



INFORMATION BULLETIN MAY 2014

WHAT ARE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERAGENCY CASE ASSESSMENT TEAMS AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

Recent Tragedies

There have been a series of recent incidents in BC involving the death or serious injury of women at the hands of their abusive spouses. In the aftermath, CCWS is getting questions from communities regarding mechanisms to respond to high risk domestic violence. Across BC we have about 22 high risk domestic violence teams, generally referred to as Interagency Case Assessment Teams, or ICATs. A number of inquests and inquiries, including the Domestic Violence Death Review Panel Report to the Chief Coroner of BC in 2010, have stressed the fact that safety for women and children can be improved by such collaborative interagency responses.

What is an ICAT?

ICATs are partnership groups which include criminal justice, child welfare, health and antiviolence workers with a goal of keeping domestic violence victims and their children safer. This goal is achieved by legally and ethically sharing risk related information and building a safety net for victims, their children and the community and initiating interventions and monitoring of suspects. Agencies in the community who are not ICAT members can still refer cases into the ICAT.

How do ICATs work?

Domestic violence cases that are suspected as being high risk are referred to the police ICAT contact. The police ICAT contact then circulates the victim and suspect names and birthdates for the next ICAT meeting. If the situation is urgent an emergency meeting may be arranged as soon as practicable. ICAT individual members then research their agency for relevant risk related information about the victim and suspect. This information is brought to the ICAT meeting where data is reviewed for presence of BCDVS 19 Risk Factors.

When the risk level is determined, information sharing proceeds and a report is created. An enhanced safety plan for the victim and a monitoring and support plan for the suspect is developed.

How is an ICAT different from Domestic Violence Units (DVUs) and police-based highest risk domestic violence teams?

Unlike a DVU, an ICAT is not an investigative body. The ICAT makes critical interventions when a case is deemed high risk.

ICATs are a partnership between a number of community services including police, child welfare, antiviolence agencies, health and income assistance. ICATs look for consensus in determining risk level. ICATs allow for more informed decision making about risk since information can be shared by a broader range of agency partners at the table. ICATs can also offer more resources to build seamless safety plans and initiate suspect intervention and monitoring.

DVUs and Police-Based Highest Risk Domestic Violence Teams are usually stewarded by the police detachment and have a focus on child welfare, police, corrections and community based victim assistance.

How is an ICAT different from Violence Against Women in Relationships Committees (VAWIR Committees) or other local coordination committees dealing with domestic violence?

VAWIR Committees are open membership groups that include service providers who work with women and children victims of domestic violence and also those that work with dv offenders. VAWIRs identify and address service gaps and safety needs, using a

strategic planning model. Networking, training and agency/service information sharing is part of a typical agenda, but information about specific cases is not shared. There are often subcommittees, one of which may be an ICAT.

An ICAT meets for the sole purpose of reviewing specific, referred high risk cases. If any systemic issues are identified through the ICAT, they are passed on to the VAWIR Committee to be included in the strategic plan. ICATs meet regularly and frequently, do not have open membership and are typically short in duration.

What if the case does not receive a high risk assessment?

Information sharing stops, but the usual police, child welfare and anti violence agency safety and support plans are enacted. The referring person monitors the case for changes in risk factors that may result in ICAT reviewing the case again.

Which agencies are members of ICAT?

It is essential to have Police, Child Welfare, Antiviolence Agency (Community Based Victim Assistance, Transition House, Police-Based Victim Assistance) and Community Corrections at the ICAT. Other necessary participants are Health (Mental Health and Substance Misuse); Income Assistance; Aboriginal representatives and immigrant servicing agencies. In rural and isolated areas, participants can call in by conference call and speakerphone.

Each agency representative should have a fully trained back up to fill in for them. Substituting non trained ICAT agency staff is not advised.

Does Crown counsel sit on ICATs?

No - Crown counsel are advisors to the process, but do not participate in ICAT case reviews or decisions.

Why are we allowed to share information at the ICAT table?

Life trumps privacy. Privacy laws limit situations in which someone's personal information can be shared but they allow personal information to be disclosed in the public interest or where compelling circumstances exist that affect anyone's health or safety. Personal information can also be disclosed to assist in a police investigation or in making a decision to start an investigation.

The provincial *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* specifically permits release of personal information if disclosure is for the purpose of reducing the risk of domestic violence if domestic violence is reasonably likely to occur. This amendment was enacted in the aftermath of the Peter Lee domestic violence murders and suicide where a perceived inability to share risk related information between sectors was identified as a systemic problem needing to be addressed to prevent more domestic violence homicides.

Do the parties have to give consent?

If your agency collects personal information for one purpose and you want to use or disclose that information for another purpose, consent is generally required. If possible and if it is safe to do so, every effort should be made to get consent from the domestic violence victim before disclosing her personal information. However, provincial and federal privacy laws recognize that in high risk situations, it may be necessary to share either victim or suspect/offender information without consent in order to prevent more violence or save a life.

What kind of information gets shared?

Information relevant to the health or safety concern in question. There are specific risk indicators for domestic violence and information related to these indicators should be shared at the ICAT table.

Is sharing information breaching privacy or unethical?

Provincial and federal privacy laws allow personal information to be shared where there are health or safety concerns or to reduce the risk of domestic violence. Most professional ethics codes provide that privilege or confidentiality does not extend to

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situations involving imminent danger. BC's Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy states that "...The authority to share information among justice and child welfare partners is found in provincial and federal legislation." (at p. 60)

How do ICATs identify risk?

ICATs use the BCDVR 19 Risk Factors, which is consistently used among police, child welfare, corrections and criminal justice partners across BC. This group of factors are evidence based, but these factors do not operate as a checklist. Professional judgment, and consideration and knowledge of domestic violence are required of the ICAT members to carefully consider the risk factors in the context of victim and suspect vulnerabilities.

Can anyone sit on an ICAT?

ICATs are not open committees. Trained representatives from agencies that work with domestic violence and a backup member are standing representatives and are not replaced in an absence. An ICAT cannot be held without the presence of a police officer.

If the referring agency is not a standing ICAT member, they are invited to attend the case presentation of their referral only. They are not included in the risk level decision, but may be asked to provide parts of safety plans.

How does ICAT keep domestic violence victims safer?

Victims of domestic violence, their children, extended family, workplaces, the community and suspects are kept safer by providing comprehensive safety plans that include mental health and practical support and monitoring to the suspect.

What is an enhanced safety plan for the victim?

Special arrangements are made, and services agree to be flexible with their mandates to ensure the highest risk victims, their families and people and pets close to them get the best safety measures possible. This may mean being prioritized for services,

consideration in bail conditions and protection orders and assistance with household and workplace security.

What about the suspect?

The suspect may be provided expedited mental health and counselling appointments, employment and housing assistance and general support by an appropriate agency.

Can ICAT help keep others safer?

Children, new partners, extended family, workplace colleagues and pets are vulnerable to harm when there is a high risk of domestic violence. Their safety is taken into consideration during the review and monitoring.

How can I find an ICAT in my community?

You can contact the Community Coordination for Women's Safety Program for more information on ICATs in your community or region.

Where can I get more information about high risk case assessment teams?

1. More resources on information **sharing and the establishment of high risk teams** including a webinar and ICAT and Information Sharing Backgrounders and information pamphlets can be accessed on the Ending Violence Association (EVA) website at:

www.endingviolence.org.

You can also contact the Community Coordination for Women's Safety Program directly by phone or email. Contact information is provided on the EVA website.

2. Further information on **privacy laws** can be found at:

www.oipc.bc.ca

www.priv.gc.ca/index_e.asp

3. Information on applicable **provincial policies** dealing with domestic violence can be found at:

www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/publications/docs/vawir.pdf

www.ag.gov.bc.ca/prosecution-service/policy-man/index.htm

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/podv

For information on RCMP Operational Policies contact Sgt. Loretta SMITH, "E" Division Domestic Violence Coordinator at loretta.smith@rcmp-grc.gc.ca

4. Information on **risk factors** associated with an increased likelihood of future violence in woman abuse cases can be found at:

- www.jocelyncoupal.com