



2018 BC Municipal Election Toolkit



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INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT

The BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) has developed this toolkit to encourage candidates running in the October 2018 municipal election to work to eliminate violence against women and children if elected. In order to raise awareness about violence against women in BC, we ask that our members, women serving organizations, individuals and other community groups contact their local candidates to advocate for legislation, policy and practice commitments that benefit women and children experiencing gender-based violence.

In this toolkit you will find background information and key points that will help inform candidates about the nature and scope of violence against women in BC. This is not an exhaustive list by any means and we hope that you will add to and adapt this material to make it as useful as possible for your own organizations and communities. We have also provided questions you may wish to ask candidates as well as a letter template to candidates. Please feel free to adapt the resources in this toolkit to strengthen your local concerns and most pressing issues.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, YOUTH AND CHILDREN IN BC

Violence against women, youth and children in BC is an ongoing public health and safety crisis that remains a devastating daily reality for many. This violence affects people of all social, economic and cultural backgrounds. It can result in lifelong impacts and creates an overwhelming health, social and economic burden mostly borne by women and their children.

Across BC, Transition Houses, Second Stage Houses and Third Stage Housing programs, Safe Home programs, and PEACE programs (Prevention Education Advocacy Counselling and Empowerment) have a frontline view of the issues experienced by women and their children escaping violence. We strongly encourage all candidates to familiarise themselves with and listen to the experience and insight of this sector. Investment by our municipal governments in violence against women support services, affordable housing, childcare initiatives, and awareness campaigns work to offset what this pervasive social problem already costs BC.

- Every year, in BC, more than 13,000 people seek police assistance to stop violence at the hands of current or former spouse or dating partner.ⁱ
- Every year, more than 30,000 women and children are referred to counselling and outreach programs as a result of their experience of violence.ⁱ
- Every year, more than 18,000 women and children access transition and safe houses to escape violence.ⁱ
- 3 to 5 children or youth in every Canadian school classroom have witnessed their mother being assaulted.ⁱⁱ



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- In just one day in 2012, 71 women in BC were turned away from Transition Houses.ⁱⁱⁱ 73% of potential new residents in Transition Houses across Canada could not be accommodated during the 24-hour survey period in 2016.^{iv}
- In addition to the human rights imperatives of doing all that we can to prevent violence against women, there are also strong economic arguments. The cost of violence against women is estimated to be \$7.4 billion per year in Canada.^v

ENGAGING WITH CANDIDATES AND VOTING

Municipal elections include the election of:

- The mayors;
- City or district councillors; commissioners for the parks board or other local community commissions (ex. the Islands Trust);
- Trustees for the local school board.

Municipal elections happen every four years in every municipality across the province, making it an ideal time to press candidates to integrate the policies and initiatives that will benefit women experiencing violence into their platforms. In order for the candidates to familiarize themselves with the issues and what cities can do, we recommend using this toolkit to show the avenues that cities have to make change for women. There are several ways to reach out to your candidates:

- Set up meetings with individual candidates and use the toolkit to inform the discussion.
- Write a letter to local candidates using the template provided below.
- Attend all-candidates meetings and ask the questions for candidates outlined in this toolkit.
- Encourage voting and provide information to staff and the community.

HOW TO VOTE

Canadian citizens over 18 are eligible to vote in the local elections. Voters must cast their ballots in the district or municipality where they reside. Each municipality will run its own election process in accordance with the Local Government Act. Here are the basic eligibility requirements:

- 18 years of age or older when you register to vote or will be 18 years of age or older on general voting day;
- a Canadian citizen;



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- been a resident of British Columbia for at least six months immediately before you register to vote;
- have lived in the jurisdiction where you intend to vote for at least 30 days immediately before you register to vote;
- are not disqualified under the Local Government Act, any other enactment, or by law from voting in local elections.

To find a polling station, you will need to consult your [local elections office](#), which will post this information. In order to vote, voters should bring to the polls with them:

- two separate pieces of identification (the BC Services Card is considered one piece of identification).
- one of the pieces of ID must prove your identity and where you live.
- one piece of identification must include your signature.



POVERTY

WHAT WE KNOW:

- Poverty is a persistent barrier to women’s ability to leave a violent partner and is often a reason for them having to return. Leaving violence often means leaving behind stable housing, financial security and possessions. It can result in relocation and the loss of employment.
- Investments in reducing poverty would impact violence against women in BC. Increasing women’s economic well-being increases their capacity to leave violence and is a powerful violence prevention strategy.
- Income inequality continues to grow in BC -- with the difference between the highest earners and the lowest earners larger than ever.^{vi} As well, women still earn 35% less than their male counterparts in BC.^{vii} These trends in income inequality disadvantage women and make it more difficult for them to earn an amount to keep up with the cost of living in this province.

WHAT CAN MUNICIPALITIES DO?

We encourage municipalities to engage in the issue of poverty for women experiencing violence in the following ways:

- Many cities across BC have already taken leadership on urging the provincial government to implement a poverty reduction strategy by passing resolutions and engaging in the poverty reduction movement in BC. Those that haven’t yet, can start by signing the [BC Poverty Reduction Coalition’s Open Letter](#) joining the call for a legislated poverty reduction plan in BC that is accountable, bold, and comprehensive. Investments in reducing poverty impact women’s economic security and women’s ability to leave violence.
- Cities can be committed to reducing barriers to public transportation for women and their children. By establishing a low-income transit pass, municipalities can facilitate better transportation solutions for women and their children so that they can afford to get to work, school, and activities. As well, cities can implement policies that maintain affordable rental housing near public transit.
- Cities can set an example for businesses and organizations in their city to prioritize fair wages by becoming a [living wage employer](#). This means that all city employees and contractors are paid a living wage, calculated regionally. To find out about the living wage for your region, check out the [Living Wage for Families Campaign](#).



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QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- In what ways will you ensure that poverty for women and children in the community is addressed?

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

WHAT WE KNOW:

- Housing is a vital issue for women and their children experiencing violence. Timely access to safe, secure, affordable housing (to rent or own) is a crucial component enabling a woman to leave a violent partner and to prevent homelessness.
- Transition Houses and Safe Homes provide much-needed emergency responses to women fleeing violence. However, they are not able to provide shelter to all those who need it and they are not designed for long-term stays. Similarly, there is not sufficient Second Stage Housing to meet demand. For example, in 2012, in just one day **237 women and children** were turned away from Transition Houses, Second Stage Houses and Safe Home Programs.^{viii}
- Research consistently demonstrates that transition houses and women's shelters across Canada are not able to meet the needs for shelter of every woman who contacts them.
- Domestic violence is a leading cause of women's homelessness.^{ix} Thus, the shortage of affordable housing in BC cannot be separated from the issue of domestic violence. The lack of access to a safe and secure place to live also increases the vulnerability of women and their children to child protection intervention and apprehension when they have to flee to unsafe, substandard living accommodation or remain with a violent partner.

WHAT CAN MUNICIPALITIES DO?

We encourage municipalities to engage in the issue of housing and homelessness for women experiencing violence by:

- Implementing zoning and building regulations that encourage affordable housing, social housing, and rental-only units. Cities can lease land to non-profit housing developers through a process called municipal leasing. Inclusionary zoning is another strategy that cities can use to make sure affordable housing units are included in private developments.^x
- Encourage the development of 3 and 4 bedroom units suitable for women and their children.
- Commit to developing a local housing strategy that invites the participation of local transition houses and women with lived experience to set goals and targets for housing that meets their needs.



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QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- How will you increase the affordable housing options for women experiencing violence in the community?

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

WHAT WE KNOW:

- Many women in transition houses have children who require specialized support and care because of their experiences with domestic violence. A 2006 UNICEF report estimates that every year the number of children in Canada exposed to domestic violence is in the range of 85,000-362,00.^{xi}
- Every year, more than 18,000 women, children and youth access transition and safe houses to escape violence.^{xii}
- Access to universal, affordable, high quality child care is a vital component to addressing gender inequality. It increases women's economic capacity and reduces the need for single parents to receive social assistance.^{xiii} The median monthly rate for full-time licensed group child care in some cities in BC is more than the average cost of a one- bedroom apartment.^{xiv}
- Violence and its effects against women, in schools, and in dating relationships is a public health and safety issue that impacts British Columbians.^{xv} School and dating violence can be prevented by implementing coordinated and well-funded programs.^{xvi}

WHAT CAN MUNICIPALITIES DO?

We encourage municipalities to engage in the issues impacting women and their children experiencing in the following ways:

- Cities can subsidize support services and programs for children and youth, such as the [PEACE Programs](#) across BC for children and youth experiencing domestic violence.
- School boards and councils can ensure that children and youth have access to prevention programs such as the [Violence Is Preventable \(VIP\) Program](#).
- Municipalities can implement local regulations and zoning that encourages the development of child care facilities and more daycare spaces for children. Women's full participation in the workforce and engagement in public life is supported by affordable and accessible quality child care for children. Ask whether there is an initiative to support affordable accessible child care in your municipality.



QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- In what ways will you ensure that the vulnerability of children and youth is addressed?
- How can you support the development of programming, supports, and facilities for children and youth?

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

WHAT WE KNOW:

- Women who experience violence have their wellbeing compromised in a myriad of ways, such as physical injuries, mental health issues, or access to services that facilitate health. Poverty decreases food security, ability to use community facilities, and access to local transportation. They also experience discrimination and isolation from the community.
- Violence against women has a wide range of negative effects on women's health, including their physical, mental and reproductive health. 1 in 3 women will experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime.^{xvii}
- While physical injuries and death are the most obvious health impacts of violence, the more prevalent consequences are longer-term mental health problems.^{xviii} Women who have experienced violence in relationships are more likely to develop depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).^{xix} The World Health Organization has declared violence against women to be the leading cause of depression for women.^{xx}
- Often women experiencing violence are forced to make impossible choices between paying rent and buying healthy food for themselves and their families. In such dire circumstances, no money is left for other aspects of well-being like exercise, community, or counselling.

WHAT CAN MUNICIPALITIES DO?

We encourage municipalities to engage in the issues of health and wellbeing for women experiencing violence by:

- Municipalities can support initiatives that provide counselling for women and their children such as funding local organizations providing [PEACE Programs](#) or Stopping The Violence Counselling Programs in the community.



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- Cities can create subsidized passes for low-income families to use city parks and recreation facilities so that women and their children have access to the facilities in their neighbourhood where they can get exercise, access programming and build community.
- Municipalities can fund food security programs, community gardens and community programming that makes healthy eating and community engagement more accessible.

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- In what ways will you work towards the well-being of women experiencing violence in your community?
- How can you support the development of accessible programming, supports, and facilities focused on wellbeing?

SAFETY

WHAT WE KNOW:

- In order to decrease the rates of violence against women, children and youth, multiple prevention strategies must be used. These should be co-ordinated and funded for the long-term. Changing social attitudes and perspectives toward violence is possible through public education campaigns.^{xxi}
- In BC, from January 2010 through December 2015, 100 persons died as a result of intimate partner violence. In BC, on average, 12 people are killed a year due to intimate partner violence murder.^{xxii}
- Indigenous women in Canada have a violent intimate partner violence victimization rate 3.5 times higher than non-Aboriginal women and are more likely to have experienced childhood physical and sexual abuse in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts, a devastating consequence of colonialism.^{xxiii}

WHAT CAN MUNICIPALITIES DO?

We encourage municipalities to engage in the issue of safety for women experiencing violence by:

- Municipalities and school boards can co-ordinate and fund initiatives to change social attitudes and perspectives toward violence. This is possible through public education campaigns and prevention programs, such as the [Violence is Preventable Program](#). From September 2016 –



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June 2017, the Violence is Preventable program reached 5,864 children and 497 adults, but with more support this program can be expanded to reach more communities.

- At the end of November every year, there is a national campaign to end gender-based violence lasting 16 days. The [16 Days of Activism on Gender-Based Violence](#) culminates on the National Day to End Violence Against Women on December 6th. Cities can support local agencies to enable the 16 Days of Activism to have a presence in your community by partnering, providing funding, and hosting local events.
- Municipalities can adopt a [women's equity strategy](#) that focuses on public awareness, safety and civic engagement.
- Municipalities can engage in reconciliation action plans to address the Canadian history of racism and colonialism. In 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) addressed the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation in its findings and calls to action are in its 2015 final report. [Honouring the Truth and Reconciling the Future](#) charts a course for Canada and municipalities to follow. Municipalities must also support the on-going [National Inquiry into the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women](#).

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- What funding can you make available for violence prevention, a women's equity strategy and a reconciliation action plan?



LETTER TEMPLATE

Date:

For the attention of:

Candidate's Name

Office Address

Dear Candidate's Name,

As we approach the October municipal election, I, on behalf of the Agency Name, would like to know the positions of our local candidates on important questions relating to ending violence against women in BC.

Insert short agency description here if you want

As someone who supports women and children experiencing and fleeing gender based violence, I am well aware of the importance of politicians in achieving adequate outcomes that will support women and children experiencing violence. These outcomes impact the safety and lives of women and children. Some questions for you based on our immediate concerns follow.

Choose backgrounders and points from this toolkit and select which topics are most relevant to your community. The following are **only examples**:

1. Housing is a vital issue for women and their children experiencing violence. Timely access to safe, secure, affordable housing (to rent or own) is a crucial component enabling a woman to leave a violent partner and to preventing homelessness. Thus, the shortage of affordable housing in our community cannot be separated from the issue of domestic violence. We encourage you as a local candidate to encourage the development of affordable housing options to rent or to own with units set aside with priority access for domestic violence survivors. This should include 3 and 4 bedroom units that can house women and their children. Housing options that meet the needs of women with disabilities and older women should also be prioritized.

What will you do to make housing affordable and available specifically for women and their children who are experiencing violence?



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2. In BC and across Canada, women and girls are being murdered and are going missing and this critical public health and safety issue has existed for decades. Every four days a woman is killed by a family member in Canada.^{xxiv} More than 1,100 indigenous women and girls have disappeared or been murdered in Canada since 1980, double an earlier estimate.^{xxv} In BC and Canada, women and girls make up over 50 % of the population and their health and safety is endangered on a daily basis.

How will you reduce the disproportionate number of indigenous women and girls being murdered and going missing?

3. Currently, there is no Transition House/Second Stage Housing in our community of **INSERT COMMUNITY**. This is placing pressure on services in surrounding areas as well as limiting the options of women requiring safety in **INSERT COMMUNITY**. In a 2012 report, in just one day, 71 women in British Columbia were turned away from Transition Houses.ⁱⁱⁱ According to a 2014 national survey, 73% of potential new residents in Transition Houses across Canada could not be accommodated during the 24-hour survey period.^{xxvi}

With an increase demand for shelter when fleeing violence, how will you meet the need of BC's women and children needing shelter?

4. Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling, and Empowerment (PEACE) is a free, confidential program across BC for children and youth aged 3 to 18, who have been exposed to domestic violence. There are 86 PEACE programs and British Columbia is the only province or territory in Canada that has a provincial program supporting children and youth exposed to violence against their mothers. In the 2018, BCSTH's 24 hour PEACE Program census, on March 13th, 2018, 929 children, youth and their parents (or guardians) who are survivors of violence were supported in-person, by 80 PEACE Programs across BC. Unfortunately, during the same time period in BC:
 - An additional 1,322 children and youth were still on waitlists for services.
 - 232 people contacted the PEACE Programs through calls, emails, texts and walk in requests but were unable to receive support services that day.
 - Only 59% of children and youth from BC who attempted to get help from PEACE Programs were able to access services. Factors contributing to waits for service were limits on staffing hours, space and resources.

With an increase demand for service and the rising cost of resources, how will you help meet the need of BC's children and youth exposed to domestic violence?

The reality is that women and children experiencing violence do not have adequate support. In our community they need better access to affordable housing, healthcare, safe transportation, and community facilities. There are waitlists for children and youth programs. We want local leadership that



shows a genuine commitment to making our community safer, supportive, and an affordable place for women and their children to live and thrive.

I would be very grateful to hear your responses on these **four** questions, and also on any other points you feel are important for eliminating violence against women, children and youth in our community and BC.

Sincerely,

Name & Title

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ⁱⁱ Jaffe, P., Wolfe, D., & Wilson, S.K. (1990). *Children of Battered Women*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

ⁱⁱⁱ BC Society of Transition Houses. (2012). [24 Hour Census Report](#).

^{iv} Canadian Network of Women Shelters & Transition Houses. (2016). [Shelter Voices](#).

^v Zhang, Ting, Josh Hoddenbagh, Susan McDonald, and Katie Scrim. (2012). [An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada](#). Ottawa: Justice Canada.

^{vi} Hunter, J. (12 November 2017). [A growing divide](#). *The Globe and Mail*.

^{vii} Vancity Credit Union. (7 March 2018). [REPORT: B.C. women are financially stressed, stretched and under-resource](#).

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^{ix} McInnes. S. (17 Aug 2016). [4 things to know about women and homelessness in Canada](#). *Behind the Numbers*.

^x BCNPHA. (2014). [Affordable Housing in BC: Municipal Election Toolkit](#).

^{xi} UNICEF. (2006). [Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children](#).

^{xii} BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel. (2016). [A Review of Intimate Partner Violence Deaths 2010-2015](#). Report to the Chief Coroner of British Columbia.

^{xiii} Tiessen, Kaylie. (2015). [Universal Affordable Childcare: Don't Scrap it, improve it](#). Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

^{xiv} First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. (2017). [May 9, 2017 British Columbia Election Toolkit](#).

^{xv} Taylor, G.(2016). [A Focus on Family Violence in Canada: The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2016](#). Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.

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^{xviii} Wathen, Nadine. (2012). [Health Impacts of Violent Victimization on Women and their Children](#). Research and Statistics Division Department of Justice Canada.

^{xix} Dutton, Mary Ann, Stacey Kaltman, Lisa A. Goodman, Kevin P. Weinfurt, and Natalie Vankos. (2005). "Patterns of Intimate Partner Violence: Correlates and Outcomes." *Violence Victims* 20(5): 483-97.

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^{xx} Thara, R. and Vikram Patel. (2001). "Women's Mental Health: A Public Health Concern." *World Health Organization Regional Health Forum*, 5: 24-33.

^{xxi} Roguski, Michael.(2015). [It's not OK' Campaign Community Evaluation Project](#). Prepared for the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development.

^{xxii} BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel. (2016). [A Review of Intimate Partner Violence Deaths 2010-2015](#). Report to the Chief Coroner of British Columbia.

^{xxiii} Violence Against Women Learning Network (2018). [Indigenous Women, Intimate Partner Violence & Housing](#).

^{xxiv} Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada. (2016). [A Focus on Family Violence in Canada](#).

^{xxv} RCMP. 2014. [Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women RCMP National Operational Overview](#).

^{xxvi} Canadian Network of Women Shelters and Transition Houses. 2016. [Shelter Voices](#).