

MISSING
WOMEN
COMMISSION OF
INQUIRY

Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

Public Policy Forums Overview

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Message from the Commissioner

Along with the public hearings, the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry has held several very successful public forums throughout Northern B.C. and a pre-hearing conference and consultation program with the Downtown Eastside community. The next and final series of public forums will be held in Vancouver during the first two weeks of May 2012.

The information and knowledge that is gained at these forums is of exceptional value. While this information cannot be considered evidence relevant to the testimony put forward in the hearings, this is an important opportunity. Your input will provide me with proposals for change and related contextual information that will help to inform the writing of my report.

The input of people who speak to us in their role as a mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, aunt, uncle or as a friend is crucial to this process. It is these voices—your voice—that will help us to make practical recommendations that will save the lives of highly vulnerable women; women who are still at risk today. I believe that no matter what our differences, we share the common goal of wanting to help save lives and to make the world a safer, more secure place.

I hope that the people of the Lower Mainland and of every community in British Columbia will stand up and speak out; that you will participate and lend your voice to this important process.

There are many options to choose from—from attending the Vancouver forums in person, to emailing us, to sending us a letter with your thoughts. Whatever works best for your

personal situation, I hope that you will take the time and give us your opinion, your feedback, your ideas. This is how we will make positive social change, how we will save lives, how we will make women—especially our most vulnerable at risk women—safer. I believe that every person has a right to feel safe and secure, and your voice can help make that happen.

I can't describe how important your role is and how valuable your input, feedback and experiences are in informing us on what can be changed, what needs to be improved, what must be done. I realize that it takes time, effort and, quite often, courage to stand up and be heard. In whatever way works best for each of us—as individuals and as human beings—it is crucial that we participate.

I hope you will take this opportunity and use your voice to make positive change for some of our most vulnerable and at risk citizens. Thank you for your participation, for your courage and for your willingness to step forward and do something to make our society a better place.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wally Oppal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Wally" being more prominent than the last name "Oppal".

Wally Oppal, Q.C., Commissioner
Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

FAQS

What are the policy forums?

The Missing Women Commission of Inquiry is set to hold six important policy forums from May 1 to May 10, 2012.

The policy forums are an opportunity for members of the public to come together to develop suggestions for practical reform and implementation strategies on issues related to the phenomenon of missing and murdered women. Each policy forum will focus on a specific theme, issue or group of issues and related recommendations for change. They include:

- ▶ What steps can we take together to prevent violence against vulnerable women?
- ▶ How can we build strong police-community relationships?
- ▶ How can the police improve police policies and practices regarding missing persons investigations?
- ▶ How can the police work more effectively with families, communities, the public and the media in missing persons investigations?
- ▶ How can police forces work together more efficiently in investigating missing women and suspected serial homicides?
- ▶ How can we better facilitate the participation of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses in the criminal justice process?
- ▶ What steps can we take to contribute to healing the harms caused by past negative police-community interactions?
- ▶ What steps can we take to ensure that the Commission's report and recommendations lead to substantive positive change?

The dialogues put forward at the policy forums will assist the Commissioner in fulfilling his policy advisory role. Your input will provide the Commissioner with proposals for change and related contextual information that will help to inform the writing of the report with recommendations that will help to create a safer place for the most vulnerable women within our communities.

How do the policy forums fit into the Commission's work?

The Missing Women Commission of Inquiry has two main functions: (1) fact-finding about the specific matters related to the missing women and the Pickton investigations, which is carried out through the formal hearings which are ongoing; and (2) making recommendations for change to improve the initiation and conduct of missing women investigations, which is carried out mostly through the Study Commission activities.

The hearing and the study aspects of the Commission's mandate are equally important. The Commissioner will rely on the input that he receives from both aspects to develop a single report.

The Study Commission involves five main initiatives: consultations, research, written submissions, workshops and policy forums.

The Study Commission activities are designed to facilitate the broader participation of individuals who have been directly or indirectly affected by the missing women investigations. We recognize that there are ongoing concerns about the safety of vulnerable and marginalized women. The Study Commission initiatives are designed to provide the opportunity for individuals and organizations to share their experiences and views with the Commission in authentic, collaborative and supportive venues.

The policy forums are a vital aspect of the Commission's work. The forums bring together all that has been learned through

research, consultations, workshops and written submissions. This is a dynamic process in which interested individuals can share and exchange their views on what steps should be taken to address the problems and issues related to missing and murdered women.

What will the policy forums be like?

The policy forums will be based on open and inclusive communication principles. A First Nation's Elder will welcome participants and say an opening prayer. The Commissioner will also welcome participants. Then the Commissioner and a facilitator will outline an inclusive approach based on talking circle principles. Each participant will have an opportunity to provide short remarks concerning the proposals for change that they would like introduce to the conversation. The facilitator will encourage dialogue after each participant has had a chance to speak. There will be counsellors available to provide support.

In addition to the circle of registered participants, others interested in participating are welcome to witness the process. Everyone present will have an opportunity to provide input by posting a written message in a designated space and, if time permits, may also join in the conversation.

The session will be audio taped and notes will be taken in order to ensure that there is a full record of the conversation available to the Commission. The audio tape will not be used for any other purposes.

How You Can Participate

How can I participate in the policy forums?

The Commission had invited expressions of interest in participating at the policy forums to be submitted by March 31, 2012. However, we will continue to accept expressions of interest until the capacity for the forums has been reached.

If you would like to participate, please email us at participate@missingwomeninquiry.ca and let us know which forum(s) you would like to attend and give a brief outline of what topics you would like to speak about. We will contact you about your participation.

Other Ways To Participate

If you cannot attend a forum in person, there are many ways to participate. A simple and effective way is to send the Commission a written submission. There are no format requirements for the submissions. We have received everything from short emails addressing one or two specific proposals for change to long and detailed written submissions that cover the wide range of issues within the Commission's mandate. All submissions are carefully considered by the Commission.

The Commission had set an earlier deadline for the receipt of submissions in order to have this input before the policy forums. However, the Commission will continue to accept written submissions until May 31, 2012 and will consider all submissions received by this date in the preparation of the Commission report which is due June 30, 2012.

All relevant submissions will be posted on the Commission website unless the writer asks that the submission be kept confidential.

You can email the Commission (participate@missingwomeninquiry.ca).

You can send a written submission via Canada Post (#1402 – 808 Nelson Street, Vancouver, BC, V6Z 2H2).

Open Invitation

We invite everyone who has an interest in the Commission's mandate and in making BC a safer place for vulnerable and

marginalized women to participate in the policy forums and/or to send in your views in writing.

Public Policy Forum Participation Guidelines

We realize that the topics of the Public Policy Forums will inspire a range of emotions in participants and viewers. We want to be respectful and considerate of everyone involved in this process and have outlined guidelines below to help each of us do that.

Prior to the forum that you will participate in please:

- ▶ Take the time to review the information provided in the MWCI Public Policy Forum information booklets relevant to the specific forum you are interested in.
- ▶ Let us know what you would like to participate in and what you will speak about. You can do that by sending an email to participate@missingwomeninquiry.ca. Participants are limited to 10 minutes each for their initial presentation/sharing of information.

At the forum

- ▶ **Arrive on time** with any supporting materials you require for effective participation.
- ▶ **Be prepared.** Before the forum actually begins, start your mental preparation for the topic at hand and what you would like to share.
- ▶ **Listen respectfully** to other participants when they speak. Don't interrupt.
- ▶ **Avoid side conversations** while someone else is speaking. This is very distracting to those around you and to the speaker.

- ▶ **Actively participate in the dialogue**, making sure that your input reflects your unique perspective, perception, experience or idea.
- ▶ **Don't dominate the dialogue**. Be brief and crisp when you make a point. Everyone attending wants to exercise their right to speak to the issues as well.
- ▶ **Make an effort to understand other viewpoints**. Others may see the same issue differently than you. Take the opportunity to learn other perspectives.
- ▶ **Stick to the specific topic at hand** rather than going off on tangents or verbalizing matters of self-interest. If you feel the need to discuss a related idea outside the forum's stated topic, please speak to the facilitator during the break or submit it in writing.
- ▶ **Make practical suggestions for improvement**. Ideas for reform are most helpful if they have a realistic chance of being implemented.
- ▶ **Be prepared to take responsibility for your ideas**. Take care not to expect things of others that you're not prepared to get behind yourself.
- ▶ **Be supportive of other participants** by adding information during the dialogue that strengthens and sharpens their ideas.
- ▶ **Build on the current train of thought to complete it** before you introduce any new train of thought into the discussion, or ask the facilitator if the current topic is over and if you can move on.
- ▶ **Help prevent "groupthink"** by respectfully challenging the assumptions and ideas of others when you don't agree with them. In the same way, be open to an evaluation of your input.

- ▶ **Be tough on the issues, but respectful of the people.** It is valuable to disagree, but not to be disagreeable.
- ▶ **Please turn off your cellphone or smartphone** so the flow of ideas is not disrupted.
- ▶ **If the session runs out of time** or you would like to share ideas in a less public fashion, we ask you to write out your information and submit it to the facilitator.

After the forum

- ▶ If you have ideas that you felt did not get enough attention at the forum, or new ideas came to mind after the forum, please submit them via email to participate@missingwomeninquiry.ca.