Family Violence
Death Review Committee
2020/2021 Annual Report
Table of Contents

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. 3

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

In-Depth Case Reviews ....................................................................................................... 8

  Method for In-Depth Case Reviews .................................................................................. 9

Operating Principles of the Committee ............................................................................... 10

  Systems-Focused ............................................................................................................... 10

  Prevention-Focused ......................................................................................................... 10

  Data-Driven .................................................................................................................... 10

Highlights from the 2020-2021 Year .................................................................................. 11

2020 Family Violence Data and Findings ............................................................................ 12

  Family Violence Deaths in Alberta by Year (2011-2020) ................................................. 12

  Characteristics of Family Violence Deaths in Alberta ..................................................... 12

  Family Violence Deaths in Alberta by Region ................................................................. 13

  Family Violence Deaths in Alberta: Causes of Death ..................................................... 14

  Family Violence Deaths in Alberta: Gender of Victims and Perpetrators ..................... 14

  Family Violence Deaths in Alberta: Age of Victims ....................................................... 15

  Family Violence Deaths in Alberta: Age of Perpetrators ............................................. 15

  Family Violence Deaths in Alberta: Perpetrator Profiles ............................................. 16

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 16
Message from the Chair of the Family Violence Death Review Committee

The last year brought much change, within and outside of the Committee. The Family Violence Death Review Committee (FVDRC) concluded another three-year term, and many members completed their service with the Committee after serving multiple terms. I would like to thank all of the outgoing members for their time committed to preventing family violence, serving Albertans, and their commitment to the FVDRC. I welcome our new members, as well as our previous members who will be serving another term.

As the Committee was wrapping up the term, I began my new role as the chair of the FVDRC. In my former role as Deputy Chief of the Calgary Police Service, I saw firsthand how important it is to prevent family violence, and I appreciate the role of the FVDRC in preventing family violence in Alberta. I am honoured and excited to take on the role of FVDRC Chair, and I look forward to working with our members, government, and community representatives across the province.

In addition to the changes to the Committee, I would be remiss if I did not mention the impact the pandemic has had on Albertans, the family violence sector, and the Committee. In many instances, isolation has broken connections to existing support networks, making it more difficult for victims of family violence to get help or escape abuse. The pandemic has required all of us to adapt to continue our work, in and outside of the Committee, and ensure Albertans’ needs are being met. Even now, we do not fully understand the impact the pandemic has had on the family violence sector, but I have been impressed by everyone’s ability to quickly change the way they do business to best meet community needs.

As we continue to navigate these unprecedented times, the FVDRC looks forward to onboarding our newest members, and continuing the Committee’s work to help prevent future incidences of family violence.

Sat Parhar, Chair
Executive Summary

Alberta’s FVDRC 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 due to 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, as well as measures that could have been taken to prevent and reduce these or other similar deaths.

The 2020/2021 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 report also gives a brief overview of highlights from the 2020/2021 fiscal year.

The 2020/2021 Annual Report also provides a detailed examination of information collected from family violence incidents that resulted in 18 deaths (15 victims and three perpetrators) in 2020. Findings from this report include:

- Family violence deaths occurred in both rural and urban communities, with the Edmonton region recording the highest number of deaths.
- The majority of the deaths were a single homicide with a female victim.
- The majority of the victims were between the ages of 20 to 29.
- The majority of the victims were in a relationship (spouse, common law or dating) at the time of their death.
- The majority of the perpetrators were male between the ages of 20 to 39.
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. [http://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 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 2020-2021 Committee members:

- **Committee Chair: Mr. Satpal Parhar**, former Deputy Chief of the Calgary Police Service
- **Ms. Sylvia Kasper QC**, former Crown Prosecutor and Calgary Domestic Violence Unit Manager
- **Superintendent Cliff O’Brien**, Calgary Police Service
- **Ms. Karen Kadatz**, Executive Director, Strathcona Shelter Society (A Safe Place)
- **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
- **Inspector Sean Armstrong**, Edmonton Police Service
- **Superintendent Jason McAdam**, Royal Canadian Mounted Police

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 might 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 data is 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](https://www.alberta.ca/public-agency-list.cfm).

**In-Depth Case Reviews**

**Process Map**

1. Police provide yearly data on all family violence deaths in Alberta
2. Secretariat staff create a synopsis for each death
3. Committee meets and selects cases for in-depth review
4. Committee breaks out into sub-committee pods and conducts in-depth review of cases
5. Pods present case review findings to the Committee
6. Committee discusses and approves recommendations
7. Committee submits a full case review report and public report to the Minister of CSS
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, criminal investigations or court 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 sentenced, or a subsequent appeal has not concluded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children killed by the perpetrator in the context of intimate partner violence (e.g.: as retaliation intended to punish or hurt the other partner).</td>
<td>Suicide death of perpetrator who was unsuccessful in a homicide attempt against their intimate partner (near misses).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An abuser killed by a victim in self-defense.</td>
<td>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>An 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 guides the formation of recommendations and stands for:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic/Reliable
- **T**imely
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 for victims and perpetrators to access help. 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, perpetrators and their families, and any 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.
Highlights from the 2020-2021 Year

The FVDRC did not let the pandemic impede its work in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. The Committee submitted Case 9 to the Minister of Community and Social Services, which was posted on the Government of Alberta’s Open Data portal in March 2021. In addition, the Committee met several times to review and discuss recommendations for Cases 10 and 11. To conduct in-depth case reviews, Committee members and the FVDRC Secretariat met with government representatives prior to finalizing the recommendations to learn about current policies and practices in order to ensure recommendations reflect the most recent policies across Government.

From the three cases submitted, ten recommendations were made to the government. The recommendations focus on increased communication and collaboration between various public service sectors, an increase in public education and awareness about family violence, as well as further training for various types of frontline workers across the family violence sector.
2020 Family Violence Data and Findings

In 2020, there were 18 family violence deaths (15 victims and 3 perpetrators). Between 2011 and 2020 there were 165 deaths in Alberta due to family violence, according to the Committee’s criteria.

Family Violence Deaths in Alberta by Year (2011-2020)

Characteristics of Family Violence Deaths in Alberta

61% of family violence deaths in 2020 were single homicides, 22% were homicide/suicides, and 17% were incidents involving multiple homicides.
Family Violence Deaths in Alberta by Region

The Edmonton region had the highest number of police reported family violence deaths in 2020. This includes the deaths of victims and perpetrators.
The majority of 2020 family violence deaths involved a weapon (firearm/knife). Seven deaths involved firearms, four were stabblings, three deaths resulted from blunt force injuries, and one was due to hypothermia. The cause of death was unknown in two cases and undetermined in one case.

**Family Violence Deaths in Alberta: Gender of Victims and Perpetrators**

Of the 18 family violence deaths, 15 were victims and three were perpetrators. The 15 victims of family violence deaths were comprised of 11 females and four males. The remaining deaths were the deaths of three male perpetrators.
Family Violence Deaths in Alberta: Age of Victims

The majority of the 15 victims were women aged 20-39 who were in a relationship with the perpetrator at the time of their death.

Family Violence Deaths in Alberta: Age of Perpetrators

The age of perpetrators in 2020 ranged from 20 to 59 years old.

*the age of one perpetrator is not identified
Family Violence Deaths in Alberta: Perpetrator Profiles

In 2020, 14 perpetrators were involved in 14 incidents of family violence, which resulted in 18 deaths. Out of the 14 perpetrators, 64% were male and 29% were female (7% were undetermined). In 73% of the incidents the victim was killed by a current intimate partner. Out of the 18 deaths, 61% involved weapons. The majority of the perpetrators were between the ages of 20 and 39.

Conclusion

In 2020, Alberta had 18 family violence related deaths that originated from intimate partner relationships, ranging from children to middle-aged adults. Deaths occurred both in rural and urban communities, with the Edmonton region recording the highest number of deaths.

The majority of incidents were single homicides with female victims, and involved male perpetrators. The majority of victims were also in intimate relationships with the perpetrators at the time of their deaths. While the data shows an increase in the number of male family violence-related homicide victims, Alberta’s data continues to demonstrate the gendered nature of family violence against women and girls.

The Committee is constantly reminded of the necessity and importance of family violence prevention, and of the need to help provide solutions that contribute to an Alberta free of family violence. The FVDRC is committed to continuing its role in family violence prevention, and to improving outcomes for Albertans living with family violence. For more information on the Committee’s recommendations to prevent and reduce family violence, please visit https://www.alberta.ca/family-violence-death-review-committee.aspx.