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Message from the Chair of the Family Violence Death Review Committee

Since the Family Violence Death Review Committee (FVDRC) began in 2013, the FVDRC has gone through many changes. Between 2013/14 and 2019/20, the FVDRC has reported to five different ministers in government and has had 18 different members. During that time, we have also witnessed the growth and evolution of policies and practices in our province that protect victims and address family violence.

Reflecting on these transitions, what has been consistent throughout, is the level of commitment and concern government, communities and individuals in our province invest in the prevention and reduction of family violence – regardless of affiliation, background, ethnicity, or geography. While we all strive to do more and to do better, we must also recognize the good work that has been done to protect victims of family violence and their families.

Over these last six years, the FVDRC has participated in the changes to Alberta’s collective family violence response through our case review recommendations and annual reports, with the goal of strengthening collective learning, best practices and capacity building within the sector. As a committee, we are proud of our work and of the foundation of cases and learnings we have contributed. The continuing work of the FVDRC is important, as it raises awareness of family violence and highlights the dependence between all of us in the sector to work together and find solutions, create opportunities and embrace improvements that will assist both victims and perpetrators with breaking the cycle of family violence.

2019/20 is my last full year of being a member and Chair of the FVDRC. I want to thank the Minister of Community and Social Services, my committee colleagues and the FVDRC Secretariat for their time, dedication and support. I also want to recognize the amazing work of Alberta’s government ministries that provide supports to family violence victims, as well as Alberta’s police organizations, family violence emergency shelters, community organizations, service providers, educators and researchers that make up the whole of the family violence response in our province. It is an honour to serve alongside all of you, as we work to end family violence.

Dr. Allen Benson, LLD (Hon.) Chair
Executive Summary

Alberta’s Family Violence Death Review Committee is a multi-disciplinary, cross-sector group that reports to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The Committee’s authority and mandate is derived from the Protection Against Family Violence Act (PAFVA). The role of the Committee is to review incidents of family violence deaths and provide recommendations to the Minister of Community and Social Services respecting the prevention and reduction of family violence.

The Committee reviews all family violence related deaths in Alberta that occur as a result of an intimate partner relationship. Incidents may involve current or former spouses, common-law relationships, boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, and the death of children or bystanders because of violence in an intimate partner relationship. Of those incidents, the Committee further selects individual cases for an in-depth case review to provide a cross-section of cases and learnings that reflect Alberta’s diverse demographics, and provide further insights as to why the deaths occurred, and measures that could be taken to prevent and reduce other similar deaths.

The 2019/2020 Annual Report provides an overview of the Committee’s membership, structure and accountability. The report also explains how case reviews are completed, the processes used to complete the reviews and the resulting recommendations.

The 2019/2020 Annual Report also provides a detailed examination of information collected from the 13 family violence incidents that resulted in 15 deaths (14 victims and one perpetrator) in 2019. Findings from this report include:

- The incidents occurred in both rural and urban communities with the Edmonton, Central and Calgary regions recording the highest number of deaths.
- The victim’s ages range from under 19 to middle-aged adults.
- The majority of victims were adults between the ages of 20-39.
- The majority of perpetrators were adults between the ages of 30-39.
- One incident involved multiple homicides.
- One incident involved a murder-suicide.
- Two of the incidents involved multiple perpetrators.
- The majority of perpetrators were male.
- Eight of the victims were female and seven of the victims were male.
- The majority of family violence deaths involved the use of a weapon.
Introduction and Overview of the Committee

In 2009, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (formerly Human Services) led a cross-ministry committee to set the foundation for a mechanism to review family violence deaths in Alberta. Subsequently, a working group of community partners and police agencies was formed to provide options for an operational structure for the Committee. In 2013, legislation was passed that established the Committee under PAFVA. 

The Committee became operational in February 2014. The work of the Committee is supported by a secretariat of staff from Community and Social Services in the Preventive Community Services Division.

Committee Membership

The Committee is a multi-disciplinary group of family violence experts. Members represent various sectors involved in providing programs, services and research in the field of family and domestic violence, including legal services, law enforcement, sexual assault services, victim advocacy and community organizations.

The 2019/2020 Committee is made up of the following members:

- **Committee Chair: Dr. Allen Benson**, Native Counselling Services of Alberta
- **Ms. Sylvia Kasper QC**, former Prosecutor and Manager of the Calgary Domestic Violence Unit.
- **Acting Deputy Chief Cliff O’Brien**, Calgary Police Service
- **Ms. Karen Pease**, Victim Advocate
- **Ms. Debra Tomlinson**, CEO, Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services
- **Ms. Monique Auffrey**, CEO, Discovery House, Calgary
- **Mr. David Grauwiler**, Executive Director, Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Division
- **Ms. Salimah Walji-Shivji**, Vice President and General Counsel, AgeCare
- **Inspector Sean Armstrong**, Edmonton Police Service
- **Superintendent Jason McAdam**, Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- **Inspector Steven Burton**, Tsuut’ina Nation Police Service

The Committee also engages Ex-Officio members for expertise on a specific subject matter when undertaking in-depth case reviews. These temporary members are subject to all governing Legislation and the Code of Conduct as standing members.
Mandate
The Committee derives its authority from the PAFVA and has the responsibility to review family violence deaths in Alberta. The Committee provides expertise to contribute to evidence-informed policy, legislation and practice, through their analysis and recommendations from the review of family violence-related deaths. The Committee reviews information and data for all family violence deaths that occur in the province, including the circumstances surrounding the deaths, to identify family violence trends and risk factors. The Committee also completes in-depth reviews of family violence-related deaths and makes recommendations aimed at preventing deaths and reducing family violence in general.

Definitions and Methodology
Under the Canadian Criminal Code, a person commits homicide when they cause the death of a human being, directly or indirectly, by any means. The Committee considers homicides to be family violence-related if:

- The victim(s) and perpetrator(s) were spouses or partners, former spouses or former partners, adults with children in common, or adults/teens who had been in a dating relationship.
- The death was a homicide of a person other than the intimate partner and it occurred within the context of family violence. This would include the homicide of a bystander or someone who attempted to protect a family violence victim from harm.
- The homicide was a child death that occurred as an extension of or in response to ongoing abuse between adult intimate partners.

Source of Information
The Committee compiles summary data from the total number of police-reported family violence homicides committed in Alberta in a given year. It is important to note that the number of police reported family violence homicides in a year may change from the numbers given in this report, as police progress through their investigations. The Committee collects data about family violence deaths from the 11 different police agencies in Alberta on a yearly basis. The Committee analyzes this information and aggregates the data, to provide an overview of family violence deaths that occur in our province, as set out in PAFVA and according to the criteria established by the Committee (above).

Confidentiality
Under PAFVA, the Committee must not disclose any identifying information about any individual whose death is the subject of review, or any other individual involved in the death, in publicly released reports. Additionally, committee members must undertake an Oath of Confidentiality during their tenure. In accordance with provincial legislation, and in order to protect the privacy of the individuals involved, the names of victims and perpetrators are not made public and only non-identifying statistics are provided.
Code of Conduct
In accordance with the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, which governs all government boards, commissions and public agencies in the province, the Committee is guided by a Code of Conduct and established Mandate and Roles. The Committee’s Code of Conduct is reviewed by the Office of the Alberta Ethics Commissioner before it is approved by the Minister of Community and Social Services. The Code of Conduct can be found online at https://www.alberta.ca/public-agency-list.cfm.

Operating Principles of the Committee

Systems-Focused
The Committee strives to understand how systems and communities are effective in responding to family violence victims and perpetrators, and to identify where barriers exist. The Committee is not a fault-finding body, and PAFVA prevents the Committee from making any findings of legal responsibility or conclusion of law. Through a thorough review of individual cases, the Committee examines how systems respond to victims of family violence and perpetrators. The objectives of in-depth reviews are to identify:

- Gaps in training, policy, practice, resources, communication and collaboration which may facilitate improved responses to family violence;
- Potential barriers to victim safety and support-seeking behaviours from both victims and perpetrators;
- How institutions can encourage an informed and appropriate response to family violence for service providers, victims and perpetrators, and members of the public that are party to incidents of family violence;
- How government and community partners delivering programs and policies related to family violence can use best practices to foster change.

Prevention-Focused
The Committee’s in-depth review process looks at the conditions that lead to family violence deaths and how the deaths may have been prevented. Issues and factors examined include:

- What factors could have prevented the violence from escalating or prevented the death from occurring?
- What conditions shaped the victims' and perpetrators' options?
- What systems were available and accessed by the victims and perpetrators?
- How did the systems respond to the victims and perpetrators?

The Committee uses these questions to develop recommendations that target systemic change, which are intended to prevent and reduce future tragedies.
Data-Driven
In addition to the information learned from conducting in-depth case reviews, the Committee analyzes yearly data from family violence deaths throughout Alberta to provide a comprehensive picture of the prevalence and circumstances surrounding family violence deaths in the province.

In-Depth Case Reviews

Process Map

- Police provide yearly data on all family violence deaths in Alberta
- Secretariat staff create a synopsis for each death
- Committee meets and selects cases for in-depth review
- Committee breaks out into sub-committee pods and conducts in-depth review of cases
- Pods present case review findings to the Committee
- Committee discusses and approves recommendations
- Committee submits a full case review report and public report to the Minister of CSS
- Minister of CSS releases the Public Report on the Open Data Portal
- Committee meets with academics and government representatives for additional information


Method for In-Depth Case Reviews

The Committee reviews all family violence-related deaths in Alberta; however, not every incident is examined through an in-depth case review. Before the Committee can conduct an in-depth review of a case, any criminal investigations or proceedings must be concluded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases that are eligible for an in-depth review:</th>
<th>Cases that are ineligible for review:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homicides and murder-suicides by an intimate partner (current or former).</td>
<td>Homicide committed by an intimate partner where there is an ongoing police investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends, family, new partners and bystanders killed by the perpetrator in the context of intimate partner violence.</td>
<td>The perpetrator is facing criminal charges and has not yet been tried or sentenced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children killed by the perpetrator in the context of intimate partner violence (as retaliation intended to punish or hurt the other partner). Abuser killed by victim in self-defense.</td>
<td>Suicide death of perpetrator who was unsuccessful in a homicide attempt against their intimate partner (near misses). Homicide of a family or a household member not related to intimate partner violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuser killed by victim’s friends, family member, or bystander intervening.</td>
<td>Child abuse homicides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuser killed by law enforcement while responding to a family violence-related homicide.</td>
<td>Death by suicide of a domestic violence victim.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When conducting in-depth reviews, the Committee identifies the presence or absence of systemic issues and makes recommendations to the Minister for effective prevention/intervention approaches that support the reduction and prevention of family violence deaths. All recommendations are made using the SMART Criteria.

**SMART Criteria**

SMART guides the formation of recommendations and stands for:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic/Reliable
- **T**imely
2019 Family Violence Statistics and Findings

In 2019, there were 15 deaths (14 victims and 1 perpetrator) due to family violence. Between 2010 and 2019 there have been 165 deaths in Alberta due to family violence as set out by the Committee’s criteria.

**Family Violence Deaths in Alberta by Year (2010-2019)**

![Bar chart showing family violence deaths by year from 2010 to 2019](chart.png)

**Characteristics of Family Violence Deaths in Alberta**

![Pie chart showing characteristics of family violence deaths](chart.png)

86% of family violence deaths were single homicides. 7% were homicide/suicide, and 7% were multiple homicides.
2019 Summary of Deaths by Region

The Edmonton, Central and Calgary regions had the highest number of police reported family violence deaths.
**2019 Family Violence Deaths in Alberta**

The highest number of victims of family violence deaths were women aged 20-39 who were killed with a weapon.

**2019 Causes of Death**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gunshot/Firearm</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blunt Force Injury</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stab Wounds/Sharp Force Injury</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangulation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of all family violence deaths involved a weapon (firearm/knife). Ten deaths involved a weapon (four due to firearms and six due to stabbings), two involved strangulation; three deaths resulted from blunt force injuries.

Of the 15 family violence deaths, 14 were victims and one was a perpetrator who committed murder-suicide. The 14 victims of family violence deaths were comprised of eight females and six males.

**Analysis of Victims of Family Violence Death in 2019**

The majority of victims of family violence deaths were women aged 20-39 who were in a relationship with the perpetrator at the time of their death.

**2019 Age of Victims**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2019 Family Violence Deaths by Gender

The majority of victims were in a current relationship with their abuser at the time of their death: 65% were spouses, common law partners or dating partners, 21% were no longer in a relationship, 7% were family members, and 7% were unrelated/bystanders.

2019 Victims Relationship with Perpetrator

Analysis of Perpetrators of Family Violence

In 2019, 18 perpetrators were involved in the 13 incidents of family violence, which resulted in 15 deaths.

The majority of family violence deaths involved a male perpetrator aged 30-39 who used a weapon against his current partner.

In 2019, men perpetrated all of the multiple homicides and murder-suicides that occurred in Alberta.
Perpetrator Profiles

- 65% were a current partner
- 67% used a weapon (firearm or knife)
- The majority of perpetrators ages range from 30 - 39

Age of Perpetrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 59</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 - 69</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 - 79+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

In 2019, Alberta had 13 family violence incidents that resulted in 15 deaths (14 victims and one perpetrator). The 14 victims range from children under 19 to middle-aged adults. The incidents occurred both in rural and urban communities with the Edmonton, Central and Calgary regions recording the highest number of deaths.

Unlike previous years, more incidents were recorded in 2019 that involved multiple perpetrators, such that the number of perpetrators notably outnumbered the number of victims. These circumstances surrounding family violence deaths have not been seen by the FVDRC since its inception.

There was an increase in male victims of family violence in 2019 over previous years. However, family violence continues to be a gendered crime with the majority of perpetrators being male and the majority of victims being women. The majority of victims were also in a relationship with the perpetrators at the time of the homicide.