

MISSING  
WOMEN  
COMMISSION OF  
INQUIRY

Missing Women Commission of Inquiry Public Policy Forum 1:  
**Ensuring the Safety of Vulnerable  
Women**

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▶ **Session A: Preventing Violence Against Sex Trade Workers**

Tuesday, May 1, 9 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Vancouver Public Library – Peter Kaye Room

350 West Georgia Street, Vancouver

▶ **Session B: Preventing Violence Against Aboriginal and Rural Women**

Tuesday, May 1, 1:30 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Vancouver Public Library – Peter Kaye Room

350 West Georgia Street, Vancouver

▶ **Session C: Building Strong Police-Community Relationships**

Thursday, May 3, 9 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Vancouver Public Library – Peter Kaye Room

350 West Georgia Street, Vancouver

# Ensuring the Safety of Vulnerable Women: An Overview

Many social factors contribute to a situation of an individual or group being marginalized or vulnerable. They include a history of being subjected to abuse and violence, health issues, housing issues, economic insecurity, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, sex discrimination and racism. These factors often cluster together and have a cumulative effect that further reinforces vulnerability and marginalization. This dynamic has been referred to as a “cycle of distress.”

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*Violence against women continues to be a serious and pervasive social problem.*

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Violence against women continues to be a serious and pervasive social problem, despite years of prevention efforts. Aboriginal women experience higher levels of violence both in terms of incidence and severity, and are disproportionately represented in the number of missing and murdered women across Canada. As a group, Aboriginal women have a heightened vulnerability simply because they live in “a society that poses a risk to their safety.”<sup>1</sup> In British Columbia and around the world, vulnerable and marginalized women are exposed to a higher risk of violence including sexual assault, murder and serial predation. The phenomenon of missing and murdered women is one stark example of this exposure and is seen as part of a broader pattern of marginalization and inequality. The increased vulnerability of certain groups of

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<sup>1</sup> Beverley Jacobs and Andrea J. Williams, “Legacy of Residential Schools: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women” in Marlene Brant Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagné, eds., *From truth to reconciliation: Transforming the legacy of residential schools* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008) 121-140 at p. 138.

women, such as women involved in the sex trade, plays an important role in providing the victims for serial killers.

Police face challenges in providing protection to vulnerable and marginalized women. One of the sets of issues to be considered by the Commission is what steps can be taken to enable police to protect women more effectively and to prevent these crimes. This is not to suggest that enhanced policing is the solution to the vulnerability and marginalization that many women face. Many strategies are required to address the underlying causes of vulnerability and marginalization and most of these are beyond the Commission's terms of reference. Nevertheless, police have a central and unique role to play within the strategies required to reduce the violence perpetrated against vulnerable and marginalized women. It is essential to frame this discussion paper with an acknowledgement that these issues are a current and pressing concern: women continue to go missing in British Columbia and there remains a large number of unresolved, and potentially serial, female homicides in this province.

This policy forum will consist of three separate sessions featuring dialogues on: (A) preventing violence against street-engaged women and women engaged in the survival sex trade; (B) preventing violence against Aboriginal women and rural women; and (C) models and structure for building strong police-community relationships.

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*What steps can be taken to enable police to protect women more effectively?*

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# **Ensuring the Safety of Vulnerable Women – *Session A: Preventing Violence Against Sex Trade Workers***

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## **Session Date, Time and Location:**

**Tuesday, May 1, 9 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

**Vancouver Public Library – Peter Kaye Room**

**350 West Georgia Street, Vancouver**

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This first session will focus on developing strategies and recommendations for enhancing the protection of street-engaged women and survival sex trade workers—a group that has been shown to be at extreme risk of all forms of violence, including serial predation. A research report prepared for the Commission identifies three overarching issues that can have a significant impact on the ability of police to provide effective protection to vulnerable and marginalized women: discrimination and discriminatory policing, problematic police-community relations, and limited policing models.

In its consultations to date, the Commission has heard about barriers to effective protection including past negative experience with the people, police attitudes, community members' perceptions of police behaviour—a belief that the justice system will not bring redress—and the fear of retribution. Participants in this forum may identify additional barriers and challenges.

Some of the questions and issues to be addressed during the dialogue at this policy forum are:

- ▶ Which crime prevention and early intervention models, strategies and techniques should be adopted by police in BC in order to better protect street-engaged women and women engaged in the survival sex trade?
- ▶ How can street-engaged women and women engaged in the survival sex trade be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to enhance their protection from violent crime?
- ▶ How can communities be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to improve police-community relations and improve police protection of vulnerable women?
- ▶ How can police restore and/or establish good relations with communities where missing women investigations are perceived as being or having been ineffective?
- ▶ Which procedures or protocols should be adopted by police in BC in order to facilitate the investigation of violent crimes against street-engaged women and women engaged in the survival sex trade?

### **Additional Information**

For more information on this topic, please review the discussion paper: *Police Protection of Vulnerable and Marginalized Women* and the consultation report: *Downtown Eastside Consultation Program Report*. You can download them here: <http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/reports-and-publications/>.

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*How can communities be involved?*

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*How can police restore and/or establish good relations?*

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# **Ensuring the Safety of Vulnerable Women – *Session B: Preventing Violence Against Aboriginal and Rural Women***

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## **Session Date, Time and Location:**

**Tuesday, May 1, 1:30 p.m. – 4 p.m.**

**Vancouver Public Library – Peter Kaye Room**

**350 West Georgia Street, Vancouver**

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This session will focus on developing strategies and recommendations for enhancing the protection of Aboriginal and rural women—two inter-related groups of women that have been shown to be at extreme risk of all forms of violence, including serial predation. A research report prepared for the Commission identifies three overarching issues that can have a significant impact on the ability of police to provide effective protection to vulnerable and marginalized women: discrimination and discriminatory policing, problematic police-community relations and limited policing models. Participants in this forum may identify additional barriers and challenges.

Aboriginal women in Canada are at particular risk of discriminatory policing as a result of the legacy of colonialism and racism exemplified in forced assimilationist policies, including the residential school system, and other discriminatory laws, policies and practices that intersect with and compound gender bias in the justice system. There is also

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*Aboriginal women in  
Canada are at  
particular risk.*

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a growing appreciation of the relationship between the urban and rural contexts, as some of the missing women had travelled to Vancouver from small towns or rural communities.

Some of the questions and issues to be addressed during the dialogue at this policy forum are:

- ▶ Which crime prevention and early intervention models, strategies and techniques should be adopted by police in BC in order to better protect Aboriginal and rural women?
- ▶ How can Aboriginal and rural women be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to enhance their protection from violent crime?
- ▶ How can Aboriginal and rural communities be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to improve police-community relations and improve police protection of vulnerable women?
- ▶ How can police restore and/or establish good relations with Aboriginal and rural communities where missing women investigations are perceived as being or having been ineffective?
- ▶ Which procedures or protocols should be adopted by police in BC in order to facilitate the investigation of violent crimes against Aboriginal and rural women?
- ▶ What are the connections between missing women in the urban and rural contexts? What crime prevention strategies can be designed to take this relationship into account?

### **Additional Information**

For more information on this topic, please review the discussion paper: *Police Protection of Vulnerable and Marginalized Women* and the consultation report: *Standing Together and Moving Forward: Report on the Pre-Hearing Conference in Prince George and the Northern Community*

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*How can Aboriginal and rural communities be involved?*

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*Forums.* You can download them here: [http://  
www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/reports-and-publications/](http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/reports-and-publications/).



# Ensuring the Safety of Vulnerable Women – ***Session C: Building Strong Police-Community Relationships***

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## **Session Date, Time and Location:**

**Thursday, May 3, 9 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

**Vancouver Public Library – Peter Kaye Room  
350 West Georgia Street, Vancouver**

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This session will provide an opportunity to have a broader conversation about proactive policing strategies and how their implementation could contribute to increased safety for vulnerable and marginalized women. It will focus, to some extent, on models and structures for building strong police-community relationships, which are at the heart of successful crime prevention strategies. Modern policing is based on the principle that the police must strive to build and maintain a relationship with the public that lives up to the phrase coined by Sir Robert Peel in 1829: “The police are the public, and the public is the police.” In some communities there is an uneasy, challenging or problematic dynamic in the police-community relationship. A problematic police-community relationship is created by and cultivates an “us” versus “them” atmosphere of distrust. The distrust is usually double-sided: the community does not trust the police and the police do not trust the community. Within the context of a hostile relationship, police officers tend to view members of the public as potential problems rather than as prospective partners or sources of

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*Building strong police-community relationships.*

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*“The police are the public, and the public is the police.”*

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*Would enhanced community policing models and methods increase police effectiveness in protecting vulnerable and marginalized women?*

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information and insight. This animosity is not generally monolithic: some individual police officers can and do establish and maintain community trust even in the context of an overall problematic police-community relationship.

Community-oriented policing is designed to build strong police-community relationships, but few police forces have been able to make a full shift towards this model. Other systemic policing issues that could be addressed include proposals for mechanisms to address continued perceptions of sexist and racist bias in policing. Changes to training approaches may also be required to support these recommendations for change.

These are some of the questions and issues to be addressed during the dialogue at this policy forum:

- ▶ Would enhanced community policing models and methods increase police effectiveness in protecting vulnerable and marginalized women? If so, what changes would be effective?
  - ▶ Are the existing, conventional or historic strategies to combat racism and sexism in policing sufficient? Or is more required to ensure that police can effectively protect vulnerable and marginalized women? If so, what strategies should be implemented?
  - ▶ Should provincial policing standards on the roles and responsibilities of police officers be amended to more specifically recognize the right to equal protection? If so, what should the standards include?
  - ▶ Should police forces change the way diverse police officers are deployed in order to more effectively protect vulnerable and marginalized women? If so, how?
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- ▶ Are the current approaches to recruiting and retaining Aboriginal police officers sufficient? What policies and practices would be more effective?
- ▶ Is the current training available to police in BC sufficient or is more needed to provide police with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively protect vulnerable and marginalized women? What changes would be most effective in supporting these efforts?

### **Additional Information**

For more information on this topic, please review the discussion paper: *Police Protection of Vulnerable and Marginalized Women* and the consultation reports: *Downtown Eastside Consultation Program Report* and *Standing Together and Moving Forward: Report on the Pre-Hearing Conference in Prince George and the Northern Community Forums*. You can download them here: <http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/reports-and-publications/>.