

Family Violence  
Death  
Review  
Committee



---

2016 Annual Report

Published by Community and Social Services, Government of Alberta  
September 2018

Family Violence Death Review Committee 2016 Annual Report

ISBN 978-1-4601-4165-6 (Print)

ISBN 978-1-4601-4166-3 (PDF)

ISSN 2562-024X (Print)

ISSN 2562-0258 (Online)

Available online at: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/family-violence-death-review-committee-annual-report>

Creator: Family Violence Death Review Committee

© 2018 Government of Alberta

This publication is issued under the Open Government Licence – Alberta (<http://open.alberta.ca/licence>)

# Table of Contents

Message from the Chair of the Family Violence Death Review Committee .....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction and Overview of the Committee .....	6
Committee Membership .....	6
Mandate .....	7
Definitions and Methodology .....	7
Source of Information .....	7
Confidentiality .....	7
Code of Conduct .....	8
Operating Principles of the Committee .....	8
Systems-Focused.....	8
Prevention-Focused .....	8
Data-Driven.....	8
In-depth Case Reviews .....	9
Family Violence Statistics .....	11
Family Violence in Alberta.....	11
Looking Ahead to the New Term (2017-2020) .....	17
Appendix 1: Recommendations from Publicly Released Case Reviews.....	18
Case Review 1 .....	18
Case Review 2.....	19

# Message from the Chair of the Family Violence Death Review Committee

In Alberta, between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2016, 13 family violence incidents resulted in the deaths of 15 Albertans. One death is too many, especially when many of these tragedies are preventable. Since 2014, Alberta's Family Violence Death Review Committee (the Committee) has been working to review incidents of death due to family violence. The role of the Committee is to review incidents of family violence resulting in deaths and to provide advice and recommendations respecting the prevention and reduction of family violence.

To date, the Committee has completed four in-depth examinations of individual cases. In 2016, the Minister of Community and Social Services released the Committee's second Case Review Public Report. This report outlined recommendations to prevent family violence, and to bring the issue of family violence further into the public's awareness.

2016 was a transitional year for the Committee; the first term of the Committee came to a close and work began to establish the second term of the Committee. The Committee has been operational since 2014 and members serve a term of three years. Over the last three years, I have had the honour of serving as chair of the Committee and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee members for dedicating their considerable expertise, time and effort.

Family violence can be prevented. The goal of the Committee is to take information from reviews and make recommendations to government on how to prevent family violence and family violence deaths.

The Committee has also benefited greatly from supportive relationships with Government of Alberta ministries and community partners; these relationships are essential to the collective ongoing work of addressing family violence. The Committee would like to thank the Ministries of Health, Children's Services, Community and Social Services, and Justice and Solicitor General. The Committee would also like to thank the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police and Alberta's police services throughout the province for their excellent work as well as for their help, support and cooperation.

As Albertans, we all have a responsibility to prevent family violence, to protect those who need our help and to promote healthy relationships. We must continue to work together to create and maintain resources and supports for Albertans dealing with family violence.

Dr. Allen Benson, LLD (Hon.) Chair

# 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 Community and Social Services. The Committee derives its authority from the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA). The Committee has the responsibility to review family violence deaths and make recommendations related to program, policy and service delivery for the prevention of family violence.

The 2016 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 2016 Annual Report also provides a detailed examination of information collected on the 13 family violence incidents that resulted in 15 deaths (perpetrators and victims). Key findings from this report include:

- The majority of incidents occurred while the partners were together as a couple.
- In seven of the incidents (7/13), the perpetrator was either the victim's spouse or common-law partner. In one incident, the perpetrator was the victim's boyfriend.
- There were two cases involving murder-suicide.
- There were two victim deaths where the cause of death is unknown.
- Eight of the incidents occurred in major metropolitan areas of Calgary and Edmonton regions. Three incidents occurred in the southern region and two occurred in the northwest region.

In 2016, family violence deaths in Alberta highlight that:

- Family violence continues to be a gendered crime.
  - Approximately 70 per cent of victims of family violence deaths were female.
  - 61 per cent of perpetrators of domestic violence homicide incidents were male.
- Those between the ages of 30-59 are at highest risk of being involved in a family violence incident leading to death.
  - Victims reflect the span of life, with the youngest in their teens and the oldest in their 70s.
  - The average victim age was 30-39 years old. The average perpetrator age was between 40-59 years old.
- Family violence deaths continue to involve the use of a weapon. Stabbing, or use of a firearm, remain the most common means of perpetrating domestic violence homicides:
  - Stabbing (5/13), shooting (3/13) and blunt force trauma (3/13) were used in 2016.

# 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 committee 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 the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA) [www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/p27.pdf](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/p27.pdf).

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

## Committee Membership

The Committee is a multi-disciplinary group of 10 family violence experts. Members represent various sectors—including legal services, law enforcement, sexual assault services, victim advocacy, research/academia and community organizations.

### The 2016 Committee was made up of the following members:

- Committee Chair: Dr. Allen Benson, Native Counselling Services of Alberta
- Mr. Gary Gibbens, YWCA Sheriff King Home in Calgary
- Mr. William Hogle, QC, Family Law Lawyer
- Ms. Sylvia Kasper, former prosecutor (Queen's Counsellor) and Manager of the Calgary Domestic Violence Unit
- Inspector Donnan McKenna, RCMP
- Inspector Trent Forsberg, Edmonton Police Service
- Acting Superintendent Cliff O'Brien, Calgary Police Service
- Ms. Karen Pease, Victim Advocate
- Ms. Debra Tomlinson, Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services
- Ms. Lana Wells, the Brenda Strafford Chair in the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary
- Ms. Kim Sanderson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Justice and Solicitor General

## 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 and perpetrator(s) were spouses or partners, former spouses or former partners, adults with children in common, or adults or 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 future 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 as police progress through their investigations. The Committee receives data about deaths resulting from family violence directly from the 11 different police agencies in Alberta. Each police agency compiles its data and provides it on a yearly basis. The Committee reviews the police reported data and determines whether the data meets the definition of family violence related deaths, as previously noted above.

## Confidentiality

The Committee complies with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP) and the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* and are required under PAFVA not to disclose any identifying information in publicly released reports. Committee members sign a non-disclosure agreement. In accordance with provincial legislation and in order to protect the privacy of the individuals involved, the names of particular victims and perpetrators are not made public in this report and only non-identifying statistics are provided.

## Code of Conduct

In accordance with the *Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act*, which governs all agencies, boards and commissions, the Committee is guided by a code of conduct and established mandate and roles. The code of conduct is reviewed by the Office of the Ethics Commissioner Lobbyist Registrar of Alberta before it is approved by the Minister of Community and Social Services. The code of conduct can be found online at:  
<http://alberta.ca/ags-ministries.cfm#Human>.

## 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 whether barriers exist. The Committee is not a fault finding body. Through deeply examining individual cases, the Committee brings to light how systems respond to victims of family violence and perpetrators. The objectives of in-depth reviews are to identify:

- barriers to safety and support-seeking behaviours;
- how institutions can discourage or encourage an informed and appropriate response to family violence;
- gaps in training, policy, practice, resources, communication and collaboration; and
- how programs and policies of government and agencies may need to adapt and change.

### Prevention-Focused

The Committee's in-depth review process looks at what conditions led up to family violence deaths and how the death itself could have been prevented. Members examine:

- 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 targeting systemic change to prevent future tragedies.

### Data-Driven

In addition to the information learned from conducting in-depth case reviews, the Committee analyzes data on 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

## Method for In-depth Case Reviews

The Committee reviews all family violence related deaths in Alberta; however, not every incident will be 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.

Cases that are eligible for an in-depth review:	Cases that are ineligible for review:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homicides and murder-suicides by an intimate partner (current or former)</li> <li>Friends, family or new partners killed by the perpetrator in the context of intimate partner violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homicide committed by an intimate partner where there is an ongoing police investigation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children killed by the perpetrator in the context of intimate partner violence (as retaliation or to punish or hurt the other partner)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The perpetrator is facing criminal charges and has not yet been tried or sentenced</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abuser killed by victims in self-defense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suicide death of perpetrator who was unsuccessful in a homicide attempt against their intimate partner (near misses)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abuser killed by victim's friends, family member, or bystander intervening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homicide of a family or a household member not related to intimate partner violence</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abuser was killed by law enforcement while responding to a family violence related homicide.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child abuse homicides</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Death by suicide of a domestic violence victim.</li> </ul>

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 guides the formation of recommendations and stands for:

**Specific**  
**Measurable**  
**Achievable**  
**Realistic/Reliable**  
**Timely**

## Completed In-depth Case Reviews

When the Committee completes an in-depth case review, a report is submitted to the Minister of Community and Social Services and subsequently released to the public. The report focuses on the recommendations only as legislation prohibits the release of identifying information to respect the privacy of the individuals involved.

Recommendations from Case Two are as follows:

1. Amend the Protection Against Family Violence Act (PAFVA) to include provisions allowing professionals to deliver services and supports through voluntary service agreements to those impacted by family violence, regardless of violence severity or protection orders being in place.
  - If a professional and a person, 18 years or older, agree that said person is in need of protection against family violence, then an agreement to make programs or other services available to them may be entered into by the person (of their own choice) and the professional.
    - Professionals include any individuals who provide services to:
      - Individuals or families who require protection against family violence;
      - Perpetrators of family violence by virtue of employment with an agency that is funded by the Government of Alberta, the Government of Canada or any municipal government; and
      - Individuals who are subject to professional standards resulting from membership in a professional organization. Examples of professionals would be shelter workers, police, social workers, psychologists, court workers, probation officers, etc.
2. Amend the PAFVA to include information-sharing provisions where professionals are supported and protected under legislation to obtain and/or disclose a victim's information (with the victim's consent) for the purpose of increasing collaboration and coordination of efforts between professionals to focus on safety planning and in and intervention, regardless of violence severity and whether the family remains intact or not.

# Family Violence Statistics

## Family Violence in Alberta

Family violence affects everyone; it occurs in high numbers across the Canada. Alberta has the fourth-highest rate of police-reported family violence among the Canadian provinces.

### Fact:

1 out of every 4 violent crimes in Canada is perpetrated by a family member.

# 12,210

victims in Alberta reported violence to police in 2016



8,002



4,208

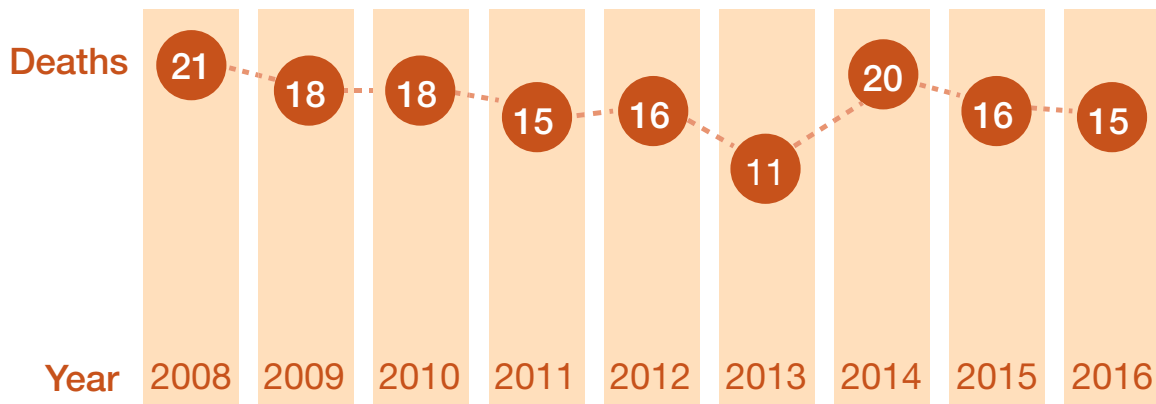
\*according to Statistics Canada

As high as these numbers are, Statistics Canada estimates the actual number of Albertans experiencing family violence is much higher as it is expected that only 70 per cent of victims report family violence to the police.

## 2016 Family Violence Deaths in Alberta

- There were 15 deaths (13 victims and two perpetrators) due to family violence.
  - Between 2008 to 2016, there were 150 deaths due to family violence.

### Family Violence Deaths in Alberta by Year:



### Characteristics of Family Violence Deaths in Alberta:

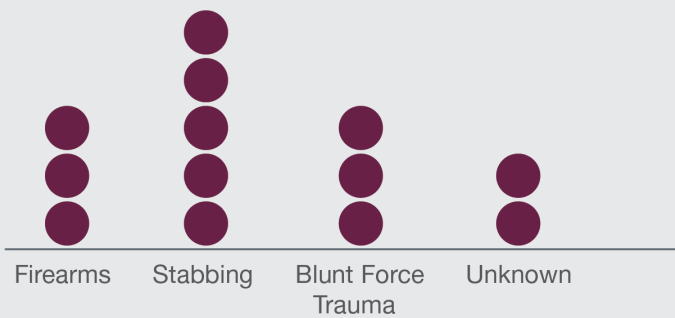
Seventy-three per cent of family violence deaths were single homicides. Twenty-seven per cent were homicide/suicide.



The majority of all family violence victim deaths involved a weapon (firearm/knife). Eight involved a weapon (five stabbing, three firearms), two were unknown and three did not involve a weapon.

## The majority of family violence deaths in Alberta involved a weapon.

Method of Homicide (by incident) 2016



\* "Unknown" cause of death is due to the information not being released publicly at this time.

\* These statistics only include victim deaths and not perpetrator deaths.



## Geographic Summary of Family Violence Deaths by Region

Alberta's major metropolitan cities had the highest rates of family violence deaths. The highest number of family violence deaths (33 per cent) occurred in the Edmonton region. This is a notable change as historically, the majority of family violence deaths (35 per cent) occurred in the Calgary region.



Region	Deaths 2016	Percentage
Calgary	4	27%
Central	0	0%
Edmonton	5	33%
North Central	0	0%
North East	0	0%
North West	3	20%
South	3	20%
Total	15	100%

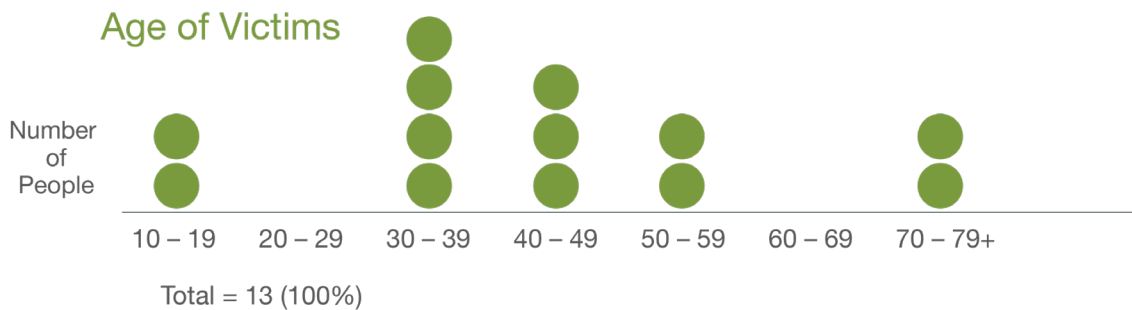
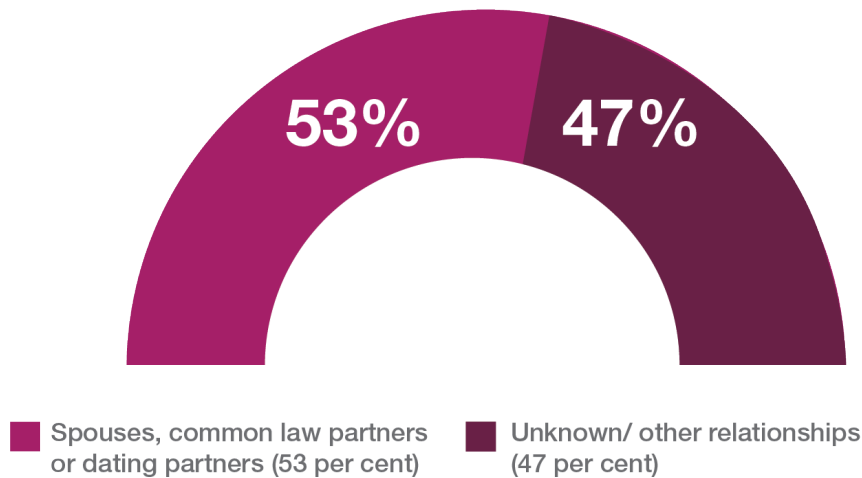
## Portrait of Victims of Family Violence Deaths in Alberta

The highest number of victims of family violence deaths were women aged 41-50 who were in a relationship with their abuser at the time of the incident.

Of the 15 family violence deaths, 13 were victims and two were perpetrators who committed murder/suicide. The 13 victims of family violence deaths were comprised of eight women and five men.

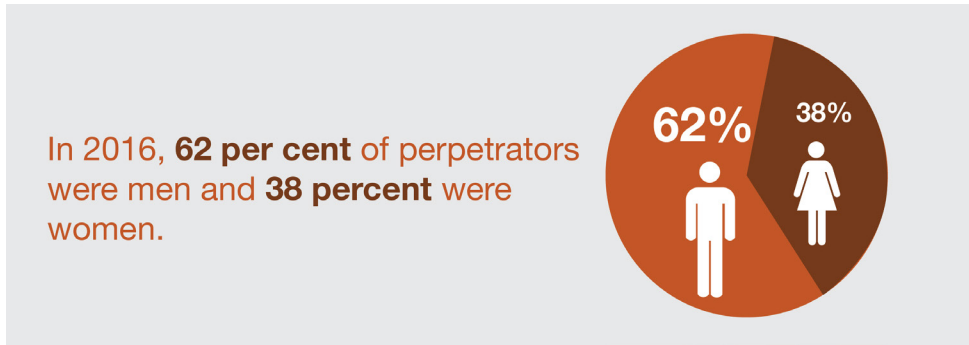


The majority of victims were in a current relationship with their abuser at the time of their death: (53 per cent) were spouses, common law partners or dating partners. The remaining 47 per cent had an unknown relationship status with the perpetrator and/or were a family member or bystander.



## Analysis of Perpetrators of Family Violence

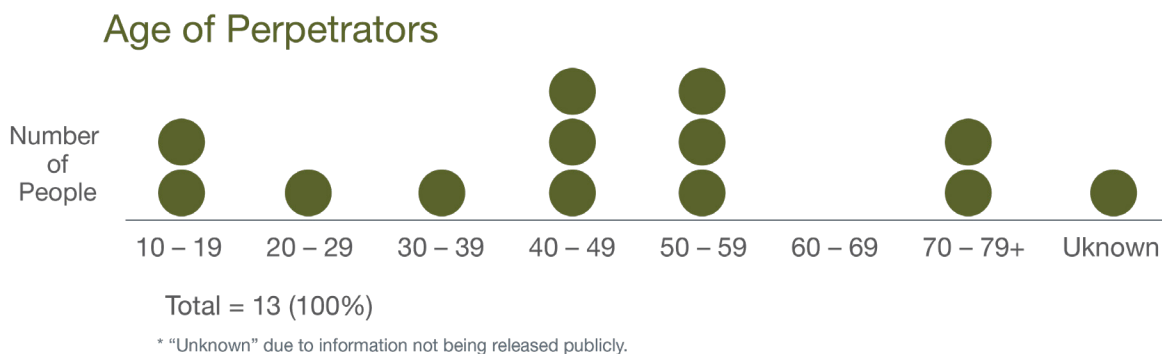
The majority of family violence deaths involved a male perpetrator aged 49-59 who used a weapon against his current partner.



**In 2016, men perpetrated all deaths involving a murder/suicide and/or bystander death.**



The majority of perpetrators were Albertans aged 40-59 years old.





# Looking Ahead to the New Term (2017-2020)

On June 8, 2017, the Minister of Community and Social Services appointed members to the Family Violence Death Review Committee for another three-year term. The Committee is thankful to those who served on the first committee for their contributions and time. In the new term, the Committee is looking forward to working together to utilize their expertise, experience and skills to conduct the reviews.

The Committee has chosen seven cases to examine for the new term. These cases were chosen through a consensus by the Committee based on the criteria outlined on page nine. The cases that will be reviewed are representative of Alberta's diverse populations and reflect the complex nature of family violence.

The Committee looks forward to continuing to work with government and community partners to advance family violence prevention in Alberta.

# Appendix 1: Recommendations from Publicly Released Case Reviews

## Case Review 1

### Recommendations:

The Family Violence Death Review Committee wishes to acknowledge and commend the good practices of the police agencies in Alberta and the work being done to prevent and address family violence.

1. The Alberta Government amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act and Code to recognize and include family violence as a workplace hazard. Family violence is to be defined as it is in the Protection Against Family Violence Act and must include: direct family violence (where the family violence is at the workplace) and indirect family violence (where the family violence is outside of the workplace) and it directly affects the workplace through employee's performance or by creating an unsafe work environment. When family violence as a workplace hazard occurs, policies, procedures, monitoring and accountability mechanisms must be implemented. Collaboration with police services is recommended when these mechanisms are being developed and implemented.
  - a. The Alberta Government, in consultation with key stakeholders, will develop training, educational and public awareness materials for employers, employees and the general public that addresses family violence as a workplace hazard.
2. The Alberta Government develop and include a family violence training component into their mandatory Alberta Basic Security Course, offered through Justice and Solicitor General, to ensure all security workers being licensed within the province of Alberta have this background. In addition, it is recommended that all existing licensees and individuals renewing a license be required to complete this mandatory training.
  - a. The Alberta Government, work with post-secondary institutions to develop and include family violence response and reporting components into their diploma and certificate programs related to security and investigations.
3. The Alberta Government distribute family violence materials at key points of public contact:
  - Alberta registries at the time of application for marriage licenses, birth certificates, driver's license applications and renewals, vehicle registration renewals, and replacement documentation requests, including links to family violence materials in cases of online applications and renewals;

- Through all Alberta Family Justice Programs and Mediation/ Dispute programs targeted towards familial matters and dissolution of intimate partner relationships (married and common law) and to all individuals applying for protection orders;
  - For any individuals attending court-ordered treatment for mental health and/or addictions treatment;
  - Through Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services programs (e.g. primary care networks);
  - To all social serving agencies, especially Immigrant-serving agencies, which partner with the Government of Alberta to provide social programs and services.
4. The Alberta Government, in collaboration with immigrant serving agencies and community partners work to identify and enhance existing family violence strategies and education materials specifically targeted towards new Canadians and newcomer populations in order to address key obstacles and (such as language barrier, isolation, stigma, and cultural differences) that prevent new Canadians from seeking assistance with family violence issues.

## Case Review 2

### Recommendations:

1. Amend the Protection Against Family Violence Act (PAFVA) to include provisions allowing professionals to deliver services and supports through voluntary service agreements to those impacted by family violence, regardless of violence severity or protection orders being in place.
  - If a professional and a person, 18 years or older, agree that said person is in need of protection against family violence, then an agreement to make programs or other services available to them may be entered into by the person (of their own choice) and the professional.
  - Professionals include any individuals who provide services to:
    - Individuals or families who require protection against family violence;
    - Perpetrators of family violence by virtue of employment with an agency that is funded by the Government of Alberta, the Government of Canada or any municipal government; and
    - Individuals who are subject to professional standards resulting from membership in a professional organization. Examples of professionals would be shelter workers, police, social workers, psychologists, court workers, probation officers, etc.

2. Amend the PAFVA to include information-sharing provisions where professionals are supported and protected under legislation to obtain and/or disclose a victim's information (with the victim's consent) for the purpose of increasing collaboration and coordination of efforts between professionals to focus on safety planning and intervention, regardless of violence severity and whether the family remains intact or not place.