

# Safer Together

Understanding Possibilities for Family  
Violence Prevention and Education in  
Alberta's Settlement Sector



# Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ABOUT THE REPORT</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>SYSTEMIC BARRIERS FACING SETTLEMENT SERVICE USERS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>AREAS OF EXPLORATION</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>NEXT STEPS</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>APPENDIX: NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>NOTES</b>	<b>53</b>



## Executive Summary

The Alberta Association of Immigrant-Serving Agencies' one-year Family Violence Prevention Project, funded by the Government of Alberta, assessed the landscape of family violence prevention programming in Alberta's settlement sector, compared research literature about family violence prevention to our context, and sought to identify promising initiatives already ongoing.

We involved thirty practitioners from a variety of organizations and population centres to discuss issues facing newcomers for whom family violence is a concern, as well as issues facing the social workers and community leaders supporting them. In this report, which is intended for leaders within and outside the settlement sector as well as for policy thinkers, we summarize what practitioners told us about the systemic barriers facing newcomers in addressing family violence.

These include the need for cultural responsiveness, the difficulties created by legal status and language differences, and tension in the interface with Canadian institutions like the police and court systems, along with economic barriers like housing. We then discuss two key areas where we heard significant interest from practitioners: prevention education and alternative resolution practices.

In March 2026, this project was renewed for another year by the government of Alberta. The research summarized in this report, along with suggestions from our stakeholder network, has led us to focus the second year of the project on possibilities for family violence education in language-learning classrooms. We describe the evolving direction of this project further in the Next Steps section.

## Introduction

H. has recently moved from a refugee camp in Ethiopia to Calgary. She, her husband, and their four children lived in the camp for several years. Her husband has always had a temper, but when they lived in the camp, if she felt frightened, she would leave their housing unit with their children to visit her friends next door. A few times, he followed her, threatened her, and hit her, but her neighbours heard the commotion and came out into the common yard to separate them. Now that they are in Canada, her husband has had difficulty finding a job and learning English, while her English has been improving rapidly. They have not been able to make friends in the local community and her husband's temper has been getting worse. But in a detached Canadian house with nobody around to hear a fight, she feels trapped and increasingly frightened for her children, especially her two youngest daughters, who have serious disabilities and sometimes provoke her husband's frustration. At a check-in with the settlement organization that will support her for at least the first year of her time in Canada, her case manager, who is a member of her ethnocultural community, notices that her manner is subdued and distracted. The case manager gently asks her in her first language, "How are you feeling today?" She already feels ashamed of the situation, so, in the moment, she only nods. But as the conversation moves on, she begins to wonder whether it would be safe to ask her case manager for help resolving her disputes with her husband.

-----

J. is an internationally trained professional who arrived in Canada seven years ago and now works as a heavy equipment mechanic in Wetaskiwin. J. is on a soccer team with L., a more recent immigrant from a country neighbouring his. One day, he goes to L.'s condominium in the evening after work to drop off some cleats he is lending L. for the season. Before he knocks on the door, he hears shouting and the sound of a drawer repeatedly slamming. L. answers the door looking drawn and a bit sheepish, holding a dishcloth to his arm. Past him, J. can see his new wife in the kitchen nook stirring a pot with her face turned away, while L.'s mother and brother, who live with them in the two-bedroom apartment, discuss something in strained, low voices in the living room. His wife came over from their home country about seven months ago after their marriage, but J. has only spoken to her once or twice. As J. drives home, he starts to get a bad feeling about the interaction, and he wonders whether he should say something to L. Not only is he worried for L. and his wife, but he knows that in Canada it is



possible that somebody else in the building may call the police if they frequently hear fighting. Years ago, J. volunteered to help other immigrants learn English at the Wetaskiwin adult learning centre, and he knows from his own experience that it takes a lot of effort to build a network in a rural area as a newcomer. He wonders whether L.'s wife is enrolled in classes at the learning centre and who else she must lean on.

----

These two narratives are anonymized composites of many real stories. The dynamics in these narratives are drawn from an extensive literature in which newcomer survivors have bravely shared their stories with researchers and activists<sup>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11</sup> as well as directly from the experiences of social service practitioners we talked to this year in the first phase of AAISA's Family Violence Prevention Project. By presenting these stories, we hope to highlight the wide variety of situations in which people with immigrant and refugee backgrounds might encounter family violence as victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and support professionals. We also hope to underline the importance of community ties and education in the effort to intervene early when families are at risk of new or escalating violence.

This year, we built connections with organizations across the province to discuss the state of family violence prevention in Alberta's settlement sector—how workers in the sector think about family violence prevention, what programs their organizations operate, and what they see as the biggest issues facing immigrant communities when it comes to family violence. In this report, we summarize what we learned and where we are best positioned to support amplification and expansion of the lively and thoughtful efforts toward violence prevention going on at Albertan settlement organizations every day.

## About the Report

### Structure and Purpose of the Report

This report provides a high-level summary and narrative analysis on the state of family violence prevention among settlement system actors in Alberta. The findings of this project might inform future efforts by settlement organizations and funding partners across jurisdictions to expand and enhance prevention programming. To improve how the report communicates across sectors, and to establish the perspective



we have used to analyze service activities in the settlement sector, we have included context on the settlement sector that will be useful to partner organizations.

This report does not focus on forwarding specific recommendations for practitioners in their daily work around gender-based and family violence, although it may assist subject-matter experts to provide context for their own recommendations in the future. As part of this project, AAISA released a toolkit bringing together links to many valuable existing resources for training and professional development around gender-based violence, including resources specific to settlement and to cultural contexts.<sup>12</sup>

This report also cannot evaluate the overall effectiveness of programs, which would require long-term partnership with agencies delivering specific programs over several years. However, we do consult the significant body of literature of research focusing on the experience of newcomers around family violence and the measurable impacts of specific prevention and education projects. We explore how this literature reflects what we heard from project participants and what bringing together this information might suggest about how family violence prevention could be forwarded in Alberta's settlement sector.

We begin by reviewing the need for the project, including a summary of how the settlement sector is structured and the types of clients that it serves, as well as the many ways that settlement sector organizations become involved in supporting clients who experience family violence. We discuss the activities that we performed to understand these issues and explore some foundational background topics that contextualize family violence prevention efforts across the settlement and mainstream sector. This includes a discussion of systemic factors that affect the needs of newcomers who face family violence. Finally, we explore several promising practices in the sector. In these latter two sections, we consider research literature side-by-side with what we were told by our project participants to allow these two sources of knowledge to inform one another.

Significant efforts are ongoing in the settlement sector to educate clients about their rights and responsibilities around family violence, as well as to provide victim-survivors with forms of support that prevent re-traumatization during the help-seeking and intervention process. However, we heard of regional variations in the accessibility of services, particularly among small centre participants for whom

resources were scarce. We discuss potential moves forward to support the expansion of promising initiatives in our final Next Steps section.

The reader may be curious about the consideration that went into our choice of terminology in various instances. In an Appendix, we review how we thought about certain terminological issues, including a section on what is included in the term “family violence,” as well as an extensive section on the sex of perpetrators and victims in intimate partner violence.

## Background

### Describing the Settlement Sector

#### *Settlement clients*

Alberta’s settlement sector serves 100,000 newcomers with federally eligible statuses each year,<sup>13</sup> about 10% of the people with these statuses living in Alberta.<sup>14</sup>

Nationwide, the federal government’s 2023 Newcomer Outcomes Survey points out that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of permanent resident newcomers who accessed settlement services in their first year dropped to 19% (pre-pandemic, the number was closer to 40%; finalized data from years 2024 and 2025 is not available).<sup>15</sup>

People come to settlement organizations for a wide variety of reasons. Settlement organizations run employment programs; teach Canada’s official languages; provide community connections groups for recreation and conversation; and assist clients in interfacing with the health and legal systems.

This graphic from AAISA’s Knowledge Hub shows an estimated breakdown of settlement client statuses. A person’s immigration status influences what types of services they are eligible to receive from federal funders and how other institutions interact with them. People with certain temporary statuses may be in danger of losing status if they leave their partner or a job in their town.

## Immigration Category Breakdown of Clients

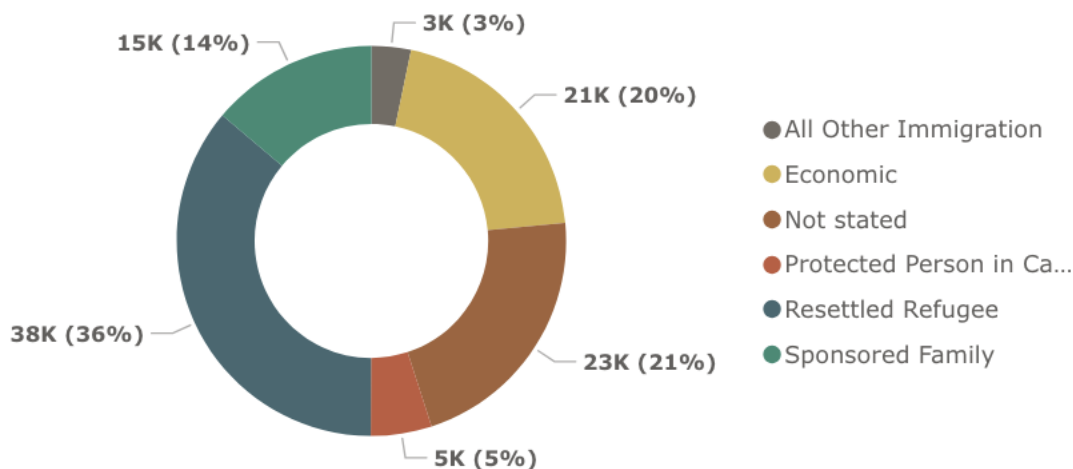


Figure 1. Immigration statuses of settlement clients

This graph shows that about 20% of clients at Alberta’s settlement organizations overall are economic immigrants. These clients have come to Canada for work and have Permanent Resident status, the most stable category of immigration status.

A further 36% of clients are UNHCR-designated refugees. These people and families have come to Canada as part of the exceedingly small proportion of displaced people worldwide who receive assistance through the UNHCR to relocate to new countries. Refugees have Permanent Resident status, and they are supported from their arrival by a designated settlement organization, but they disproportionately face other types of barriers, including trauma and health issues related to their displacement, as well as, typically, lower language and literacy levels than economic immigrants. Refugees make up an exceedingly small percentage of people moving to Canada with Permanent Status overall—about 3%, according to the Levels Plan 2026-28, which projects immigration admissions levels.<sup>16</sup> However, because they receive services from settlement organizations upon arrival, they make up a larger presence in settlement service work.

A further 5% of clients are Protected Persons. This is a particular status given to refugee claimants, also called asylum claimants, whose applications are approved. Asylum claimants are people who come to Canada directly to apply for protection from violence because the UNHCR process is unavailable to them for distinct reasons.



The processing of the application can take many years, but after the application is approved, claimants receive this status.

People with all these statuses can also sponsor their own family members. 14% of clients are sponsored family members of primary applicants with other statuses.

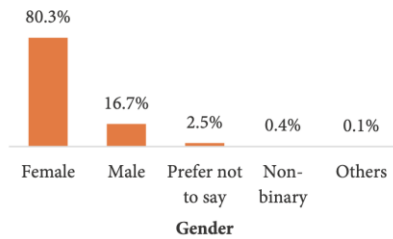
The final category of clients, where status is “not stated,” are people with temporary statuses. People with temporary statuses are not eligible for IRCC services, even though they constitute a significant majority of newcomers to Canada. However, many agencies seek out funding from other sources to serve clients with temporary status. An AAISA survey delivered in 2025 to settlement agencies resulted in a preliminary estimate that, on average, about 30% of clients of settlement agencies have non-permanent status.<sup>17</sup> This might include temporary foreign workers, international students, asylum claimants with pending applications, and undocumented people.

A comparable situation holds for people under 18, who may arrive in Canada as sponsored family members of primary applicants from any of these status groups. Most children and youth are not eligible for federal settlement funding, but settlement organizations may apply for additional funding to provide programming for them.

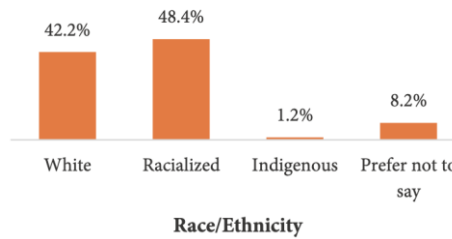
#### *Settlement workers and organizations*

The AAISA Health of the Sector survey found in 2022 that, across the Prairies and Northwest Territories, 80% of settlement sector workers are female and 48% come from a racialized minority group.<sup>18</sup> Over 60% of workers who responded to the Health of the Sector Survey were born outside Canada. (Note, however, that only a small minority, 6% of the overall sample, had arrived in the past five years.) This means that many workers in the settlement sector face discrimination in the labour market and may have limited bargaining power if their work environment impacts their well-being.

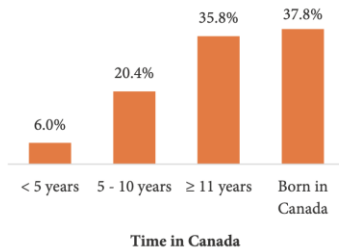
Gender of Respondents by Percentage



Race and Ethnicity of Respondents by Percentage



Length of Time in Canada by Percentage



Figures from [AAISA Health of the Sector Survey](#).

What is more, as in many work sectors, in the settlement sector demographic characteristics are not distributed equally across management levels.<sup>19</sup> Racialized women workers tend to hold jobs at lower levels in the organization, with locally born white women and men holding more management positions.

Like other direct service workers in hierarchized publicly funded organizations, settlement workers face conflicting imperatives.<sup>20 21 22</sup> They are asked to negotiate complex and sensitive human interactions in ways that are trauma-informed and client-centered—to use two pieces of common service sector jargon—but obligations flowing from funding bodies and managing parties do not always align with this goal. Attempting to balance these interests makes social services provision difficult.

When describing the settlement sector in this report, here and elsewhere, we focus on AAISA’s member organizations and other project participants. As an umbrella association, AAISA counts 55+ member organizations. This constitutes a sizeable proportion of organizations in Alberta’s settlement sector, but by no means all. AAISA’s member organizations are primarily non-profits and charities with a pan-immigration focus, as well as colleges with English-language-learning programs and programming designed for international students. Many organizations that fall into this demographic are primarily funded by Immigrants, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, so funding and directives from the federal government are a major influence



on their operations. However, many also seek out additional financial support from the Government of Alberta, municipal governments, foundations, and community, especially to provide programs for clients who fall outside federal eligibility. In the case of community colleges with language programs, revenue also contributes to their funding. Our member organizations vary in size; some serve several hundred clients a year and others serve hundreds of thousands of clients. Member organizations are located across Alberta in population centres of all sizes. AAISA also maintains ties with Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs). These are regional networks funded by the federal government, which usually employ a small number of staff to coordinate among services delivered by many system partners (police, colleges, housing authorities, etc.) municipalities to meet the needs of immigrant community members.

Until recently, AAISA was least well-integrated with grassroots organizations and local ethnocultural associations. With funding from the federal government, in 2025 AAISA began a Grassroots Accelerator Program and an associated grassroots collective to seek more opportunities to bridge these organizations with our existing network.

### **Settlement Organizations as Providers of Family Violence Services**

Some settlement organizations provide specialized services in-house for family violence and gender-based violence, such as, for example, supportive counselling. Specialized support for family violence might also be delivered during “case management,” the term used federally to describe the provision of high-involvement services to clients with complex cases. Staff under the case management service stream are funded to maintain lower client-to-staff ratios and to provide more hours of service per client. In a review of one Edmonton organization’s case files, about 41% of women clients had disclosed domestic violence.<sup>23</sup>

Even at organizations that do not provide specialized in-house support for family violence, as the client-worker relationship strengthens through other settlement supports, clients may sometimes disclose that they are facing or perpetrating family violence. Clients at settlement organizations benefit from an environment that prioritizes cultural sensitivity and can often find support in their first language or from a worker with a similar cultural background. These connections may encourage clients to seek help with a settlement worker first in sensitive situations.

Current best practice guidelines tend to counsel against universal screening for family violence with immigrants and refugees, which has been employed in some other healthcare settings. Notably, this is the conclusion of the authors of the 2011 Canadian Medical Association Journal's Clinical Guidelines for immigrants and refugees and the team of the 2016 McMaster University VEGA review of violence prevention initiatives.<sup>24 25</sup> These accords with what practitioners shared with us in terms of their on-the-ground knowledge about needs assessment. However, in the specific context of refugee needs assessment, at least one study in Australia has found positive results after training front-line service workers to deliver direct assessment.<sup>26</sup>

In the settlement sector, the federal government funds a standardized Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral Service (NAARS), which certain organizations in each population centre are funded to administer centrally. The National Standardized Assessment Template (NSAT) used for this assessment contains a question which appears to be intended to screen for family violence at this stage, but which is worded in such a way as to allow the practitioner to case-find rather than to open a conversation about family violence directly.<sup>27</sup>

While the advised best practice for NAARS assessments is to screen family members over 18 separately, time constraints can be prohibitive. We were made aware over the course of the project of front-line workers (not in participant organizations) who regularly screened both members of a couple together, for example, which might prevent the disclosure of family violence. Practitioners said that they might sometimes have separate discussions with family members under 18, but the practice was not habitual. As we note above, youth are not technically eligible for IRCC services, including NAARS assessments.

Settlement organizations may also be contacted by other organizations to support as part of a care team when somebody who has immigrated seeks help at a specialized domestic violence organization, or when such a person, or a third party, reports family violence to the police and the person enters the court system.

In an early survey to which 30 service workers responded, many of whom became ongoing participants in our project, we asked respondents to indicate their subjective feeling of preparedness around diverse types of cases. Twenty-one respondents chose to answer this question. For most types of cases, 70-80% of respondents felt "very

prepared” or “somewhat prepared”, and around 15-20% felt “somewhat unprepared”. In a few cases, especially for cases such as abuse of an elder and sexual abuse, the percentage of respondents expressing uncertainty about how to handle these types of family violence was higher—as high as 15% “unprepared” for abuse of an elder and about 28% “somewhat unprepared” or “very unprepared” for sexual abuse. In our appendix on terminology, we discuss further how our approach to this wide slate of meanings of “family violence” evolved over the course of the project. The difficulties and tensions posed by the types of family violence for which workers felt more prepared proved to be more than enough to occupy the time available for inquiry and analysis. However, these results might point toward possibilities for development of professional learning opportunities that address these specific, less well-known topics.

Q7

21 responses

Below, we have included a list of examples of specific types of family violence. How would you rate your overall feeling of preparedness in response to client cases where these types of family violence might be occurring? For example, you might feel prepared if you know how you would handle interactions with the client, who you could ask for advice, what referrals you would make, and how you would care for yourself while working on the case.

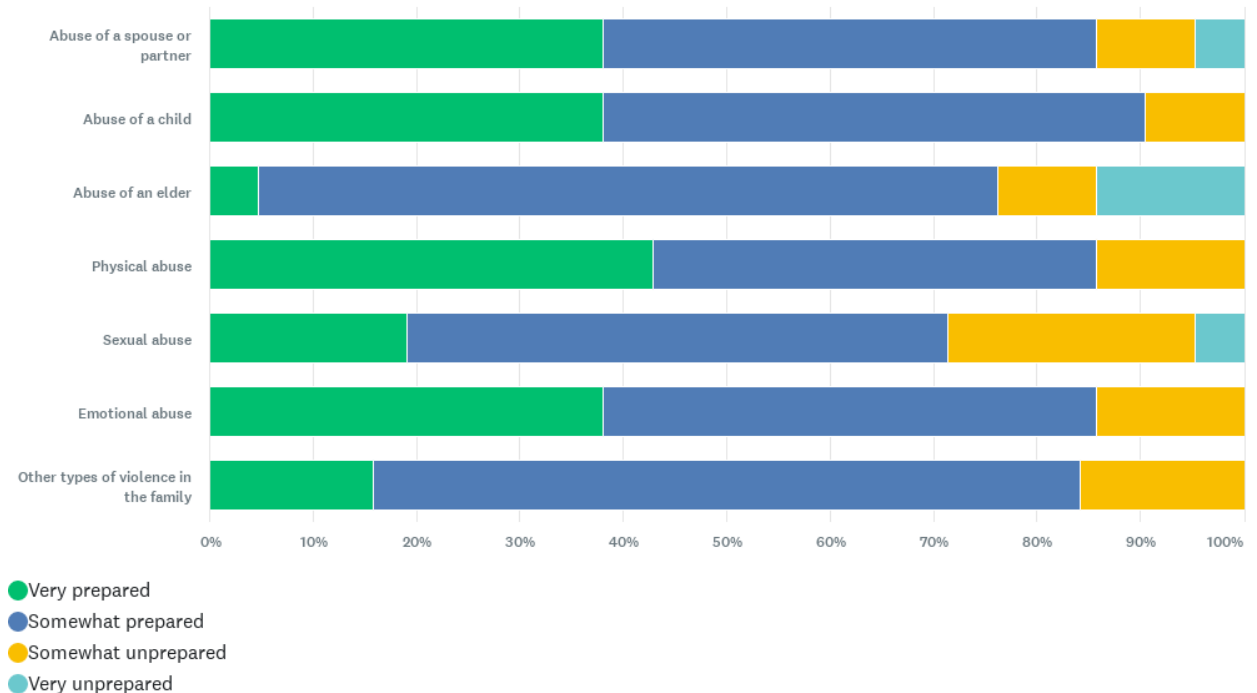


Figure 2. Responses to preparedness question

A further question also pointed to greater uncertainty among respondents around working with perpetrators of family violence, as opposed to working with victims.

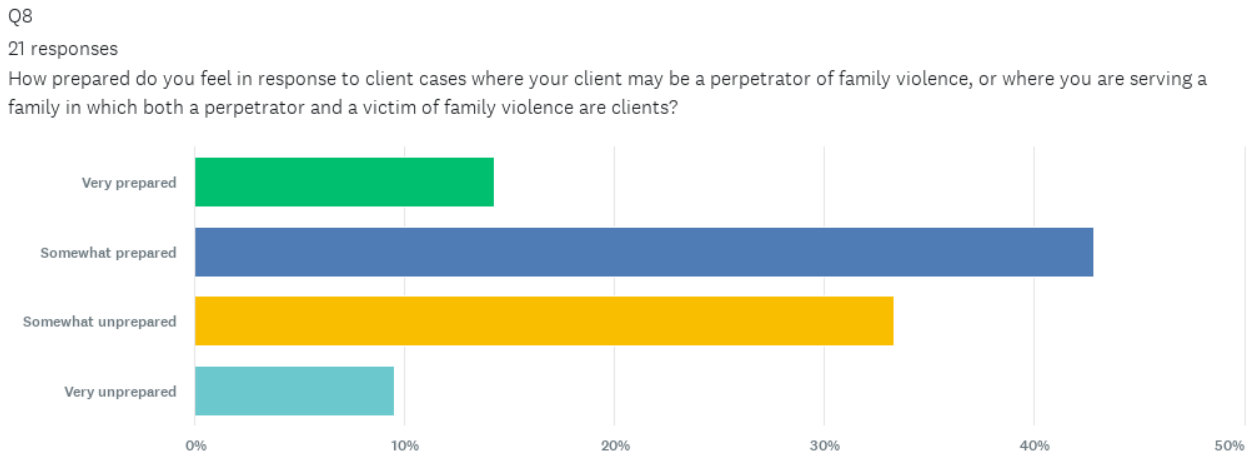


Figure 3. Responses to preparedness question -- perpetrators

We expect that many workers who did not choose to participate in our project were less confident and experienced in supporting clients with family violence cases than were our participants.<sup>28</sup> Beginning a targeted effort to draw in one segment of this population, LINC and other English language teachers, is a major focus of the initiative we have proposed for the second year of the project (see Next Steps, below).

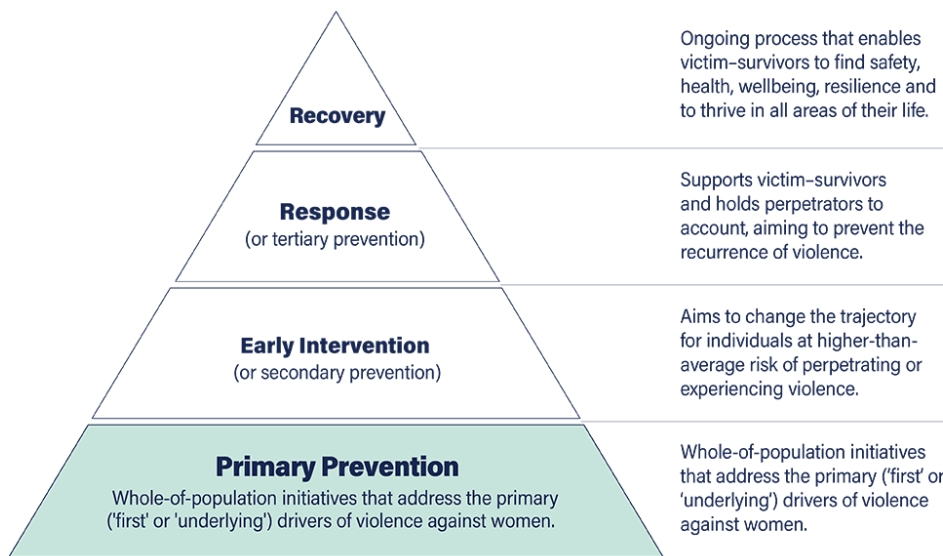
In addition to direct services, settlement organizations in Alberta are involved in promoting family violence prevention at the community level. Especially in urban centres, we heard of constructive cooperation among family violence organizations and settlement organizations, with initiatives taken to share educational materials in settings such as language-learning classes and refugee welcome sessions.

### Prevention of Family Violence: The General Field

In the last twenty years, many experts in the field of family violence as a public health issue have converged on the importance of studying preventative measures rather than relying exclusively on reacting to existing violence without other systemic changes. Locally to Alberta, the University of Calgary’s SHIFT program, led by Dr. Lana Wells,<sup>29</sup> has been a vanguard in promoting primary prevention research for family violence. Proponents of preventative approaches argue that they are more effective in

reducing violence, less retraumatizing for the victim, and more cost-effective<sup>30 31</sup> than interventions through the court system.

Because family violence is often cyclical and escalatory, some approaches that seek to intervene after violence begins to prevent further harm are also frequently described as “preventative.” In these cases, the difference is philosophical: preventative approaches tend to emphasize a collective systems-level approach, for example, understanding perpetrator behaviour<sup>32</sup> and activating bystanders<sup>33</sup> in order to protect victims. Programs that seek to stop violence as early as possible may be referred to with terms like “early intervention” or secondary prevention. Programs that seek to prevent future re-occurrence of violence, including restorative and alternative justice programming, might fall into the category of “response” or tertiary prevention.<sup>34</sup> An explanatory figure from Our Watch, a national project to prevent family violence in Australia, is reproduced below. We draw attention to their inclusion of “recovery” programming as well, which seeks to support the healing of survivors.



Source: Our Watch Australia, <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/what-is-primary-prevention>. Accessed Mar 21, 2025.

Preventative approaches to the incidence of family violence in all these categories might employ several different mechanisms of action to reduce offending, re-

offending, and further harm to violence survivors. The U.S. Centre for Disease Control's violence prevention public health program describes these mechanisms as several components in a nested system.<sup>35</sup> We can use these categories to describe common forms of violence prevention programming for the specific case of family violence:

- **Individual:** Training and skill-building programs, such as group workshops, to enhance individual capacities in areas such as conflict resolution, emotional psychoeducation, or individual safety in relationships.<sup>36</sup> Assault resistance training.<sup>37</sup>
- **Relationship:** Parent-child interventions for child maltreatment, one model for which, Parent-Child Intervention Therapy, is particularly recommended by the McMaster University VEGA program.<sup>38</sup> Relational interventions for certain types of low-risk family violence, which are controversial.<sup>39</sup> Gender transformative interviewing interventions with couples.<sup>40</sup>
- **Community:** Education through community institutions to activate bystanders, open conversations and set community norms.<sup>41</sup> Training bystanders to intervene or seek help.<sup>42</sup> Improving social and physical infrastructure within communities that may lead to the escalation of violence (e.g., improving the availability of shelters/cooldown housing; ensuring public transport is accessible to people fleeing violence).<sup>43</sup>
- **Societal:** Opening institutional pathways to seek help at an early stage of risk development before violence occurs or escalates.<sup>44</sup> Changing policies that increase vulnerability to violence victimization, inability to escape violence, and vulnerability to violence perpetration, including by using the levers of known risk factors such as poverty and racist marginalization.<sup>45 46</sup>

For any of these initiatives to be targeted appropriately, researchers and practitioners must first identify risk factors for perpetration and victimization, as well as protective factors that may keep individuals safe.<sup>47 48 49</sup> Then, as initiatives unfold, it is equally important for researchers and practitioners to evaluate whether they have a reproducible effect on family violence incidence, determining what works and why.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>51</sup> This type of evaluation is not straightforward to begin with, but it can be especially difficult in a short-term funding environment and without specialized research

expertise, as program staff are generally unable to employ the type of measurement tools that would be meaningful to describe such an effect. Absent longer-term partnerships with professional researchers, some evaluative techniques available to practitioners might include consulting existing literature, evaluating qualitative and quantitative results with the methods that are possible within their local scope, and adopting a critical and reflexive position toward their work that allows them to respond flexibly to gaps they notice in the course of practice.

A meta-analysis of domestic violence interventions targeted specifically at newcomers documents several common models. In the *primary prevention* category, some models used have included training for religious and community leaders as well as culturally adapted versions of bystander intervention trainings.<sup>52</sup> Moving further along the spectrum to *secondary prevention*, another common approach is adapting mainstream family violence intervention programs to a specific cultural and linguistic context, including counselling groups for men who abuse their partners and support groups for women who have experienced family violence or who are at risk. In the category of *tertiary prevention*, that is, preventing further harm and beginning recovery for victims, immigrant communities have participated with other racialized communities in the growing effort to mainstream survivor-centered restorative justice and diversion models. These efforts are not yet well-documented in research literature, but our project participants discussed a variety of grassroots projects of this nature within Alberta alone, which suggests that they are increasingly common.

One model of primary prevention education, emerging in response to calls within ethnocultural communities, centres around community discussion sessions and workshops delivered through immigrant-serving organizations like AAISA's member organizations.<sup>53 54</sup> We attended prevention education sessions using this model held by project participants in Calgary. We discuss this model in the Areas of Exploration section below, under the headline "Prevention Education."

## Methodology

### About the Project

This report resulted from a project initially funded for one year by the Government of Alberta to build capacity among settlement service organizations around family violence. The final deliverables of the project shifted several times as we gained a better understanding of the landscape of family violence service provision in Alberta



and prevention efforts already in place. We performed 15 research interviews and a literature review in an initial exploratory phase over the course of summer 2025, which allowed us to identify areas of particular interest. We also ran a small initial survey to set a baseline for our understanding around levels of engagement with issues of family violence in the settlement sector. In fall 2025, we reported some initial directions at the Newcomer Research Network conference in Calgary held by ActionDignity and sought feedback from project participants. In winter 2026, we sought out additional interview participants to fill specific gaps in our understanding and held discussion groups with project participants that would inform the composition of this report and the direction of the project. We also ran another small survey to sketch regional patterns around promising practices that had been identified in prior stages, an effort which we later determined would be more effectively networked with AAISA's ongoing Knowledge Hub project for general mapping of settlement services.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the project, we were also grateful to have the opportunity to attend several programs run by project participants and to connect participants with one another to build referral networks.

Overall, the project's rhythm was characterized by regular course-correction with project participants. This dynamic caused us to de-escalate initially ambitious proposals which would have required significant subject-matter expertise and consensus among organizations, such as the creation of a policy framework for family violence prevention for member organizations. We focused instead on identifying champions for family violence prevention efforts in AAISA's network and understanding their perspectives and priorities to define future directions.

We recruited participants for the project primarily through AAISA's existing networks, including newsletters, social media, and email blasts. Further referrals came from existing participants. An especially fruitful recruitment method was the mid-project presentation at the Newcomer Research Network conference, where several participants who were not initially part of AAISA's pre-existing network showed interest in the project. In the second phase of the project, we hope to focus on engaging further participants without pre-existing expertise in family violence prevention and support.

### **About project participants**

We count a total of 31 people who participated in the project, representing about the same number of organizations. 23 people participated in formal research interviews with the principal researcher or more informal but nevertheless substantial project discussions. About nine others did not take up a formal interview, but participated in at least one discussion group, site visit, or update call. 45 responses were recorded to research surveys related to the project.

A mailing list was used to track project participants. Of mailing list participants, 60% (25) came from organizations involved in AAISA's core network, settlement organizations funded by IRCC. 19% (8) came from organizations or roles focused on family violence, including organizations primarily involved with the court system. 19% (8) were staff at other types of non-profits or government organizations. The last 5% (2) were unaffiliated or freelance independent researchers and community leaders.

## Systemic Barriers Facing Settlement Service Users

### About This Section

This section outlines some of the systemic factors that complicate family violence prevention in the settlement sector. When we discussed family violence prevention with project participants, systemic factors were typically the most prominent in the minds of participants. What we heard from our project participants echoed the findings of several studies, which we reference throughout.<sup>56 57</sup>

### Economic Factors

*"One thing that's often a barrier, too, is money. We have to get the money. We have to get every application. And we have to call income support. It has to be right away. We have to open a new bank account. So when these things happen, like, last time it happened with my most recent client, I would meet with her every day for weeks."*

A lack of financial resources underlies many of the barriers we describe below. Financial abuse further exacerbates these problems. For example, several of our interviewees described issues that had to do with payment of the Canada Child Benefit. This benefit might be filed under the name of an abusive head of household; a spouse seeking to escape that household with her children finds herself in the position of having to gain access to the benefit to provide for them. Similar issues

might have to do with the transfer of refugee support payments during the one-year period when refugees receive a small stipend.

In countries where simple cash transfer supports have been trialled, several studies have noted a decrease in intimate partner violence under some design conditions, such as when household transfers are directed to wives rather than husbands.<sup>58</sup> The Government of Alberta provides an Escaping Abuse Benefit to assist people suffering from intimate partner violence with direct payments, but, at the time of writing, project participants attested that the benefit quickly reached capacity and was not accessible.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, this flexible funding benefit is a promising innovation in family violence prevention which has been trialled with positive results in various jurisdictions in the USA and UK.<sup>60 61</sup> Continuing to expand this benefit, especially to provide for legal assistance,<sup>62</sup> would efficiently address several of the axes of structural barriers, especially around housing and legal issues in both immigration and family law.

### **Lack of Cultural Responsiveness**

*“After she had gone to the police, and then she came back home...they had even brought the police to her home to see if the husband was in breach of the no contact order. And I was there too. And she was, at the time, when the police showed up not wearing her [covering] and she felt mortified, these men, because she normally wears, like, even a face veil. And here comes four men into her home.”*

Project participants emphasized the need for mainstream service provision and social institutions like shelters and law enforcement to adapt their approaches for immigrant clients. Such an adaptation would aim to ensure that clients from various cultural backgrounds have equal access to services and do not encounter alienating or dismissive responses to their cultural context.<sup>63</sup> Project participants typically described these needs in terms of “cultural responsiveness,” “cultural sensitivity,” or “cultural flexibility.” One of our project participants expressed an explicit preference for the term “cultural responsiveness,” and it is the term that we will use most frequently.

Interviewees described how services and interventions proffered by mainstream service organizations could have reached their clients more effectively. This criticism fell into two broad categories. Sometimes, the problem had to do with a lack of

awareness around how particular pieces of advice might be specific to Canadian culture rather than universal. For example, safety planning tools might suggest that emergency contacts could be kept in a tube of lipstick, without providing alternatives for clients who do not wear cosmetics. This is an example of a missed opportunity for positive cultural adaptability. There might be another equivalent way that a client could carry emergency contacts secretly on her person based on her own way of dressing and preparing herself and objects in her home that her partner is unlikely to handle.

In other cases, the failure of cultural sensitivity had less to do with these contextual specifics and more to do with a presumption on behalf of the service provider of total fluency on the part of the client in Canadian culture and English language. For example, a court-ordered therapy program might judge a person's performance based on their participation and relationship-building with other members of the group. This disadvantages immigrant clients, who might find themselves isolated because of social and linguistic differences from Canadian-born members of the group. One interviewee told two stories in short succession illustrative of different dimensions of this issue:

This client was mandated to go to group parenting courses at the library, and then they wanted her to make friends with the other parents there to prove she had a support network. And yeah, in an ideal world, that sounds great. But unfortunately, I know that when every other person there is white, and our client shows up in a floor length [burqa] and not speaking very good English, people are fairly reluctant to approach them....

...I had another client too, that she ended up divorcing her husband, but before she could start the process with her lawyer, she needed to do this Parenting After Separation course through the Government of Alberta. And it is only offered in English.... You have to complete the course before you can present your paperwork to the judge, because there are kids, and it's just an online training on a Government of Alberta website, but it's only in English.

One caution important to introduce: mainstream service providers could risk essentializing service users in an equally harmful way by using culture indiscriminately as a heuristic to determine what types of service a client needs. People within minoritized cultural groups have different experiences, just as Canadian-born women do within services and institutions based on Euro-Canadian

culture. For example, a minority ethnocultural community can be a source of strength, and some clients may find solace at ethnocultural associations. But on the other hand, people who experience family violence also sometimes encounter revictimization in community organizations, just as they may at mainstream organizations.<sup>64 65</sup>

Settlement workers may have an advantage in assisting service users to determine the best path forward for their specific preferences. This is especially true when the worker is part of the same cultural or linguistic group as the service user. Indeed, one practitioner in the mainstream family violence sector told us of a case in which they were specifically warned by a settlement worker *not* to connect a client experiencing family violence with a particular ethnocultural community association, because that settlement worker had insider knowledge about a negative environment within that specific organization for sufferers of family violence. Our interviewees discussed addressing these issues primarily through principles of practice: following the client's lead and maintaining a position of respect and humility while informing the client of the possible outcomes of various decision pathways.

### **Legal Status**

*"In my previous role, if there was domestic violence going on, we could refer them to income support and income support used to provide them some additional financial benefit...our clients are not eligible for that, because they are still under RAP [payments] during that time."*

Our project participants discussed legal immigration status less frequently than do many social workers in other similar studies, because most of our participants in the settlement sector worked for agencies that serve permanent residents. However, as the above quote indicates, status still played a role in some cases.

A key place where immigration status becomes relevant in cases of family violence is when victim-survivors are sponsored by their abuser, for example. Their specific status determines whether their ability to stay in Canada may be at risk if they leave, but there are an increasing number of tools to help them stay in Canada.<sup>66</sup>

Even if these tools are available, abusers may make false claims that discourage their use. For example, an abuser may claim that if his partner makes a police report, she will be deported. He may also lie to his partner about when and whether a spousal

sponsorship is processed or hold the processing of a sponsorship over the partner's head to exercise control.<sup>67</sup> And, finally, he may attempt to punish an ex-partner or estranged relative by making claims to authorities that would jeopardize her status, for example, that their relationship was only initiated for immigration purposes.

Temporary residents, including those who are awaiting permanent status, may be bound to a specific employer, which can be a barrier to escaping an abusive situation. This can be especially true in small communities, such as for individuals seeking Permanent Residency through Alberta's Rural Renewal stream.

In all these situations, it is vital that legal advice be available for newcomers to ensure that they understand options related to their specific legal status.

The federal humanitarian and compassionate immigration stream are theoretically designed to capture situations of this type in which clear common sense would demand an exemption to a rule that would remove somebody from Canada. Family violence is listed explicitly in the practice guidelines for immigration officers reviewing humanitarian and compassionate applications. These guidelines attend to many important components of a situation of family violence, including the difficulties with employment, housing, and language that victim-survivors may face, which may be reflected on their application.<sup>68</sup> Considerations intended to provide trauma-informed procedural fairness to applicants who have survived family violence also include the framing of an applicant's interview and reasons to consider that abuse may never have been previously formally reported or disclosed.<sup>69 70</sup>

Unfortunately, in practice, the accessibility of these streams may not be universal. On April 7, 2026, Immigrations, Refugees and Citizenship Canada reported that they would take more than 10 years to process a new humanitarian and compassionate application.<sup>71</sup> As of March 2026, the Government of Canada continued to advertise that applicants for whom family violence is the basis of a humanitarian and compassionate application may be eligible for an expedited decision in several specific situations that include inland spousal sponsorships, interim permanent resident applications for family class, and cases where an abuser falsely claims they have submitted an application.<sup>72</sup> We have no testimony from our project participants about what this process might look like or how expedited such a decision may be. During the processing of a humanitarian and compassionate application, a person can be removed from Canada.<sup>73</sup>



The federal government has also introduced a special temporary resident permit for those experiencing family violence in cases where a person's temporary resident permit has expired. This is a twelve-month permit that may be renewed and for which fees are waived. Once again, in applying for any of these permits legitimate legal advice is crucial; the applicant will be asked to prove their case. Under these circumstances, letters and affidavits from settlement social workers may prove valuable to clients. Settlement social workers can also guide clients in seeing other providers, such as health care providers and family violence practitioners, who will eventually be able to corroborate the client's experience when such corroboration is required.

Additional complications may arise when child maltreatment is at play in the family situation, which may apply on its own or if the child is exposed to intimate partner violence. At this point, the legal mechanisms of the child protection system are activated: children may enter foster care, and parents may lose legal custody of their children, which may have consequences for the legal status of both parties. For example, in situations like this it is possible for youth to age out of the care system and then discover that they are eligible for deportation because their parents never applied for citizenship for them.<sup>74</sup>

These facts may alert settlement organizations to the possible benefit of involving legal navigators in efforts to transition youth out of the foster care system. One of the initial difficulties with such an effort would be the fact that youth exit foster care at the age of 16, two years before they become eligible for IRCC-funded services at the age of 18. An exception for youth exiting foster care, which would give youth who are not citizens access to employment programs, case management, and other services, might be warranted.

A final important note is that precarious status *itself* constitutes a harm to families as a major stressor that can lead to both violence within a spousal relationship and unsafe parenting.<sup>75</sup> People with precarious status or no status may feel the need to isolate themselves to prevent interactions with authorities who may deport them, which worsens the effects of isolation imposed by abusive family members and prevents them from seeking help. As many such victim-survivors negotiate ambivalent relationships with the person who harmed them, with attachment and hope as well as

fear and anger, people suffering family violence may also fear the consequences that could accrue to perpetrators with precarious status if they report.

## **Housing**

*“Shelters are always full. We don’t have a place to put them until they find shelter. There is no waiting list or anything, you just have to call every morning to find a spot. So, on DV cases, that’s the biggest problem as of today, finding shelter right away for someone that’s troubled. It’s kind of to the extent some of them would say, you know what, I would rather go to the police, because if you go to the police, they somehow find a place for us...”*

Several interviewees indicated that housing was the single most critical issue facing newcomers who experience family violence. Many of our interviewees stated that even eligible clients frequently could not secure spaces in limited shelter housing in their region. Some spoke of special difficulties clients might face in shelter housing situations. For example, youth from conservative families who leave an abusive family to live in a group house experience culture shock as an additional stress in an already stressful environment.

As part of the federally funded Blueprint Project, the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters held advisory group sessions, including one focused on the needs of newcomers, immigrants, and refugees, between 2022 – 23. These sessions culminated in a new assessment tool, the Healing, Understanding, and Growth Guide.<sup>76</sup> Other resources created by the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters intended to assist shelter staff in improving their cultural competence are included in AAISA’s online family violence resources toolkit.<sup>77</sup> For the most part, our interviewees indicated that their interactions with shelter staff had been positive and that they trusted their clients would receive good support in the shelters in their communities.

Housing suitable for men was one of the issues raised by several interviewees. Mainstream men’s shelters were frequently considered an unsuitable option for settlement service users coming from a significantly different culture. In the settlement context, this is not only a concern for victims of family violence who are male but also for perpetrators with other vulnerabilities, such as refugees or people with precarious statuses. For example, when one partner receives an Emergency

Protection Order after a police report, the other must leave the shared domicile until the order and the case is resolved.

### **Court System and Law Enforcement**

*“One time we reported—[the client] called my team member, and she said, you know, this is what happened. And then my team member encouraged her to call the police. And then when the police came, the police said, ‘We don’t believe you.’ Like, the partner was there, and the partner just...because of the language barrier... and then the police didn’t believe her, and then they did nothing. And the same thing with the children, you know, they say, ‘oh, children exaggerate things,’ and then they do nothing. And then they will give them more power to abuse them more. You know... we follow up, and they say like, ‘we don’t believe this lady.’ What we can do? And what can she do?”*

Charges are laid whenever law enforcement officials arrive on scene at a domestic dispute in Alberta.<sup>78 79</sup> It falls to law enforcement on scene to determine which partner is the “primary aggressor.” This determination is not a simple matter. For example, in one especially complex case type, abusers sometimes accuse the person they are controlling of criminal violence, particularly in reaction to self-defensive physical force.<sup>80 81</sup>

It can occur that police officers decide about which partner is the primary aggressor that turns out to be incorrect. This is especially true in situations of self-defence. In an Ottawa-based study, legal scholar Anita Grace found that 17 of the 18 of the women whom she had recruited who were charged by police after a domestic conflict had been the subject of ongoing physical violence by their partner, some in mutually violent situations and some in controlling situations where the partner appeared to manipulate events to instrumentalize the police against them.<sup>82</sup> In the Greater Toronto Area, Patrina Duhaney found comparable results in a study focusing on Black women.<sup>83</sup> Such confusion is especially disastrous for victims whose immigration status could be impacted by being charged with such a crime.<sup>84</sup> This problem is especially present for women of colour, who may be stereotyped by police officers as aggressive or violent.

In cases where a language barrier is present, for example, law enforcement officers may have difficulty determining how to proceed to best protect the family. Although Victim Service Units use the interpretive service Cantalk,<sup>85</sup> and police have access to similar services on-scene, in any large organization operating in high-stakes

situations, miscommunications and poor practice heuristics can develop. It is concerning, given all that we have described, that, for example, one interviewee noted that she had heard from police that they believed women of a particular national background were more likely to be violent to their partners than to be victims. This raises the possibility that officers faced with the responsibility of determining a primary aggressor might resort to anecdotal heuristics based on national origin.

We heard from project participants that newcomers may be unsure what will happen when they call the police, with varying understandings based on their country of origin. On one side of this issue, we heard of cases in which newcomers called 911 expecting the police to assist them in mediating a dispute or to “scare their partner straight”; in these cases, the callers were sometimes shocked when their partner was arrested and charged. Because these charges are usually accompanied by Emergency Protection Orders that forbid the arrested partner from living in the same house, this can be a major problem even for victim-survivors of serious abuse who are not prepared to leave. As a counterbalance, other project participants spoke of newcomer clients who called police officers who sided with their abuser; others did not want to contact the police at all because of a fear of law enforcement. In some cases, this impression may have been formed in their country of origin, while in other cases, it may originate in a fear of discrimination here in Canada.

Police responses to intimate partner violence situations, especially ambiguous situations, can be helpful, but evidence points to the conclusion that they may be above all variable.<sup>86</sup> In one national Canadian study of intimate partner violence and the workplace, of 1,000 respondents who had reported the violence they were experiencing to the police, about a third found the police “very helpful” and about a third “not at all helpful.”<sup>87</sup> This study also points out that even the third of respondents who found the police “very helpful” frequently gave mixed open-response testimonials about their experience. Their rating was often based on their gratitude for the intervention of single, particularly supportive officers.

Once a case arrives at the courts, a new set of challenges arises. Project participants noted that the level of sensitivity to the needs of the victim and the context of the offense in certain regional court systems was low, or at least variable. This motivated a widespread recommendation among our participants for more culturally responsive options within the court system to provide off-ramps from criminal charges when the

professionals involved judged that this would reduce the overall harm to the family and the victim. Some of our project participants were involved in existing efforts to improve these institutional responses. We discuss some of the issues related to this recommendation in our Areas of Exploration section below.

### **Language Barriers**

*“My client had two children, one with a psychological problem, the other one a physical disability...[with her husband out of the picture], she couldn’t even leave their house to just improve her English.”*

Language fluency is usually presupposed by Canadian systems. The need for settlement workers to serve as interpreters is universal in the settlement sector due to the additional logistical difficulty and cost of third-party interpreters. Interpretation by settlement workers may protect the client from involving additional parties with whom they feel uncomfortable disclosing sensitive information—not only because of the natural reluctance to involve more strangers in a traumatic personal event, but also because, in small language communities, people serving as interpreters may be known to the victim-survivor or the perpetrator.

In situations where family violence may be a factor in the case, settlement workers interpreting for a client undoubtedly constitutes a significant improvement over the other common informal interpretation arrangement, which is interpretation by a family member.<sup>88 89</sup> This practice is strongly discouraged, especially in sensitive environments.

Professionals in other organizations may have various sorts of concerns or conflicts about the presence of a third-party practitioner. At least one interviewee told us of a referral organization refusing her access to interpret for her client under confidentiality policies, despite the client’s desire to have her available.

## **Areas of Exploration**

### **About This Section**

In this section, we discuss three topics that rose to the surface of our analysis of project participant interviews and the settlement system in Alberta. We begin by contextualizing our discussions by identifying how we think about AAISA’s role in prevention education. We then proceed to a brief discussion of three topics that

project participants focused on which may also be amenable to interventions by an organization in AAISA's position. The two topics we discuss are:

- **Prevention Education Gap Analysis:** Given our discussion of the demand for prevention education above, how could prevention education be most effectively delivered to newcomers?
- **Alternative Resolutions:** Our project participants expressed great interest in relational and restorative justice processes, risk-managed early intervention programs, and more culturally sensitive diversion programs. These programs are a vital complement to primary prevention education. What efforts are currently ongoing in these areas in the settlement sector?

Across both these areas, one of our interests is in mitigating regional differences. Despite frequently suffering from a lack of resources, our experience working with small centre practitioners suggests that small centres are just as often innovators as adopters. Smaller, closer service networks can provide the foundation for effective collaborations. However, we heard about more variation between rural and urban centres in the case of family violence prevention than we have in other subject areas. Project participants suggested to us that one major determinant of program longevity and success was the differing levels of partnership with important interlocking institutions like police and the justice system, which can sometimes be opaque. A regional effort to promote family violence prevention in small centres is ongoing through the University of Calgary's SHIFT program. In the second phase of our project, we hope to continue to work with practitioners in small centres to better understand how we can support their efforts to make progress in their local networks.

### **Discussion: Alternative Resolutions, Diversion Programs, and Restorative Justice**

#### *Working with Perpetrators: Practices and Risks*

Settlement sector organizations are in an unusual position compared to some other service organizations when it comes to working with family systems. The most clear-cut example of the situation that can face settlement organizations is in the case of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). Both spouses are clients of the organization, and the organization has a duty of care to each of them. A husband who displays abusive behaviours is still in an extremely vulnerable position as a refugee. Whether or not the family can stay together, the best outcomes will result if he maintains access to language education, community connections, employment, and a safe place to live.

Project participants acknowledged this problem and discussed several established practices that assisted them in managing the dynamic between members of client families where family violence has occurred. For example, several participants told us that their agency had protocols to transfer the offender to a new case manager if accusations of family violence arose. Still, across sectors, the new ethical demand that the research on family violence prevention has made on helping professionals is not easy to navigate; increasing research examines how doctors and other types of practitioners handle interactions with perpetrators, for which there is much less official training than the reverse.<sup>90 91</sup> In our initial survey, the plurality of respondents (42%) stated that they felt “somewhat prepared” to deal with cases like this, but a third of respondents (32%) stated that they felt “somewhat unprepared”. This associated services to perpetrators with the lowest preparedness level in our slate of questions about preparation overall.

We identified several key concerns that have to do with work with perpetrators. The first is worker safety. One interviewee described that a worker had been subject to indirect threats from a client. In a small centre, a participant described safety concerns since the name of the case worker who was assisting a woman to leave her husband was well-known in a way that would have been impossible to mitigate. Because settlement workers are frequently members of the same ethnocultural communities as their clients, this concern also applies to sub-communities within larger metropolitan areas. In each of these cases, the participants were satisfied that their organization had handled the situation in a way that kept workers safe. Although none of our project participants expressed concern about repercussions to themselves in the larger ethnocultural community that might be associated with assisting a victim-survivor when a community sides with the perpetrator, this also appears as a possibility that settlement organizations would do well to anticipate and discuss with case managers in this position.

Another concern is protecting the victim-survivor. A participant from a rural service organization described difficulties when both a husband and wife were the clients of the single organization available in their area. Services such as English language classes were rightfully owed to both and would prove a significant barrier to the ability of the perpetrator to make constructive connections in Canada. In that case, the perpetrator was kept back from a particular class until the person he had harmed

graduated into the next level. Even with measures like these, this interviewee found reason for concern in the fact that the two clients might encounter one another in shared buildings and community spaces. Another foreseeable danger is that perpetrators may contact case managers or administrative staff to gather information about an estranged victim-survivor or shared children.

It is rarer for organizations to serve a parent who has demonstrated violence toward a child along with that child in a situation where the two are completely estranged and so must be kept separate. This is because in such situations children might normally be placed in care. Additionally, settlement workers only work with youth individually in specialized programs, such as in Settlement Workers in Schools. However, there are other situations in which settlement workers might find themselves working with parents alone who are in this situation, such as clients who are working with CPS to attempt to regain custody of their children after a removal.

Women who escape intimate partner violence with children frequently must negotiate exchange with their abusive ex-partner and sometimes need access to supervised exchange programs.<sup>92</sup> Results from AAISA's sector survey suggest that relatively few agencies offer safe exchange and safe visitation programs—only three of 45 respondent agencies in AAISA noted that they offered this service in 2023.<sup>93</sup>

#### *What Is Recommended in Services to Perpetrators?*

At the outset, we hoped that a body of literature on work with perpetrators might assist us in discovering promising practices for settlement workers to use in these cases. To recap, the purpose of such practices would be twofold:

- To suggest options as to how settlement workers can work with perpetrators, administering services like language education, employment counselling, and safe exchange, without seeming to license their behaviour or causing harm to victim-survivors.
- Where appropriate, to suggest options around how to work specifically with perpetrators *on* their behaviour, e.g., in the context of case management – and how to determine when this work might be appropriate.

However, research on personal intervention with perpetrators is in fact an especially contested field. Experts disagree on what types of intervention are useful and safe, in part because of a scarcity of high-quality evaluation of the type required to produce

large-scale practice guidelines. The 2013 World Health Organization guidelines on responding to intimate partner violence and preventing intimate partner violence could not address interventions for perpetrators.<sup>94 95</sup> McMaster University's VEGA systematic review in 2020 found that there was not sufficient evidence on any existing interventions for intimate partner violence offenders to make a recommendation on which interventions were most promising, although, in the case of child maltreatment, they approve the use of a particular form of supervised parent-child therapy.<sup>96 97</sup> Indeed, the situation is such that, in addition to several inconclusive or contradictory meta-analyses on various models for addressing violence use, a *meta-meta-analysis* released in early 2026 found the methodology of *those* meta-analyses unconvincing.<sup>98</sup> In other words, the research and evaluation community is some way from determining what interventions work at all to stop people from using violence in their relationships, let alone what interventions might work especially well for newcomers. Two areas that do seem to show promise are risk-managed early intervention programs and restorative justice programs. These programs are often tied to interactions with the courts and police, which requires buy-in from those institutional partners. While these options cannot necessarily assist individual service providers working with people who use violence in relationships, we can look to these types of programs to explore the space of secondary prevention and tertiary prevention/response.

This responds to the desire we heard from project participants for better options for newcomers who experience family violence, other than traditional law enforcement and court approaches. Many of their clients who wanted to seek help for violence in their relationship felt alienated from traditional avenues intended to support them (as do many Indigenous and Canadian-born victim-survivors). Options available through these systems are also improving, such as through the work of Albertan victim support organizations like Home Front, but many clients sought other supports first. They tended to gravitate toward community-based and relational options. For example, we heard:

- “In the previous occasion when there was a domestic violence issue, rather than going to [the local shelter], they wanted it to be taken to their community leaders, church leaders, and stuff like that, right. So we have done that in the past as well, and the elders from that community will give them direction, keeping in mind their culture and everything as well. So we support that if that's what the client wants. But if the clients want separation, then we support with them on that as well.”

- “Sometimes it's also understanding in their communities what a safe person is like, usually in terms of mediating situations and stuff and whatnot. Depending on the community, sometimes there are certain community leaders where they like to resolve a lot of things within the community. I won't say that that's always the suggestion that's made, really depending on the severity and what the situation looks like. But just kind of keeping in mind that there's also like, within each culture, there's kind of some social structures that people feel comfortable working through when issues like this arise that might fall outside of the regular approach that people would take with family violence.”

As the quotes above express, project participants emphasized that they followed the client's lead to support them in their preferred pathway, whether that involved court systems or not. Our aim in this section is to explore what interventions might best serve clients who hesitate to become involved with traditional court programs.

#### *Relational Counselling for Couples Where Intimate Partner Violence Is a Factor*

Relational counselling refers to programs in which victims and perpetrators are counselled together. Referrals to traditional couples counselling have been discouraged by experts, including by the McMaster VEGA study.<sup>99</sup> This is because couples counselling can have *negative* outcomes as well as positive ones, as when the counselling agitates the perpetrator or provides him with additional emotional and social tools to leverage against his partner, including attempting to bring the counsellor onside against his partner. This means that it may not be safe for spouses in extremely violent relationships to enter relational counselling even if there seem to be no real options for the woman to leave in the short-term. In these cases, safety planning, working with a family violence specialist at a violence-focused organization, and exploring options to involve the justice system may be more appropriate.

However, especially given that our interviewees suggested that their clients frequently gravitate toward an approach that involves both members of a couple, we also note that at least a few researchers have recently begun to explore interventions designed specifically for couples with situational or bilateral violence use. Determining suitability for these interventions requires appropriate and careful risk assessment, but they may have promising outcomes in some cases, including in settings in low-and-middle-income countries that are home countries for many immigrants.<sup>100 101 102</sup> Research teams note that this treatment is inappropriate, among other cautions, in cases of long-term continuing violence, if either partner wants to end the relationship, or if one partner denies the severity or significance of the violence.

This ongoing research would not lead us to recommend that facilitators who have not been trained in this specific therapy format could necessarily produce similar positive results. One of the reasons that reviews like the VEGA program conclude that relational counselling is *not* recommended, as opposed to merely stating (as they do for group counselling programs below), that the evidence is mixed and no recommendation can be made, is that couples counselling undertaken in inappropriate circumstances is dangerous to the victim. Nevertheless, seeking training in these therapy formats, such as Domestic Violence – Focused Couples Therapy (DVFCT), may be worthwhile professional development for counsellors already specializing in immigrant and refugee mental health, for example, in connection with a settlement organization funded to provide counselling. Practitioners could then begin discussions within the sector about risk profiles associated with these interventions.

#### *Group Counselling for Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence (“Batterer Intervention Programs”)*

In the mainstream system of court-mandated perpetrator therapies, the effectiveness of existing programs aimed at men who commit intimate partner violence is debated. The VEGA systematic review concludes that there is not enough evidence either to recommend or discourage this sort of program. Another systematic review suggests that when these groups do have a positive effect, the rapport between the group members and the facilitators is a key mediating factor.<sup>103</sup> This may be the mechanism that makes culturally specific and first-language groups for men who use violence in their intimate partner relationship especially important.<sup>104</sup>

An important metric that is frequently overlooked in programs targeting partner-violent men is how their partners feel about their participation and progress.<sup>105 106</sup> In some reviews, women may notice positive behavioural changes in their partners or at least an interruption or abatement of violence during the program. But in other cases, the behavioural techniques learned in such groups were used to further manipulate them, or they might feel pressure to remain in the relationship because the partner is “trying to change.” Once again, the specific rapport between the group and the facilitator is suggested by one study as the key mechanism of variation.<sup>107</sup>

#### *Restorative Justice*

Restorative justice approaches are one intervention focusing on developing a fulsome, victim-centered response to relational violence. These approaches seek to both maintain the accountability of the perpetrator and explore the victim's needs in a facilitated, constructive setting that is more responsive to her experience than the courtroom. Because of the harms done to Black, Indigenous, and immigrant communities by the conventional court system, leadership around restorative justice has been associated heavily with these communities, which is another reason that it is attractive to consider its learnings in the settlement context.<sup>108</sup>

Alberta has an expanding Restorative Justice Pilot Project associated with criminal courts.<sup>109</sup> Most victim-survivors do not press criminal charges, however. There may be opportunities to integrate the principles of restorative justice into situations in which a survivor does not wish to involve the formal justice system at all for several reasons, including systemic ones such as her immigration status or language barriers. The Center for Court Innovation, in a study described below, found in their listening sessions with survivors and practitioners in the restorative justice system that many participants agreed there were too few options to practically confront violence outside of the criminal system.<sup>110</sup>

It is first vital to avoid thinking of restorative justice in terms of pressuring the victim-survivor to forgive the offender, keeping the family together when one partner desires to separate, or elevating empathy for the perpetrator above accountability. One of our participants mentioned that restorative justice approaches are rarely used for family violence cases in Alberta. This is understandable because the intuition that restorative justice aims to literally “restore” a situation would contravene the dignity and agency of many victim-survivors of family violence who wish to leave their partner safely. But restorative justice may also help victim-survivors to process their feelings and separate under expert supervision. Perhaps because of the perpetrator's feeling of loss of control, separation and estrangement are among the most dangerous times for women who leave abusive partners and are classically assessed as a major risk factor for intimate partner homicide.<sup>111</sup>

There have been significant historical debates over whether restorative justice is appropriate for cases of intimate partner violence and sexual violence. At one time, experts broadly discouraged their use in these cases.<sup>112</sup> However, as restorative justice



practices have continued to confront issues in the mainstream court system, this consensus has begun to shift.<sup>113 114 115 116 117</sup>

A variety of practices might fall under the umbrella of restorative justice processes. A foundational form is a small-group conference that may involve the victim, the offender, one or two support people for each participant, and one or two facilitators.<sup>118</sup> Other programs prefer to operate without bringing the victim and offender together, using a “survivor voice”, a trained facilitator who represents the survivor in the process with the offender.<sup>119</sup>

As for other interventions in this space of family violence prevention, there are only a handful of studies systematically evaluating restorative justice interventions.<sup>120</sup> There are also reasonable concerns with the use of restorative justice protocols in cases of intimate partner violence.<sup>121</sup> For example, some worry about a greater likelihood of re-victimization in restorative violence processes if survivors feel pressured to participate to assuage the guilt of their perpetrator or to please their community. Another potential issue is the potential “re-privatisation” of gender-based violence. The criminalization of domestic violence has been the result of feminist advocacy over decades to change a situation in which violence against female partners was considered a private matter, less severe than stranger violence. Because of the gendered patterns of, especially, severe and controlling intimate partner violence, initiatives to treat family violence as a public offense have been part of an ongoing political effort to protect women’s equality before the law and their full participation in public life.

As with many other components of a justice process for family violence, the success and appropriateness of a restorative justice program seem to depend on the specifics of the case and the skillfulness of specific facilitators and organizers. Practically, for settlement workers, this means that the right way to approach perpetrator referrals is regional and relational. Pre-emptively forming relationships with providers of these services, with the evidence we have reviewed in mind, may help workers to distinguish where they feel comfortable making referrals. This is one of the reasons why a better understanding around regional distribution of programming would be a crucial step toward family violence prevention.

## **Discussion: Prevention Education for Immigrants in Alberta and Gap Analysis**

### *The “Community Discussion” Model*

We reviewed in the Background section that a particular prevention education model is especially common in the settlement sector compared with other sectors. This is the “community discussion” model, in which information sessions or workshops are held at settlement organizations, or else at community locations with settlement sector support. This model might have developed in Canada and Australia in particular, which share the organizational principle of centrally funding a set of settlement sector organizations with similar service portfolios to deliver family violence prevention programming along with their other programming. There are some salient differences between the community discussion model and other models that are commonly employed in the research on family violence prevention education for newcomers, such as culturally responsive group therapies<sup>122</sup> or bystander trainings.<sup>123</sup>

- They invite community members from various ethnocultural backgrounds, as opposed to focusing on one culture.
- They may include both community members and authority figures within the community, as opposed to focusing only on community leaders.
- They do not require or presume that members of the discussion group have any specific history with family violence, rather than targeting education specifically at people who either use violence or have been the victims of violence.
- They may be mixed-sex or single-sex.
- Their curriculum and aspects of presentation may be primarily based on the direct advice of community leaders and members.

It appears that a major point of emphasis in the developing philosophy of this model has been on drawing in men through an indirect approach that seeks to build participant trust as a foundation for conversations about family violence; indeed, the papers we found that focus on prevention education discussions with this model are *primarily* about how men interact with the programs.<sup>124 125</sup> The key tension is between keeping men, as well as women who endorse conservative views on gender roles, in the conversation about family violence while still challenging views that devalue women and limit their control over their lives—what one research group calls the “trust vs. prevention paradox”.<sup>126</sup> We could not locate resources that systematically evaluate a slate of programs using this specific model or evidence-based curricula to

support navigating the core dilemma faced by practitioners who deliver these programs. This may speak to an opening for future research.

Rather than the “facts and myths” focus of traditional prevention education sessions, in community discussion sessions held at settlement agencies, participants might learn more about:

- how support persons in service organizations think about family violence and what terminology they use
- what types of impacts family violence has on children, since research suggests that this is especially meaningful at least for women who are considering seeking help for family violence; this consideration is also especially key when considering intergenerational prevention
- what will happen if the police are called, either by one of the family members or by a neighbour
- where they can get support, either for their partner’s behaviour or for their own behaviour, before violence escalates

Community discussion sessions may also play a key role in:

- taking the lead in opening conversations that may be uncomfortable or feel private
- making community members more aware of signs of abuse as bystanders
- activating community members to counsel their own personal networks in future
- raising the profile of immigrant-serving organizations as places to receive professionalized support for family violence that centres cultural responsiveness and where interpretation may be available
- building solidarity among community members who attend sessions and sparking new partnerships

During this project, we encountered an especially broad appetite specifically for primary prevention education programming among immigrant communities and immigrant-serving organizations. Legal aid lawyers, victim support professionals, and immigrant-serving professionals told us that immigrant perpetrator clients who were moving through the court system in family violence cases frequently attributed their situation to a lack of knowledge about Canadian laws and norms, so that they felt they

could have come to healthy resolutions without the intervention of formal authorities if they had been drawn into discussion about differences in Canadian practice. On the other hand, for victim-survivors, educational sessions were a key place where the topic of domestic violence could be made public and community norms established that would encourage disclosure to safe support people. For example, respondents told us:

- “The other gap lately that we have realized is education...it is so important that we bring awareness to our public around what is legal when it comes to gender-based violence or abusive situations, right? What does it mean? What are the basic things that you need to know? What are your rights as a woman?”
- “[We hold] a psychoeducational session... [with] stigma around the domestic violence, people might not be comfortable to talk about it. But when we have the group conversation, and then we very slightly, just touch [on] the violence, we see people coming individually and reaching out to our team to say, ‘oh, I really need to talk about this more.’”

In this section, we discuss different facets of this problem and perspectives on interventions.

### *The Role of Prevention Education: Limits and Benefits*

There are limits to the power of prevention education. One of the best-studied prevention education models with a similar structure to the settlement organization community discussion model is the practice of holding one-time sexual assault education sessions on college campuses, for example, during orientations. Unfortunately, a significant body of research now suggests that these sessions do not greatly reduce the incidence of sexual violence, although programs that involve longer, repeated courses of sessions and participation from attendees may be more promising.<sup>127</sup> Some researchers are pessimistic about the success of educational programming overall in the area of sexual violence—they point out that, over the last forty years of efforts to prevent sexual violence through sessions that educate and change attitudes, rates of sexual violence have not shifted in the USA.<sup>128</sup> As one participant pointed out in regard to the multiple orientations of this type held for refugees at her organization, “A lot of the families have trauma, and a lot of the time when you're providing information to someone that's still traumatized, [they won't necessarily] be able to focus on what we're saying.”

Approaches that rely exclusively on prevention education might risk underestimating the complexity of the relationship between what we hear, what we believe, and what we do. Even if we decide that we trust new information when it is presented to us, new information alone often does not cause people to change their attitudes, and even those who change their attitudes may not change their behaviour.<sup>129</sup> In one meta-analysis, the characteristic that was most associated with men who do not become perpetrators of intimate partner violence, despite the presence of other risk factors in their lives, was an *internal locus of control*—a psychological term that describes our internal sense that our actions are fundamentally under our control, as opposed to, in this case, the sense that others can “make us” use violence toward them by frustrating or frightening us.<sup>130</sup> Another study using existentialist therapeutic techniques with perpetrators identified deep patterns in their violence use which have to do with their fundamental construction of the relationship between their selves and the selves of others—patterns that *can* be changed, but not without self-understanding, motivation, and dedication.<sup>131</sup> The way these types of patterns might be employed against a person’s family is not necessarily a matter of simple pedagogy.

Thus, in addition to their support for prevention education, our participants also spoke of other cases that clearly depicted deliberate and intractable use of violence in the home as a method of control or as a means of emotional regulation for the perpetrator at the victim’s expense. These cases underline that education can only set a baseline, though an important baseline, in family violence prevention. Overall, indeed, the focus of our project participants was on the system-level barriers described above that prevented victim-survivors from changing their situation even when they knew exactly how they would proceed if they could act freely.

However, our project participants observed that, for newcomers, all systemic factors being equal, some amount of violence as well as some amount of re-traumatization in the court system may be prevented by ensuring that people who arrive in Canada from elsewhere are aware of their options when it comes to family violence. It certainly bears noting that most of the research that shows this result has been *specifically* performed on college campuses and similar settings. This does not necessarily rule out that, for newcomer populations, especially in the context of the congregation of an ongoing service community, prevention education might have different effects. In addition to the testimony from our project participants,

researchers continue to suggest awareness and education interventions for immigrant populations, as do immigrant community members in other studies.<sup>132 133</sup> The different mechanism of action that we presume for the case of newcomer education sessions, compared to the mechanism of action that is presumed for mainstream populations, might warrant future investigation with more formal evaluative tools. Doing this type of evaluation would also assist practitioners who stage these types of educational sessions to capitalize on their benefits while saving time by deprioritizing fewer effective components of the curriculum.

#### *Where Can Prevention Education Be Delivered?*

It has been natural for settlement organizations, given funding, to develop community discussion opportunities that flow through their existing programming. However, project participants took a wider systems-level perspective when considering how it would be *best* to deliver this type of prevention education.

As IRCC's Newcomer Outcomes Survey showed, the percentage of permanent residents who accessed settlement services in their first year was just under 20% in the first years post-COVID. Understanding whether this number has shifted will have to await future years of data. What is more, permanent residents who are eligible for IRCC-funded services, whether they are economic permanent residents or refugees, constitute only a minority of immigrants in the country overall. For example, Canada's Levels Plan in 2024 allowed for 395,000 people to receive permanent resident visas in 2025, of whom about 68,000 falls under humanitarian categories, such as resettled refugees.<sup>134</sup> But, between targets and a "contingency reserve" intended for the case of humanitarian emergencies, up to ~815,000 people were expected to arrive on various kinds of temporary visas in 2025.<sup>135</sup> This speaks to Canada's de facto two-step immigration process, which usually requires people who are interested in immigrating to arrive here first on a precarious temporary visa, sometimes for many years.<sup>136</sup>

Finally, in the worst cases of intimate control, men may not allow their wives to access services outside the home. In one example of a possibility for mitigating this factor, we heard from an agency that focuses on women clients that they sometimes received clients whose families would not allow them to go anywhere else, because of the promise of a sex-segregated environment.



To combat these factors, several project participants were interested in providing family violence education at the pre-arrival or arrival stage. This would provide much better coverage for the type of prevention education that practitioners are interested in investing in. However, this is more difficult in practice than it may initially appear.

As it happens, there are no or very few means by which pre-arrival information is currently provided to non-refugees. Refugees do receive some information about “healthy relationships,” including positive parenting, as part of the UNHCR pre-arrival program; we are also aware of similar programs at agencies that support refugees full-time during their first few weeks in Canada.<sup>137</sup> Project participants also told us that some embassies provide optional sessions in home countries to would-be economic immigrants. But the field is at the least fragmentary. Temporary residents, who make up most arrivals to Canada, appear to receive no such guidance. Some may receive minimal, general information packages about their eligibility for settlement services when they obtain permanent resident visas.

Since there is currently no infrastructure to deliver this material, any project to do so would unfold only in the long term. Once the infrastructure was constructed, policy designers would face the question of which information across the entire field of Canadian life was most urgent to provide to all newcomers, which would be an especially challenging task since newcomers come from a wide variety of cultures and educational backgrounds. In concept, there might well be merit to a pre-arrival program that would include information about family violence as part of a package about safety or personal rights in Canada, which might also touch on labour rights, emergency care, or other high-risk topics.

Another recommendation by project participants was to include information on family violence at arrival sites, such as through Calgary’s Immigrant Arrival Centre, established at the Calgary International Airport in 2022.<sup>138 139</sup> Members of the collective responsible for the Immigrant Arrival Centre do already provide services and education to newcomers around family violence, but it is not clear what sorts of resources, if any, are provided to newcomers to take away at the airport, and how potential clients are routed to the centre when they arrive. The Immigrant Arrival Centre might be able to provide individual light-touch education efforts for family



safety and supports for violence in the home; but much like other forms of prevention education, it would not be universal.

Post-arrival education is at least a feasible addition to the portfolio of prevention initiatives in the absence of these two options. One of the promising practices we heard of from project participants was providing some type of family violence education in language-learning classrooms.

### *Sketching the Proposal: Family Violence Prevention Education in Language-Learning Classrooms*

At the outset, we are aware of several project participants who provide family violence prevention education in language-learning classrooms. However, several different models appear feasible. The first stage of an investigation into this practice would be to further understand what models are used at various schools, given the wide variety of staff, class, funding, and curriculum structures. We mention two possibilities below that we are aware of, but we expect to learn of more in the coming year of the project.

In one model, organizations invite family violence education specialists to provide sessions like the community discussion sessions mentioned above. These curricula might be like those associated with classrooms and campuses and might focus on understanding relationship health, bystander intervention, and on discussions about the state of the community that build solidarity and bring tensions to the surface for the facilitator to work through.

Because this model requires an English-speaking specialist without specific training in language-learning, it must take place in higher language-level classrooms. However, the federal government, which funds many language-learning classrooms through the LINC program, is in the process of contracting funding for higher language levels. In 2025 – 26, the federal government will phase out funding for Stage 2 language education, Canadian Language Benchmark 5 – 8, leaving only Stage 1, Canadian Language Benchmark 1 - 4. Higher levels may still be available at some schools through other funding sources. The CLB 4 language level approximates two or three semesters of language courses in a mainstream school setting. Clients in this stage are often very vulnerable for other reasons: nobody, or almost nobody, in this CLB stage would have come to Canada as a permanent economic resident and as the primary

applicant, due to the requirement for language skills usually associated with those immigration pathways.

As a result, in the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment system used by federally funded schools, language learning at this stage doubles with learning about the Canadian infrastructural system. The pedagogical program is centred around tasks that newcomers may have to perform in the real world: opening a bank account, going to a community event, signing a lease, and so on.

This points to the second model of which we are aware at the outset: If it is a natural fit in this context to learn about public safety issues in general, one of those public safety and public health topics might surround safety in the home. For example, it might be reasonable to introduce material around the options available to people in Canada who face situations of violence in the home, what will happen if the police are called (by the student or by a neighbour or other third party), what is legal and illegal in terms of child discipline, and, especially, to learn about the availability of free services for consultation and safety planning that will not force a student into any particular decision. Not only would such information contribute to early intervention and invite help-seeking, but the information provided may enable people in the course to inform others in their own networks in turn. In personal communication, specialists at the International Organization of Migration provided more details about the types of curriculum activities that are performed around family violence with refugees before arrival:<sup>140</sup>

In our sessions, typically we facilitate interactive activities such as “Legal/Illegal” and “Acceptable/Not Acceptable”. Participants are given “O” and “X” cards and asked to indicate whether they believe certain actions or behaviours are legal or illegal, or acceptable or not acceptable. This approach encourages everyone in the room to share their perspectives in a safe environment, while also allowing the facilitator to gauge participants’ understanding and provide additional clarification where needed.

While the topic of illegality and emergency in family violence may be more socially fraught on its face than issues of disaster evacuation or vaccination, we heard that language teachers already receive disclosures from students and already encounter crises of trauma in the classroom. Formally building this topic into public health curricula could thus be paired with support for language teachers on dealing with disclosures and with painful dynamics between couples in their classrooms.

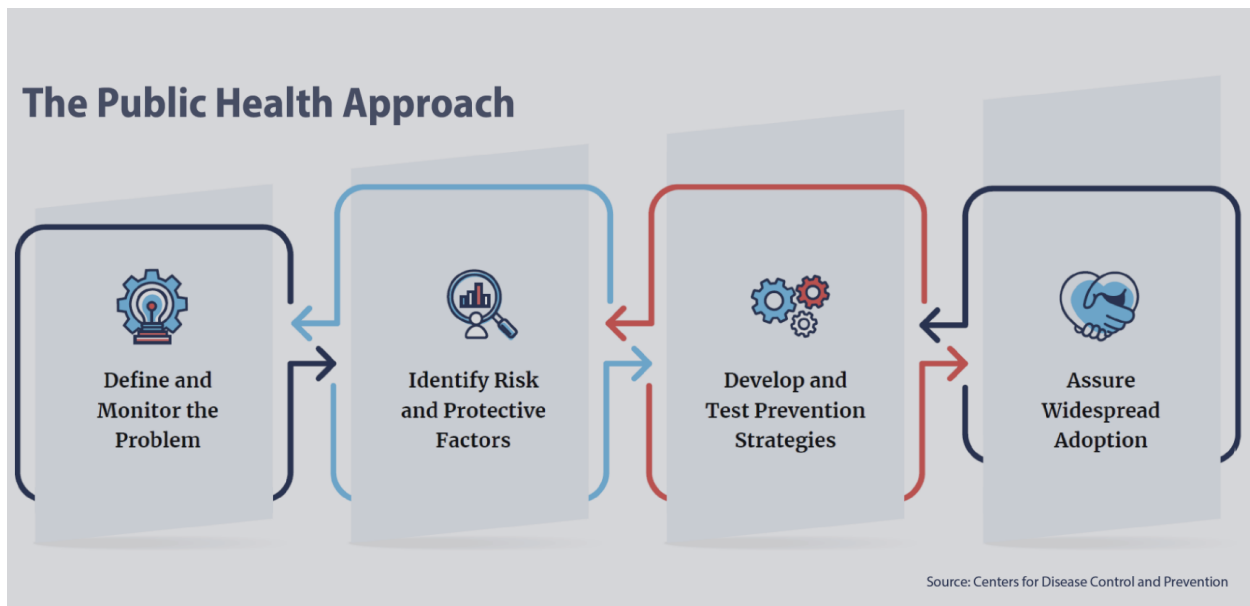
This is only one additional example. We expect that several models might be used in tandem depending on a language school's situation, and that models unique to the situation of schools are likely in place around Alberta.

In each of the models we have discussed here, we note that subject matter expertise beyond AAISA's core scope would be required to produce specific resources. In the first model, a curriculum for family violence prevention education specifically for adult newcomers, who have different educational gaps than Canadian-born students, might be a powerful tool. It might allow educators to focus their curriculum on the possible benefits of the community discussion sessions that we described above and capitalize on their opportunity to bring attention to the issue of family violence in newcomer communities. In the second model, curriculum resources would be required that reflect the expertise of language teachers in bringing difficult and painful topics to the classrooms they teach in a way that is trauma-informed and aligned with lower language levels. However, our hope is that, by reviewing and articulating possible models, opportunities may open to bring together these subject-matter experts to begin assessing the pathway to development of those resources, or indeed, to share with them resources that already exist and promote the use of those resources.

## Next Steps

### **AAISA's Role in the Practice Innovation Ecosystem: Ensuring Widespread Adoption of Promising Practices**

The public health model of primary prevention used, for example, by the U.S. Centre for Disease Control, includes a crucial fourth step: after the problem is identified and strategies are tested, those strategies must be implemented widely for promising strategies to have an effect.



This is an especially appropriate role for AAISA due to our broad network in the settlement sector. As such, our ideal path forward for this project would be to identify promising practices in the sector that are scalable within the given period and with the given staff resources and assist champions in expanding those practices through existing pathways.

Our discussion of systemic factors above should make it clear that there are many areas where adoption of promising practices would require higher levels of systems change over a longer period. We hope that one benefit of this report may be in assisting partner institutions to identify issues within their own remit that are amenable to change benefiting newcomers who need support to keep themselves and their families safe.

### Phase 2: The “Our Love Languages” Project

The Alberta Association of Immigrant-Serving Agencies was approved to proceed with a program related to capacity-building for family violence prevention in the 2026 – 27 fiscal year. In determining which promising practices to focus on, we considered the research we read, the information communicated to us by project participants, and the feasible scope of the project. The option which seemed most promising, given our assessment of our role above, was **examining primary prevention education delivered in language-learning courses**. Prevention education in language-learning



courses seems to be a promising direction because it occurs in a setting in which people already congregate, in an ongoing community, and where professionals with whom participants have an existing relationship would be available to support and lead discussion. We suggested this direction to the Government of Alberta after our discussion with an in-person working group of project participants in Calgary. We shortly received several encouraging comments about this direction from LINC and EAL specialists. The National Gender-Based Violence Settlement Strategy group recently published curriculum resources for LINC and EAL teachers, which provides a further opportunity to forward this work in the Albertan context.

Despite these promising signals, we do not currently know how far along different language-learning organizations may be in their interest in providing this form of education in LINC/EAL courses. Language-learning organizations may be federally funded (LINC) or non – federally funded (EAL). They may operate within an immigrant-serving agency, or outside of such an agency, including as part of a university or college; another common location where English classes are delivered is at Community Adult Learning Programs in rural and remote areas.

Some of our project participants partnered with external or internal family-violence specialists to deliver healthy relationships training, but, due to logistical constraints and language level restrictions, this training would not be available to all students. One benefit of this model is the opportunity for organizations to strengthen relationships with other agencies in their regions that provide domestic violence services. In other cases, the school might have teachers individually provide healthy-relationship curriculum, with or without specialized training. By bringing together facilitators already holding sessions of this type, AAISA may be able to jump-start a collection of good practice guidelines and curriculum tools. And, by strengthening these partnerships, project participants may be able to make inroads with justice system institutions that will open possibilities in the future for collaborations on alternative-resolution programs.

The pathway to capitalizing on this venue for family violence prevention education suggests several complex logistical hurdles. By undertaking a comparison of models currently in use among champions and recruiting new project participants to stress-test these models in new contexts, AAISA may be able to assist in clearing that path.



In the coming fiscal year, AAISA will launch the Our Love Languages project and begin reaching out to language schools in Alberta to hear about how they currently deliver family violence prevention education, if they do. We hope that this approach will enable us to also begin mapping regional differences more closely.

However the project unfolds, we look forward to continuing work with our project participants and new partners in this joint effort to make Alberta a safer place for our immigrant community members, both within their families and in Alberta's social institutions.

## **Appendix: Notes on Terminology**

### *Victim, survivor, and victim-survivor*

Overall, we have taken a neutral position on many of the terminological differences that occur in literature on family violence. We use terms such as "victim," "survivor," and "victim-survivor" interchangeably, depending on context. The same is true for terms such as "perpetrator," "offender," and "person who uses violence."

### *Family violence, gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence*

We note, without resolving, the difficulties posed by the ambiguity of terms like "family violence" in the same space as "gender-based violence" and "intimate partner violence." These terms ought to refer to different but overlapping phenomena, although they are often used interchangeably or euphemistically. We have attempted to use "intimate partner violence" when referring strictly to abuse perpetrated by one intimate partner against another, but we continue to use "family violence" when referring to systems and services that could address multiple types of violence. Especially at the outset of our research, we initially preferred a broad definition of family violence that included all types of violence in the family: not only intimate partner violence, but also abuse of children by parents, elder abuse, sexual abuse of children in the family, abuse of parents by young adult children, and abuse by in-laws and extended family. However, in practice, these forms of violence have differing practice implications, which caused the focus of our investigation to narrowly significantly over the course of the project toward the most well-researched forms of violence, that is, intimate partner violence.

Toward the end of the project, we began to make a specific effort to include participants who worked primarily with youth. This is especially important, even before considering direct harm of children by parents and other adults in the family, because intimate partner violence itself implicates the well-being of children and youth in the family. A number of researchers, such as the McMaster University VEGA study on family violence, choose to think in terms of a trio of interconnected issues: intimate partner violence, child maltreatment, and child witnessing of intimate partner violence.<sup>141</sup> Research also suggests that the well-being of children is a major motivating factor in women's decisions in cases of intimate partner violence, both under the belief that a separation will harm the children more than witnessing intimate partner violence, and as a factor that can assist women in breaking out of a cycle of abuse.<sup>142</sup> This implies that a focus on the whole family system can encourage women to seek help.

The fact that we allowed the project to drift toward a focus on intimate partner violence for reasons of scope has the major limitation of sidelining two vectors of harm which appeared, anecdotally, to be especially under-exposed exactly because of their specificity to newcomer households. The two vectors we refer to here are abuse by extended family members and abuse of mothers by young adult sons. We expect that these dynamics may be overlooked in the conceptualization of family violence employed by mainstream service providers focused on Western nuclear families and couples, and we indeed overlooked them at the outset of the project. However, we heard from both project participants and researchers about notable cases in which the pattern of violence either involved adult sons harming their dependent mothers, or in-laws and extended family members of both sexes perpetrating harm, sometimes collectively, against daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law, and wives. In a qualitative study performed in Alberta by Dr. Wendy Aujla, of seven South Asian women who came forward to speak about their experience with family violence, all had suffered abuse from extended family members (in addition to their spouse in six cases).<sup>143</sup>

### *Immigration status and violence*

Most cases of family violence we heard about through our project participants were cases that involved families in which both members of a couple were newcomers or in which parents immigrated with their children. Throughout the report, as a result, we have referred to relationships in which all members are newcomers.

However, settlement organizations may also become involved in cases of abuse in relationships between newcomers and Canadian-born people. For example, they may support a client who is the victim of violence from a Canadian-born partner who may be able to exploit a higher language fluency and familiarity with Canadian culture to maintain a dynamic of control. On the other hand, in cases where a newcomer client is the perpetrator of violence toward a Canadian-born partner, settlement organizations may find themselves in an especially difficult position when they retain duty of care towards a perpetrator without corresponding eligibility for services for the victim. For example, the settlement organization may be the primary support for perpetrators with other serious forms of vulnerability, such as refugee status. They may also be better equipped than other organizations involved in a case to attempt to address violence use in ways that the perpetrator can absorb, such as through first-language and culturally appropriate counselling.

#### *The sex of perpetrators of intimate partner violence*

Finally, one choice around language in this report that we have made to represent a particular position on the literature, rather than the neutrality or practical limitation that previous sections have outlined, is our preference for male nouns and pronouns to describe perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Researchers on intimate partner violence are split on how to interpret data referring to the sex of perpetrators and victims. Some researchers find that intimate partner violence is evenly distributed among men and women, a “gender symmetry” pattern.<sup>144</sup> Our perception is that this idea appeals to many social services organizations at first glance because of the understandable desire to avoid excluding clients who may need support. But other researchers find that men are by far the most common perpetrators of the most serious and repetitive intimate partner violence and women the most common victims, a “gender asymmetry” pattern.<sup>145 146</sup> This dynamic might result from misogynistic belief systems that cause men to accept urges to violence as a tool to control their intimate partners and express their negative emotions; misogynistic social dynamics that make it more difficult for women to act freely or receive help even in life-threatening conditions; the fact that most men are statistically larger and stronger than most women and thus inflict worse injuries; and whatever causes contribute to the fact that men are statistically likelier to use violence across all social contexts.<sup>147</sup> This is one reason, in many contexts outside English American politics, deaths of domestic violence victims are interpreted as femicides—political murders

that occur specifically because the victim is female—rather than as tragic but random manifestations of private social dynamics.<sup>148 149 150 151 152</sup>

We hold with this latter group. These authors sometimes attribute the difference of interpretation in part to a methodological problem.<sup>153</sup> The problem can be exemplified by studies that rely exclusively on one major tool for measuring intimate partner violence, the Conflict Tactics Scale. These tools ask individuals to self-report whether they have experienced or performed violent behaviours, such as hitting and insulting. Although this scale was originally intended by its designer to be used in conjunction with interviewing and other more in-depth methods of assessing violence use in a couple, it is often used to derive self-reported incident rates at a population level, which results in the “gender symmetry” finding.<sup>154</sup> But this practice may tend to conflate several dynamics of violence. On its own, it cannot provide information about severity of acts, patterning *between* members of a relationship, or relationship context associated with acts. It also does not account for differences between self-reporting patterns of perpetrators and victims or between men and women.<sup>155</sup> Researchers who criticize this approach sometimes promote disaggregating the results of tools like this one to understand different patterns. One such typology differentiates “intimate terrorism”—long-term, one-sided manipulative campaigns to control a partner—from “violent resistance” to abuse and “situational couple violence”.<sup>156</sup> In other words, measurement tools like the Conflict Tactics Scale do not distinguish well between a treatment-resistant, highly violent individual systematically intimidating his partner, a person *defending* herself against systematic control and violence (e.g., pushing away a partner who has slapped her), and two partners with a high-conflict relationship or a partner who has poor conflict resolution skills but might recover with support. The Canadian General Social Survey has a similar tendency.

Most other research tools tend to show a different picture. For example, an alternate scale that adds an instruction to *not* count instances of joking-around or horseplay significantly reduced reports by men.<sup>157</sup> (For methodological reasons, scientists often do not tell people undertaking these tests that they are trying to measure intimate partner violence.) Police reports made by women about male perpetrators tend to recount more shocking and extreme threats.<sup>158</sup> And, in research with men who have had violence used against them by their partners, male victims themselves often acknowledge a bidirectional pattern of violence and their partner’s self-defence.<sup>159 160</sup>

Both intimate terrorism and situational couple violence ought to be considered serious public health concerns for the people involved who are subject to violence. Situations of bidirectional violence can be deeply traumatizing for both parties. However, distinguishing between these two types of violence is vital, because they demand different responses from service providers. Allowing a perpetrator to paint a case of intimate terrorism as a case of situational couple violence threatens the life of the female partner and enables the perpetrator to weaponize state and service systems that are intended to protect her. On the other hand, treating a case of situational couple violence as a case of intimate terrorism may harm the members of the couple and their children by starting up the machinery of the court and custody system to address a situation that could potentially be resolved through interpersonal mediation or professional assistance to separate safely.<sup>161</sup>

The effort to provide equal and sensitive care to male victims, which is an important one, is further complicated by the fact that, in the worst cases of intimate terrorism, perpetrators may actively manipulate authorities and service providers to portray themselves as a victim of violence or a participant in bidirectional violence—the tactic sometimes colloquially called “Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender”.<sup>162</sup> Several qualitative studies on women accused of domestic violence suggest that this perpetrator tactic is not uncommon.<sup>163</sup> In one particularly saddening example, during the course of this project, The Guardian released a whistleblower investigation on a well-known Australian family annihilation case, which showed that the murderer, who set fire to a car with his wife and three children inside, had evaded his wife’s repeated reports about his violence by convincing police that she was making false accusations to manipulate him.<sup>164</sup>

The division between these risk profiles is indeed particularly problematic in encounters with police, who, in Alberta, must attempt to decide on-scene which partner is “primarily” responsible for violence.<sup>165</sup> Newcomers are especially vulnerable to the dangers created by this dynamic when third parties such as neighbours or landlords report partner conflict, and when the members of the couple have differing English levels or levels of comfort engaging with police, so that police have little information from which to make a reasoned decision about whether a woman has really initiated violence unilaterally or whether she is defending herself. This can even result in victims of domestic violence being charged with domestic violence offenses, which can in turn affect their immigration status.<sup>166</sup> Front-line

service providers in the settlement sector must be aware of the possibility that perpetrators may lie to them in order to punish their partners for contacting emergency authorities or to cut them off from potential sources of support. Professionals in intimate partner violence services should be involved in cases where front-line service workers have any doubt about the directionality of violence.

Our decision has been to emphasize the form of intimate partner violence with the higher risk profile, and this is the reason that we have composed many sentences in the report presuming a female victim and a male perpetrator in statements that clearly refer to intimate partner violence, and to forego more complex constructions that would be more gender-neutral. However, we do not employ this usage exclusively, especially when speaking more broadly of family violence, or of promising practices that might be appropriate in cases of situational couple violence.

---

<sup>1</sup> Oluwakemi Agnes Adebayo, “Exploring West African Immigrant Women’s Experience and Perception about Domestic Violence and Related Supports in Alberta, Canada” (master’s thesis, University of Calgary, 2025), *PRISM Repository*, <https://hdl.handle.net/1880/120775>.

<sup>2</sup> Umaima Anwar and Humaira Jaleel, *Understanding Gender-Based Violence in the Muslim Community* (Healthy Muslim Families, 2023), <https://healthymuslimfamilies.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/HMF-DV-Research-Report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Wendy Aujla, “‘It Was Like Sugar-Coated Words’: Revictimization When South Asian Immigrant Women Disclose Domestic Violence,” *Affilia* 36, no. 2 (2021): 182–203, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109920916038>.

<sup>4</sup> Patrina Duhaney, “Contextualizing the Experiences of Black Women Arrested for Intimate Partner Violence in Canada,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37, nos. 21–22 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211056723>.

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Fonteyne et al., “Immigrant Women’s Experiences of Domestic Violence in Canada: A Qualitative File Audit,” *Journal of Family Violence* 39, no. 4 (2024): 613–22, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00490-1>.

<sup>6</sup> Crystal J. Giesbrecht et al., “‘I Felt Like I Was a Puppet—He’s the Master, and He’s Playing With My Life’: Newcomer Women’s Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence,” *Violence Against Women* 30, no. 5 (2024): 1226–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231158108>.

<sup>7</sup> Anita Grace, “‘They Just Don’t Care’: Women Charged with Domestic Violence in Ottawa,” *Manitoba Law Journal* 42, no. 3 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.29173/mlj1112>.

<sup>8</sup> Nicola Henry et al., “Technology-Facilitated Domestic Violence Against Immigrant and Refugee Women: A Qualitative Study,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37, nos. 13–14 (2022): NP12634–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211001465>.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Kikulwe et al., “Newcomer Women’s Experiences of Help-Seeking after Intimate Partner Violence,” *Journal of Family Violence*, ahead of print, March 31, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00869-2>.

- 
- <sup>10</sup> Jo Spangaro et al., “Intimate Partner Violence and Post-Migration Stressors Reported by Refugee Women Accessing Settlement Services,” *BMC Women’s Health* 25, no. 1 (2025): 167, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-025-03698-z>.
- <sup>11</sup> Stefani Vasil, “‘I Came Here, and It Got Worse Day by Day’: Examining the Intersections Between Migrant Precarity and Family Violence Among Women with Insecure Migration Status in Australia,” *Violence Against Women* 30, no. 10 (2024): 2482–510, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231159414>.
- <sup>12</sup> AAISA, “Family Violence Toolkit,” <https://aaisa.ca/toolkit/domestic-violence-dv-toolkit-for-newcomer-immigrant-and-refugee-nir-service-providers/>
- <sup>13</sup> Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, “Newcomer & Settlement Services in Alberta by City | AAISA Knowledge Hub,” accessed March 25, 2026, <https://knowledgehub.aaisa.ca/>.
- <sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada Government of Canada, “Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census - Alberta,” July 13, 2022, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?lang=E&topic=9&dguid=2021A000248>.
- <sup>15</sup> Refugees and Citizenship Canada Immigration, “2023 Settlement Outcomes Report: Part 1 - Newcomer Outcomes Stock Take,” April 29, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/settlement-resettlement-service-provider-information/2023-settlement-outcomes-report/2023-settlement-outcomes-report-part1.html>.
- <sup>16</sup> Refugees and Citizenship Canada Immigration, “Supplementary Information for the 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan,” November 4, 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/corporate-initiatives/levels/supplementary-immigration-levels-2026-2028.html>.
- <sup>17</sup> This data is not public outside the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, but can be shared upon request.
- <sup>18</sup> Alberta Association of Immigrant-Serving Agencies, “Health of the Newcomer-Serving Sector in the PNT Region,” 2023, [https://aaisa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/HOTS\\_Report\\_Final\\_March\\_18.pdf](https://aaisa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/HOTS_Report_Final_March_18.pdf).
- <sup>19</sup> Sita Jayaraman and Harald Bauder, *Niche Employment or Occupational Segmentation?: Immigrant Women Working in the Settlement Sector in Germany and Canada*, Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement Working Papers 2014/3, March 2013.
- <sup>20</sup> Michael Lipsky, *Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1980), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610447713>.
- <sup>21</sup> Jingzhou Liu and Shibao Guo, “The Making of Ideal Immigrant Settlement Workers: Examining the Technologies of Ruling Power in Canadian Immigrant Service Organisations,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49, no. 9 (2023): 2229–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2158791>.
- <sup>22</sup> Bernardo Zacka, *When the State Meets the Street: Public Service and Moral Agency* (The Belknap press of Harvard university press, 2017).
- <sup>23</sup> Tanya Park et al., “Domestic Violence and Immigrant Women: A Glimpse Behind a Veiled Door,” *Violence Against Women* 27, nos. 15–16 (2021): 2910–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801220984174>.
- <sup>24</sup> VEGA Project, “Intimate Partner Violence Systematic Review Summary,” McMaster University, 2016.
- <sup>25</sup> Kevin Pottie et al., “Evidence-Based Clinical Guidelines for Immigrants and Refugees,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 183, no. 12 (2011): E824–925, <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.090313>.
- <sup>26</sup> Jo Spangaro et al., *Domestic Violence Identification and Response for Refugee Women in Settlement Services (The SAHAR Study)* (University of Wollongong, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.25900/3HGF-2477>.
- <sup>27</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “National Standardized Assessment Template for NAARS,” December 4, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/partners-service-providers/funding/national-standardized-assessment-template-naars.html>.
- <sup>28</sup> Karin Wachter et al., “‘We Weren’t Ready’: Provider Perspectives on Addressing Intimate Partner Violence Among Refugees and Immigrants in The United States,” *Journal of Family Violence* 37, no. 2 (2022): 235–46, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-021-00285-2>.
- <sup>29</sup> SHIFT Project, “Home Page”, n.d., accessed March 26, 2026, <https://preventdomesticviolence.ca/>.

---

<sup>30</sup> Lauren Sheppard et al., “What Interventions Are Cost Effective in Reducing Violence Against Women? A Scoping Review,” *Applied Health Economics and Health Policy* 22, no. 3 (2024): 283–96, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40258-023-00870-0>.

<sup>31</sup> Lana Wells et al., “It Costs More to Do Nothing: Preventing Male Perpetration of Domestic Violence,” *University of Calgary Public Policy School Briefing Papers* 19, no. 03 (2026), <https://dx.doi.org/10.55016/ojs/sppp.v19i1.81133>.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Flood and Lula Dembele, *Putting Perpetrators in the Picture*, Centre for Justice Briefing Papers (Queensland University of Technology, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.5204/book.eprints.215168>.

<sup>33</sup> Anya Litviniuc and Lana Wells, “A Case for Leveraging Informal Supporters and Bystanders for Primary Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence,” SHIFT Program, 2022, [https://preventdomesticviolence.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/R74\\_Shift\\_2023\\_A\\_Case\\_for\\_Leveraging\\_Informal\\_Supporters.pdf](https://preventdomesticviolence.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/R74_Shift_2023_A_Case_for_Leveraging_Informal_Supporters.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Our Watch Australia, “What Is ‘Primary Prevention’ of Violence against Women?,” 2026, <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/what-is-primary-prevention>.

<sup>35</sup> Centre for Disease Control, “About Violence Prevention,” CDC Violence Prevention, July 21, 2025, <https://www.cdc.gov/violence-prevention/about/index.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel and Alison Brummett, “Intimate Partner Violence Prevention and Intervention Group-Format Programs for Immigrant Latinas: A Systematic Review,” *Journal of Family Violence* 36, no. 2 (2021): 209–21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00160-6>.

<sup>37</sup> Paula C. Barata et al., “A Successful Sexual Assault Resistance Program Also Reduced Intimate Partner Violence,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 40, nos. 9–10 (2025): 2234–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241270057>.

<sup>38</sup> VEGA Program, *Child Maltreatment Systematic Review Summary* (McMaster University, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Brian Littlechild et al., “Relational Interventions for Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Narrative Review,” *Research on Social Work Practice* 35, no. 7 (2025): 809–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315241287915>.

<sup>40</sup> Sheppard et al., “What Interventions Are Cost Effective in Reducing Violence Against Women?”

<sup>41</sup> Karla Elliott et al., “‘It’s Really Important That We Listen to Them’: Engaging Immigrant Men in Family Violence Prevention,” *Journal of Family Violence*, ahead of print, May 30, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00897-y>.

<sup>42</sup> Litviniuc and Wells, “A Case for Leveraging Informal Supporters and Bystanders for Primary Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence,” 2022

<sup>43</sup> Shamsun Nahar and Courtney Cronley, “Transportation Barriers among Immigrant Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence,” *Transportation Research Record* 2675, no. 9 (2021): 861–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03611981211004587>.

<sup>44</sup> Yiannis Karavias et al., “Impact Evaluation and Economic Benefit Analysis of a Domestic Violence and Abuse UK Police Intervention,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (February 2023): 1063701, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1063701>.

<sup>45</sup> Montesanti, S., Wells, L., & Litviniuc, A. (2023). The role of social welfare policies and programs in the prevention of domestic and family violence. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta, CARE Research Lab.

<sup>46</sup> Lana Wells, “How Policy and Legislation Can Prevent Domestic Violence,” SHIFT Project, n.d., [https://preventdomesticviolence.ca/sites/default/files/research-files/Using%20Policy%20and%20Legislation%20to%20Prevent%20Domestic%20Violence\\_0.pdf](https://preventdomesticviolence.ca/sites/default/files/research-files/Using%20Policy%20and%20Legislation%20to%20Prevent%20Domestic%20Violence_0.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Chelsea M. Spencer et al., “What Puts Individuals at Risk for Physical Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration? A Meta-Analysis Examining Risk Markers for Men and Women,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 23, no. 1 (2022): 36–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020925776>.

<sup>48</sup> Isabelle Timshel et al., “A Systematic Review of Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Family Related Violence in Refugee Families,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 70 (August 2017): 315–30, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.06.023>.

- 
- <sup>49</sup> Matin Ayubi and Lata Satyen, “Factors Associated with Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration Among Migrant Men: A Systematic Review,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 25, no. 2 (2024): 1365–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231178758>.
- <sup>50</sup> VEGA Program, *Child Maltreatment and Intimate Partner Violence Systematic Review Summary*
- <sup>51</sup> Loraine J. Bacchus et al., “Interventions That Prevent or Respond to Intimate Partner Violence against Women and Violence against Children: A Systematic Review,” *The Lancet Public Health* 9, no. 5 (2024): e326–38, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(24\)00048-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(24)00048-3).
- <sup>52</sup> Abha Rai et al., “Culturally Responsive Domestic Violence Interventions for Immigrant Communities in the United States: A Scoping Review,” *Journal of Social Work in the Global Community* 7, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.5590/JSWGC.2023.8.1.01>.
- <sup>53</sup> Elliott et al., “It’s Really Important That We Listen to Them.”
- <sup>54</sup> Simbandumwe et al., “Family Violence Prevention Programs in Immigrant Communities.”
- <sup>55</sup> AAISA, “Knowledge Hub”
- <sup>56</sup> Cuesta-García and Crespo, “Barriers for Help-Seeking in Female Immigrant Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review.”
- <sup>57</sup> Philomina Okeke-Ihejirika et al., “A Scoping Review on Intimate Partner Violence in Canada’s Immigrant Communities,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 21, no. 4 (2020): 788–810, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018789156>.
- <sup>58</sup> Amber Peterman and Shalini Roy, *Cash Transfers and Intimate Partner Violence: A Research View on Design and Implementation for Risk Mitigation and Prevention*, 0 ed. (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896294332>.
- <sup>59</sup> Government of Alberta, “Escaping Abuse Benefit – Get Help with Costs to Leave | Alberta.Ca,” March 24, 2026, <https://www.alberta.ca/family-violence-costs-leave>.
- <sup>60</sup> Cris M. Sullivan et al., “Flexible Funding as a Promising Strategy to Prevent Homelessness for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 34, no. 14 (2019): 3017–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516664318>.
- <sup>61</sup> Pawanpreet Dhaliwal, *Flexible Funding Evaluation Report*, (Hertfordshire, UK), 2022, <https://www.hertshealthevidence.org/documents/thematic/evaluation/flexible-funding-evaluation-report.pdf>.
- <sup>62</sup> Kate Webster, “Legal Representation Can Have a Significant Impact on Women and Children’s Socio-Economic Outcomes. And yet, Access to a Family Lawyer Is Still Considered a Luxury for Many Women.,” *The Philanthropist Journal*, February 23, 2026, <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2026/02/funding-legal-support-for-survivors-is-an-upstream-intervention/>.
- <sup>63</sup> Ling San Lau and Graeme Rodgers, “Cultural Competence in Refugee Service Settings: A Scoping Review,” *Health Equity* 5, no. 1 (2021): 124–34, <https://doi.org/10.1089/heq.2020.0094>.
- <sup>64</sup> Aujla, “It Was Like Sugar-Coated Words.”
- <sup>65</sup> Ayallo, “Addressing Family Violence Experienced by Ethnic Migrant Women in Aotearoa/New Zealand.”
- <sup>66</sup> Community Legal Education Ontario, “Women, Family Violence, and Immigration,” November 2024, <https://www.cleo.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/famvio.pdf>.
- <sup>67</sup> Aisha Alsinai et al., “Use of Immigration Status for Coercive Control in Domestic Violence Protection Orders,” *Frontiers in Sociology* 8 (April 2023): 1146102, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1146102>.
- <sup>68</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “The Humanitarian and Compassionate Assessment: Dealing with Family Relationships,” program descriptions, July 24, 2014, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/permanent-residence/humanitarian-compassionate-consideration/processing/assessment-dealing-family-relationships.html>.
- <sup>69</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “Abuse: Interview Considerations,” guidance, February 3, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/service-delivery/abuse/interview-considerations.html>.

---

<sup>70</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “Abuse: Assessing Evidence,” guidance, July 26, 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/service-delivery/abuse/evidence.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Refugees and Citizenship Canada Immigration, “Check Current IRCC Processing Times,” September 20, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/application/check-processing-times.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “Immigration Options for Victims of Family Violence,” April 7, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/family-sponsorship/fees-permits-victims.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Janet Mosher, “Domestic Violence, Precarious Immigration Status, and the Complex Interplay of Family Law and Immigration Law,” *Canadian Journal of Family Law* 35, no. 1 (2023): 296–359.

<sup>74</sup> Abigail Lash Ballew and Mandeep Kaur Mucina, “Narratives from Non-Citizen Former Youth in Child Welfare Care Fighting Crimmigration and Deportation,” *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies* 1, no. 1 (2023): 10058305, <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJMS.2023.10058305>.

<sup>75</sup> Mosher, “Domestic Violence, Precarious Immigration Status, and the Complex Interplay of Family Law and Immigration Law.”

<sup>76</sup> “Addressing the Gaps,” *Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters*, n.d., accessed March 27, 2026, <https://acws.ca/addressing-the-gaps/>.

<sup>77</sup> AAISA, “Family Violence Prevention Toolkit,” <https://aaisa.ca/toolkit/domestic-violence-dv-toolkit-for-newcomer-immigrant-and-refugee-nir-service-providers/>

<sup>78</sup> Jennifer Koshan, “Mapping Domestic Violence Law and Policy in Alberta: Intersections and Access to Justice,” *Alberta Law Review*, March 11, 2021, 521, <https://doi.org/10.29173/alr2640>.

<sup>79</sup> Alberta Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, “Intimate Partner Violence: Police Guidelines,” March 2020, <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/64b3845b-7070-475b-885e-5594b7a8a88c/resource/21adcb0d-3dc2-46ce-9789-b46735e22b63/download/jsg-intimate-partner-violence-police-guidelines-2020-03.pdf>.

<sup>80</sup> Duhaney, “Contextualizing the Experiences of Black Women Arrested for Intimate Partner Violence in Canada.”

<sup>81</sup> Grace, “‘They Just Don’t Care.’”

<sup>82</sup> Grace, “‘They Just Don’t Care.’”

<sup>83</sup> Duhaney, “Contextualizing the Experiences of Black Women Arrested for Intimate Partner Violence in Canada.”

<sup>84</sup> Mosher, “Domestic Violence, Precarious Immigration Status, and the Complex Interplay of Family Law and Immigration Law.”

<sup>85</sup> Alberta Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, “Intimate Partner Violence: Police Guidelines.”

<sup>86</sup> Simiao Li et al., “Women’s Perspectives on the Context of Violence and Role of Police in Their Intimate Partner Violence Arrest Experiences,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 30, no. 3 (2015): 400–419, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514535100>.

<sup>87</sup> Saxton et al., “Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence Victims With Police and the Justice System in Canada.”

<sup>88</sup> A. Chand, “Do You Speak English? Language Barriers in Child Protection Social Work with Minority Ethnic Families,” *British Journal of Social Work* 35, no. 6 (2005): 807–21, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch205>.

<sup>89</sup> Alberta Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, “Intimate Partner Violence: Police Guidelines.”

<sup>90</sup> Shannah Mousaco et al., “‘No One Teaches Us How to Deal with This’: General Practitioners’ Experiences of Working with Men Who Use Violence in Relationships,” *Australian Journal of General Practice* 48, no. 7 (2019): 487–91, <https://doi.org/10.31128/AJGP-12-18-4801>.

<sup>91</sup> Danielle Schalk and Christina Fernandes, “How Health Professionals Identify and Respond to Perpetrators of Domestic and Family Violence in a Hospital Setting: A Scoping Review,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 25, no. 4 (2024): 3405–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380241246783>.

---

<sup>92</sup> Daniel Kikulwe et al., “Newcomer Women’s Experiences of Help-Seeking after Intimate Partner Violence,” *Journal of Family Violence*, ahead of print, March 31, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00869-2>.

<sup>93</sup> AAISA, “2024 Alberta Settlement Sector Survey Report,” accessed March 27, 2026, <https://aaisa.ca/2024-alberta-settlement-sector-survey-report/>.

<sup>94</sup> World Health Organization, ed., *Responding to Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence against Women: WHO Clinical and Policy Guidelines* (World Health Organization, 2013).

<sup>95</sup> Christopher Mikton, “Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence against Women: Taking Action and Generating Evidence,” *Injury Prevention* 16, no. 5 (2010): 359–60, <https://doi.org/10.1136/ip.2010.029629>.

<sup>96</sup> VEGA Project, “Intimate Partner Violence Systematic Review Summary.”

<sup>97</sup> VEGA Program, “Child Maltreatment Systematic Review Summary.”

<sup>98</sup> Giulia Punzo and Patrizia Velotti, “Interventions for Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence: An Umbrella Review of Systematic Reviews,” *Aggressive Behavior* 52, no. 1 (2026): e70056, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.70056>.

<sup>99</sup> VEGA Project, “Intimate Partner Violence Systematic Review Summary.”

<sup>100</sup> Littlechild et al., “Relational Interventions for Intimate Partner Violence.”

<sup>101</sup> Sandra M. Stith et al., “International Adaptation of a Treatment Program for Situational Couple Violence,” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 46, no. 2 (2020): 272–88, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12397>.

<sup>102</sup> Brooke M. Keilholtz and Chelsea M. Spencer, “Couples Therapy and Intimate Partner Violence: Considerations, Assessment, and Treatment Modalities,” *Practice Innovations* 7, no. 2 (2022): 124–37, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pri0000176>.

<sup>103</sup> Berta Vall et al., “A Systematic Review of the Quality of Perpetrator Programs’ Outcome Studies: Toward A New Model of Outcome Measurement,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 25, no. 3 (2024): 1985–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231203718>.

<sup>104</sup> Lata Satyen et al., “The Effectiveness of Culturally Specific Male Domestic Violence Offender Intervention Programs on Behavior Changes and Mental Health: A Systematic Review,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 22 (2022): 15180, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192215180>.

<sup>105</sup> Tony McGinn et al., “Survivor Perspectives on IPV Perpetrator Interventions: A Systematic Narrative Review,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 17, no. 3 (2016): 239–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015584358>.

<sup>106</sup> Tony McGinn et al., “Male IPV Perpetrator’s Perspectives on Intervention and Change: A Systematic Synthesis of Qualitative Studies,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 21, no. 1 (2020): 97–112, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017742167>.

<sup>107</sup> McGinn, “Male IPV Perpetrator’s Perspectives on Intervention and Change”.

<sup>108</sup> Mimi E. Kim, “Transformative Justice and Restorative Justice: Gender-Based Violence and Alternative Visions of Justice in the United States,” *International Review of Victimology* 27, no. 2 (2021): 162–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758020970414>.

<sup>109</sup> “Restorative Justice Pilot Project,” accessed March 27, 2026, <https://albertacourts.ca/cj/about-the-court/innovation/restorative-justice-pilot-project>.

<sup>110</sup> Centre for Court Innovation, “A National Portrait of Restorative Approaches to Intimate Partner Violence,” 2021, [https://www.innovatingjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Report\\_IPV\\_12032019.pdf](https://www.innovatingjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Report_IPV_12032019.pdf)

<sup>111</sup> Jacquelyn C. Campbell, “Helping Women Understand Their Risk in Situations of Intimate Partner Violence,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 19, no. 12 (2004): 1464–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260504269698>.

<sup>112</sup> Pamela Rubin, *Restorative Justice in Nova Scotia: Women’s Experience and Recommendations for Positive Policy Development and Implementation Report and Recommendations*, 2003.

[https://www.nawl.ca/wp-content/uploads/attachments/Pub\\_Brief\\_NSRestorativeJustice03\\_en.pdf](https://www.nawl.ca/wp-content/uploads/attachments/Pub_Brief_NSRestorativeJustice03_en.pdf)

- 
- <sup>113</sup> Center for Court Innovation, “A National Portrait”
- <sup>114</sup> Heather Hensman Kettrey and Noah Samuel Reynolds, “Is Restorative Justice Appropriate for Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the ‘Empirical Vacuum,’” *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, ahead of print, December 3, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-024-09651-8>.
- <sup>115</sup> Mimi E. Kim, “Transformative Justice and Restorative Justice: Gender-Based Violence and Alternative Visions of Justice in the United States,” *International Review of Victimology* 27, no. 2 (2021): 162–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758020970414>.
- <sup>116</sup> Samantha Jeffries et al., “Adult Restorative Justice and Gendered Violence: Practitioner and Service Provider Viewpoints from Queensland, Australia,” *Laws* 10, no. 1 (2021): 13, <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10010013>.
- <sup>117</sup> Linda G. Mills et al., “A Randomized Controlled Trial of Restorative Justice-Informed Treatment for Domestic Violence Crimes,” *Nature Human Behaviour* 3, no. 12 (2019): 1284–94, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-019-0724-1>.
- <sup>118</sup> Jeffries, “Adult Restorative Justice”
- <sup>119</sup> Centre for Court Innovation, “A National Portrait”
- <sup>120</sup> Kettrey and Reynolds, “Is Restorative Justice Appropriate for Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence?”
- <sup>121</sup> Samantha Jeffries et al., “Adult Restorative Justice and Gendered Violence: Practitioner and Service Provider Viewpoints from Queensland, Australia,” *Laws* 10, no. 1 (2021): 13, <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10010013>.
- <sup>122</sup> Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel and Alison Brummett, “Intimate Partner Violence Prevention and Intervention Group-Format Programs for Immigrant Latinas: A Systematic Review,” *Journal of Family Violence* 36, no. 2 (2021): 209–21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00160-6>.
- <sup>123</sup> Mieko Yoshihama et al., “Peerformance: Bystanders Enacting and Challenging Gender Norms in Community-Based Theater to Prevent Domestic Violence,” *Violence Against Women* 28, nos. 3–4 (2022): 922–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012211014556>.
- <sup>124</sup> Elliott et al., “It’s Really Important That We Listen to Them.”
- <sup>125</sup> Simbandumwe et al., “Family Violence Prevention Programs in Immigrant Communities.”
- <sup>126</sup> Michael Runner et al., “Intimate Partner Violence in Immigrant and Refugee Communities: Challenges, Promising Practices and Recommendations: (601452012-001),” 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1037/e601452012-001>.
- <sup>127</sup> Sarah DeGue et al., “A Systematic Review of Primary Prevention Strategies for Sexual Violence Perpetration,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 19, no. 4 (2014): 346–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2014.05.004>.
- <sup>128</sup> Roni Porat et al., “Preventing Sexual Violence: A Behavioral Problem Without a Behaviorally Informed Solution,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 25, no. 1 (2024): 4–29.
- <sup>129</sup> Porat et al., “Preventing Sexual Violence,” 2024.
- <sup>130</sup> Chelsea M. Spencer et al., “What Puts Individuals at Risk for Physical Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration? A Meta-Analysis Examining Risk Markers for Men and Women,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 23, no. 1 (2022): 36–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020925776>.
- <sup>131</sup> Cite
- <sup>132</sup> Rosa M. Gonzalez-Guarda et al., “Intimate Partner Violence in Immigrant Populations,” *Intimate Partner Violence: A Health-Based Perspective*, eds. Connie Mitchell et al., second edition (Oxford UP 2025)
- <sup>133</sup> Simbandumwe et al., “Family Violence Prevention Programs in Immigrant Communities.”
- <sup>134</sup> “Key Issues on the Levels Plan - Permanent Residence Admissions Levels,” AAISA, November 5, 2024, <https://aaisa.ca/news-post/key-issues-on-the-levels-plan-permanent-residence-levels/>.
- <sup>135</sup> “Changes in Canadian Immigration Levels Plan: Key Updates for Settlement Organizations,” AAISA, October 25, 2024, <https://aaisa.ca/news-post/changes-in-canadian-immigration-levels-plans-key-updates-for-settlement-organizations/>.

<sup>136</sup> Feng Hou et al., “Two-Step Immigration Selection: An Analysis of Its Expansion in Canada,” Statistics Canada, July 22, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/11-626-X2020010>.

<sup>137</sup> Yoojung Ha, International Organization of Migration. Personal communication. January 27, 2026. For an example of the types of positive parenting curricula that are delivered, see “Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) – O-Canada Conversations 27”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyR6Oep9FrS>. Accessed May 14, 2026.

<sup>138</sup> “Home Page,” Immigrant Arrival Centre, accessed March 27, 2026, <https://www.immigrantarrivalcentre.ca>.

<sup>139</sup> “The Calgary Airport Authority and the Calgary Newcomers Collaborative Lead the Nation in Opening the First Voluntary Immigrant Services Program at YYC,” YYC - Calgary International Airport, accessed March 27, 2026, <http://www.yyc.com/en-us/media-centre/blog/artmid/1030/articleid/30/the-calgary-airport-authority-and-the-calgary-newcomers-collaborative-lead-the-nation-in-opening-the-first-voluntary-immigrant-services-program-at-yyc>.

<sup>140</sup> Yoojung Ha, International Organization of Migration. Personal communication. January 27, 2026.

<sup>141</sup> “VEGA Publications,” *VEGA Project*, n.d., accessed March 24, 2026, <https://vegaproject.mcmaster.ca/vega-publications/>.

<sup>142</sup> Molly Allen-Leap et al., “Seeking Help From Primary Health-Care Providers in High-Income Countries: A Scoping Review of the Experiences of Migrant and Refugee Survivors of Domestic Violence,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 24, no. 5 (2023): 3715–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221137664>.

<sup>143</sup> Aujla, “It Was Like Sugar-Coated Words.”

<sup>144</sup> Denise A. Hines and Emily M. Douglas, “Men’s Experiences of Female-Perpetrated Intimate Partner Violence,” in *Domestic Violence Against Men and Boys* (Routledge, 2022).

<sup>145</sup> Janet L. Fanslow et al., “Evidence of Gender Asymmetry in Intimate Partner Violence Experience at the Population-Level,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 38, nos. 15–16 (2023): 9159–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605231163646>.

<sup>146</sup> Mick Cunningham and Kristin L. Anderson, “Women Experience More Intimate Partner Violence than Men over the Life Course: Evidence for Gender Asymmetry at All Ages in a National Sample,” *Sex Roles* 89, nos. 11–12 (2023): 702–17, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-023-01423-4>.

<sup>147</sup> John Archer, *Male Violence*, Psychology Revivals (Routledge, 2022), 3403130, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=358090c2-048c-3914-bcc1-78597ca1bf51>.

<sup>148</sup> Akansha Deshmukh, “Femicide Epidemic In India: A Dire Consequence Of Deep-Seated Misogyny,” *Feminism in India*, February 27, 2023, <https://feminisminindia.com/2023/02/28/femicide-epidemic-in-india-a-dire-consequence-of-deep-seated-misogyny/>.

<sup>149</sup> Naiara Galarraga Gortázar, “La indignación por los feminicidios en Brasil se abre espacio en el debate público y sale a las calles,” *El País América*, December 15, 2025, <https://elpais.com/america/2025-12-15/la-indignacion-por-los-feminicidios-en-brasil-se-abre-espacio-en-el-debate-publico-y-sale-a-las-calles.html>.

<sup>150</sup> Marie-Eve Morasse et al., “Dossier: Féminicides | La douleur de ceux qui restent,” *Actualités, La Presse*, March 7, 2026, <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/feminicides/la-douleur-de-ceux-qui-restant/2026-03-07/feminicides/c-est-assez.php>.

<sup>151</sup> Cristina Eloisa Baclig, “Femicide: Targeting Women Because They’re Women,” *INQUIRER.Net*, January 9, 2025, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2022784/femicide-targeting-women-because-theyre-women>.

<sup>152</sup> Myrna Dawson and Saide Mobayed Vega, *The Routledge International Handbook of Femicide and Feminicide*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003202332>.

<sup>153</sup> Sherry Hamby, “A Scientific Answer to a Scientific Question: The Gender Debate on Intimate Partner Violence,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 18, no. 2 (2017): 145–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015596963>.

<sup>154</sup> Richard T. Jones et al., “A Critique of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales-2 (CTS-2),” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 37 (November 2017): 83–90, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2017.08.005>.

- 
- <sup>155</sup> Jeffrey Ackerman, "Assessing Conflict Tactics Scale Validity by Examining Intimate Partner Violence Overreporting," *Psychology of Violence* 8, no. 2 (2018): 207–17, <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000112>.
- <sup>156</sup> Michael P. Johnson, "A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence," Northeastern University Press, 2008.
- <sup>157</sup> Sherry Hamby, "Self-Report Measures That Do Not Produce Gender Parity in Intimate Partner Violence: A Multi-Study Investigation," *Psychology of Violence* 6, no. 2 (2016): 323–35, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038207>.
- <sup>158</sup> Heather C. Melton and Joanne Belknap, "He Hits, She Hits: Assessing Gender Differences and Similarities in Officially Reported Intimate Partner Violence," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 30, no. 3 (2003): 328–48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854803030003004>.
- <sup>159</sup> Carolyn Brooks et al., "'How Many Silences Are There?' Men's Experience of Victimization in Intimate Partner Relationships," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 35, nos. 23–24 (2020): 5390–413, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517719905>.
- <sup>160</sup> Michaela Zverina et al., "Managing Victim Status in Group Therapy for Men: A Discourse Analysis," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 26, no. 14 (2011): 2834–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260510390949>.
- <sup>161</sup> Study on use of restorative justice, relational counselling in cases of violence (Littlechild et al 2025?)
- <sup>162</sup> Grace, "'They Just Don't Care'"
- <sup>163</sup> Duhaney, "Contextualizing the Experiences of Black Women Arrested for Intimate Partner Violence in Canada"
- <sup>164</sup> "Hannah Clarke Was Failed by Police before She Was Murdered. It Shouldn't Be up to Whistleblowers to Demand Better," Australia News, The Guardian, November 26, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/commentisfree/2025/nov/26/hannah-clarke-was-failed-by-police-before-she-was-murdered-it-shouldnt-be-up-to-whistleblowers-to-demand-better>.
- <sup>165</sup> Alberta Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, "Intimate Partner Violence: Police Guidelines."
- <sup>166</sup> Grace, "'They Just Don't Care'"