a leadership opportunity here. Canada

could be the first country in the global north to design and implement a comprehensive prevention strategy that targets men and boys while tackling the root causes, setting an example for our provinces, territories and peers. We can remind the country and the world that any effort to reduce gender-based violence must also tackle gender inequality and transform patriarchal structures that perpetuate its elemental causes.

The Government of Canada can uproot gender-based violence through creating innovative funding models to get at the drivers of male violence. In order to do this, we suggest **developing a specific, government-funded strategy in the National Action Plan to Prevent Gender-Based Violence that targets and supports men and boys.**

We have identified four goals to do just that.



GOAL 1:

Create safe spaces where men can grow: Increase the number of men and boys engaged as allies, leaders and violence disrupters in every province and territory.

Why: If we want more men and boys in the anti-violence movement, we need to change the narrative, making it more inspirational and less diagnostic.³ We need to create more safe spaces where men can learn and make mistakes without judgement. We need to create more opportunities for men to explore healthy masculinities and gender socialization with other men. We also need to actively support male allies in this work. This means building capacities; creating connections with others who are doing this work; and co-developing interventions that will shift the cultural, material and structural conditions that drive gender-based violence and gender inequality.⁴

How: Changing the paradigm of gender-based violence starts with envisioning new funding models (described in more detail in the “A Way Forward” section). To achieve the goal of engaging more men and boys, we suggest the following investment initiatives:





1.

Fund a **national network** that supports pro-feminist, male-identified advocates, and feminists to advance this field together.⁵ We recommend this entity be co-led with partners from government, community and academia. The network should reflect the diversity of men and multiple worldviews, so the field does not solely reflect a White perspective.⁶

2.

Invest in more **programs** across the country to support men and boys to experience gender-transformative programming that expands their awareness and skills, enabling them to engage in, and model to others, violence prevention and gender equality.

3.

Support existing evidence-informed **programs and trainings to move online**. Organizations need support to develop virtual interventions that engage and support men. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for the sector to expand its capacities beyond face-to-face programming and maximize the potential of virtual interventions.

4.

Provide specific dollars that support **customizable programming** for ethnocultural organizations/community groups. Programming should be tailored to the specific culture, structure, strengths, priorities and challenges of each group.⁷

5.

Fund and support **Aboriginal community leadership** in developing and implementing culturally appropriate responses to violence against women, such as initiatives that focus on traditional healing and holistic approaches.⁸

6.

Fund the development, coordination and operations of a **national men's help line, phone app and virtual interventions** to support mental health and well-being. More specifically, support each province and territory to develop an **Integrated Coordinated Access** initiative that includes intake, triage, and assessment of men, along with increasing supports available.



GOAL 2:

Get to the root of the problem: Increase human services sector (organizations, leaders and practitioners) capacities to go beyond programming and services.

Why:

Programs and training are important but they're not enough to effect the systemic change required to dismantle the patriarchal, sexist structures that feed gender-based violence. Trying to eradicate gender-based violence through programs alone is like clipping the heads from dandelions: you need to dig beneath the surface. Our research suggests that practitioners and influencers must go where men and boys naturally congregate and change the very nature of these contexts.⁹ We need to go to where they work, where they play, where they learn, where they worship, and where they socialize (basically, anywhere they interact) and infuse specific content into these settings and institutions.¹⁰ This approach must focus on changing the culture while developing the will and skills that support gender equality and healthy relationships, reinforce positive and healthy masculinities, and disrupt and stop violence.¹¹

We call this the **Changing Contexts Approach**, and the focus is on changing the social norms, networks, organizations, and sociocultural exchanges that shape men's behaviours.¹² This approach fills a gap in the intervention landscape in two ways. First, it targets men while emphasizing alliances. Second, this intervention fills a gap at the **organizational level** of the social ecology*. The Changing Contexts Approach, which we designed in partnership with 14 human service organizations and governments, is theoretically informed and draws on feminist theory and gender-transformative approaches, social norms theory, diffusion theory, and the most recent behavioural science approaches that produce behavioural change.¹³ Changing Contexts embeds a Nudge Theory approach to making small tweaks to elements within male-dominated settings, thus "nudging" men towards more equity; inclusion; civility; and prosocial, positive role-modelling behaviours.¹⁴

How:

To increase the capacity of the human services sector to enhance their skills to implement the Changing Contexts Approach, we suggest the following steps:

1. **Invest in our research initiative at the University of Calgary.** We're testing this approach with the Calgary Police Service, and it could be scaled in other policing organizations and male-dominated settings across Canada.
2. **Fund knowledge mobilization activities** (Learning Collaboratives, online learning modules, training) to build capacities within the human service sector to engage and scale this evidence-informed approach.

* The social ecology refers to both the physical and social environments that constitute people's habitats (Oishi, S., & Graham, J. (2010). Social ecology: Lost and found in psychological science. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(4), 356-377).

GOAL 3:

Plant seeds for change: Target initial investments at areas with evidence and momentum for quick wins.

Why: There are dozens of ways to focus effort on eliminating gender-based violence, and the Government of Canada has already made great strides toward this goal. But, to truly kick-start a specific national strategy focused on men and boys, we recommend targeting investments and policy on three specific “sweet spots.” Our research has identified three areas that are particularly likely to accelerate progress in supporting men and boys to become allies and advocates.¹⁵

How: By targeting these “sweet spots,” we can ensure our efforts get results, fast. The three focal points are:

1. Increasing opportunities for positive father involvement.[†]
2. Improving young people’s healthy relationship skills.
3. Shifting men from problem to solution.

These three areas have the potential to spark quick wins because there is already momentum across the country. We recommend initial investments in these areas as there is also evidence showing that they create and accelerate change. Following are details on these areas.

[†] Positive father involvement refers to responsive, consistent and nurturing interactions that promote a child’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical health as well as having a respectful and non-violent relationship with the child’s mother or co-parent (Dozois E, Wells, L, Exner-Cortens, D., & Esina, E. (2016). *No Man Left Behind: How and Why to Include Fathers in Government-Funded Parenting Strategies*. Calgary, AB: The University of Calgary, Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence).



1. Increasing opportunities for positive father involvement¹⁶

Simply put, fatherhood is the *best* time to engage men. We know that positive involvement of men in their children's lives can prevent intimate partner violence perpetration, and victimization of their own children when they become adolescents and adults.¹⁷ For men who perpetrate or are at risk of perpetrating intimate partner violence, becoming a father or wanting to remain involved in their children's lives can provide the motivation to avoid or stop violent behaviours.¹⁸ We know that increased paternal involvement can shift traditional masculinities and gender norms and increase gender equality, both in families and in society as a whole.¹⁹ In the Canadian context, targeting fatherhood as a violence prevention and gender equality strategy is one of the most effective entry points.

How: To increase opportunities for positive fatherhood, we recommend the following policy and investment tactics:

- Make a portion of parental leave mandatory for fathers (male-identified care givers or identified caretakers).²⁰
- Create a specific fund for public health and grassroots organizations to access so they can create and support peer groups for new dads at the local level.
- Ensure parenting programs you already fund include fathers (in their program design, intervention, and evaluation systems).²¹

2. Improving young people's healthy relationship skills

The earlier in life prevention starts, the more effective it is. Research has identified adolescence as an ideal time to reach boys, as values and norms around gender equality are being forged.²² By reaching out and supporting adolescents, we can prevent the critical problem of dating violence. Research over the past decade has indicated that experiencing aggressive and violent behaviours in a first romantic relationship is a particularly strong predictor of future intimate-partner violence victimization.²³

Increasingly, there is a call for investing in more programs that engage adolescent boys in violence prevention and promote healthy and positive constructs of masculinity.²⁴ Despite these calls, there are few gender-specific healthy relationship program options available for adolescent boys.²⁵

How: To improve young people's healthy relationship skills, including specifically targeting male-identified adolescents, the following approaches are crucial to success:

- Fund more school- and community-based gender-transformative programs that promote healthy relationships, and sexual health programs for adolescents, with a particular focus on increasing offerings that target at-risk male-identified adolescents. These programs should include strategies to engage parents and caregivers, and support school climates, where applicable.
- Promote and fund the development of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools, as research has identified that GSAs support safer school environments for gender- and sexually diverse youth, as well as promoting an overall school climate of tolerance.²⁶
- Invest in comprehensive and multi-pronged social marketing strategies to address traditional and constricting narratives of manhood that negatively influence young men's peer and dating relationships.²⁷
- Invest in research identifying effective ways to build the capacity of parents (or primary caregivers) of adolescents in teaching their adolescents the competencies necessary to develop and maintain healthy relationships.



The earlier in life prevention starts, the more effective it is.

3. Shifting men from problem to solution

The movement towards violence prevention and gender equality has historically been viewed as an issue for women, with men framed as the problem.²⁸ More recently, however, men have been recognized as essential stakeholders and co-beneficiaries.²⁹ Thus, intentionally supporting men to develop healthy masculinities along with skills in promoting gender-equitable relationships, inspiring them to take on role-modeling opportunities, and strengthening their transformative leadership capacities are all required in order to support social change.

How: To shift men from problem to solution, we need to create and support opportunities that inspire non-violent men to take on change-maker roles, and strengthen transformative leadership capacities. To that end, you can invest in the following approaches:

- Map existing efforts from coast to coast to coast and build on the network of supports already available in each province and territory.
- Support male gender-equality leaders and champions by investing in leadership capacities at the grassroots, community and institutional level.
- Promote and support the creation of more male ally spaces (e.g., events and opportunities that bring men together).
- Development of accessible resources to inform and support change efforts by leaders.
- Invest in a national network of male-identified leaders alongside feminist leaders.

GOAL 4:

Gather surveillance and program evaluation data that allows us to benchmark and target the change we seek.

Why: Our research has consistently pointed to the need for more data and evaluation across all aspects of efforts to engage men and boys in violence prevention and gender equality.³⁰ More specifically, Canada still does not have a comprehensive data set “on men’s and women’s practices and attitudes as they relate to gender norms; attitudes toward gender-equality policies; household dynamics, including caregiving and men’s involvement as fathers; intimate partner violence; health; and economic stress.”³¹

How: To advance research and evaluation in this area, the Government of Canada can:

1. Invest in the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in partnership with Promundo.³² We believe these efforts to develop and implement a national gender-norms survey have been initiated, and we would encourage this work to move forward, given its importance to the field.
2. Provide evaluation dollars to every new program and initiative you fund in this area, and create a portal to support the scaling of evidence-informed approaches. For example, stipulate that all government-funded mental health programs be evaluated in ways that include a gender-based analysis, and invest in the scaling and evaluation of fatherhood programs. Stipulate that all government-funded parenting programs be evaluated in ways that include a gender-based analysis, and focus on preventing violence and advancing equitable relationships.³³



Of special note:

In response to COVID-19, Shift/UCalgary partnered with [IMPACT](#) (an Alberta provincial collective impact initiative representing close to 300 domestic and sexual violence organizations/systems) and [HelpSeeker](#) (a [Certified B-Corp](#) technology enterprise based in Calgary) to create the [Data2Action](#) initiative, whose goal is to curate information from key community and government stakeholders, along with real-time data from Google Analytics, Twitter and HelpSeeker. The focus of this initiative is on preventing domestic and sexual violence. There are three main prongs to the **Data2Action** initiative: Systems Map, Data Dashboard and Research & Knowledge Mobilization:

1. The **Systems Map** captures in real time the network of formal and informal services available across Alberta, supporting those at risk of or experiencing domestic and sexual violence. We will be using HelpSeeker's systems-mapping platform to curate this data and will then make it available to anyone looking for help using HelpSeeker's navigation apps in 22 languages.
2. The **Data Dashboard** will be a live web-based application collating the curated data from a range of collaborators to give us a picture (in as close to real time as possible) of domestic and sexual violence in Alberta. This will include shelter, call centre, police, health, and service use data as well as more novel input from HelpSeeker, Google, and social media channels.
3. **Research & Knowledge Mobilization** includes ongoing research and knowledge mobilization with key stakeholders in real time. Shift's research committee will ensure real-time sense making and is responsible for providing timely research to inform decision-making. This will include numerous outputs such as infographics, media briefs, policy briefs, community reports and research briefs. These knowledge translation products will be disseminated to all stakeholders, including community organizations, policy makers, civil society, media and academia, to advance prevention efforts.

The approach used in Alberta could support a national Data2Action gender-based violence prevention model across Canada through the development of provincial pods made up of key stakeholders (service providers, researchers, government) to support rollout in respective regions. This project will disaggregate data based on gender to better understand service needs, gaps in services, and trends related to domestic and sexual violence, along with identifying prevention approaches. In late 2020, we submitted a proposal to WAGE and we have included it as Attachment A for your review.

A way forward:

Committing to long-term change from the ground up



The Government of Canada can move the dial on this evidence-based recommendation. A long-term, thoughtfully targeted funding commitment has enormous potential to prevent gender-based violence and promote gender equality. We know you envision, as we do, the fruitful efforts of men and boys as they work toward a better future – a future where men live peacefully alongside all genders, enjoying the rewards of healthy and productive relationships. Our research shows that realizing this vision begins with rethinking the traditional funding model and designing a specific strategy that targets men and boys.



Building a funding model that nurtures change

The current funding approach in this area is short term, crisis oriented, and focused on the proliferation of programs. In response to this approach, the human service sector has developed a relatively strong focus on programmatic interventions as their sole approach to engaging men and boys in violence prevention. For example, most of the human service sector funding, reporting mechanisms, organizational structures, hiring, training and evaluation practices are designed to support the development and implementation of programs. **Yet our research has shown that men are unlikely to participate in violence prevention programs or seek help via services.**³⁴ Therefore, we need to rethink our infrastructure, our capacities and the conditions required to move the sector and government beyond individual programming.

Fast-tracking progress:

Preventing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality will require long-term, systemic change – and we at Shift are working on that. But change also needs to happen quickly. The four goals we outlined in this document can inject much-needed momentum into the federal government’s strategy to prevent gender-based violence. These evidence-informed goals are:

1. Create more safe spaces where men can grow: Increase the number of men and boys engaged as allies, leaders and violence disrupters in every province and territory.
2. Get to the root of the problem: Increase human services sector (organizations, leaders and practitioners) capacities to go beyond programming.
3. Plant seeds for change: Target initial investments at areas with the strongest evidence for quick wins.
4. Gather surveillance data to better understand the norms, perceptions and attitudes of men and boys in Canada. With this data, we can benchmark and target the change we seek.

We recognize the tensions that co-exist, particularly among women’s rights and feminist organizations, as the discourse shifts toward engaging men and boys.³⁵ These organizations are justifiably concerned “that efforts to engage men may dilute the feminist orientation of work on gender, violence and health,” and may “marginalize women’s voices and leadership.”³⁶ For these reasons, we partnered with the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters to develop [Supporting best practices: Guidelines for funding programs that engage and mobilize men and boys in violence prevention](#),³⁷ a resource specifically targeted to funders working in this area (see Attachment B). We suggest WAGE use this tool to inform their decisions on how to fund programs that engage men and boys.

It is also important to note that more work needs to be done on expanding our policies, programs and practices to move beyond the gender binary (e.g., male/female and man/women). Research shows that prevention and intervention are lacking when it comes to supporting sexually and gender-diverse individuals and communities.³⁸ There is clearly a need to do further work in this area, and we encourage the Government of Canada address this gap.

The recommendation, goals and tactics in this document can help the Government of Canada develop a bold funding model that supports innovative ways to engage more men and boys in preventing gender-based violence and advancing the gender equality movement. We look forward to collaborating with the federal government on this momentous project. Thank you for taking the time to consider our recommendation.

End Notes

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