

# BACKGROUND

Petition to the Government  
of Canada for Action to  
Significantly Reduce Violence

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## **Backgrounder for the Petition to the Government of Canada for Action to Significantly Reduce Violence, 2021**

This backgrounder was prepared<sup>1</sup> by Audrey Monette (research consultant and staff at the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention) and Dr. Irvin Waller (Emeritus Professor, University of Ottawa) to provide background information on the Petition to the Government of Canada for Action to Significantly Reduce Violence.

The petition was developed by Rev. Frances Deverell, Retired Unitarian Minister and advisor to the Canadian Unitarian Council on Violence Prevention, in collaboration with:

- Shannon Turner, Co-Chair, Violence Prevention Canada – Prévention de la violence Canada
- Priscilla de Villiers, Executive Director of the Victim Justice Network
- Kathy Vandergrift, Past Chair of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children
- Sarah Burke, Co-Chair, Violence Prevention Canada – Prévention de la violence Canada
- Rebekah Erickson, Senior Policy Consultant
- Irvin Waller, Emeritus Professor, University of Ottawa
- Audrey Monette, Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention

The petition can be found at <https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-3218>. Please sign the petition and share with your networks.

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<sup>1</sup> Developing the backgrounder to the petition was a collective effort. Sincere thanks and gratitude are extended to Jeffrey Bradley, Shannon Turner, Priscilla de Villiers, Kathy Vandergrift, Sarah Burke, and Felix Munger for providing input and feedback to improve the document.

# Why Canada Needs a Violence Prevention Strategy

Canadians pride themselves for the peace and safety of their country. However, millions of people are harmed by violence each year. Canada cannot achieve significant reductions in violence by doing more of the same and ignoring the systemic injustices impacting vulnerable people. Canada needs a violence prevention strategy to reduce the 2.2 million victims of violent incidents self-reported each year<sup>2</sup> and the over 2.2 million Criminal Code incidents reported to police<sup>3</sup>. Statistics show that Indigenous, Black, and People of Color are disproportionately victims of violence at about 1 in 4 persons being harmed yearly and are disproportionately impacted by the criminal legal system. In addition, women, girls – and particularly Indigenous women and girls – members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and women living with a disability experience violence at rates 2 to 7 times higher than amongst the general population<sup>4</sup>. The total annual cost of crime is estimated at \$55 billion a year in harm to victims (including invisible harm such as significant trauma and loss of quality of life) and \$22 billion in criminal legal responses through police, courts, and prisons<sup>5</sup>.

## Limits of the Status Quo

Canada will reduce violence significantly by shifting from the status quo to investing strategically in prevention that addresses the root causes of social problems. Relying on reactive measures such as policing, hospital emergency rooms, transition houses, and other after the fact solutions does not help to tackle the root causes and systemic issues that foster violence. The root causes of violence are impacted by social, economic, and political factors. Reducing inequality by focusing more on health, education, basic income, and employment will translate to less violence as will focusing on risk factors<sup>6</sup> through programs proven to reduce violence such as youth outreach, family support, school curricula on attitudes to violence, and job skills.

Governments – including Canada – are committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030, including significantly reducing homicides and violence in SDG 16.1 and gender-based violence as part of gender inequality in SDG 5. Canada is a Pathfinder for ending violence against children (SDG 16.2). Similarly, lobby groups and social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter and Idle No More are calling on the government to take action now to address systemic racism, oppression, and violence. The following essentials will ensure that Canada shifts away from the status quo towards the successful reduction of violence throughout the country to save thousands of lives and unacceptable rates of trauma and harm caused by violence.

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. (2015). *Criminal victimization in Canada, 2014*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14241-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. (2020). *Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2019*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00010-eng.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Status of Women Canada. (2018). *About Gender-Based Violence*. Retrieved from <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/violence/knowledge-connaissance/about-apropos-en.html>

<sup>5</sup> Waller, I. (2019). *Science and Secrets of Ending Violent Crime*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield

<sup>6</sup> Public Safety Canada. (2015). *Risk and protective factors*. Retrieved from [https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/crm-prvntn/fndng-prgrms/rsk-fctrs-en.aspx#root\\_map](https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/crm-prvntn/fndng-prgrms/rsk-fctrs-en.aspx#root_map)

## Awareness of Violence Prevention Science

The evidence on what works to prevent violence is readily available<sup>7</sup>, but not yet widely used. The gap between the violence prevention science and the action in countries such as Canada must be bridged. To do so, we call for increased awareness of the effectiveness and cost-benefits of programs scientifically proven to prevent violence better than current use of police, prisons, and other criminal sanctions as well as broad social and economic policies. Therefore, we call for new and adequate investment in using these proven programs to stop violence before it happens. Programs that are scientifically proven to reduce violence significantly include youth services, family support, school curricula, hospital-based services, strengthening anti-violence social norms, mitigating financial stress, and improving the physical environment.

## Multi-sectoral Approach

Successful violence prevention requires establishing partnerships through a multi-sectoral approach for community safety where we mobilize social service agencies and others who are well suited to tackling the risk factors and underlying causes. These sectors include housing, education, child and youth services, health, and mental health. They must, work together to prevent and intervene in high-risk situations by sharing data, reviewing cases, and addressing people's needs through social supports as well as measuring outcomes.

## City-Wide Strategies

The federal government should encourage cities across the country to learn from best practices and successful strategies in Canada and internationally which reduce violence significantly. By sharing national and international knowledge and experience, cities can learn best practices and tailor plans to their community needs. Internationally, cities such as Glasgow (Scotland) and London (England) have implemented successful Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) which diagnose the community safety-related challenges, address the risk factors identified in the diagnosis, and measure reductions in violence. They also call for greater investments in prevention efforts, training for human talent, public engagement, and have been evaluating their results consistently. While availability of guns and inequality contribute to much higher rates of gun violence in US, cities such as Boston and Oakland have demonstrated significant reductions in violence and more cities are initiating community safety strategies inspired by science and success.

## Partnerships

Violence prevention efforts should be conducted in partnership with various groups – particularly those who are disproportionately impacted by violence and police and criminal justice responses (i.e., Indigenous Peoples, Black, and People of Color, gender-diverse people, and other minorities). In order to redress the legacy of colonialism, residential schools, and advance the process of reconciliation, violence prevention initiatives should be conducted in partnership with Indigenous communities and be aligned with the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Gender-Diverse

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<sup>7</sup> National Institute of Justice. (2020). *Crime Solutions*. Retrieved from <https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov>

Peoples Calls for Justice. Canada should also work in partnership with groups disproportionately impacted to implement social policies that address risk factors and foster equity, quality education, job training, and opportunities for Black, racialized, and other minority youth to thrive.

## Measuring Results

It is crucial to set a vision for the future. Planning should include working towards measurable targets. The evidence and success of leading cities suggests that violence can be reduced by 50% within 5 years. This will require investments in training and professional development of the human capacity to undertake the planning and implementation as well as development and use of ways of measuring violence that go beyond police data, such as epidemiology in admissions to hospitals because of violent incidents and surveys. By monitoring and evaluating results, strategies can be data driven and be reformed as needed to ensure best practices.

## Investment in Upstream Social Prevention

Providing adequate and sustained funding into evidence-based violence prevention programs and practices that address the root causes of violence and using targeted social development such as education in schools, parenting supports, youth outreach, conflict resolution, mentoring, sports, life-skills, job training, and social welfare. Most of these programs have been shown to be highly cost effective, often returning more than US \$7 for every US \$1<sup>8</sup> invested in savings to victims and to taxpayers in reduced costs of reaction.

## Training Practitioners

Hiring practitioners who are trained in violence prevention and equipped to implement standards that ensure supports are needs based, culturally sensitive, trauma-informed, intersectional, holistic, and consistently applied. Human talent will ensure strong leadership, dedication, and collaboration with key partners, in addition to raising awareness on what works to prevent violence. The Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention offers training sessions on crime prevention and community safety & well-being planning to practitioners across the country. The training provides participants with the necessary understanding, knowledge, and practice implications to prepare a community safety plan in collaboration with community partners to proactively address locally identified priorities.

## Mobilizing Support Groups

Grassroots support groups such as Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, March for Our Lives, #MeToo, and MOMs can help build capacity and be at the forefront of shifting the culture to create communities that care. Values and norms will change with collaborative partnerships working towards transformative solutions. Support groups can also help inform solutions to systemic issues.

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<sup>8</sup> Aos, S., Phipps, P., Barnoski, R., Lieb, R. (2001). *The comparative costs and benefits of programs to reduce crime*. Retrieved from [http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/756/Wsipp\\_The-Comparative-Costs-and-Benefits-of-Programs-to-Reduce-Crime-v-4-0\\_Full-Report.pdf](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/756/Wsipp_The-Comparative-Costs-and-Benefits-of-Programs-to-Reduce-Crime-v-4-0_Full-Report.pdf)

## Violence Prevention Office

All orders of government need a permanent office to coordinate and lead the strategies and mobilize key sectors to ensure sound implementation of prevention science. Local planning boards can assist with technical support on measurement and planning, coordinate training opportunities, raise awareness and support research, while funding grassroots projects that are community driven.

These key essentials can help save countless lives through effective preventative actions that can address root causes and make systemic changes for the well-being of all people in Canada. Through our collective efforts we can create a just, peaceful, safe, and equitable society.

## Additional References

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## APPENDIX I: Developments in Crime Prevention in Canada

Many individuals and cities in Canada have endorsed the Violence Prevention charter calling for a national action plan for violence prevention. Mayors are beginning to commit to reductions in violent crime exceeding 50%. The prevention framework builds from that vision and those aspirations to concrete actions that are needed to save lives, protect women and avert the trauma and losses from violence.

The framework builds on key elements from the consensus both nationally and internationally that we have the evidence that shows that prevention is the most effective and cost-effective way to reduce crime. That is, we need evidence based, adequately funded, and sustained actions that tackle the causes before violence occurs to make Canadians safe and avoid victimization. It also includes knowledge about how to implement those winning strategies successfully, awareness of the compelling case for investment, and the need for national leadership.

In 1983, the Canadian Council for Social Development proposed that the number of victims of crime would be reduced significantly by tackling the social causes of crime. In 1989, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities joined with US and European Mayors to call on governments and cities to go beyond policing and criminal justice to tackle the roots of crime. In 1993 and 1996, two separate parliamentary committees recommended establishing a national crime prevention strategy that would tackle the causes of crime and fund it annually with the equivalent of 5% of federal spending on policing and criminal justice. The federal government allocated 1% annually starting in 1998 for short term projects. If it fulfills its electoral promise in 2019 f/n, it will double the allocation to 2% or \$100 million. Annual federal expenditures on police, courts, and corrections are \$5 billion out of the total \$22 billion.

At the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Canada agreed on guidelines to prevent urban crime in 1996 and national crime prevention in 2002, which call for evidence based and sustained strategies to reduce crime. In 2015, Canada committed to significant reductions in homicides and violent crime, intimate partner and sexual violence, and violence against children as part of the UN sustainable development goals.

The World Health Organization (WHO) published a comprehensive report on the evidence on the causes and preventive solutions to interpersonal violent crime in 2002. Canada has agreed at the World Health Assembly to resolutions to act on violence against women and girls. In 2017, Canada hosted WHO to discuss action in Canada and abroad on a framework known as INSPIRE and use of a comprehensive resource of all the evidence on what has worked to prevent violent crime.

In 2019, the UN General Assembly adopted UN System Wide Guidelines on Safer Cities building on 25 years of programs in cities that go beyond policing and criminal justice to tackle the causes of violence, using evidence, at the city level.

In Canada, the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention partnered with a team of researchers at the University of Ottawa to highlight the conclusions from the evidence and these national and international sources to share what policy makers can do. The book *Science and Secrets of Ending Violent Crime* highlights the tragedies and costs of the status quo, specific actions with youth, families, schools, and policing that have been proven to reduce crime, as well as how governments and cities can implement those actions. It includes a compelling economic case for investing in prevention and shows its feasibility, affordability, and popularity.

Reducing violent crime by 50% is increasingly seen as an obtainable goal. Both the Global Parliament of Mayors and the Peace in Our Cities campaign on the Sustainable Development have momentum for Mayors to learn from the knowledge and pioneering cities to achieve a 50% cut in violent crime by 2030: <https://pluspeace.org/peace-in-our-cities>

It is not just a question of knowing the evidence and how to plan its use but more one of helping Canadian government agencies, cities, and civil society become aware of the evidence, become skilled and trained in the planning processes to get it implemented, and getting the sustained and adequate funding to make it happen. It will mean changes from the status quo which must be managed in terms of changes in jobs and skills.