



# 2022 BC Municipal Election Toolkit

A Toolkit for Women's Transition House and Support  
Programs

September 2022



## INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT

The BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) has developed this toolkit to encourage candidates running in the October 2022 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 advocacy around local issues and concerns.

## 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 familiarize 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 the tremendous costs that BC already faces from this pervasive social problem.

- Approximately every six days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner.<sup>i</sup>
- 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.<sup>ii</sup>
- Every year, more than 30,000 women and children are referred to

- counselling and outreach programs because of their experience of violence.<sup>iii</sup>
- Every year, more than 18,000 women and children access transition and safe houses to escape violence.<sup>iv</sup>
  - In just one 24-hour span, or a single day of service in 2021, 1116 people were supported by Transition Housing programs in BC, while 109 were turned away due to lack of capacity.<sup>v</sup> On that same day, there were 602 children and youth who were unable to be served by PEACE programs in BC, with 789 on waitlists for services.<sup>vi</sup>
  - 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.<sup>vii</sup> While this is the most up-to-date data measuring the total economic impact of gender-based violence in Canada, further research is needed to explore this issue, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## ENGAGING WITH CANDIDATES AND VOTING

Municipal elections include the election of:

- The mayor.
- City or district councilors, commissioners for the parks board or other local community commissions (e.g., 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 and children 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 at the end of this toolkit. Note though that sending hand-written and unique letters (as opposed to those built from templates) resonates more deeply with candidates. Many municipalities still follow the practice of having elected officials personally read hand-written and personalized communication.<sup>viii</sup>
- Attend all-candidates meetings and ask the questions for candidates outlined in this toolkit. Be watchful of invitations issued by specific municipal offices and departments.
- There are often options to sign on to mailing lists to receive these kinds of notifications.

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;
- 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:

- **One** of these pieces of ID;
  - A BC driver's license
  - A BC Identification Card (BCID)
  - A BC Services Card (with photo)
  - Another card issued by the Government of B.C. or Canada that shows your name, photo and address
  - A Certificate of Indian Status
- or, any **two** pieces of [ID or documents](#) that both show your name. At least one must have your current address.
- Voters who do not have identification can have their identity [vouched for](#) by another person.

## GENDER-BASED ELECTION ISSUES 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 reduce 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 is growing in BC, with the disparity between the highest earners and the lowest earners continuing to widen in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>ix</sup>
- In 2016, there were 557,000 people in BC living below the poverty line.<sup>x</sup> About 40% of people experiencing poverty in BC are working.<sup>xi</sup> Indigenous peoples are twice as likely to live in poverty, as are people living with disabilities.<sup>xii</sup>
- B.C. has one of the highest child poverty rates in the country, with approximately one in five children (156,560) living in poverty in BC.<sup>xiii</sup>
- The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on women's economic wellbeing. In total, 2.8 million women lost their jobs or were working less than half of their regular hours as a result of the March 2020 lockdown.<sup>xiv</sup>
- As well, women earn \$0.89 for every dollar men earn in BC, with racialized women earning just 59.3% of what white men earn on average.<sup>xv</sup> These trends in income inequality disadvantage women and make it more difficult for them to earn an amount to keep up with the rising 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 reviewing the [BC Poverty Reduction Coalition's Blueprint for Justice](#) and joining the call for action on [BC's Poverty Reduction Strategy](#). 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 Municipal Election Toolkit](#).

## **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 2021, in just one day, **109 women and children** were turned away from Transition Houses, Second Stage Houses and Safe Home programs.<sup>xvi</sup> The limited capacity of Transition Housing programs has worsened throughout the COVID-19 pandemic due to reduced capacity in order to allow for social distancing.
- 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.<sup>xvii</sup> 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.<sup>xviii</sup>
- Encourage the development of affordable 3 and 4 bedroom units suitable for women and their children.

- Adopt an intersectional approach to housing policy that recognizes the diverse needs of women seeking housing. An intersectional analysis tells us that not all women experience housing precarity in the same way across the province. Prioritizing the voices of those with lived-experience, and treating the experiences of marginalized women as distinct and outside of an average measure in policy development, leads to more effective policy decisions.
- 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.

### **QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:**

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



## CHILDREN AND YOUTH

### WHAT WE KNOW:

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that the number of children in Canada exposed to domestic violence each year is 85,000-362,000.<sup>xxix</sup> COVID-19 has exacerbated domestic violence globally and in Canada, and the ongoing economic impacts of the pandemic mean that this will likely remain an important health concern.<sup>xx</sup>
- The pandemic has taken a toll on young people's mental health - the Kids Help Phone received more than 4 million contacts from young Canadians in 2020, compared with 1.9 million in 2019.<sup>xxi</sup>
- Access to universal, affordable, high quality childcare 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.<sup>xxii</sup> The median monthly rate for full-time licensed group childcare in some cities in BC is more than the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- Violence and its effects against women, in schools, and in dating relationships is a public health and safety issue that impacts British Columbians.<sup>xxiv</sup> School and dating violence can be prevented by implementing coordinated and well-funded programs.<sup>xxv</sup>

### WHAT CAN MUNICIPALITIES DO?

We encourage municipalities to engage in the issues impacting women and their children experiencing violence 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 work with their local PEACE Programs to 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 childcare 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 care for children. Ask whether there is an initiative to support affordable accessible childcare 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:

- 1 in 3 women will experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime.<sup>xxvi</sup> Violence against women has a wide range of negative effects on women's health, including their physical, mental and reproductive health.
- While physical injuries and death are the most obvious health impacts of violence, longer-term mental health problems are often severe for survivors of violence. Rates of depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, sleep disorders, personality disorders, substance use disorders, self-harm and suicide are higher among women who have experienced violence.<sup>xxvii</sup>
- Women who experience violence have their wellbeing compromised in a myriad of ways, including severely limited access to services and supports that facilitate health and wellness. For example, poverty decreases food security, ability to use community facilities, transportation options and access to supports such as counselling. Women who experience violence also report feeling isolated and disconnected from their community, often as a result of deliberate efforts of the offender to control and isolate them, as well feelings of shame and fear of judgment from others.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### 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 free counselling supports for women and their children by funding local organizations providing [PEACE Programs](#) or [Stopping the Violence](#) counselling programs in the community.
- 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 neighborhood where they can get exercise, access programming and build community.

- Municipalities can fund food security programs, community gardens and other 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 BC, from January 2010 through December 2015, 100 people died as a result of intimate partner violence. On average, 12 people are killed in BC each year due to intimate partner violence homicide.<sup>xxix</sup> From January to September 2022, BCSTH counted 16 femicides (the killing of women and girls primarily, but not exclusively, by men<sup>xxx</sup>) in BC.
- The epidemic of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada reflects the ongoing, devastating impacts of colonialization on Indigenous families, communities and Canada as a whole. More than six in ten (63%) Indigenous women report having experienced physical or sexual assault in their lifetime.<sup>xxxi</sup> Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be murdered or missing than other women in Canada.<sup>xxxii</sup>
- In order to decrease the rates of violence against women, children and youth, multiple prevention strategies must be implemented and funded for the long term. Changing social attitudes and perspectives toward violence can be achieved through public education campaigns.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### WHAT CAN MUNICIPALITIES DO?

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

- Municipalities and school boards can coordinate 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](#). In 2021, the Violence is Preventable program reached 5,787 children and 157 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 of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women](#) on December 6<sup>th</sup>. Cities can support local agencies to enable the 16 Days of Activism to have a presence in your community by collaborating, providing funding, and hosting local events.
- Municipalities can engage in reconciliation action plans to address Canada's historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism in their communities. In 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) addressed the legacy of

residential schools and put forward 94 [Calls to Action](#) directed at all levels of government. [Honouring the Truth and Reconciling the Future](#) charts a course for Canada and municipalities to follow. Municipalities must also support the [National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls](#) and the associated [Calls to Justice](#).

- Municipalities can adopt a [women's equity strategy](#) that focuses on public awareness, safety and civic engagement.

### **QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:**

- What funding can you make available for violence prevention, a women's equity strategy and a reconciliation action plan?
- How do you plan to implement the TRC's Calls to Action, as well as the Calls to Justice for Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls?

## 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 gender-based 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?***

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 2.5 days, a woman or girl is killed in Canada.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be missing or murdered than other women in Canada.<sup>xxxv</sup> 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 just one day in 2021, 109 women in British Columbia were turned away from Transition Houses due to lack of capacity.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

***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 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 a parent. On one day in 2021, 450 children, youth and their caregivers who are survivors of violence were supported in-person or remotely by PEACE Programs across BC.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Unfortunately, on that same day in BC:
  - An additional 602 children, youth and their caregivers were unable to be supported, with 789 children and youth still on waitlists for services.
  - Only 57% 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 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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