



October 24, 2024

The Honourable Doug Ford  
Premier of Ontario  
Legislative Building, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON  
M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford

United Ways across Ontario are writing to express our profound concern with the enduring prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) in our province.

For decades, survivors, their families, community service agencies and advocates, elected officials and residents have sounded a clarion call for urgent action at all levels of government. This sustained advocacy and mobilization has helped bring to light the devastating effects on survivors; the intersectional nature of IPV with issues such as housing instability and income precarity and the disproportionate impact on women and children already facing systemic inequities, racism and discrimination; as well as the broader social and economic impacts of IPV in our communities, neighbourhoods, cities and province. IPV has been recognized by the World Health Organization as a major public health issue and a global crisis<sup>1</sup> and has severe health consequences, including death, injury, and mental health problems, and is the leading cause of women's homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, across Canada and Ontario, women and girls continue to be murdered, at alarming rates and with untold impact. In 2022, 184 women and girls were violently killed in Canada.<sup>3</sup> The Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses reported 52 femicides in Ontario within 52 weeks from November 2021 to November 2022.<sup>4</sup> The time has come for the Government of Ontario to take bold and decisive action to end this violence and support those impacted.

Ontario United Ways work across public, private and community services sectors to address the enduring chronic issues facing women and gender-diverse people in our province. With deep connections in community, Ontario United Ways have long partnered with agencies and survivors to address IPV and other forms of gender-based violence, including through investments in counselling and crisis support programs, support for shelters and second stage housing, and advocacy. IPV also intersects with our work on affordable and adequate housing, availability and access to mental health supports and crisis responses, employment opportunities, food security, countering hate and violence, and youth programming. We have seen firsthand the lasting impact of IPV and urge government take the action needed to:

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<sup>1</sup> ["Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018"](#), World Health Organization. (2021).

<sup>2</sup> Yakubovic, Alexa R et al., ["Housing interventions for women experiencing intimate partner violence: a systematic review"](#), The Lancet Public Health, Volume 7, Issue 1, e23 - e35

<sup>3</sup> ["Call it Femicide: Understanding Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls in Canada 2018-2022"](#), Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> ["More Than a Number: Addressing the Roots of Gender-Based Violence"](#), Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses, 2022.

### ***Declare IPV an epidemic***

Ontario United Ways are encouraged that Bill 173, *Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, 2024* is being considered by the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and we urge the provincial government to adopt the Bill without delay. By formally recognizing IPV as an epidemic, the government of Ontario has an historic opportunity to champion the need for comprehensive and coordinated action to address IPV in Ontario and ensure the required resources, policies and interventions are in place to support survivors and address root causes.

### ***Prioritize the safety of Indigenous women and girls and the Calls for Justice put forward in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women***

Indigenous women face a homicide rate nearly seven times higher than that of non-Indigenous women<sup>5</sup> and are 1.4 times more likely to experience intimate partner violence in their lifetimes.<sup>6</sup> Systemic anti-Indigenous racism and systemic discrimination contribute to barriers that further prevent many Indigenous women from feeling safe in their communities and obtaining help following violent or traumatic experiences, such as inaccessible supports and services, availability of culturally-responsive supports, and the deep impact of their experience with the police, criminal justice system, and institutions intended to protect.<sup>7</sup>

The Calls for Justice put forward in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls define a clear pathway for embedding Indigenous-informed approaches into any action plan on gender-based violence. Government's strategy must acknowledge the disproportionate rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls and their root causes, including the long impact of colonialism, racism, sexism and trauma. In developing a clear and responsive action plan, it is imperative that Indigenous women are meaningfully engaged in legislative, policy, program and service developments. An effective action plan also requires the necessary and sustained funding for community-based, culturally grounded services that focus on prevention and family and community living.

### ***Develop a comprehensive, data-informed plan to end IPV and support those impacted***

Drawing from the Calls for Justice in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the recommendations from the inquest into the deaths of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Natalie Warmerdam in Renfrew County in 2015, and the submissions and depositions received by the Standing Committee on Justice Policy in its consideration of Bill 173, develop a comprehensive plan, ensuring the required resources, policies and interventions are in place to support survivors and address root causes, including through prevention and education initiatives. This plan should also include investing in a comprehensive data collection and monitoring process to more accurately measure the prevalence and impact of IPV, including disaggregated data to ensure appropriate resources are directed to communities that are disproportionately affected by these forms of violence.

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<sup>5</sup> [Rates of homicide victims and accused persons, by sex and Indigenous identity and province and territory](#), Statistics Canada, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Loanna Heidinger, "[Intimate Partner Violence: Experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women in Canada, 2018](#)", Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Intersecting social inequities leave certain populations at higher risk of experiencing these forms of violence and being underserved when they do. Gender-diverse people and women and who are Black, racialized, with disabilities, newcomers and refugees, or those living in rural or remote communities, are more likely to experience IPV yet have far fewer culturally appropriate supports and resources available to them. The plan must reflect the unique needs and challenges experienced by women and gender-diverse people who are Black, racialized, with disabilities, newcomers and refugees, as well as those living in rural and remote communities where barriers such as isolation from community connections, limited digital connectivity, lack of public transportation, and sparse/distant resources are a reality. These needs and challenges require deliberate and targeted approaches that also leverage and scale community-based supports that are trauma-informed, survivor-centred, and intersectional.

***Engage experts, including women and gender-diverse people with lived and living experience of IPV, in planning and decision-making***

Convene a formal provincial expert roundtable dedicated to ending IPV comprised of survivors, violence against women sector leaders, Indigenous leaders and advocates, and other relevant partners to inform legislative, policy and program measures to address IPV. These measures should include addressing the systemic social, cultural, institutional, and historical causes of IPV.

***Sufficiently resource sector capacity***

The sectors addressing IPV and gender-based violence in the province play a critical role in supporting survivors, including women’s emergency shelters; provincial crisis lines; safety planning; child protection; healthcare facilities; settlement services; educational institutions; legal information, advice, and representation; and counselling. Despite the significance of these services, they face considerable instability due to inconsistent and chronic underfunding. Permanent, multi-year operational funding for shelters and transitional housing, and the full range of support services is critical to stabilizing the sector.

***Ensure availability and access to safe, adequate and affordable housing***

On an average day, violence against women shelters across Canada turn away almost 1,000 women and their children – many of whom will return to situations of violence and precarity.<sup>8</sup> A CBC investigation in early 2020 found two thirds of women and children seeking safe shelter in Eastern Ontario are turned away every year due to lack of space.<sup>9</sup>

Safe, adequate and affordable housing options – from emergency shelters to transitional housing to permanent supportive housing and affordable rental housing – are crucial to a holistic IPV response strategy, supporting survivors of gender-based violence, and are foundational for the long-term stability of individuals to rebuild their lives, including those caring for children and other dependents. We urge government to expand housing options that meet the needs of survivors and to protect the range of affordable and accessible housing options available through long-term and predictable investments in non-market housing solutions and wraparound supports, housing stabilization and eviction prevention supports, and renter protections that help survivors access and live in secure homes. Increasing investments in integrated transitional and supportive housing are also crucial to providing a range of culturally responsive and relevant wraparound services for Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit individuals.

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<sup>8</sup> Schwan, K., Versteegh, et al., “[The State of Women’s Housing Need & Homelessness in Canada: Key Findings](#)”, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> “[Eastern Ontario shelters turning away 2 of every 3 fleeing abuse](#)”, CBC, March 5, 2020.

Ontario faces a unique opportunity to substantially advance how we address and prevent IPV and support those impacted. Ontario United Ways look forward to continuing to work closely with government, our partners, and our communities to bring lasting changes to the lives of women, girls and gender-diverse people and their families across Ontario.

Sincerely,

United Way Bruce Grey  
United Way Centraide North East Ontario  
United Way Centraide Simcoe Muskoka  
United Way/Centraide Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry  
United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex Chatham-Kent  
United Way for the City of Kawartha Lakes  
United Way Durham Region  
United Way East Ontario  
United Way Elgin Middlesex  
United Way Greater Toronto  
United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin  
United Way of Haldimand and Norfolk  
United Way Halton & Hamilton  
United Way Hastings & Prince Edward  
United Way of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington  
United Way Leeds & Grenville  
United Way Niagara  
United Way Northumberland  
United Way Oxford  
United Way Perth-Huron  
United Way Peterborough & District  
United Way Sault Ste. Marie & Algoma District  
United Way Thunder Bay  
United Way Waterloo Region Communities