

The background of the cover is a photograph of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) in shades of green and purple, with silhouettes of evergreen trees at the bottom. A large, semi-transparent green rectangle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text.

Blueprint for Violence Prevention

Edmonton

Focused Engagement What We Heard Report March 2025

Safe & Healthy Communities
Social Development, Community
Services

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project was initiated by a Council Motion made on August 28, 2023 at the Community and Public Services Committee Meeting. The motion requested:

"That Administration provide a report with the development of a violence prevention action plan, in collaboration with partners, as part of the broader Community Safety and Well-Being strategy, highlighting key priorities, including but not limited to youth and neighbourhood prevention, and related funding requirement; and provide a memo midway as an update on this work."

Administration's response to this motion was the development of the Blueprint for Violence Prevention which was informed by the engagement conducted and outlined in this report.

APPROACH

Administration conducted a focused engagement approach from May to October 2024. Most of the participants engaged were from Edmonton, but some notable experts were from other parts of Canada and the United States. Section 3: "Who We Engaged" lists the stakeholders who participated in the engagement. This focused approach was selected in order to ensure that the insights gathered from previous engagement efforts are honoured; to ensure that this project did not contribute to widespread engagement fatigue; and to make best use of the limited time and resources available.

We acknowledge that this is just a starting point and further engagement will be integral to the future implementation of this plan where more direct engagement will occur with both social and geographic communities experiencing violence in Edmonton.

For the purposes of this project the focused engagement include the following four phases:

1. Socializing

The engagement approach begins with socializing the intent and early framing of the Action Plan with stakeholders to collect early learnings, inform our understanding of the

violence prevention ecosystem, and create buy-in and participation early on. By sharing our early understandings of root causes and a draft theory of change we are offering the opportunity for stakeholders to provide critical feedback around this conceptualization early on in the process.

2. Analysis of Previous Engagement and What We Heard Reports

Given the extensive engagements with organizations and communities over the years and upon recommendations from across the section and branch, we reviewed City of Edmonton What We Heard Reports and connected Frameworks/Strategies that are interconnected and intersect with violence prevention. Drawing upon the learnings and insights that have already been shared through previous efforts acknowledges that we are not starting this conversation from ground zero and can help to focus on what might have changed or what we have missed.

3. Focused Conversations

Building upon early learnings during the socialization process and key takeaways from previous engagement efforts and related strategies, the project team met with a variety of organizations from different sectors. These conversations helped to further develop the proposed theory of change and help create and refine the focus areas in the Blueprint. Given that this phase of the project, the development of the Blueprint has a focus on what systems and structures need to be in place for the successful implementation of a violence prevention plan, the focused conversations targeted key community and system leaders in this space. Wherever possible, the project team met with existing committees and collaboratives where multiple organizations were present at the same table.

4. Open House

The final phase of the engagement process included an open house opportunity at MacEwan University where stakeholders, partners, agencies consulted in previous phases, and other interested parties could 'drop in' and learn about the initiative. Participants were encouraged to provide feedback by leaving stickers and notes on the

information presented, answer open ended questions, and engage in dialogue with the project team.

WHO WE ENGAGED

Engagement was conducted with those working at the level of service providers, policy-makers, researchers, and community leadership. Some of the stakeholders listed below were involved in all four phases, while others may have provided input during one of the four phases. Below is a summary of the internal and external stakeholders that provided their feedback to inform this report:

Internal

City Administration

- Business Licence, Zoning and Bylaw
- Community Recreation and Culture
- Community Standards
- Neighbourhood Empowerment Team (NET) Governance Table
- Social Development
- Transit Safety Oversight Committee

External

Government Entities

- Alberta Health Services
- Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nation
- Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord
- Edmonton Catholic School Division
- Edmonton Police Service
- Edmonton Public School Board
- Government of Alberta, Public Safety and Emergency Services
- Otipemisiwak Metis Government
- Peace in Our Cities network

Academic

- University of Alberta, Center for Healthy Communities
- University of Alberta, Department of Criminology
- University of Alberta, Sociology
- University of Alberta, Social Sciences
- NorQuest, Justice Studies
- University of Calgary, Shift: Project to End Domestic Violence
- University of Ottawa, Criminology

Social Agencies/Organizations

- Boyle Street Community Services
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Edmonton Region
- Catholic Social Services
- e4C
- Edmonton Family Violence Prevention Center
- Encompass (previously Edmonton John Howard Society)
- Family Center
- Islamic Family
- Jewish Family Services Edmonton
- MAPS Alberta
- Momentum Counselling
- NiGiNan Housing Ventures
- Old Strathcona Youth Society
- Organization for the prevention of violence
- REACH Edmonton
- Rise Up Society
- SAIFSociety
- Today Family Violence Help Centre
- Wings of Providence
- Youth Empowerment and Support Services
- YWCA

Advisory Groups

- Women's Advisory Voice of Edmonton Committee (WAVE)

Other

- REACH Resource Connect Event (October 16): over 70 agencies and service providers in attendance

WHAT WE ASKED

Sessions began with a summary of the approach the project team was taking in development of the plan, including a synthesis of the research and the approach to utilizing local data, what we have heard so far from previous reports. Each session had a slightly different question based on the group that was being engaged but generally asked two questions:

1. *What is needed in a community to prevent violence?*
2. *What is needed to implement and sustain a violence prevention plan?*

WHAT WE HEARD

This section summarizes the relevant feedback collected through all four phases of the engagement.

Engagement Themes

A. Connection and Vibrant Communities

- In order to prevent violence people need to feel a sense of connection. Connection to family, to friends, to community, culture, and to place etc.
- We need safe and accessible spaces (community hubs) in the community for people to connect and find belonging - especially for youth.
- Physical spaces in communities feeling safe or unsafe does make a difference in terms of the connection to the community. Activating streets/alleys can be an effective way to encourage participation and prevent crime.
- Safe secular spaces for people who are structurally vulnerable.

B. Address Root Causes

- Violence is not experienced equally among different groups. This has a lot to do with inequities in basic needs or social determinants of health.

- Address root causes of violence instead of always dealing with symptoms.
- Safe and affordable housing is a huge determinant to whether a person can achieve personal safety.
- Economic stability in order to be able to navigate life.
- Translation, language and workforce support for newcomers.
- Income support is a basic need that can help to reduce motivation or need to resort to violent acts to meet basic needs.
- Accessible mental health support and counselling is needed to address underlying mental health concerns before they become problematic, support victims of trauma and violence, and to support those who may have inflicted violence and are looking to recover.
- Unaddressed underlying trauma can lead to perpetrating or experiencing violence. We need more support to be able to address that trauma.
- Engage men and boys in the development of programming and education for men and boys to encourage healthy relationships.

C. Opportunities with Families and Schools

- Provide support for families to develop healthy relationships within the family unit. Work across sectors to provide higher risk families with the support they need early on.
- Early education within schools on what violence means, healthy behaviours etc. Schools can be one of the only safe spaces for some youth - bring in agencies to be able to provide extra support for some youth who might be identified as vulnerable.

D. Prevention and Intervention are Entangled

Prevention is important, but not just primary prevention. Secondary and tertiary prevention (or intervention) are also important and related to primary prevention.

- Can not shift investment towards primary prevention and expect to see a reduced demand for intervention right away - this shift will take time.
- Enforcement and security is necessary but don't want to only focus on being reactive - must balance with prevention.

- There has been a shift in funders requiring efforts to focus on primary prevention. This is positive, but it must be balanced with acknowledging we still need resources to be able to meet the needs of those who are already in crisis and past that primary prevention phase.
- Sometimes the efforts within a tertiary prevention space feed back into primary prevention. For example, the work done with a family who has experienced violence not only aims to reduce harms related to that violence, but it also acts as primary prevention for the children in that family so they don't go on to perpetrate violence in the future.
- Ensure that the support for victims is also balanced with a support for offenders to reduce recidivism.
- More restorative justice opportunities in order to heal from violence.
- More needs to be done to support victims of domestic violence and intervene earlier with perpetrators.

E. Community Co-Creation

Systems change is necessary, but do not forget that communities themselves are part of that system. Communities know what they need and what works for them. It is essential to involve the community in decision making.

- Different social and geographic communities have different needs, experiences and ideas of what might work to prevent violence. It is essential that these voices are consulted and included in the decision making process when determining what interventions may be considered.
- Violence is inequitable. Some groups experience violence more frequently than others due to overlapping inequities. It is important to consider these unique needs when tailoring approaches for violence prevention.
- Culturally relevant violence prevention programming is essential to ensure the unique needs of certain communities are considered.
- Communities can lead their own strategies (ex. Metis led healing strategy).
- Governance structures need to involve and include community based agencies - in a meaningful way.

- Don't reinvent the wheel. Look at programming and services that are already being offered and shown to be successful and provide appropriate resources and investment to scale those up. There is a lot of good work going on that if given the appropriate resources could be more effective.

F. Funding and Accountability

The need for adequate and sustainable funding was perhaps one of the most common points made throughout the engagement process.

- Many agencies shared the challenge of not having adequate or sustainable sources of funding to maintain programming that may be working.
- Funders are always looking for something shiny and new, rather than scaling up what works.
- Many community based agencies shared challenges around recruiting and maintaining staffing.

There was a collective ask for accountability amongst all of the different engagement approaches. Accountability to do what we say we will do and move strategy into action, but also accountability within each of the sector partners to address how violence might be embedded and perpetuated within institutional structures.

- How do we take accountability for violence embedded and perpetrated by institutions?
- General frustration with the amount of strategies and frameworks produced by the City and other systems partners without the proper funding to implement.
- If actions are identified, the City must regularly report back to the community on progress and how success is being evaluated.
- How goals will be measured and needing a clear action plan or responsibilities of groups/stakeholders.
- Follow through on commitments to increase safety and uphold accountability to decrease racial crime.

G. Coordination and Collaboration

The desire to work together on collaborative actions for violence prevention was emphasized and is already being practiced by many local agencies.

- There needs to be a clear division of roles and responsibilities amongst sector partners.
- We need to share data across sectors and community-based organizations to understand how violence is being experienced.
- People on the frontline do a great job of collaborating. It's the larger systems that need to coordinate more effectively.
- Find the major causes of violence, and coordinate action across sectors and with system partners to tackle them at scale, delivering a long-term reduction in crime, violence and associated harms.
- Foster better relationships with partners.
- Collaborate with Indigenous people to improve Indigenous safety by creating community support and educating service providers on Indigenous culture and history.
- More partnerships between enforcement and frontline agencies.
- Education and awareness on what is considered violence and on spotting the early signs of violent behaviour for people working on the frontline across sectors.
- Work across all four orders of government (municipal, provincial, Indigenous, Federal).

Program Highlight - WiseGuyz

WiseGuyz is a healthy relationship, life skills program for male-identified individuals in grade nine. WiseGuyz is an evidence-informed participatory program offered by the Centre for Sexuality and is designed to promote healthy relationships and prevent adolescent dating violence. The program provides a safe space for participants to reflect on the impacts of harmful gender stereotypes and build essential relationship skills. These skills aim to promote healthy sexuality and healthy relationship development while decreasing attitudes related to homophobia and gender-based violence.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The themes generated from this engagement informed the development of the Blueprint for Violence Prevention that will be presented to the Community and Public Services Committee in March 2025 as part of Council Report CS02082. All participants who have been a part of the development of the plan will be notified when the Council Report is made publicly available.

We thank everyone who was able to participate in discussions to inform the development of the Blueprint for sharing their time and their insights with us. We look forward to continuing these discussions as we move this work forward.