

MISSING
WOMEN
COMMISSION OF
INQUIRY

Missing Women Commission of Inquiry Public Policy Forum 4:
**Inter-jurisdictional Collaboration and
Coordination Among Police**

Tuesday, May 8, 9 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Wosk Centre for Dialogue – Room 420
580 West Hastings Street, Vancouver

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Session Date, Time and Location:

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Missing persons investigations often call upon the resources of more than one policing agency.

In order to carry out an effective missing persons investigation, police must communicate and collaborate with a range of individuals and agencies. Given the high level of mobility in today's society and the patterns associated with serial crimes, missing persons investigations often call upon the resources of more than one policing agency, especially where foul play is a possibility. In many cases, these investigations will cross one or more jurisdictional boundary, such as across local police forces, across a province, between provinces or even between nations.

An organization is best equipped to carry out its functions effectively when it has appropriate structures in place. This leads to a central question: is the current organizational structure of policing in British Columbia sufficient to provide the service expected of it in investigations of missing women and suspected multiple homicides?

In most reports on missing persons police practices, organizational structure is considered only from an internal police force perspective and the focus is on issues such as the advantages of having an independent missing persons unit or a missing persons coordinator. However, structural issues also arise from a larger system perspective, taking into account the organization of policing in the province as a whole rather than within individual police forces. From this holistic perspective, there are two main groups of issues: inter-jurisdictional collaboration and accountability mechanisms.

This policy forum focuses on this first set of issues relating to the ability of the police to prepare for and respond to serial crimes that cross multiple jurisdictional boundaries and the inherent challenges of communication and coordination they entail.

Recent reports have identified a number of barriers to inter-jurisdictional collaboration and coordination among police forces:

- ▶ The need for greater integration of systems is not sufficiently recognized.
- ▶ There are inconsistencies in police policies and practices across departments and agencies.
- ▶ Cultures of police organizations vary and there are engrained cultural norms relative to guarding investigative information that may contribute to a hesitation in information sharing.
- ▶ In some cases, there is a history of inter-agency competition and rivalry.
- ▶ Autonomous authority for funding and personnel rests with the managers of individual police agencies. Their need to maintain accountability for jurisdictional resources may hamper decisions to join forces.

Additional steps may be required to ensure effective inter-jurisdictional investigations.

- ▶ There can be difficulties in the sharing of resources in multi-agency operations.
- ▶ Numerous problems are faced in information sharing, especially with respect to criminal intelligence.
- ▶ Case ownership can impede collaboration.
- ▶ Despite progress, there remain diverse and incompatible information management systems, especially in terms of case management systems.
- ▶ Police agencies have limited resources to fund joint forces operations.

Over the past decade or more, there has been a movement away from ad hoc joint forces operation to more formally structured multi-agency teams such the Integrated Homicide Investigative Team (IHIT). However, additional steps may be required to ensure effective inter-jurisdictional investigations.

Today, the practices of major case management (MCM) take place within individual police organizations on a daily basis. Most police agencies have general investigation sections that are prepared with the investigative competencies and in-house resources needed to handle major investigations. Multi-agency MCM, in contrast, only occurs if and when police agencies identify a common crime problem and come to an agreement to work together as an investigative team. In the majority of provinces in Canada the protocols to form multi-agency teams are unstructured and informal.

A related issue is the fragmentation of police forces in the Greater Vancouver area and the Capital Regional District around Victoria. Discussions about the advantages and drawbacks of the regionalization of the police force have been ongoing for many years. These debates are often cased in terms of the value of:

- ▶ Small departments against large ones;
- ▶ Specialized versus community policing; and
- ▶ Centralized versus decentralized policing.

In the context of the Commission's work, the question is whether regionalization would assist in the more effective initiation and conduct of missing persons investigations and suspected multiple homicides.

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

- ▶ Are existing BC approaches to inter-jurisdictional investigations of missing persons and potential serial homicides effective? What gaps remain to be filled? Is there a need for more developed inter-agency protocols to enhance collaboration and coordination? Are there legislative impediments to further integration?
- ▶ What support systems are required to support more effective inter-jurisdictional collaboration? What role could the BC Police Missing Persons Centre play in these efforts?
- ▶ Should there be one Major Case Management system for the province of BC? Should steps be taken to promote compatible Major Case Management systems across Canada?
- ▶ What steps can be taken to facilitate the cultural change required within and among police agencies to promote effective collaboration across agencies?
- ▶ Would greater amalgamation of police forces in the Greater Vancouver area and/or Capital Regional District facilitate collaboration and coordination in these investigations? If so, what steps should be taken toward amalgamation and regionalization?

What gaps remain to be filled?

What support systems are required?

What steps can be taken?

Additional Information

For more information on this topic, please review the discussion paper: *Issues Related to the Structure and Organization of Policing Arising from the Missing Women Investigations* and the research report: *Municipal Policing in the Lower Mainland District of British Columbia*. You can download them here: <http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/reports-and-publications/>.