



BC Association of  
Specialized Victim Assistance  
& Counselling Programs

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For Immediate Release

## **New Recommendations Could Save Lives of Domestic Violence Victims**

A multidisciplinary team with expertise in domestic violence, including the Honourable Judge Josiah Wood, Victoria lawyer Diane Turner, and community advocates, have released a major report calling for critical changes to the ways in which the BC justice system responds to domestic violence. The Report entitled: *Keeping Women Safe—Eight Critical Components of an Effective Justice Response to Domestic Violence*, identifies eight components which must be addressed to improve the safety of women and children. The Report includes recommended actions for police and government. Its release is particularly timely given the pending Coroner's Inquest on April 28 regarding the Lee tragedy in Oak Bay.

The recommendations emphasize coordination between police, Crown prosecutors, community-based support services and government. The collaborative approach recommended in the report has already gained support in principle from RCMP E Division and BC Municipal Chiefs of Police.

Violence against women in relationships is pervasive. Canada-wide, about 653,000 women were victims of some form of domestic violence in the five years up to and including 2004. In BC, 10,273 incidents of spousal assault were reported to police in 2005, a 9% increase from the number reported in 2004. During the last fiscal year in our province, spouse assault accounted for more requests for victim services than any other offence

"Police are continually looking for ways to respond to crimes of violence against women and children," says RCMP Superintendent Byron Boucher. "We are considering the Report's recommendations and gathering additional best practices. We believe that coordination and collaboration also needs to include community-led prevention strategies, initiatives for education, early identification and intervention to complement response strategies."

Deputy Chief Constable Mike Chadwick, President of the BC Association of Chiefs of Police, agrees. "Municipal Chiefs believe that a collaborative approach involving dialogue and coordination across sectors is needed to better ensure the safety women experiencing domestic violence."

Lawyer Diane Turner notes that the Report's authors came together in an effort to determine, from the research and various models for addressing domestic

violence, what elements are required to respond effectively. “The recent murders of women and children in BC by those who are closest to them, heightens the pressing need to better coordinate our efforts around crimes against women and children.”

Tracy Porteous, Executive Director of the BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling programs states, “We are not looking to point fingers at specific sectors or individuals, rather, we want to identify systemic problems which can make it difficult for justice system personnel to carry out their duties. We want to help ensure that each sector has the resources and specialized support necessary to make life and death decisions. We believe there is some work to do in this regard.”

Key Report Recommendations stress:

- The need to re-define what constitutes “successful” justice system intervention in domestic violence cases. While the possibility of sanctions is an important goal, other factors need to be considered as important indicators of success: managing victim safety, encouraging and supporting her involvement with the justice process and communicating to the abuser that the system takes this matter seriously
- The need for all responders to conduct risk assessments at key stages in the case
- Development of a provincial case coordination protocol to guide information sharing about risk factors between systems in domestic violence cases
- Specialized training for Police and Crown.
- Consistent enforcement of bail and restraining orders, as well as other protection orders-- currently, breaches are not always rigorously pursued, putting women and children at greater risk
- More community based victim services specializing in responding to violence against women

Copies of the complete report can be downloaded from the website of the BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs at: [www.endingviolence.org/publications](http://www.endingviolence.org/publications).

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