



Domestic Violence
Action Plan Update 2012



Introduction

All persons in Nova Scotia should live free from domestic violence and abuse.

This vision prompted the Nova Scotia government to develop the Domestic Violence Action Plan, which was released in December 2010. The plan identified existing government programs, showed ways government could work smarter and outlined new ways the government and community could work together to improve supports and services.

The vision was developed by a group of government and community representatives and continues to direct provincial efforts related to domestic violence today.

This document provides an update on many of the actions taken since the Domestic Violence Action Plan was released. Several new initiatives are now in place to help make a difference in the lives of Nova Scotians affected by domestic violence, however there is still work to be done.

Goals of the Domestic Violence Action Plan

- Make the safety of women and children a priority in government policies and programs
- Build service capacity to target the needs of those affected by domestic violence, including responding to inequities that affect the health and well-being of marginalized populations
- Increase access to programs and services for victims
- Strengthen case processing, coordination and management for victims
- Strengthen case processing, coordination and management to hold those who commit abuse accountable and to support their rehabilitation
- Strengthen knowledge, skills and connections between people who are helping to prevent and address domestic violence
- Focus on planning and policies that build supportive environments (social, political, economical) to help prevent intimate partner violence from happening in the first place.

Acknowledgements

It is important to acknowledge the significant efforts of the community-government Domestic Violence Prevention Committee. Their 2009 report provided the vision, direction and focus for the Domestic Violence Action Plan. Since then, numerous community partners, government departments and provincial agencies have contributed to the work of the Domestic Violence Action Plan. We are committed to continuing to work towards creating a Nova Scotia that is free of domestic violence and abuse.

Goals

- Make the safety of women and children a priority in government policies and programs.
- Build service capacity to target the needs of those affected by domestic violence, including responding to inequities that affect the health and wellbeing of marginalized populations.
- Increase access to programs and services for victims.
- Strengthen case processing, coordination and management for victims.
- Strengthen case processing, coordination, and management to hold those who commit abuse accountable and to support their rehabilitation.
- Strengthen knowledge, skills, and connections between people who are helping to prevent and address domestic violence.
- Focus on planning and policies that build supportive environments (social, political and economic) to help prevent intimate partner violence from happening in the first place.

What we are doing

Government invests significant resources aimed at preventing, responding to, and reducing domestic violence, with legislation, protocols, policies, programs and services in place.

New actions to address domestic violence

We have launched new actions to address recommendations made by a joint community-government Domestic Violence Prevention Committee in 2009. These actions span prevention, victim supports, innovative responses, education, training and legislative change.

Domestic Violence Action Plan Update 2012

Working better together

Government departments are working together and collaboratively with community organizations to improve Nova Scotia's capacity to understand, prevent and respond to domestic violence. Partnerships in research and evaluation, training and community-government networking continue to be areas of focus.

Vision:
All persons in Nova Scotia should live free from domestic violence and abuse.



www.nsdomeesticviolence.ca

As of December 2012, we have made progress in every area of activity outlined in the Domestic Violence Action Plan. Through our actions, we are:

- Building awareness and helping people address domestic violence
- Making it easier for victims to navigate and access services
- Improving case processing through the launch a domestic violence court program pilot
- Making legislative changes to better support victims
- Helping service providers respond to victim needs more effectively
- Improving supports for at risk families and children
- Improving supports for those who commit abuse
- Undertaking research to build Nova Scotia's knowledge base
- Improving education and training opportunities
- Undertaking program assessments
- Developing collaborative partnerships for research, education and evaluation
- Facilitating community government networking
- Collecting first hand experiences on an ongoing basis

Letter from the Premier

Domestic violence is a serious issue that affects thousands of Nova Scotians. It has devastating consequences for victims and leaves a lasting impact on families, friends, communities and our province overall.

For years, police, transition houses, intervention programs, government and communities worked independently to combat domestic violence. Victims struggled with how to come forward and get the help and support they needed, and deserved.

In December 2010, government introduced the Nova Scotia Domestic Violence Action Plan, a three-year provincial strategy to address domestic violence. The plan built on steps this government already took to help victims of domestic violence, including increasing funding for transition houses for the first time in a decade. The following pages are an update on that plan.

A great deal of work has been done since the plan was first introduced. With the help of our community partners, the province has been able to develop new tools and supports for victims, build awareness and understanding among victims and others, find new ways to deal with those who commit abuse, and explore ways to improve existing supports and services.

The only way to really make a difference for those living with domestic violence is for everyone involved to work

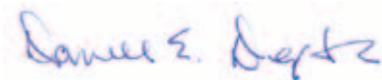
together. This is work government would not—and could not—have done without the help of community partners.

There's no doubt that there is still work to be done. Domestic violence is larger than the Domestic Violence Action Plan. It touches individuals, families, employers and communities, and for that reason, addressing it is going to take time.

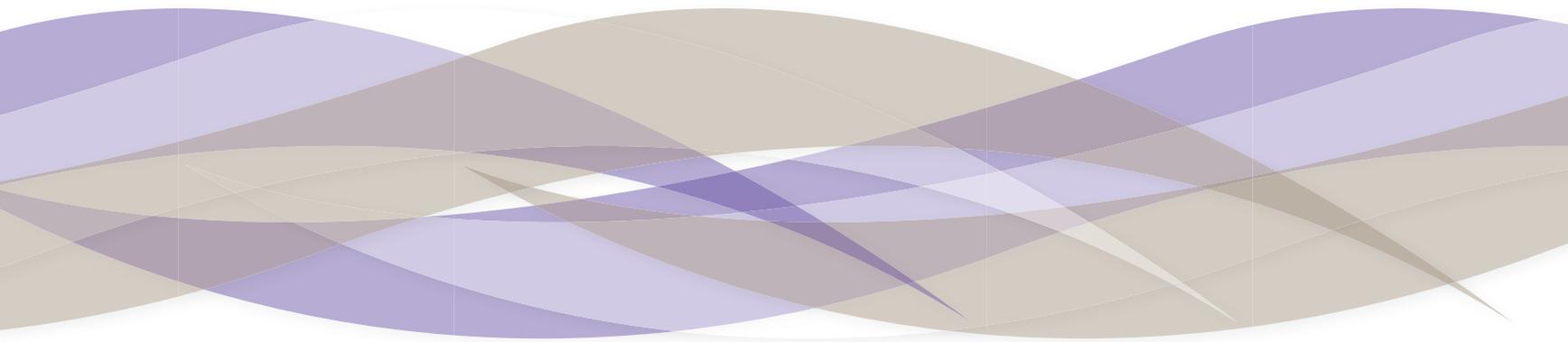
I want to acknowledge those who have been touched by this issue. To the victims for their courage in coming forward and asking for help; to the friend or neighbour who tried to help instead of looking the other way; to the transition house worker who offered a safe haven and a kind word; to all those who have helped a victim of domestic violence—thank you.

I encourage you to read on to learn more about what has been done, and to see what you can do to help. Together, we will continue to work to improve the lives of the far too many Nova Scotia families who continue to experience domestic violence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Darrell E. Dexter". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name of the Premier.

The Honourable Premier Darrell Dexter



Highlights

“We’ve been able to take the best parts of other court programs and incorporate them into our approach. We’re working as a team with the courts and those connected with the case to change behaviour in ways that make lives better and safer for everyone involved. As Chief Crown Attorney for this region, I am very pleased everyone worked together in rolling this new court program out.”

Dan MacRury

Chief Crown Attorney,
Sydney, Nova Scotia

Domestic Violence Court Program

The Domestic Violence Court Program was created to prevent future violence and help keep victims and their children safe. Launched in June 2012, the pilot program is a first for Nova Scotia and offers quicker access to programs for those who commit abuse so they can change their behavior.

This pilot program gives offenders from Cape Breton Regional Municipality the option to enter a guilty plea so they can take part in an educational/therapeutic program designed to help them better understand their behavior.

In its first four months:

- 253 cases proceeded through the court system
- 123 individuals expressed interest in the program
- 26 individuals pleaded guilty and started, or are waiting to start, the program



“The DV website is a valuable and well used resource for workers, communities, and families who are looking for information and support. It gives anyone affected by domestic violence easier access to useful, relevant, and in some cases - life saving, information.”

Bea LeBlanc

Chair of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on Status of Women

www.nsdomeesticviolence.ca

In March 2011, www.nsdomeesticviolence.ca was introduced to help victims of domestic violence and others find important information. The website centralizes useful and relevant information and resources on domestic violence. Since its launch, the website has received more than 129,000 visits.



The site includes resources for victims, people who want to help victims, medical professionals and researchers. It also includes an extensive list of frontline service providers that offer domestic violence supports and services. The site is currently being translated and will soon be available in French.

“We are very pleased to be working collaboratively with the province and community volunteers to deliver this program. We are also happy to provide skilled counsellors for the Neighbours, Friends and Families phone line.”

Pamela Harrison

Provincial Co-ordinator
Transition House Association of Nova Scotia

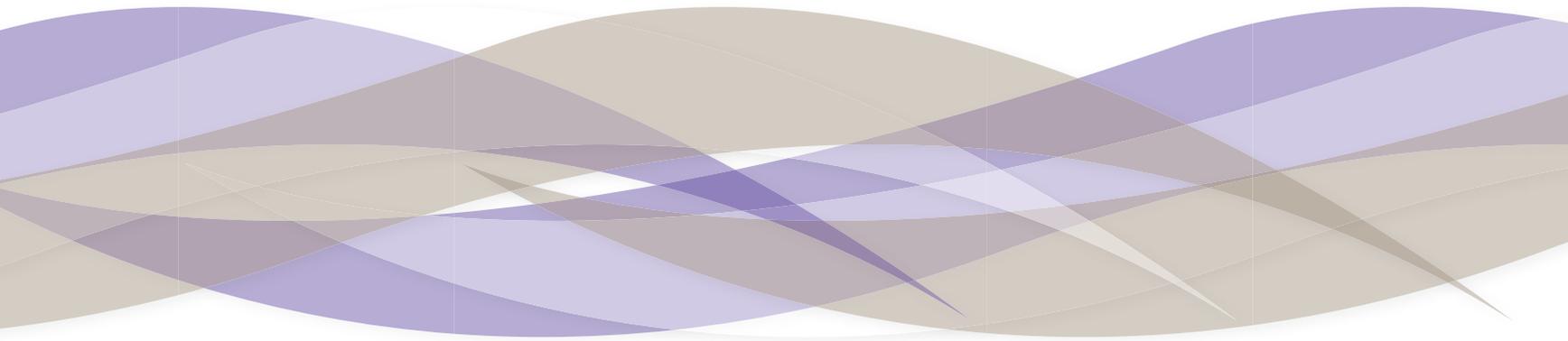
Neighbours, Friends and Families Public Education Campaign

In October 2012, Neighbours, Friends and Families was launched in Nova Scotia. This is a public education and awareness program to help people spot signs of domestic violence and teach them to approach possible victims without making the situation worse.

In September 2012, people from groups such as law enforcement, transition houses, intervention programs, First Nations and government were trained to educate community members about effectively supporting victims of violence. They will reach out to people at their places of work and in their communities with presentations.

As part of the campaign, the province worked with the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia to establish the province's first domestic violence toll-free line at 1-855-225-0220. Transition house staff from across the province monitor the line 24 hours a day and provide support on how to help the abused, or abuser and spot warning signs of abuse.





Work Complete
or Ongoing

Annual Public Opinion Poll on Domestic Violence in Nova Scotia

Province-wide polls were conducted in 2011 and 2012 to better understand Nova Scotian's perspectives on domestic violence.

Highlights include:

- 95 per cent of respondents recognized domestic violence as a crime.
- People are more willing to talk about having been a victim of domestic violence and to intervene on domestic violence situations than they were five years ago.
- 77 per cent of respondents indicated they would know where to get help or support for someone dealing with domestic violence, but awareness of specific services and resources was lower.

Statistical Reports on Domestic Violence

Fact sheets were created featuring updated highlights from the Department of Justice's July 2010 report, *A statistical portrait of intimate partner violence: Nova Scotia and Canadian perspectives*. Topics include prevalence of violence, assistance provided by victim services agencies and public opinion related to domestic violence. The fact sheets are available online at www.nsdomesticviolence.ca.

Updated Domestic Violence Educator Training

Domestic violence educator training curriculum has been updated with new information and research on risk factors, safety planning, cultural diversity and partner policies. Training took place in November 2011 and included domestic violence educators from government and community organizations such as law enforcement, courts, legal aid, public prosecution and the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia. Train the trainer sessions are held every three years, with training updates for educators every year.

Safety Planning Resources

Information and planning resources are now easily accessible to help victims with safety planning. The new materials were distributed in conjunction with the Neighbours, Friends and Families training sessions and are available at www.nsdomesticviolence.ca, transition houses, courts and other community-based agencies.

Parenting Journey Program

Throughout 2012, a parenting program for high-risk families was held at the Nova Scotia Youth Facility and Cape Breton Correctional Centre. Sessions focused on the impact a parent's behavior can have on a child. Topics discussed included age appropriate behavior for parents, disciplinary measures, and the effect a parent's chosen peers/community can have on children.

More SchoolsPlus Access Points

Therapists who provide counseling services to children exposed to domestic violence through the province's Criminal Injuries Counseling Program can also counsel students in a SchoolsPlus designated school if a child's family prefers that option. With the expansion of SchoolsPlus, this option is now available to more children in Nova Scotia.

Health Link 811

Nova Scotians experiencing domestic violence can now call the province-wide HealthLink 811 toll-free line to receive advice and information from registered nurses and connect with services in their communities.

Enhanced Supervised Access and Exchange Program

The province's Supervised Access and Exchange Program will now allow parents/guardians affected by domestic violence and who are involved in the family justice system supervised access to their children. Until recently, this service was only available in the areas of the province served by the Supreme Court (Family Division). The goal, wherever possible and safe to do so, is to reunite families or strengthen family relationships. The program has been expanded into all areas served by Family Court. Training has already been delivered in Bridgewater, Pictou/New Glasgow, Kentville, Amherst, Cape Breton Regional Municipality and Halifax.

Providing more services in French

Domestic violence presentations were made to key Francophone stakeholders. Domestic violence resources such as www.nsdomesticviolence.ca and the Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign have been, or are in the process of being, translated into French. Government is committed to providing domestic violence resources in French when and where possible.

Provide Support and Mentoring for Male Youth/Children

On an ongoing basis, training will be offered to staff of government-funded community-based organizations that work with male adults, youth and children. These training opportunities may be delivered directly by a government department or community-based organization. Recent training included a skill-building workshop on how to work with victims or perpetrators of domestic violence.

Gathering and sharing of information

To better understand domestic violence, over the past year first-hand domestic violence experiences were collected through an online tool called the *Dialogue on Domestic Violence Survey*. The survey tool is currently being piloted with an extensive group of community and government representatives and more than 120 first-hand experiences have already been submitted. Nova Scotians will be invited to complete the survey once the pilot program is complete. This information will be used to better inform government and community partners on how to address domestic violence.

Facilitate Community Government Networking Sessions

Work is underway to ensure community and government have opportunities to build understanding and awareness and share information and successes with one another through networking opportunities. More than 32 sessions have taken place to date including:

Regional discussions

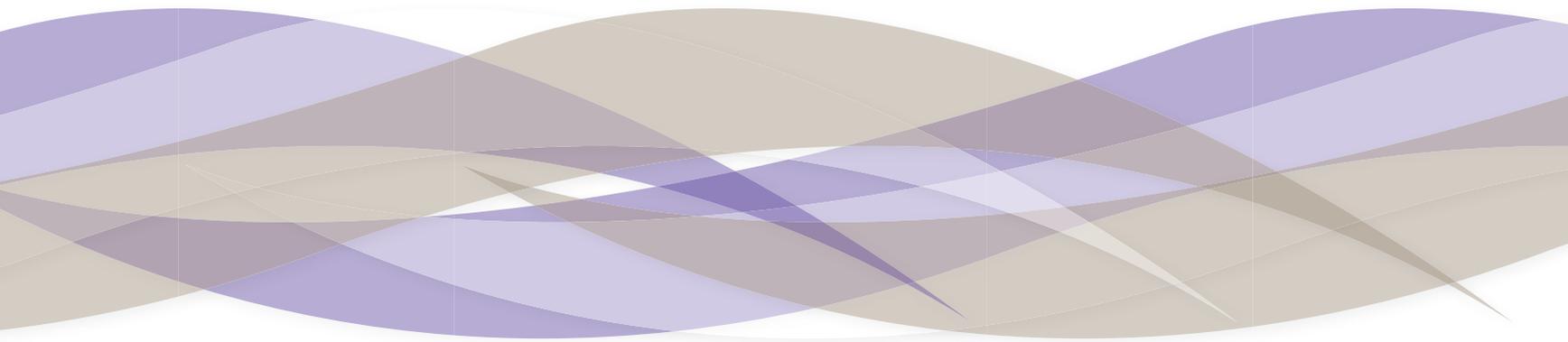
Throughout 2011-12, regional discussions were held across the province led by the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women to determine how community groups want to interact and share information with government.

The 4th Annual Crime Prevention Symposium

Community and government coordinated efforts to showcase community excellence in crime prevention, including prevention approaches for children and youth, men's intervention programs, women in custody who are victims of domestic violence, and the role of transition houses and second-stage housing.

Ensure Policies and Practices are in Place to Enforce Domestic Violence Laws

Nova Scotia's policies and practices related to victims are currently being reviewed to ensure our laws are properly enforced. The goal is to provide consistent service across the province while maintaining some flexibility and discretion based on the circumstances of each case. It is expected that this project will move ahead in 2013 once analysis is complete.



Work Underway

Residential Tenancies Act

Government is taking steps to amend the Residential Tenancies Act to allow a tenant who is a victim of domestic violence to end their lease early. This legislation was introduced in November 2012.

Updates to Family Law Legislation

Through changes to the Maintenance and Custody Act, legislation will soon be in place requiring courts to consider the impact of family violence when assessing the best interests of the child. After extensive consultation, the bill to amend the Maintenance and Custody Act received Royal Assent in May 2012 and is expected to come into effect in early 2013.

Police Act Amendment

An amendment to the Police Act ensures police refer victims of domestic violence and other crimes to local victim services. Law enforcement and the province are currently working on the regulations for this amendment and it is expected to be proclaimed in 2013.

Develop Common Language for Cases Where Domestic Violence and Custody and Access Issues Coincide

The Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service has developed common language for release orders or conditions in cases where domestic violence and custody and access issues coincide. The language gives Crown Prosecutors the flexibility to adapt orders/conditions based on circumstances when required.

Family Violence and the Workplace Training Resource

Nine provincial government departments and agencies are working together to develop training resources for employers and employees on how to approach a co-worker experiencing family violence. Family violence covers a broader range of violence including elder, child and intimate partner abuse.

Legal Information for Newcomers and Immigrants

The Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, community partners and government are working together to develop legal information on domestic violence for newcomers and immigrants. Brochures, a poster and a bookmark will be available in eight languages in early 2013.

Formal Process for Joint Case Conferencing

To help service providers better respond to victims, committees across the province are hosting Regional Family Violence Tables. The tables allow service providers the chance to discuss how best to serve the needs of high risk families on a case-by-case basis. An evaluation of these tables is currently underway to develop recommendations on how to move forward.

Men's Intervention Programs

Work is underway with men's intervention programs to establish a framework of standards to ensure consistent services are available from all men's intervention programs throughout the province.

Nova Scotia Intimate Partner Violence Tracking Project

This project is unique to Canada and tracks cases of intimate partner violence through each stage of the criminal justice system. Recent results of this project can be found at www.nsdomeesticviolence.ca.

Educating the Health Sector on Domestic Violence

Work is underway to develop a policy and guidelines to help health care providers respond to domestic violence. This will ensure health care responders and students in health professions have access to training, educational materials and resources.

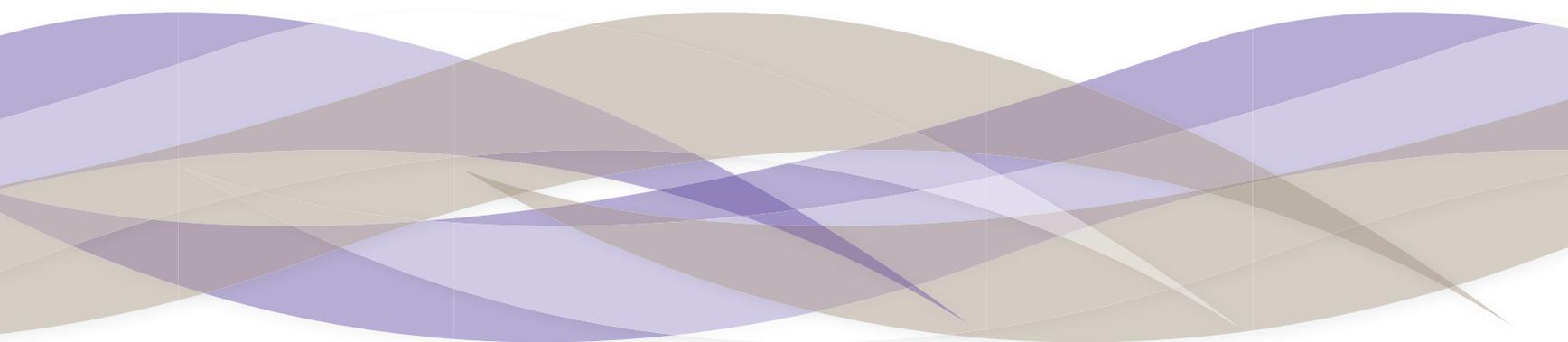
The Department of Health and Wellness hosted a Health Equity Forum in 2012 on domestic violence. Participants were from community agencies, health organizations, healthcare providers, government and academia. They reinforced the need for safety planning, prevention, supporting aboriginal communities and making materials accessible to Nova Scotians in all their diversity.

Transition Houses and Second-stage Housing Upgrades

Government invested in transition houses and second-stage housing in 2011-12 to complete health and safety renovations, energy efficiency and security related repairs and upgrades in shelters and transition houses across the province. Government continues to work with shelters and transition houses to identify areas to improve energy efficiency and security.

Options for Second-stage Housing

A Mi'kmaq consultant will research second-stage housing models (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) and work with relevant Aboriginal service providers and organizations to identify and prioritize the programs, services, and model components necessary to meet both the cultural and safety needs of Aboriginal women and their children.



Work Ahead

A great deal of work has been completed or is underway, however there are still areas that require further development. We remain committed to addressing all areas of the Domestic Violence Action Plan.

Surplus Cell Phones to Victims

Providing surplus cell phones to victims remains a priority and government continues to pursue the best option to ensure the phones are accessible and reliable. Government is currently looking at other jurisdictions with similar programs and exploring potential partnerships within the community to ensure a successful rollout in Nova Scotia.

Case Conferences as Part of High Risk Case Coordination Protocol

Draft case conferencing models are being reviewed to determine the most appropriate application to be used across the province. Case conferencing models bring together those who offer supports to high-risk families to ensure they receive the best possible service and support.

Introduce a Caring Dads Pilot and Expand Supports for Male Adults, Youth and Children

Government will work with men's intervention programs to explore how the Parenting Journey Program can be adapted to support fathers.

Review Early Childhood Development Curriculum to Incorporate Domestic Violence Education

Consultation will take place with early childhood education training partners such as universities and colleges, to identify areas where domestic violence is addressed in curricula and where the topic could be enhanced.

Domestic Violence Training Partnership

Work is underway to create a Domestic Violence Training Partnership – a coordinated approach that would ensure resources are used effectively and consistent materials are available. The Health Equity Forum on Domestic Violence and Neighbours, Friends and Families training sessions have helped lay the groundwork for the partnership.

Domestic Violence Research Partnership

Government is working with community agencies and academic institutions across Nova Scotia to develop a way to share information and harness one another's research capabilities. A preliminary session was held in 2012 with a commitment to continue discussions.



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