

Family Violence Death Review Committee

**Annual Report to the
Minister of Human Services**

2014/2015 Annual Report

Alberta 

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Message from the Chair



Between 2008 and 2014, there were 117 deaths due to family violence in our province. Since starting our work as a Committee in February 2014, we have been continually reminded of the importance of our commitment to review cases, and to provide advice and recommendations that will prevent and reduce family violence deaths. The resolve of our work has been heightened with the recent tragic multiple deaths that occurred in Edmonton in late December 2014, where children, family and community members were killed.

It is essential to note that Alberta has a dedicated history in helping to prevent and address family violence, and currently has many strong family violence initiatives in place at community and government levels. The Family Violence Death Review Committee (the Committee) is a multidisciplinary Committee whose members have many years of experience across a wide range of family violence work including law enforcement, sexual violence, victim advocates, legal, and research/academia. The overarching role of the Committee is to conduct reviews of family violence deaths and identify trends, risk factors and systemic gaps. The Committee then makes recommendations for effective intervention and prevention strategies. Over the past year, the Committee has worked diligently and collaboratively to identify guiding goals to frame our work from a strength-based approach. We identified six cases for further in-depth review.

Our focus for this past year has also been on developing effective case evaluation processes with an emphasis on best practices, so that a solid foundation is established to review cases in detail. As part of building this foundation, it has also been essential that the Committee fully understand the scope of family violence in Alberta, what it means in our province, and how the Committee's work contributes to family violence prevention efforts throughout Canada. For this reason, the Committee's first annual report does not include recommendations; rather it serves to establish a context for family violence in Alberta, and to highlight how important the continuing work of family violence prevention is to current and future generations.

I would like to thank the Committee for its hard work and dedication and for its exceptional knowledge and expertise. I would like to acknowledge the Committee's dedication to helping end family violence. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Human Services for their dedication and efficiency in which they carried out their duties to support the work of the Committee.

Original signed

Dr. Allen Benson, Chair

Family Violence Death Review Committee

Committee Membership

- **Allen Benson,**
Chair, CEO of Native Counselling Services of Alberta
- **Trent Forsberg**
Inspector, Edmonton Police Service
- **Gary Gibbens**
Mental Health/Domestic Violence Specialist
- **William Hogle, QC**
Family Lawyer
- **Sylvia Kasper, QC**
Retired Crown
- **Donnan McKenna**
Inspector, RCMP
- **Cliff O'Brien**
Acting Superintendent, Calgary Police Service
- **Karen Pease**
Director of a Women's Emergency Shelter
- **Kim Sanderson**
Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Correctional Services Division,
Justice and Solicitor General
- **Debra Tomlinson**
CEO of Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services
- **Lana Wells**
Associate Professor, University of Calgary, Social Work

Executive Summary

Alberta's Family Violence Death Review Committee (the Committee) is an internal arm's-length, multi-disciplinary, cross-sector group reporting directly to the Minister of Human Services, deriving its authority from the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA) (appendix 1). The Committee has the authority to conduct in-depth reviews into systemic issues related to incidents of family violence resulting in deaths in the province of Alberta and to provide the Minister with recommendations related to program, policy and service delivery.

The Committee convened its first meeting on February 11, 2014, and established guiding goals to include the following:

1. to understand the reasons for family violence deaths;
2. to understand where and how agencies and systems intersect and how they can better work together;
3. to determine the barriers to supports and services that the victim and perpetrator may have experienced; and
4. to understand and make recommendations on how family violence can be prevented and reduced.

Chapter One provides an overview of the Committee and its work, along with applicable legislation and regulations, its accountability, and reporting requirements. Section 17 of the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA) gives the Committee the legal authority to request information on family violence deaths. Chapter Two explains the request for information. The Committee has established several relationships with various public bodies for the purpose of receiving pertinent information on specific family violence death cases. These public bodies include Police Services, Child and Family Services, Medical Examiner Office and the Crown.

To conduct the in-depth reviews, the Committee has defined a process to choose and review cases, which is discussed in Chapter Three. Six cases have been identified to review and the first in-depth case is in the final stages of completion. In Chapter Four, family violence deaths are detailed by gender, age groups, relationship status and method of death. The Committee collected family violence death statistics between 2008 and 2014. The review of the Alberta family violence death statistics is explained within the context of Canadian statistics of family violence homicides.

In its first year, the Committee focused on building a strong foundation to inform best practices and recommendations going forward.

While the Committee identified six cases for in-depth review during the first year, all 76 incidents of family violence-related deaths were initially assessed to understand the scope of the work ahead. The Committee's goal is not only to review cases and make recommendations, but to understand family violence and ensure that the many complex issues and factors involved with family violence are taken into account, so that a thoughtful, respectful and deliberate approach is applied to each case. As the Committee continues to review more cases, trends, risk factors and systemic gaps will emerge and will be reflected in the recommendations the Committee puts forward.

With the goal of going forward with a solid foundation, the Committee did not include recommendations in this first annual report. Instead, the Committee provided information that establishes a clear picture of family violence in Alberta as it relates to a Canada-wide context, to help Albertans better understand the effects and consequences of family violence.

Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

Introduction

Violence in all its forms is unacceptable, regardless of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. However, one of the worst kinds of violence is that which occurs within relationships of trust. Not only is it a breach of trust, but more importantly, it can lead to death when violence escalates. We need to look at these tragic incidents and learn from them. It is a very real and important thing we can do for the family and friends of victims.

Formation of the Family Violence Death Review Committee

Until recently, Alberta did not have a formalized, multi-disciplinary mechanism to review or analyze family violence deaths; therefore, officials were not able to quantify the deaths accurately, comprehensively assess how and why they occurred, or determine if systemic issues may have been factors in the deaths.

In response to an identified need to establish such a group, Human Services led a cross-ministry and community partner committee to inform the research, required legislation, and required operational structure for the Family Violence Death Review Committee in Alberta.

On April 16, 2013, legislation was passed that established the Family Violence Death Review Committee. Cabinet approved, as part of the proposed *Children First Act*, related amendments to the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA) which established the Committee in the Act.

The former Minister of Human Services (2013 Administration) sent a request to his colleagues on the Ministers of the Families and Communities Committee, the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, the Alberta Family Law Bar, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assaults Services, and the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, for nominations for prospective members expertise in family violence.

Cabinet approved the recommended names in October 2013. The former Minister of Human Services signed a Ministerial Order on November 21, 2013, appointing the members to a three-year term.

On November 1, 2013 the amendments to PAFVA establishing the Committee were proclaimed in force. The Committee held its first meeting on February 11, 2014.

Purpose and Process of Committee

The Committee provides advice and makes recommendations through the Minister of Human Services pertaining to the reduction of family violence through the examination of family violence deaths, pursuant to the PAFVA.

The scope of the work includes:

- all homicides and homicides/suicides where the victim was a current or former intimate partner of the person responsible for the homicide; and
- homicides of people other than the intimate partner that occur in the context of intimate partner violence, or in the midst of a perpetrator's attempt to kill an intimate partner.

The Committee defines "family violence deaths" to include the following:

1. all homicides and homicides/suicides in which the victim was a current or former intimate partner or immediate family member of the person responsible for the homicide; and
2. homicides of people other than the intimate partner that occur in the context of intimate partner violence, or in the midst of a perpetrator's attempt to kill an intimate partner or an immediate family member.

The definition of "intimate partner" will include the following:

1. current or former dating relationships;
2. current or former common-law relationships;
3. current or former marriage relationships; and
4. persons who are parents of one or more children regardless of their marital status or whether they have lived together at any time.

The Committee established a process to receive, manage, review and ultimately provide recommendations. The initial step includes a notification of death, which leads to a case synopsis. Cases between 2008 and 2014 were documented and divided into eligible and ineligible cases. Eligible cases are incidents that resulted in murder-suicide or those that have been concluded through court proceedings. Ineligible cases are those incidents still under investigation or where charges have been laid and have not been processed through the courts. All ineligible cases will be considered eligible for an in-depth review once processed through the criminal justice system.

The Committee identifies specific eligible cases for further in-depth review. From the identified cases, information is obtained from various agencies.

Once analyzed, a completed report, including identified risk factors, systems involved and recommendations is presented to the Minister (Appendix 2). The Family and Community Safety Branch of Human Services is responsible for liaising with other ministries to implement and monitor the recommendations.

Sources of Family Violence-Related Information

The following links represent a sample of publicly published information sources that the Committee refers to when reviewing cases:

- <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/family-violence-hurts-everyone.pdf>
- <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/abuse-bullying/14839.html>
- http://justice.alberta.ca/programs_services/criminal_pros/crown_prosecutor/Pages/domestic_violence_guideline.aspx

Key Roles and Responsibilities

The Committee is a multi-disciplinary expert group that provides the Minister with advice and recommendations to help reduce and ultimately prevent family violence.

Specifically, the Committee will:

1. conduct reviews of family violence deaths;
2. identify the presence or absence of systemic issues of each case;
3. identify trends, risk factors, and patterns from the cases reviewed and make recommendations for effective intervention and prevention strategies;
4. report annually to the Minister of Human Services the trends, risk factors, and patterns identified; and
5. make appropriate recommendations based on the aggregate data collected from family death reviews.

Applicable Legislation and Regulations

The Committee has responsibilities, under, and is subject to, the *Protection Against Family Violence Act*.

The Committee is required to comply with certain provisions of additional pieces of legislation relating to finance, human resource, and administrative matters.

- *Financial Administration Act*
- *Public Service Act*
- *Lobbyists Act*

Membership of the Committee

The Committee is a multi-disciplinary group of 11 family violence experts. Members represent various sectors including law, enforcement, sexual assault services, victim advocacy, and research/academia.

Committee Members

Dr. Allen Benson, LLD (Hon.), Chair (CEO of Native Counselling Services of Alberta)

Dr. Benson has been integral in fostering the development of strong family and community values through his innate understanding of sharing, generosity and compassion for others. Dr. Benson has transformed these values into innovative service delivery methods, community-based action and a strong vision for the future for Aboriginal people. Dr. Benson has dedicated his life to advocating for the poor and disenfranchised and for the actualization of healthy Aboriginal individuals, families and communities, both in Canada and internationally. As Chief Executive Officer of Native Counselling Services of Alberta and President and CEO of BearPaw Communications Limited, he has spearheaded the development of many groundbreaking programs for Aboriginal people, particularly in the areas of corrections, employment, restorative and social justice, health, housing, and employment. Dr. Benson has received the following recognition: the Alberta Centennial Medal, the Alberta Aboriginal Role Model Award in Justice, the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International Paul Harris Fellow, an Honourary Doctorate of Laws from the University of Alberta, and the International Community Corrections Association's highest honour – the Margaret Mead Award. In 2013, Dr. Benson was appointed Chair of the Alberta Family Violence Death Review Committee and is president of the National Association Active in Criminal Justice (NAACJ).

Trent Forsberg (Inspector, Edmonton Police Service)

Inspector Forsberg has been a member of the Edmonton Police Service for 26 years. His experience includes Emergency Response and Patrol, Neighbourhood Foot Patrol Officer, Forensic Crime Scene Examiner within the Crime Scene Investigation Unit, Major Crimes Investigator and Detective in the Sexual Assault Section, Human Resources Team Lead – Employee Assistance, and Staff Sergeant in the Criminal Investigation Section – Downtown Division. Currently, Inspector Forsberg is the Officer in Charge of the Serious Crimes Branch, a position that oversees the Domestic Offender Crimes Section, the Child Protection Section, the Sexual Assault Section and the Internet Child Exploitation Section. His current assignment affords him the opportunity to provide insight, guidance, vision, and high-level support to investigations surrounding some of our most vulnerable clients. His passion for the prevention, suppression, and investigation of criminal activity, particularly as it affects the Edmonton community, is evident.

Inspector Forsberg married and raised a family in the Edmonton area, and has been an active community member, volunteering as a community football league coach and board member of a local public school society for many years, as well as his ongoing commitment to the support of Edmonton's art community through his involvement with local theatre initiatives.

Gary Gibbens, MA Psychology (Mental Health/Domestic Violence Specialist)

Mr. Gibbens has worked in the counselling field since 1970. His experience includes the treatment of substance abuse and chronic mental health illnesses, as well as the provision of emergency psychiatric services. Mr. Gibbens was involved in the Denver Metro Fatality Review Committee for a number of years, reviewing 33 domestic violence fatalities.

Since 1999, Mr. Gibbens has been a manager at the YWCA Sheriff King – Calgary, responsible for adult counselling programs (providing services to both domestic violence abusers and victims) as their Domestic Violence Specialist. He has been integral in the development of an Aboriginal men's treatment program with the Strengthening the Spirit group. Mr. Gibbens is certified in the use of domestic violence risk assessment tools and as a trainer in providing the Danger Assessment Risk Assessment instruments. Mr. Gibbens' current focus is on providing intervention for those impacted by substance abuse and family violence when they are co-occurring conditions, working with both Community Corrections and AADAC to deliver these services. Most recently, Mr. Gibbens has been a part of the project team responsible for the establishment of a High Risk Management Initiative as part of the Coordinated Community Response in Calgary. Additionally, he contracts with the Government of Alberta to provide consultation and supervision for domestic violence programs in Fort McMurray, St. Paul, Rocky Mountain House, and Drumheller.

William Hogle, QC (Family Lawyer)

Mr. Hogle has been a lawyer in private practice since 1989 with a focus on family law and federal prosecutions. Mr. Hogle has a social work background and has extensive experience in child protection matters, representing the Director of the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*, foster parents and children involved in child protection litigation (including youth confined as a danger to themselves or others). He has represented a Delegated First Nations Agency delivering statutory child protection services on Reserve for 15 years, attending to all court and appellate matters, including fatality inquiries.

Mr. Hogle serves as a volunteer with the Canadian Bar Association, the Legal Education Society of Alberta, various community organizations, and international development initiatives. He was appointed Queen's Counsel in 2010, a standing agent for the Director of Public Prosecutions in 2011, and to the Ministry of Human Services' Family Violence Death Review Committee in 2013.

Sylvia Kasper, QC (Retired Crown)

Ms. Kasper is a retired Assistant Chief Crown Prosecutor with Alberta Justice. Ms. Kasper has significant knowledge of the law surrounding all aspects of domestic violence prosecutions. She was a board member and worked closely with HomeFront (a not-for-profit organization creating a safe community by eliminating domestic violence through direct client services, justice coordination and facilitated community action), as well as being in charge of the Calgary Domestic Violence Unit. Ms. Kasper has over 30 years of experience in the legal field and over 20 years of experience working in the domestic violence area, both as a prosecutor and as a manager of the Calgary Domestic Violence Unit. Ms. Kasper also participated in a province-wide domestic violence committee that shared successes and experiences.

Donnan McKenna (Inspector, RCMP)

Inspector McKenna possesses a Bachelor of Arts degree in Justice and Law Enforcement from the University of Winnipeg and is working on his Master's Degree in Security and Terrorism. Inspector McKenna is presently the Operations Officer at the Grande Prairie RCMP Detachment and continues to supplement his education with a variety of professional development courses.

Inspector McKenna has over 25 years of experience in frontline policing and is experienced in security, community policing, operational policy and compliance, operational planning and execution, as well as leading an international team of Canadian and foreign police units in event situations. He was the Contingent Commander on a United Nations (UN) Mission to the Ivory Coast where he assumed the role of the UN Formed Police Unit Commander during a time of conflict. After returning from the UN mission, he authored the RCMP's K-Division Domestic Violence Policy and oversaw the review of domestic violence files from across the province, including the analysis of all of the files to ensure policy compliance. At the National level, Inspector McKenna oversaw the RCMP's policy development and implementation on external investigations or reviews, responsible for reporting emotionally disturbed persons. He has conducted Directed Reviews for the RCMP on major incidents such as member involved shootings and an intimate partner homicide.

Cliff O'Brien (Acting Superintendent, Calgary Police Service)

Superintendent O'Brien graduated from Mount Royal College in 1990 with a Diploma in Criminology. He continued his education and in 1997, graduated from Simon Fraser University with a Bachelor of Arts (Major in Criminology and Minor in Psychology).

Superintendent O'Brien joined the Calgary Police Service in 1996 and over the past 19 years, has worked as a police officer in a variety of capacities including patrol officer, a member of the Crowd Control Unit, General Investigations Unit investigator, G-8 Planning Team Sergeant, a Quarry/Instructor for Officer Safety, Robbery and Homicide Unit Detective, Human Resources Section Sergeant, Professional Standards Section Staff Sergeant, and an Inspector in the Chief's Office. In January 2011, he became the Inspector in Charge of the Calgary Police Service Major Crimes Section (Domestic Conflict, Homicide, Robbery, Arson, Missing Persons, and Elder Abuse). During his tenure as the Commander of Major Crimes, he oversaw the expansion of the Domestic Conflict Unit with a continued focus on prevention and early intervention and was a member of the Alberta Family Violence Death Review planning team.

In January 2014, Superintendent O'Brien took over command of the Calgary's Downtown District and was responsible for 240 members including the Gang Suppression Team, Beat Officers, Patrol Officers, Community Resource Officers, Mountain Bike Unit, a covert operations team, and investigators. In March 2015, he was temporarily re-assigned as an Acting Superintendent in the Chief's office serving the Interim Chief as his Executive Officer.

Karen Pease (Former Director of a Victim Services Organization and Community Advocate)

Ms. Pease was the Executive Director of the Community Crisis Society, a 25-bed emergency shelter for over 20 years. Ms. Pease holds a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Calgary and is a Registered Social Worker (RSW) with the Alberta College of Social Workers. Ms. Pease has shared her experiences and expertise at various conferences related to family violence. She has been a board member on the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS), including the position of vice-president, and chaired the ACWS's Programs and Education Committee for over 10 years. Ms. Pease served on the Calgary Counselling Turn for the Better Project and Engaging Women Research Project advisory committees. She is trained in the use of the Danger Assessment instruments since 2003 and became a trainer in 2010; and has also been trained in the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) and the Stalking Assessment and Management (SAM) models. Her knowledge of family violence extends to both urban and rural settings.

Kim Sanderson (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister of the Correctional Services Division, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General)

Ms. Sanderson holds a Bachelor's Degree in Criminology and a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice Administration, both from the University of Alberta. She has 25 years of experience in the public sector and is one of the few Canadian board members of the International Community Corrections Association. Ms. Sanderson is currently the Acting Assistant Deputy Minister of the Correctional Services Division with Alberta Justice and Solicitor General.

Debra Tomlinson (CEO of the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services)

Ms. Tomlinson brings with her over 30 years of experience in the not-for-profit sector as a leader and community mobilizer. Her specialties of practice include sexual assault/abuse and domestic violence/abuse, partnership development and collaboration, and community development and consultation.

Currently, Ms. Tomlinson is the Chief Executive Officer for the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Centres (AASAS). During her tenure with AASAS, Ms. Tomlinson led a province-wide movement which resulted in government funding for sexual assault services in Alberta. Ms. Tomlinson's educational qualifications include a Master's Degree of Social Work from the University of Calgary; a Bachelor's Degree of Social Work from York University, Toronto; and a Bachelor's Degree of Fine Arts from the University of Regina. Ms. Tomlinson is a Registered Social Worker with the Alberta College of Social Workers.

Lana Wells (Associate Professor, University of Calgary, Social Work)

Ms. Wells is the Brenda Strafford Chair in the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Social Work and Fellow, and Faculty Member of the School of Public Policy, at the University of Calgary. Her areas of expertise include domestic, family and sexual violence; women's issues; social policy, social justice and social change; leadership and organizational change; and the not-for-profit sector. Ms. Wells is currently leading Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence. Shift's purpose is to develop, implement and scale up best and promising primary prevention practices, strategies and actions in partnership with government, systems and civil society with the goal of preventing domestic violence before it starts.

Ex-Officio Members

As required, ex-officio members with specific expertise can be requested by the Chair of the Committee. Perlita Torres, registered Psychologist, was an ex-officio member during the 2014/15 fiscal year.

Perlita Torres, MA (Registered Psychologist)

Ms. Torres is a registered psychologist who has been practicing in Alberta for the last 26 years. She has a wide array of professional experiences and has worked with a variety of clients, including an assessment/treatment psychologist at the Yellowhead Youth Centre for almost six years, working in a maximum security prison for almost two years, delivering therapeutic groups for perpetrators of domestic violence and for sex offenders (as a clinical supervisor at McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association), and has been in private practice since 1998. Ms. Torres completed a doctoral program in Forensic Psychology in 2011. Currently, Ms. Torres is completing a PhD program in Mental Health, Policy, and Practice and in 2014, wrote a concept paper entitled: Canadian Legal Response to Child Custody Disputes Involving Domestic Violence. Currently, she is working on a dissertation pertaining to stress, burnout, and differentiation of self.

Mandate and Accountability

The Committee will provide expertise that will contribute to evidence-informed policy, legislation and practice through their analysis and recommendations from the review of family violence death-related cases.

Committee Accountability

The Committee is accountable to the Minister. Committee members shall act honestly and in good faith, leaving aside personal interests to advance the public interest and mandate of the Committee.

The Committee will prepare and submit to the Minister, reports summarizing individual reviews and an annual report.

It has committed to act with impartiality and integrity, demonstrate respect and accountability, respect the protection of individual privacy and confidentiality, and act in the best interest of the public.

The Committee's mandates and roles can be found at:

<http://alberta.ca/ags-ministries.cfm#Human>.

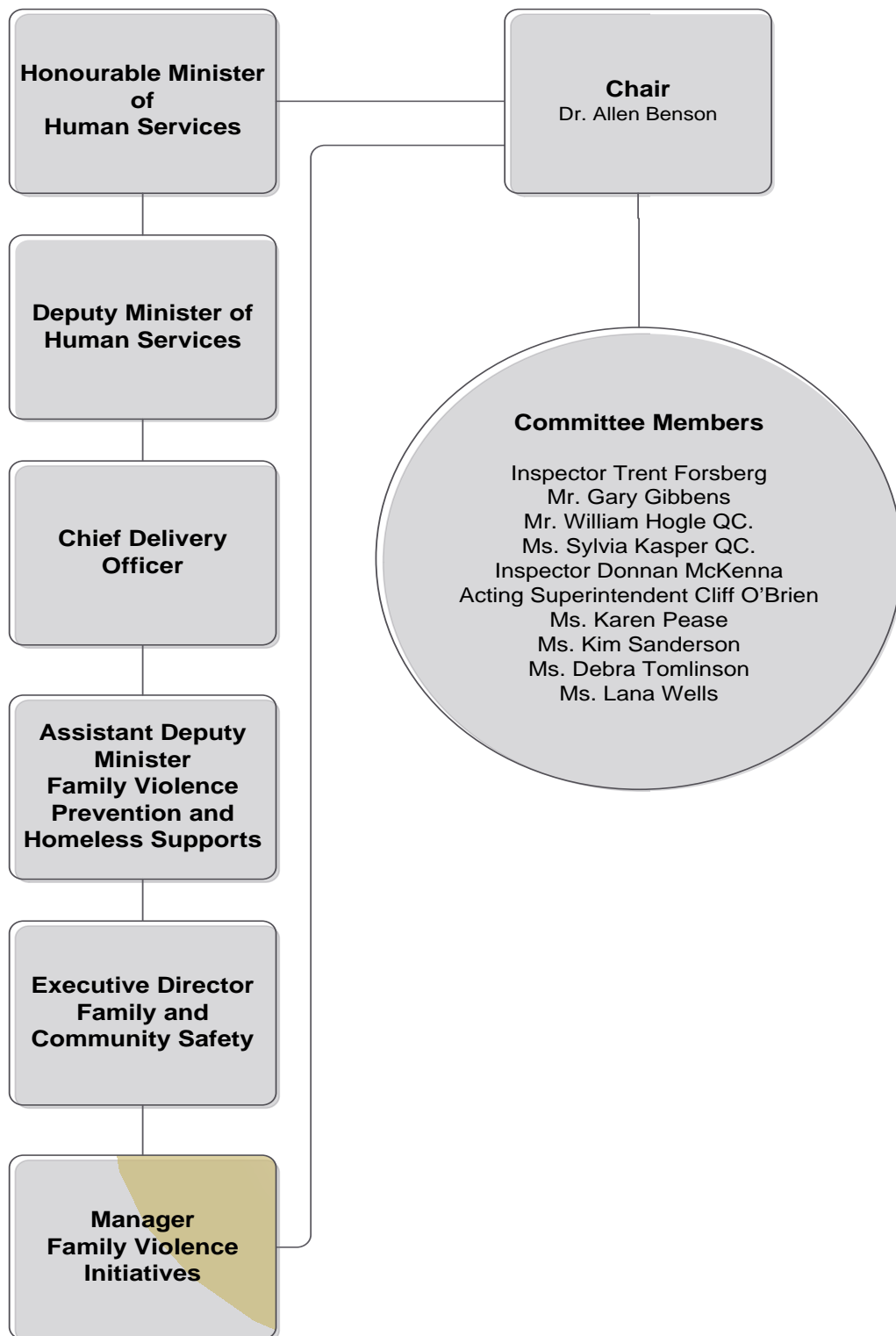
Minister's Accountability

The Minister is accountable to the Legislature for the operation of the Committee. Upon receiving an annual report from the Committee, the Minister must table the report in the Legislative Assembly, if it is sitting. If it is not sitting, the Minister must table the report within 15 days after the beginning of the next sitting.

The Committee Chair reports to the Minister. The Chair meets formally with the Minister, annually, to provide a list of recommendations and to discuss and present the Committee's annual report.

Organizational Structure

The Committee reports directly to the Minister of Human Services. The following diagram provides a view of the organizational structure since inception.



Chapter Two: Establishing Relationships and Processes to Collect Information for In-Depth Case Reviews

Purpose

The Committee has established relationships with specific public bodies to collect pertinent information on family violence deaths for in-depth reviews. Information collected for these reviews allows the Committee to identify trends, risk factors and patterns in specific cases. Having this information also helps the Committee develop recommendations that improve programs, services and policies aimed at preventing and reducing family violence deaths in Alberta.

Legislative Authority to Obtain and Request Information

Section 17 of the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA) gives the Committee the legislative authority to request and obtain information necessary to complete a review.

17(1) The Committee is entitled to any information, including personal information and health information, that

- (a) is in the custody or under the control of a public body or custodian, and
- (b) is necessary to enable the Committee to carry out a review.

(2) A public body or a custodian that is a public body shall, on request of the Committee, disclose to the Committee the information to which the Committee is entitled under subsection (1).

(3) A custodian that is not a public body may, on request of the Committee, disclose to the Committee the information to which the Committee is entitled under subsection (1).

(4) Nothing in this section compels the disclosure of any information or records that are subject to any type of privilege, including solicitor-client privilege and parliamentary privilege.

Information Requests

In its first year, the Committee has established relationships with public bodies and information custodians to obtain, in a timely manner, important information to complete reviews of cases. The information is collected systematically, gathering from primary sources, reviewing the information and further information gathering as required.

Initial information requests for the reviews occur with:

- the Office of the Medical Examiner;
- Police Services throughout the province;
- Child and Family Services, Alberta Human Services; and
- Criminal, Civil and Family courts.

Other organizations may also receive information requests through the process. Examples of other information sources could include:

- Alberta Health Services;
- Women's Emergency Shelters; or
- other community agencies that provide services.

Chapter Three: Method for In-depth Case Reviews

Family Violence Death Review Committee's Guiding Goals

When reviewing cases, the Committee is guided by the following goals of understanding:

1. the reasons for family violence deaths;
2. where and how agencies and systems intersect and how they can better work together;
3. the barriers to supports and services that the victim and perpetrator may have experienced; and
4. making recommendations on how to prevent and reduce family violence.

Method for Reviewing Cases

The Committee established a protocol to process incoming information and provide recommendations. Family violence deaths that occurred in Alberta between 2008 and 2014 were documented and divided into two categories: eligible and ineligible cases.

Eligible cases are incidents that resulted in murder-suicide and those that have been resolved through the criminal justice system.

Ineligible cases are those incidents that have not yet been processed through the courts. All ineligible cases will be considered eligible for an in-depth review once processed through the courts and a conviction has been handed down. Currently, 50 cases are eligible for in-depth reviews and 26 cases are ineligible.

In-depth Case Reviews Chosen

At the initial meeting in February 2014, the Committee chose five cases for in-depth reviews. One case was later added, making a total of six that are in the review process including one in the final stages of approval. The cases were chosen based on specific criteria:

- reviewing the most recent eligible cases;
- representing a diversity of ages;
- geographical locations;
- status of relationships; and
- ethnicity.

Of the six cases chosen between 2010 to 2013, two cases involved the deaths of a female by a male and were classified as murder suicide, two cases involved the death of a female by a male and were classified as a single homicide (as there was only one victim), and two cases were classified as multiple homicides as there was more than one victim (one female along with two males in one case and two children in the other case).

With the tragic multiple homicide/suicide that occurred in Edmonton in late December 2014, the Committee identified this case as a priority once the police have completed their investigation and it becomes eligible for review.

When conducting in-depth reviews, the Committee will recognize good practice in each case reviewed, as well as identify the presence or absence of systemic issues, and make recommendations to the Minister for effective intervention strategies that support the reduction and prevention of family violence deaths.

The intended outcomes include:

- improved services, supports, crisis response and prevention strategies for victims of family violence;
- enhancement of quality assurance mechanisms; and
- reduction of family violence-related deaths and increased safety.

Chapter Four: Canada and Alberta Context – A Statistical Overview

Canada Family Violence Homicide/Suicide Overview

On January 15, 2015, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics released a Statistical Study, *Family Violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2013*. This study includes Canada-wide police reports and self-reported victimization data. Across Canada, police reports indicate that family violence-related deaths are declining:

- police-reported data indicates that in 2013 there were 126 victims of familial homicide in Canada (pg. 12);
- in 2013, there were approximately 2.31 intimate partner homicides per million population, which was half the rate recorded 20 years earlier;
- in 1993, there were 5.18 intimate partner homicides per million population; and
- in 2013, the rate of family homicides per million was less than half the rate documented in 1983, which indicates a 59 per cent decline over the past 30 years (pg. 12).

Although there has been a decline in family violence homicides, women and girls are still more likely to be killed by a family member than boys or men:

- the family-related homicide rate in 2013 was four per million population for female victims, compared to 3 per million population for male victims (pg.12); and
- In 2013, the rate of homicides involving a female intimate partner was 3.74 per million population, which was 4.5 times higher than the rate for those against a male intimate partner.

Between 2003 and 2013, police services reported 960 homicides committed against intimate partners. Of these, 747 (78 per cent) were committed against a female victim (pg. 28). During this time period, the rates of intimate partner homicides against women were highest for victims aged 20 to 44. Of that age group, victims of intimate partner homicides were at its highest for those in their mid-'20s (pg. 28).

Homicides in Canada, from 2003 to 2013, involved more married partners than common-law partners (pg. 29). Of the intimate partner homicides that occurred between 2003 and 2013:

- 77 per cent of intimate partner homicides involved current intimate partners at the time of the incident;
- 76 per cent were committed by legally married or common-law spouse (from a current or former union) (pg. 29);

- 22 per cent were committed by a dating partner (current or former);
- the most frequently reported motive was the escalation of an argument (nearly 40 per cent);
- the second most common reported motive was a feeling of frustration, anger or despair (26 per cent); and
- the third most common motive was jealousy (20 per cent) (pg. 29).

Between 2003 and 2013, 319 children and youth were victims of familial homicide and accounted for one in five family-related homicides (pg. 43).

- 59 per cent of all children and youth victims of homicide were victims of family-related homicide compared to 30 per cent of adult victims (pg.43);
- children were more at risk of being victims of familial homicide than youth (pg. 43)
 - victims of homicide 11 years old and younger were more often killed by a family member than a non-family member;
 - between 2003 and 2013, children under the age of one were most at risk to be killed by a family member;
- overall, the most common method of familial homicides of children and youth was strangulations, suffocation or drowning (27 per cent);
- between 2003 and 2013, the most common motive in familial homicides of children and youth was frustration of the accused (62 per cent). This was especially true for homicides of children 6 years of age or younger, in which about two-thirds (67 per cent) of familial homicides were motivated by frustration; and
- the highest reported motivation for familial homicides of 12 to 17 years old was arguments (21 per cent) (pg. 44).

In Canada, it is a rare occurrence for a senior to be a victim of a family violence homicide. The statistics indicate that:

- in 2013, the overall rate of family-related homicides against seniors was 3.2 out of every one million people aged 65 and over (pg. 62);
- senior victims of family-related homicides were most likely to have been killed by their grown children;
- between 2003 and 2013, the victim's grown child was identified as the perpetrator in nearly half (47 per cent) of all family-related homicides of seniors (pg. 63);
- the primary motive given in most family-related homicides of seniors was the feeling of frustration, anger, and despair experienced by the accused, which led to

33 per cent of the homicides. Nearly 31 per cent were the result of an argument (pg. 43);and

- a senior death relating to a mental illness or dementia accounted for less than one in five family-related homicides (pg. 63).

Alberta Family Violence Homicide/Suicide Overview

Between 2008 and 2014, there were 76 incidents of family violence involving 97 victim deaths and 20 perpetrators who committed suicide. All incidents reported during this timeframe were examined by the Committee, from which six cases were identified for further in-depth review. During this period in Alberta, the total number of family violence-related deaths recorded was 117.

This chapter includes seven graphs with accompanying charts, including various statistics on family violence deaths occurring between 2008 and 2014.

- Graph 1 – type of homicide (single, multiple, single or multiple homicide/suicide)
- Graph 2 – number of deaths by gender and incident type
- Graph 3 – victim method of death
- Graph 4 – incident method of male perpetrator
- Graph 5 – incident method of female perpetrator
- Graph 6 – victim’s relationship status to perpetrator at time of death
- Graph 7 – victim’s death by age group

The definition adopted by the Committee is broader than the rest of Canada’s family violence homicide definitions. Alberta’s definition includes family members and bystanders. For example, in 2010, there was a massive explosion which leveled a residence and also completely destroyed the neighbouring residences. Two people were killed in the primary location. Two other people were killed in the neighbouring residence. The two people in the neighbouring residence are included as bystanders in the Committee’s statistics.

In another example, a 16-year-old boy shot and killed his father. The boy’s parents had a history of family violence, and the boy also experienced physical and emotional abuse from his father. This case fits within the Committee’s family violence deaths definition. The definition is not limited to intimate partners. Between 2008 and 2014, 17 family members and nine unrelated/bystanders were killed due to a family violence homicide (see Graph 6).

Gender

In Alberta, like the rest of Canada, a woman or girl is still more likely to be killed by a family member than a man or boy. Between 2008 and 2014, 66 homicides were committed against a female victim and 31 homicides were committed against a male victim.

Relationships

The majority of family violence deaths in Alberta also involve married partners (18.6 per cent female and 4.1 per cent male), slightly more than a common-law partner (15.5 per cent female and 6.2 per cent male). As shown in Graph 6, between 2008 and 2014, there were 8.2 per cent female victims of a dating partner and 4.1 per cent male victims of a dating partner.

Children and Seniors

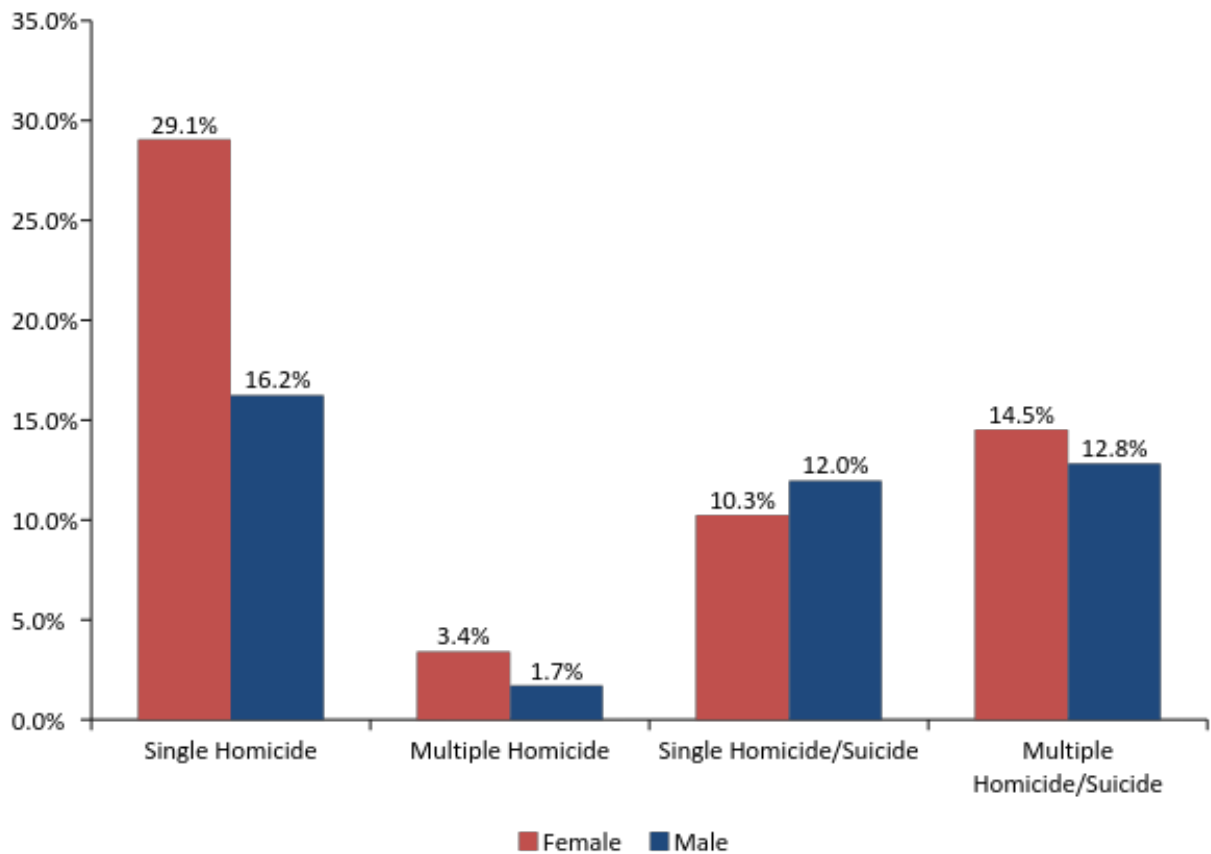
Considerable evidence indicates an escalation of violence in cases of separation. In our province, a woman leaving a relationship was significantly more impacted by a family violence homicide than a man leaving a relationship:

- females leaving a relationship make up 13.4 per cent of the family violence homicides;
 - ex-spouse (7.2 per cent);
 - ex-common law (1.0 per cent); and
 - ex-girlfriend (5.2 per cent);
- homicides committed against a male leaving a relationship make up 3.1 per cent;
 - ex-spouse (1.0 per cent);
 - ex-common law (0.0 per cent); and
 - ex-boyfriend (2.1 per cent).

Statistical Overview: Summary Statistics for Family Violence Deaths, 2008-2014

Family Violence Deaths in Alberta, including Perpetrator Suicide, 2008-2014									
MANNER	Single Homicide		Multiple Homicide		Single Homicide/Suicide		Multiple Homicide/Suicide		Total
Female	34	29.1%	4	3.4%	12	10.3%	17	14.5%	67
Male	19	16.2%	2	1.7%	14	12.0%	15	12.8%	50
Total	53		6		26		32		117

Summary Statistics for Family Violence Deaths reviewed in Alberta, 2008 -2014 (Graph 1)



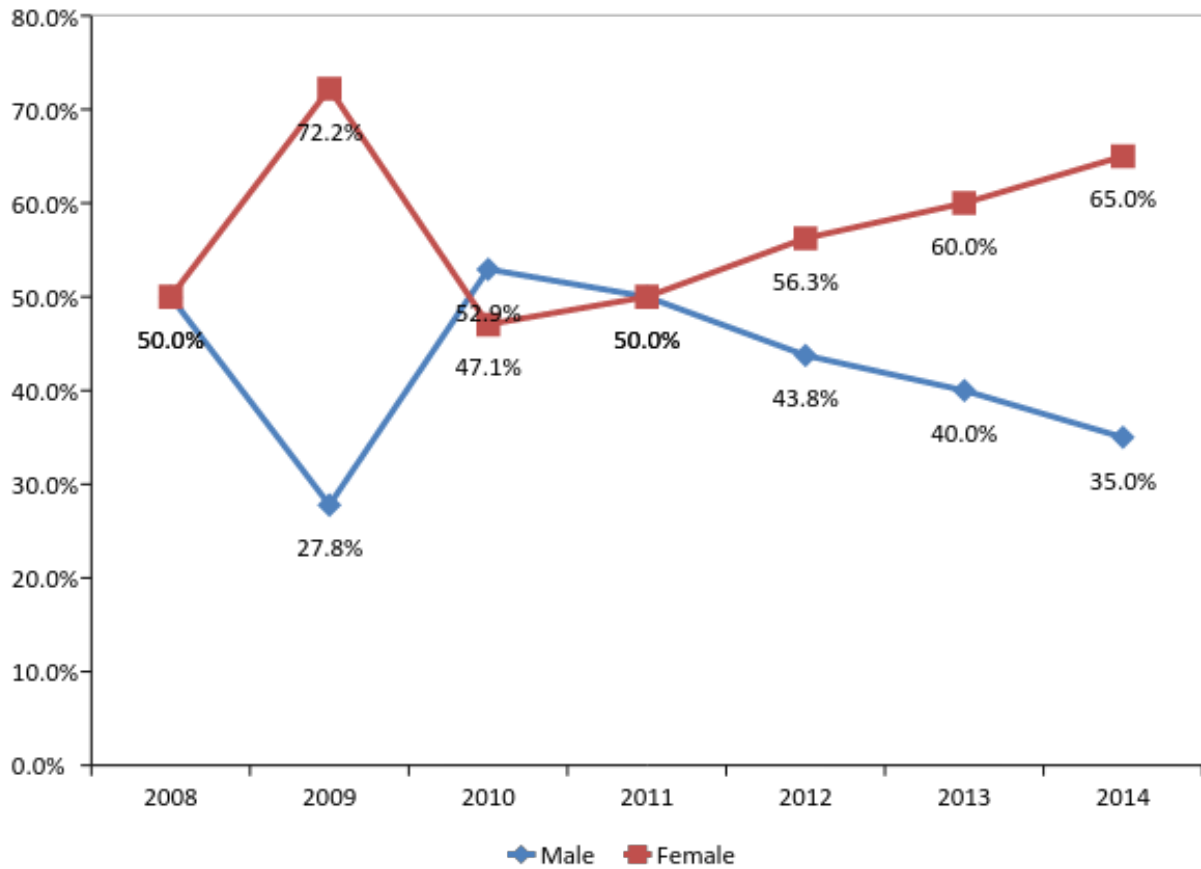
Overall

- 57.3 per cent of homicide/suicide victims were female.
- 42.7 per cent were males who died as a result of homicide/suicide.
- 20 perpetrators committed suicide; 19 were male and one was female.

Definitions

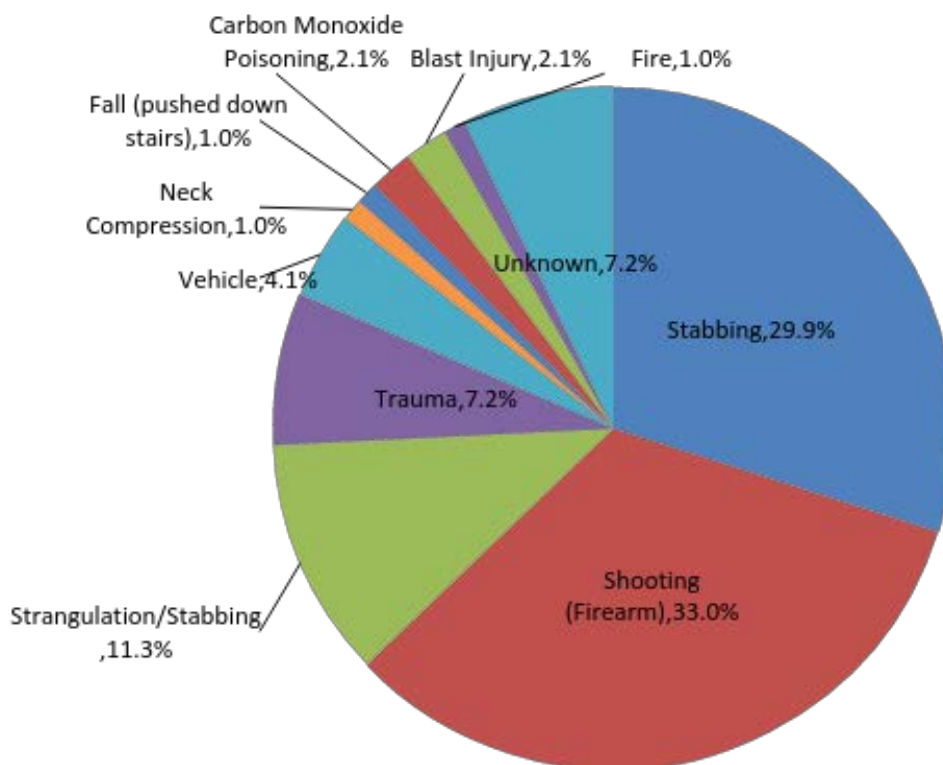
- Single homicide refers to the death of one victim.
- Multiple homicides refer to more than one death in a single incident where the perpetrator did not die.
- Single homicide/suicide refers to one victim homicide where the perpetrator died by committing suicide.
- Multiple homicide/suicide refers to more than one victim homicide where the perpetrator committed suicide.

Percentage of Deaths by Gender, 2008-2014 (Graph 2)



Detailed Number of Deaths by Gender and Incident Type, 2008-2014									
Year	Single Homicide		Multiple Homicide		Homicide/Suicide				Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male Suicide	Male not Suicide	Female Suicide	Female not Suicide	
2008	5	4	0	0	5	1	0	7	22
2009	1	6	0	0	4	0	0	7	18
2010	2	3	2	2	3	2	0	3	17
2011	3	5	0	0	2	2	0	2	14
2012	2	5	0	0	3	2	1	3	16
2013	3	5	0	0	1	0	0	1	10
2014	3	6	0	2	1	3	0	5	20
Total	19	34	2	4	19	10	1	28	117

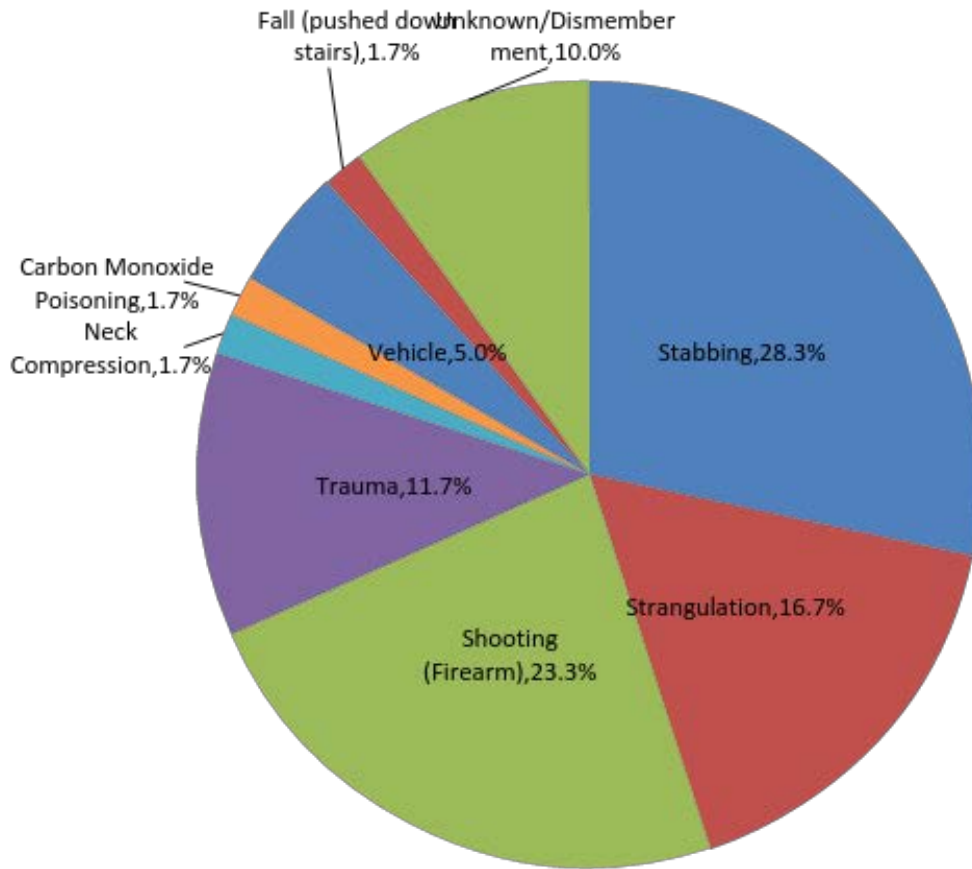
Victim: Method of Death Alberta, 2008-2014 (Graph 3)



Between 2008 and 2014, the majority of the victims were killed by a current or previous intimate partner. A few cases did not follow this pattern.

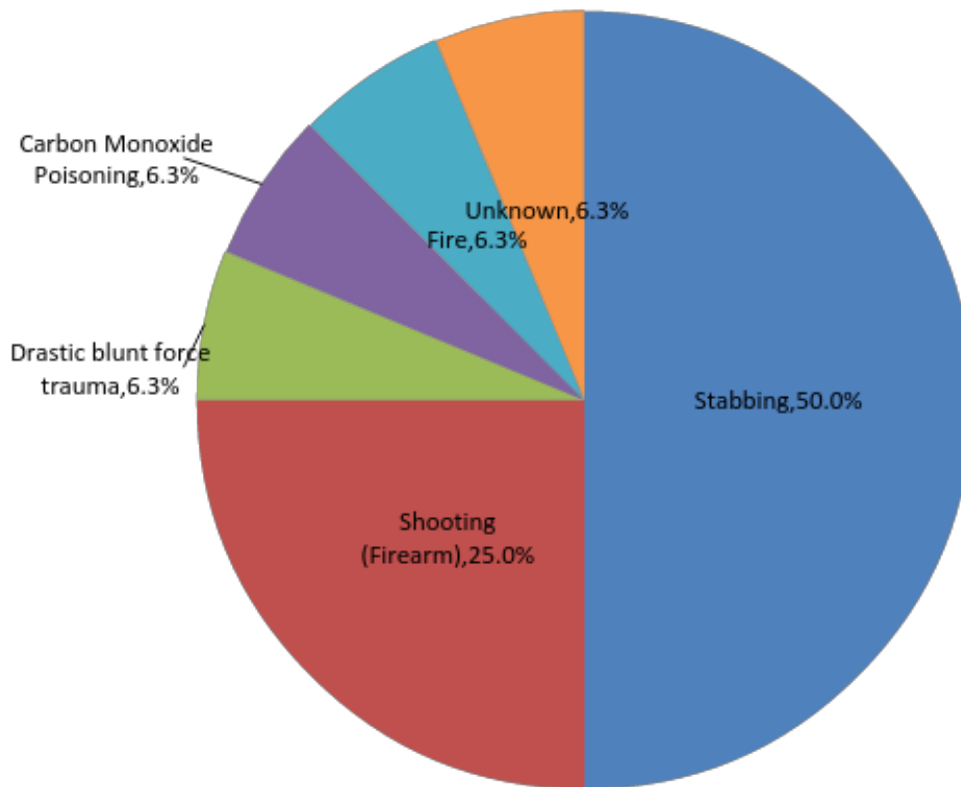
- A male killed his three-year-old son and committed suicide by carbon-monoxide poisoning. The male and his ex-partner were in the midst of a custody, divorce and property battle.
- A male killed his two sons and attempted suicide. He did not complete his suicide attempt. The male and his ex-partner were separated and involved in a custody dispute.
- A woman killed her son and committed suicide by carbon-monoxide poisoning.
- Two males in a neighbouring residence were killed due to an explosion. They were unrelated to the couple in the primary residence.
- Two male bystanders were killed in a vehicle targeted by the perpetrator.
- A 16-year-old boy shot and killed his father. The boy's father and mother had a history of family violence, and the boy had experienced physical and emotional abuse from his father.
- In three separate incidents, a male killed family members, bystanders and then himself (wife and child; wife, children and tenant; separated partner, his partner's parents, sister and her daughter, the couple's son and two unrelated bystanders).

Incident of Male Perpetrator Method, 2008-2014 (Graph 4)



This chart illustrates how males committed homicides. It is not delineated by gender of the victim, as there are both male and female victims. Stabbing is the most common method of homicide. The use of a firearm was most common in the multiple homicides. All of the multiple homicides were committed by males.

Incident of Female Perpetrator Method, 2008-2014 (Graph 5)

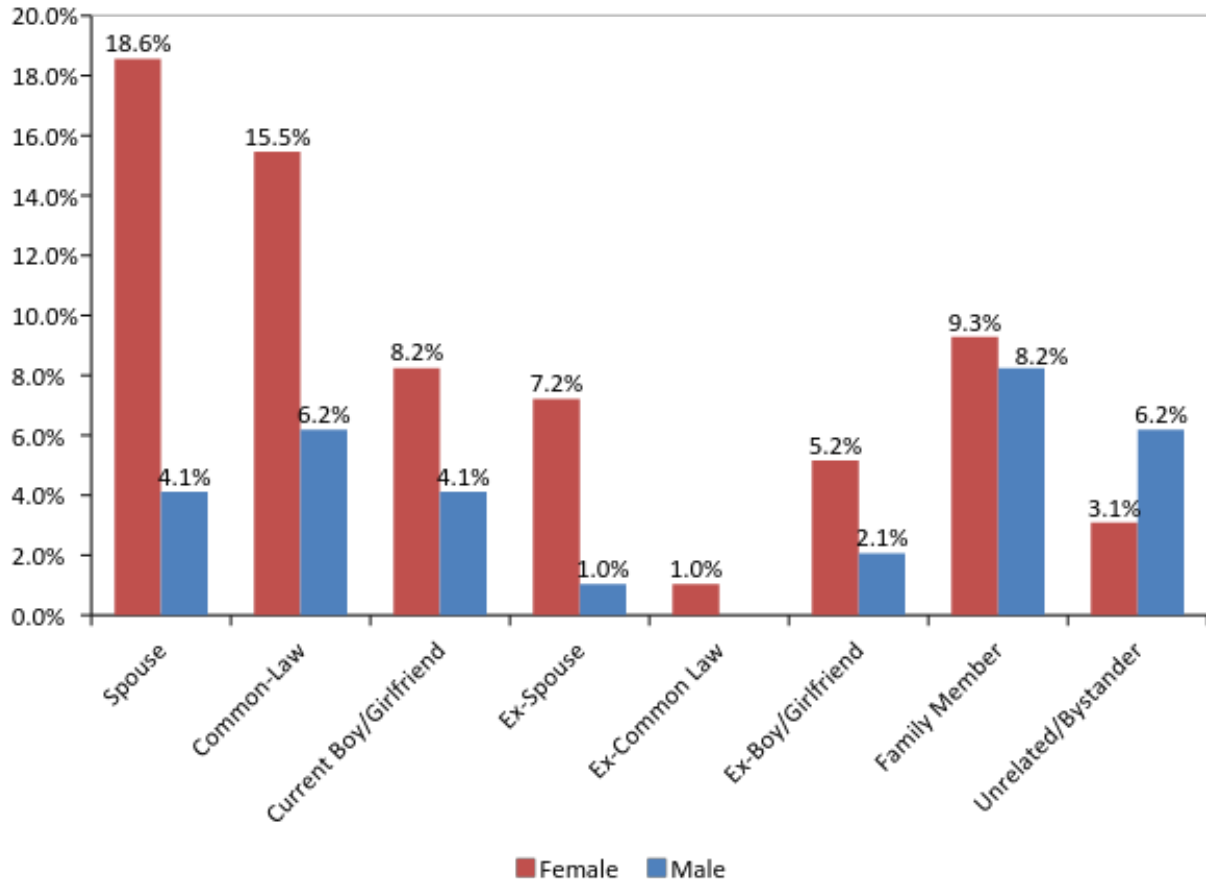


This chart illustrates how females committed homicides. All homicides committed by females were against males, there were no female victims when the perpetrator was a female. There is only one incident where a female committed suicide. The female and her six-year-old son died due to carbon-monoxide poisoning.

Incident of Male Perpetrator Method, 2008-2014									
Method		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Stabbing		5	1		3	3	3	2	17
Shooting (Firearm)	<i>Firearm (Shooting)</i>	1	3	3	2	1	2	1	13
	<i>Shot by RCMP</i>				1				1
Strangulation/ Stabbing	<i>Strangulation</i>	1	3	2		2			8
	<i>Strangulation and stabbing</i>	1		1					2
Trauma	<i>Blunt force trauma</i>			1	1			2	4
	<i>Blunt force trauma and chop wounds</i>		1						1
	<i>Blunt force trauma – hit by vehicle</i>						1		1
	<i>Blunt force trauma and indignity to a body</i>				1				1
Vehicle	<i>Motor vehicle crash</i>						1		1
	<i>Dragged from moving vehicle</i>						1		1
	<i>Hit by vehicle</i>							1	1
Neck Compression/Blast Injury			1						1
Fall (pushed down stairs)		1							1
Carbon-Monoxide Poisoning	1								1
Unknown	<i>Unknown and dismemberment</i>		1						1
	<i>Unknown</i>					2		3	5
Total		9	10	8	8	8	8	9	60

Incident of Female Perpetrator Method, 2008-2014									
Method		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Stabbing		2	1	1	2	1		1	8
Shooting (Firearm)		3		1					4
Drastic Blunt Force Trauma							1		1
Carbon-Monoxide Poisoning						1			1
Fire								1	1
Unknown (2 male accomplices)						1			1
Total		5	1	2	2	3	1	2	16

Victim's Relationship to Perpetrator at Time of Death, 2008-2014 (Graph 6)

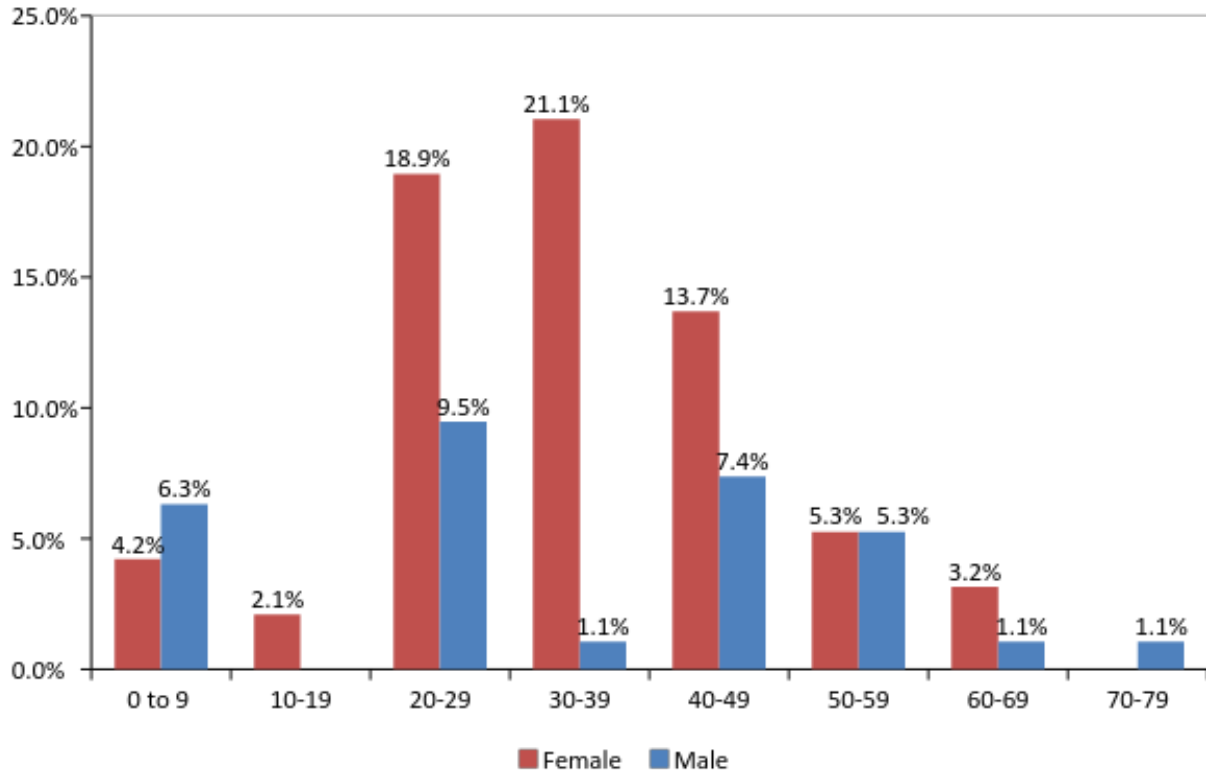


Victim's Relationship to Perpetrator at Time of Death, 2008-2014					
Gender	Female		Male		Total
Spouse	18	18.6%	4	4.1%	22
Common-Law	15	15.5%	6	6.2%	21
Current Boy/Girlfriend	8	8.2%	4**	4.1%	12
Ex-Spouse	7	7.2%	1	1.0%	8
Ex-Common Law	1	1.0%	0	0.0%	1
Ex-Boy/Girlfriend	5*	5.2%	2	2.1%	7
Family Member	9	9.3%	8	8.2%	17
Unrelated/Bystander	3	3.1%	6	6.2%	9
Total	66		31		97

*A female victim was an ex-fiancé to the male perpetrator (2012)

**In two separate incidents, two males were killed while in a relationship with the male perpetrators (2013 and 2014)

Victim's Deaths by Age Group, 2008-2014 (Graph 7)



Victim's Deaths by Age Group, 2008-2014					
Age Group	Female		Male		Total
0-9	4	4.2%	6	6.3%	10
10-19	2	2.1%	0	0.0%	2
20-29	18	18.9%	9	9.5%	27
30-39	20	21.1%	1	1.1%	21
40-49	13	13.7%	7	7.4%	20
50-59	5	5.3%	5	5.3%	10
60-69	3	3.2%	1	1.1%	4
70-79	0	0.0%	1	1.1%	1
Total	65		30		95*

*Two victim's ages are unknown from a 2013 and 2014 incident

Female victims of family violence homicides between the ages of 20-40 made up 40 per cent of the deaths (ages 20-29, 18.9 per cent and ages 30-39, 21.1 per cent). This statistic compared with males of the same age group (10.6 per cent) indicates that female victims of family violence homicides were in the vast majority and at a significantly higher risk.

Between 2008 and 2014, 10 children (four females, six males) were victims of family violence homicides. They were all under the age of nine and killed by a family member; seven were killed by their father, one by their grandfather, one by their mother and one by their uncle. Two females were killed in the 10-19 age range, one was 17 and killed by her father (he also killed his wife, then committed suicide), and the other female was 19 and stabbed by her boyfriend.

Similar to the Canadian-wide statistics, family violence homicides against seniors are rare in Alberta. Between 2008 and 2014, 5.2 per cent of victims of family violence homicides were 60 years of age or older (3.2 per cent females and 2.2 per cent males).

Conclusion

Between 2008 and 2014, there were 76 incidents of family violence homicides involving 117 deaths in Alberta. Similar to the statistics in the rest of the country, a female is significantly more at risk to be killed by a male partner than a male is at risk of being killed by a female partner. Between 2008 and 2014, 66 homicides were committed against a female victim and 31 homicides were committed against a male victim. Females between the ages of 20 to 40 are most at risk. Women in this age group made up 40 per cent of the family violence deaths in Alberta. The most common method of homicide for both male and female perpetrators was stabbing. The use of a firearm was most common in multiple homicides, and all multiple homicides were committed by males.

The Committee is mindful of the critical undertaking to prevent and reduce family violence deaths in our province. During this first year, the Committee completed an initial assessment of all 76 incidents of family violence-related homicides, and is in the process of finalizing its first in-depth review. As the Committee carries on its commitment to review cases, it will gather more statistics, risk factors, trends, gaps and strengths that will lead to making sound recommendations to create and improve policies, programs and services.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 --*Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA)
- Appendix 2 -- Alberta Family Violence Death Review Process

Appendix 1:

PROTECTION AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE ACT – Part 2

Family Violence Death Reviews

Family Violence Death Review Committee

15(1) The Minister may establish a Family Violence Death Review Committee.

(2) The Minister may, with respect to the Committee,

- (a) appoint or provide for the manner of the appointment of its members,
- (b) prescribe the term of office of any member,
- (c) designate a chair, and
- (d) authorize or provide for the payment of remuneration and expenses of its members.

(3) In appointing members to the Committee the Minister shall ensure the Committee includes persons with knowledge and expertise in the area of family violence.

(4) A member of the Committee continues to hold office after the expiry of that member's term of office until the member is reappointed, a successor is appointed or a period of 3 months has expired, whichever occurs first.

(5) Subject to this Part, the Committee may determine its own procedures.

Role of Committee

16 The role of the Committee is

- (a) to review incidents of family violence resulting in deaths, and
- (b) to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister respecting the prevention and reduction of family violence.

Right to information

17(1) The Committee is entitled to any information, including personal information and health information, that

- (a) is in the custody or under the control of a public body or custodian, and
- (b) is necessary to enable the Committee to carry out a review.

(2) A public body or a custodian that is a public body shall, on request of the Committee, disclose to the Committee the information to which the Committee is entitled under subsection (1).

(3) A custodian that is not a public body may, on request of the Committee, disclose to the Committee the information to which the Committee is entitled under subsection (1).

(4) Nothing in this section compels the disclosure of any information or records that are subject to any type of privilege, including solicitor-client privilege and parliamentary privilege.

Report respecting a review

18(1) On completing a review, the Committee shall prepare a written report containing

- (a) its findings respecting the incident that is the subject of the review, and
- (b) its advice and recommendations to the Minister.

(2) The findings of the Committee must not include any findings of legal responsibility or any conclusion of law.

(3) The Committee shall

- (a) provide the report prepared under subsection (1) to the Minister but shall not disclose it to any other person or body, and
- (b) prepare and provide to the Minister a publicly releasable version of the report.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (3)(b), a publicly releasable version of a report must not disclose the name of, or any identifying information about, the individual whose death is the subject of the review or any other individual involved in the death.

(5) The Minister shall make the publicly releasable version of the report public at a time and in a form and manner the Minister considers appropriate.

Annual report

19(1) As soon as possible after the end of each year, the Committee shall prepare and provide to the Minister a report summarizing the activities of the Committee in that year.

(2) On receiving a report under subsection (1), the Minister shall table the report in the Legislative Assembly if it is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

Members not compellable as witnesses

20 A member of the Committee shall not give or be compelled to give evidence in an action in respect of any matter coming to his or her knowledge in the course of a review, except in a prosecution for perjury.

Communications privileged

21 The following information, records and reports are privileged and not admissible in evidence in an action, except in a prosecution for perjury

- (a) anything said, any information supplied and any record produced during a review;
- (b) a report prepared under section 18(1) and provided to the Minister under section 18(3)(a).

Protection of Committee and its members

22(1) Subject to subsection (2), no action lies or may be commenced or maintained against

- (a) the Committee, or
- (b) a member of the Committee in respect of anything done or omitted to be done in the exercise or intended exercise of any power under this Part or in the performance or intended performance of any duty or function under this Part.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in respect of anything done, or omitted to be done, in bad faith.

Regulations

23 The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations

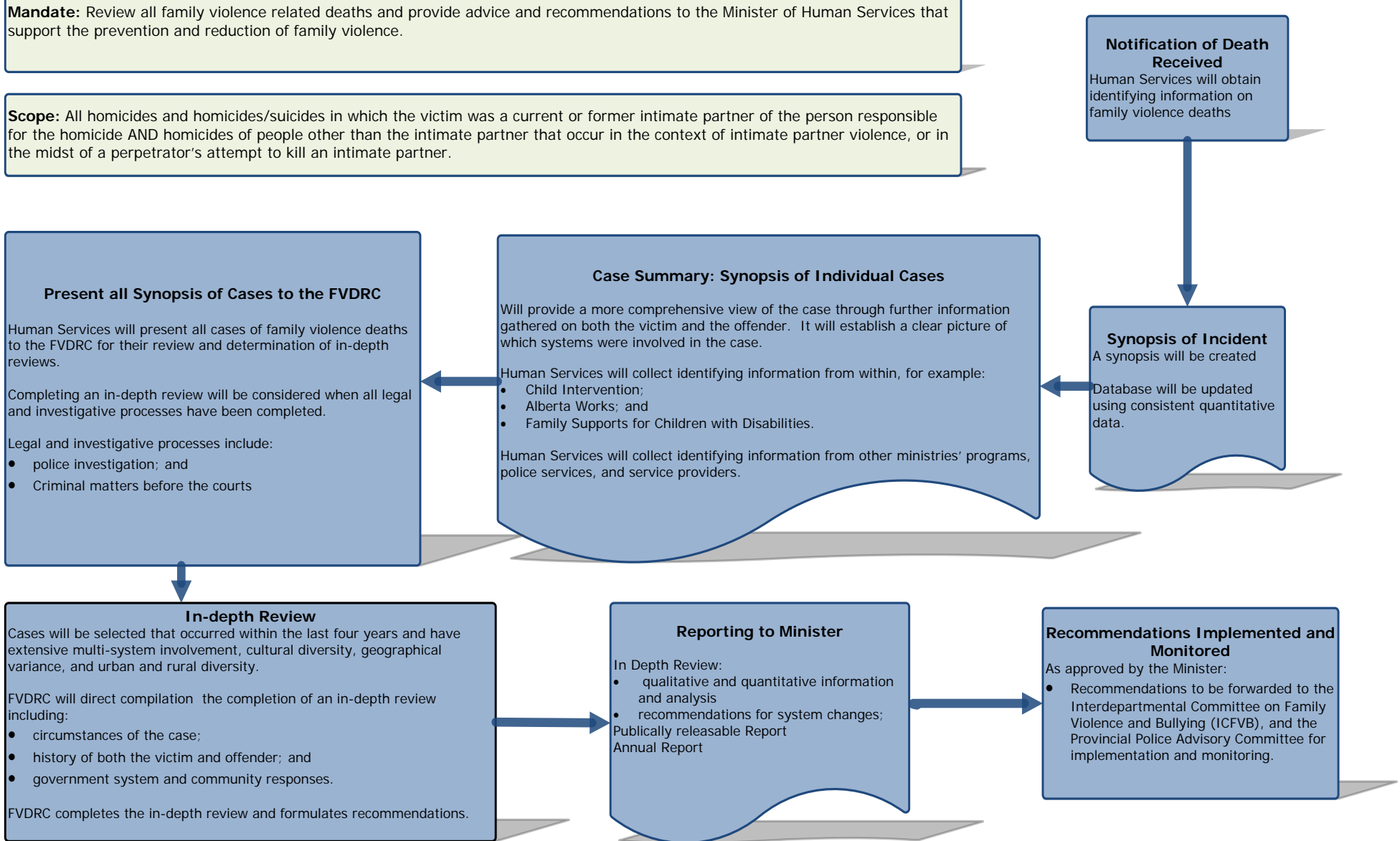
- (a) defining any word or expression used in this Part but not defined in this Part,
- (b) respecting any other matter or thing that the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers necessary to carry out the intent of this Part.

<http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/p27.pdf>

Appendix 2: Alberta Family Violence Death Review Process

Mandate: Review all family violence related deaths and provide advice and recommendations to the Minister of Human Services that support the prevention and reduction of family violence.

Scope: All homicides and homicides/suicides in which the victim was a current or former intimate partner of the person responsible for the homicide AND homicides of people other than the intimate partner that occur in the context of intimate partner violence, or in the midst of a perpetrator's attempt to kill an intimate partner.



References

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