



**D**OMESTIC  
**V**IOLENCE  
**A**CTION  
**P**LAN FOR ONTARIO



**Ontario**

Ontario Women's Directorate  
Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration



## F O R E W O R D

Domestic violence. Sadly, it is a term all too familiar. Hearing it brings to mind horrific images from news channels, shocking reports from the courts and, worse, the faces and personal stories of women who have suffered abuse or whose lives have been brutally taken by a spouse or partner.

To our government, to our citizens, this is intolerable. Every woman deserves to live her life free of fear. Every child deserves to grow up knowing no threat of violence in the home.


This Domestic Violence Action Plan was developed through a Ministerial Steering Committee, chaired by Sandra Pupatello, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, and involving 13 Ministers and the Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier. It incorporates advice received through a series of stakeholder consultations with Laurel Broten, Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier. The result is a comprehensive, balanced approach across ministries designed to better protect women and children now and reduce domestic violence in the future.

Our vision for this Action Plan is to free all women and their children from the fear or threat of domestic violence. It's a long-term vision that will require many partners and it will take time – perhaps a generation – to do it right.

Front-line workers in shelters, counselling agencies and women's centres provide critical services and supports to women who seek help. The plan enhances these vital community supports with increased funding for existing services, as well as support for new initiatives. We are also strengthening the justice system to respond more effectively to abusers and better protect victims through the courts.

At the same time, we are placing greater emphasis on better training for a broader range of professionals – such as workers in hospital emergency departments, teachers, police – as well as neighbours, friends and families, so that they can recognize the early signs of abuse, intervene early and take action to protect women and their children.

We recognize that if we want to reduce domestic violence, we must change the attitudes and behaviours that make it possible, even acceptable, for women to be victimized by the men who are closest to them.



This year, we will be launching a ground-breaking campaign to address a major root cause of violence against women. We will motivate children, aged eight to 14, to put an end to gender stereotyping and perceived inequality and help them learn social skills for healthy relationships that are free from all forms of violence. This comprehensive campaign will also mobilize communities to get actively involved in changing attitudes, so that our society as a whole will not tolerate violence against women and girls.

This is a new approach to domestic violence that invites everyone's participation – governments, corporations, professionals, families, friends, neighbours and co-workers, to name a few. By working together, we can better protect and support women and children now and reduce domestic violence in Ontario over the long term.

Our government will not tolerate domestic violence, but it is clear that we cannot be truly effective unless the entire community makes it a priority. We have to take domestic violence out of the shadows and bring the full power of public censure to bear.

Together we can make a difference to the lives of many.

Dalton McGuinty  
Premier

Hon. Sandra Pupatello  
Minister of Community and Social Services and Minister Responsible  
for Women's Issues (Chair)

Hon. Michael Bryant  
Attorney General

Hon. Monte Kwinter  
Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services

Hon. Rick Bartolucci  
Minister of Northern Development and Mines

Hon. Gerrard Kennedy  
Minister of Education



Hon. John Gerretsen  
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Hon. George Smitherman  
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

Hon. Christopher Bentley  
Minister of Labour

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni  
Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister of Citizenship and Immigration

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur  
Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs

Hon. David Caplan  
Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal

Hon. Jim Watson  
Minister of Consumer and Business Services

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers  
Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

Laurel Broten  
Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PRINCIPLES

BETTER COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORTS FOR VICTIMS

IDENTIFY WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT RISK AND INTERVENE EARLIER

CHANGE ATTITUDES TO PREVENT VIOLENCE FROM HAPPENING IN THE FIRST PLACE

STRENGTHENING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM RESPONSE

BETTER ACCESS TO FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women in Ontario is a serious, pervasive problem that crosses every social boundary. The McGuinty government is doing more to protect women and their children by developing a long-term action plan to tackle domestic violence in a coordinated and comprehensive way.

The government's Domestic Violence Action Plan provides a balanced approach that enhances community supports to better protect victims, focuses on public education, early intervention and prevention strategies to help reduce domestic violence, strengthens the justice system response and offers better access to French-language services for the Francophone community.

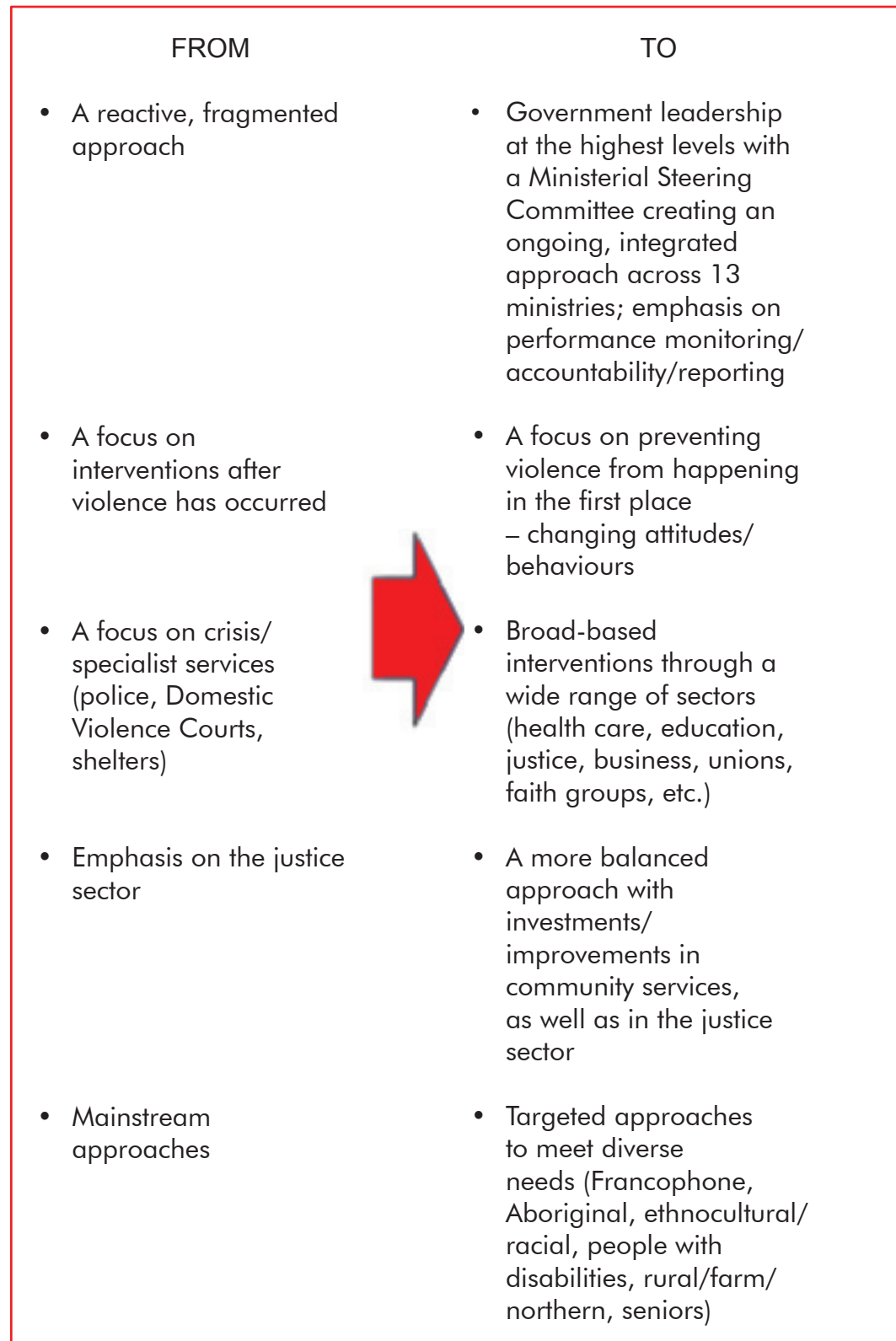
The plan was developed following extensive consultations in 2004. It reflects input from 30 roundtable meetings involving 180 experts and stakeholder representatives, and meetings with front-line workers. The recommendations of the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee Report to the Chief Coroner were also considered when developing the Plan. It involves a broad range of partners, both traditional and non-traditional, to more effectively address domestic violence.

The four-year plan includes:

- \$56 million to provide better community supports for victims, including enhanced counselling services and transitional and housing supports
- \$5.9 million to train front-line workers, professionals, families, neighbours and friends to recognize early signs of abuse and help victims get the information and support they need
- a comprehensive \$4.9 million major public education and prevention campaign, designed to change attitudes and mobilize communities to stop violence before it happens
- improvements to Ontario's criminal and family justice system to better protect women and their children and hold abusers accountable for their violent behaviour

The plan also targets programs and services to meet the needs of women from diverse and at-risk communities.

## TRANSFORMATION





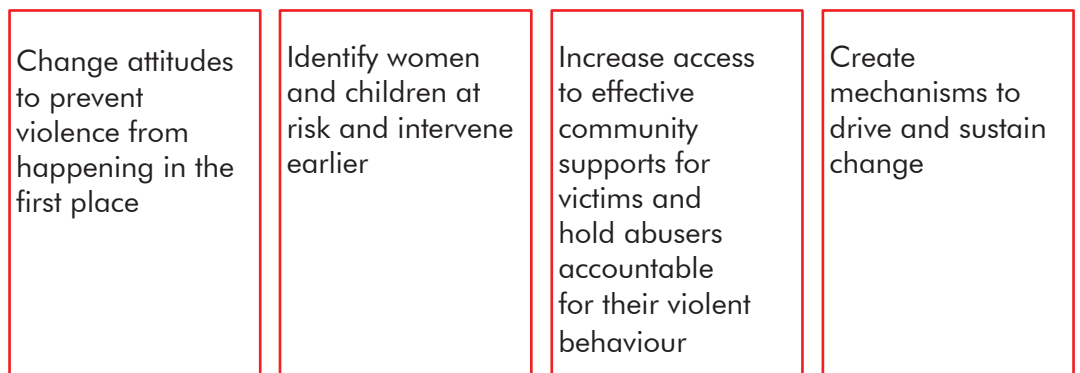
## REAL AND MEASURABLE PROGRESS

This action plan sets the wheels of change in motion to make Ontario women and their children safer. Within this government's mandate, real and measurable progress can be made in the following areas:

- increased awareness of the warning signs of domestic violence and what to do when you see them;
- province-wide participation in a campaign to help today's youth learn how to have healthy, equal relationships;
- better access for abused women and their children to a continuum of supports in their community to help them be safe, heal and to live independently and productively;
- improved risk assessment tools to help police, courts and others in the justice system to determine risk of offenders re-offending and to protect victims;
- enhanced training in the health, education, justice and social sectors of front-line professionals and service providers as well as neighbours, friends and families across Ontario to recognize the signs of domestic violence and to help abused women get the support they need;
- targeted initiatives for groups that are at increased risk of domestic violence or for whom access to supports is limited by language, geography, disability or culture;
- a better coordinated and more accountable system, with efficient allocation of resources to priority needs; and
- increased knowledge and knowledge-sharing about best practices, building on research and experience in Ontario, and internationally.

## INCREASED SAFETY FOR WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

### STRATEGIES



← Improved access to French Language Services and targeted initiatives to address the unique needs of people with disabilities, seniors and Aboriginal, ethnocultural/racial, rural/farm/northern communities. →

### KEY ACTIVITIES





## LEADERSHIP, COORDINATION AND MONITORING

A coherent, multi-sectoral strategy is needed to deal with domestic violence. For that reason, implementation of this Action Plan is being:

- led at the highest level of the government through a Ministerial Steering Committee on Domestic Violence, chaired by the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, and including 13 Ministers and the Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier;
- coordinated at the provincial operational level across multiple ministries by the Ontario Women's Directorate (OWD), working with an Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Women's Issues;
- coordinated at the community level through strengthened Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees;
- informed by an external review of ministries' violence against women programs and services to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness; and
- monitored for results through the Ministerial Steering Committee for all components of the Action Plan, with public accountability for progress made.

This Action Plan conveys the government's commitment on the issue of domestic violence and outlines key areas in which actions are being taken now.

It provides a framework within which all our partners – and all Ontarians – can come together for a common cause.

There is more hard work ahead of us. We will continue to consult with stakeholders. We will continue to work with communities and partners. We will maintain our commitment to this issue. This Action Plan will help to create momentum towards achieving our vision of an Ontario where all women and children are safe from violence in their homes and communities.

## 2 . P R I N C I P L E S

Ontario's Domestic Violence Action Plan reflects the following principles:

### THE RIGHT TO SAFETY

All women have the right to live in safety and dignity, free from threat, intimidation and violence.

### EQUALITY

The root causes of violence against women are societal, and the solutions lie ultimately in changing values about equality between men and women. While women in Canada have made great strides in recent decades, women and their children are still the primary victims of domestic violence.

### PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

Government must play a leadership role in protection, intervention and prevention, using the legislative, regulatory, policy, program and funding levers it has available to address violence against women.

### SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

We all share the responsibility to protect women and children who are at risk of harm and to prevent violence from happening. We cannot look away. Partnerships are needed between and among governments, advocacy groups, corporations, charitable foundations, community organizations, educational institutions, families, neighbours, friends and others to improve public understanding and to help change attitudes and behaviours that lead to violence against women.

### PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Abusers must be held accountable for their actions. Violence against women is contrary to this province's values. Abusers should receive effective intervention to prevent future incidence of domestic violence.



## DIVERSITY AND EQUITY OF ACCESS

The ethnic, linguistic, cultural and geographic diversity of Ontario requires targeted and sometimes unique responses. What will work in a big city may not work in a rural area or in the north. If programs are to be successful in reaching women outside the mainstream, differences must be respected. Women with disabilities have special needs. Aboriginal women need services that recognize their culture and issues in their communities. Francophone women should receive services in their language in accordance with the French Language Services Act.

## A HOLISTIC RESPONSE

Violence against women requires a holistic response. It is a social issue, an employment issue, a housing issue, a child care issue, an education issue, a health issue, a community safety issue, a justice issue, and more. The lives of women do not conform to boundaries among programs, ministries, agencies, institutions or levels of government. Efforts must be coordinated within and across sectors to create an integrated continuum of supports.

## A BALANCED APPROACH

We must balance efforts to prevent violence, to intervene early, to identify risk, to hold perpetrators accountable, and to support and protect victims when violence occurs.

## MEASURABLE PROGRESS OVER TIME


Sustained, long-term commitment by government and its partners is needed to end violence against women. It is important to monitor what is working, to measure what has been achieved, and to continue to improve the quality and range of services provided, based on experience and new knowledge.

### 3 . B E T T E R C O M M U N I T Y - B A S E D S U P P O R T S F O R V I C T I M S

The government is investing to provide stabilized funding to core services, and to expand community supports:

- Counselling is vital to help victims of domestic violence through the immediate crisis and to deal with longer-term, related emotional issues. It assists women who are victims of domestic violence to increase their safety, prevent re-victimization and take steps to rebuild their lives. Annual funding for community-based counselling services will be increased by \$2.5 million starting in 2005-06 to address waiting lists and gaps in services for specific populations through regional service planning. This funding is in addition to the three per cent operating increase that was implemented in 2004-05.
- The Transitional and Housing Support Program helps victims of domestic violence to find safe, secure housing, counselling services, job training, income supports and other important services. The government is investing an additional \$3.5 million annually starting in 2004-05 for this program to help more than 70 women's shelters, second-stage houses and community agencies assist women and their children. Starting in 2006-07, an investment of \$1 million annually will enhance this program, bringing the total investment up to \$10.1 million annually.
- A one-time investment of \$2 million in 2004-05 will be made to refurbish women's shelters and second-stage housing facilities. Funding will be provided for capital improvements to support efficiency, health and safety, and energy conservation measures.
- \$3.5 million annually for the next two years and \$1.4 million each year annually from 2007-08 onward will help women's agencies such as shelters and second-stage housing programs improve their functional capacity. This is in addition to the three per cent annual operating increase being provided to shelters starting in 2004-05.
- Social housing provides safe, affordable housing for many victims of domestic violence. \$500,000 will go toward training social housing providers such as non-profit housing corporations, municipal service providers, and access centres to build their skills in addressing issues facing abused women.

- Funding which will grow to \$2 million annually by 2007-08, will be provided for a new pilot training program to help abused women succeed in the workforce and gain economic independence. Criteria for this program will be developed by the OWD in consultation with key stakeholders.
- As part of its continuing efforts to improve services for abused women and their children, the government is reviewing the Assaulted Women's Helpline and the regional Francophone crisis lines.
- The Language Interpreter Services program helps service providers work with victims of domestic violence who have limited proficiency in English. Interpreters help victims access shelters, social services, health care, legal services and the court systems. In the past this program was supported through a time-limited grants program. Following a review, funding of \$2.2M for Language Interpreter Services programs will be annualized from 2006-07 onward to provide more stability for these vital services.
- A wide variety of stakeholders have expressed concerns about problems related to the Special Priority Policy under the Social Housing Reform Act. This policy provides priority access to social housing for victims of domestic violence. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing formed a working group in November 2004, comprised of municipal service managers, domestic violence organizations, provider and tenant organizations, access centres networks, the Ontario Women's Directorate, the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of the Attorney General. This working group will provide recommendations on regulatory changes that will strengthen the protection provided to victims of abuse and improve implementation of the policy.
- Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees provide important service coordination work at the local level. Stable funding in the amount of \$2.4 million over three years will go to new and existing Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees to enhance program and service coordination.
- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services child welfare reform/transformation is developing an Ontario Differential Response model of child welfare service delivery. The model will include a more flexible, strength-based response to lower risk situations. This will



facilitate a more supportive approach to women and children who have experienced domestic violence. The Ministry will also work with universities and other organizations in their research initiatives to better understand the impact of the reforms, including how to better support women and children who have experienced domestic violence.

- Through Hospital Reports, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will be tracking the use of clinical practice guidelines that have been developed to assist health care providers in emergency departments respond appropriately to the immediate needs of victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Through the Ontario Women's Health Council, an extensive study is underway across diverse health care settings to evaluate the effectiveness of universal screening for identifying women abuse. The project will be completed in fall 2006 and follow-up training of health care professionals will be undertaken to disseminate the results of the study.
- Ontario Works providers are being trained to assist Ontario Works staff in providing more effective responses to abused women. The training curriculum was developed by Education Wife Assault in partnership with the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association and included input from violence against women experts and Ontario Works staff. The training provides Ontario Works staff with the increased knowledge and sensitivity necessary to effectively support women who are abused and their children.
- Sexual violence is frequently one of the types of abuse experienced by women in intimate relationships and women may seek support from Sexual Assault Centres. Funding to these centres has been increased by \$1.9 million starting immediately. This means an increase of 8 per cent to 36 centres, as well as achieving equal funding for Francophone centres and improving access to French-language support services. This is the first increase in 13 years.

#### 4. IDENTIFY WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT RISK AND INTERVENE EARLIER

The government will spend \$5.9 million over four years for training, research and conferences in key sectors to help prevent domestic violence:

- Training will focus on early intervention and response for professionals and service-providers working in a wide range of sectors such as health care, education and justice, as well as families, friends and neighbours who potentially come into contact with abused women at a point where early detection and intervention are crucial. They will be trained to recognize the warning signs of abuse and offer appropriate responses, information and supports.
- Expert training advisory panels will develop and/or promote core training materials for front-line workers, professionals, family, friends and neighbours to help them detect the early signs of abuse. These panels will also assist with the delivery of training programs.
- Training initiatives will address the unique needs of people with disabilities, seniors, ethnocultural/racial, rural/farm/northern, Aboriginal and Francophone communities.
- Ontario will host a provincial conference in fall 2005 for community leaders, experts and service providers to share best practices, new approaches and recent research in preventing domestic violence and providing support to victims.
- An inventory/clearinghouse of quality resources and programs that meet training standards will be developed by the Ontario Women's Directorate in consultation with key sectors.

## 5. CHANGE ATTITUDES TO PREVENT VIOLENCE FROM HAPPENING IN THE FIRST PLACE

The \$4.9 million, four-year, public education and prevention campaign will mobilize Ontarians to play an active role in ending violence against women and girls:

- A high profile public education campaign will target boys and girls aged eight to 14 years, and the adults who influence them. Pre- and early adolescence has been identified as a crucial time for the emergence of patterns of violence and victimization. This campaign will focus on promoting healthy, equal relationships and preventing violence from happening in the first place. It will be aimed at mobilizing communities across Ontario to help break the cycle of violence.
- A wide range of partners from the business community, educational and community organizations, and more, will be involved in the campaign. They will take on activities and work to support the campaign within their sectors.
- Ongoing targeted initiatives will address the unique needs of people with disabilities, seniors, ethnocultural/racial, rural/farm/northern, Aboriginal and Francophone communities.
- A variety of tools will be developed for schools and workplaces. Information about healthy relationships, the warning signs of domestic violence and where to go for help will target youth and the adults who influence them.

## 6 . S T R E N G T H E N I N G   T H E   J U S T I C E   S Y S T E M   R E S P O N S E

The government continues to make improvements to Ontario's criminal and family justice system to better protect women and children from domestic violence and to ensure the seamless delivery of services from the justice system:

- An inaugural meeting of federal/provincial/territorial attorneys general and ministers responsible for women's issues will be convened to discuss key issues related to improvements needed in the justice system's response to abused women.
- The Children's Law Reform Act will be reviewed and amendments will be proposed to require courts to consider domestic violence when making orders relating to the custody of or access to a child.
- The services provided through domestic violence courts will be evaluated and improvements made based on results. This will include an examination of the experience of women from diverse communities. Stakeholders will have opportunities to participate in the evaluation. This will be a comprehensive process and is expected to be completed by the end of 2005.
- The effectiveness of the abusers' Partner Assault Response Program in changing attitudes about domestic violence will be researched. The results of the review will be used to modify the program.
- Access to justice will be improved by:
  - working with the federal government to improve funding for family and civil legal aid;
  - working with stakeholders to examine other models to better support abused women in family law disputes;
  - using community legal education publications to increase awareness of family law, domestic violence and civil rights; and
  - encouraging the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to require reverse onus in bail situations and to retain the concepts of custody and access in any amendments to the Divorce Act.

- Based on consultations with justice and community partners to be held in early 2005, civil protections for abused women will be improved, including improvements in restraining orders and enforcement of breaches. Standardized provisions for restraining orders are being developed to ensure consistency of practice across the province.
- Ongoing funding of \$300,000 annually will be provided to the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, beginning on April 1, 2005, to continue the work of the specialized legal services for assaulted women, a project that has been operating for five years and has demonstrated its effectiveness in helping women who have been abused and have complex legal problems.
- Coordination between family courts and criminal courts will be improved by:
  - examining ways to improve communications between the two courts;
  - developing a protocol to improve communication;
  - funding a symposium to examine different models of integrated service and information sharing systems, including those in Boston and San Diego; and
  - discussing with the Law Society of Upper Canada the potential for a Continuing Legal Education program for the Criminal and Family Bars to educate lawyers about how each court system deals with domestic violence issues, and to identify cross-over issues and ways the systems could better work together to support victims.
- Current Bail Safety Pilot Programs that are underway in Perth, Hamilton and Sudbury have been evaluated. Six new sites will be added and additional evaluation will be undertaken.
- Funding will be provided over three years to the National Judicial Institute to provide skills-based education and practical tools to assist Ontario judges in court cases involving violence against women.

- Special training on domestic violence will be provided and a mechanism will be developed to ensure training for part-time Crown Attorneys to help them prosecute cases effectively.
- Pilot tests of the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) tool began in January 2005 in the North Bay area and Ottawa among police, Crown Attorneys and others in the justice system to identify and assess risk in abusive situations. The tool will be tested in both French and English in both communities. Depending on the evaluation of these pilots at the end of a year, a province-wide rollout will be determined.
- The Model Police Response to Domestic Violence is being evaluated in police services across the province to ensure that policies and procedures are implemented appropriately and required improvements are made.
- The impact on victims of dual charging will be mitigated by strengthening policies and police training on the policies. A draft support tool has been developed and is being examined by professional and community experts in domestic violence.
- Solutions will be identified and implemented to improve the time required to place Probation Orders and convictions on the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC).
- A technical and literature review of electronic monitoring systems will be undertaken to assess the impact on persons who have abused their significant others.
- An evaluation will be conducted and improvements made to programs that serve incarcerated women who have been victims of physical or sexual abuse.
- An enhanced offender telephone management system will be implemented to monitor calls made by inmates in order to help prevent offenders from harassing or threatening abused women via telephone from jail.

## 7. BETTER ACCESS TO FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

In accordance with the French Language Services Act, access to French-language programs and services will be improved within all the components of the Domestic Violence Action Plan, including public education and prevention, early intervention, community supports and the justice system response. Ministries will report on improved access to French-language violence against women programs and services. Initiatives will include:

- A French-language services strategic plan will be developed to address key service priorities and gaps over the next three to five years. As a first step, funding has been increased to all sexual assault centres by 8 per cent, with additional funding to French-language Sexual Assault Centres to improve services to Francophone women.
- Regional service planning will consider the needs of Francophone communities.
- The level of funding provided to Francophone sexual assault centres will be increased to a level comparable to that of other sexual assault centres starting in 2004-05. French-language sexual assault services will be developed and/or improved in other communities, in consultation with local and provincial stakeholders.
- The effectiveness of services provided by bilingual sexual assault centres will be reviewed to ensure that services provided are accountable. The French-language component of a bilingual sexual assault centre may be reallocated to the development of Francophone services as appropriate.
- A review of French-language crisis lines will be undertaken to improve these services.
- A French-language component of the public education campaign to target Francophone communities will be developed.
- Training for French-speaking professionals will be funded to improve the delivery of services to Francophones.
- A pilot training program to help abused women succeed in the workforce and gain independence will be delivered in French, through French-language organizations.

- The Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment tool (ODARA) will be piloted in French.
- Given the multi-service nature of Francophone violence against women agencies, strategies will be developed to address community concerns about the administrative burden caused by multi-ministry reporting.
- Meeting the needs of Francophone women will be specifically identified as an objective, with performance indicators, in the administration of existing programs and/or the development of new policies, programs and services related to the prevention of domestic violence, in consultation with Francophone violence prevention stakeholders.
- Performance measures to report on improved access to French-language violence against women programs and services will be developed.

Please visit our website at [www.ontariowomensdirectorates.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorates.gov.on.ca) for ongoing Ontario Women's Directorate activities and any enquiries you may have regarding our Domestic Violence Action Plan.