

## **Ministers' Table on Gender Based Violence**

### **Meeting Summary – May 26, 2026**

The third meeting of the Ministers' Table on Gender Based Violence was held in Halifax on May 26, 2026.

There were more than 75 people in attendance. The meeting included community members along with 9 ministers and numerous delegates and senior leaders from 11 government departments and offices:

- Department of Justice
- Department of Opportunities and Social Development
- Status of Women Office
- Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs
- Office of L'nu Affairs
- Office of Equity and Anti-Racism
- Department of Health and Wellness
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Department of Growth and Development
- Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration
- Office of Addictions and Mental Health
- Executive Council Office

### **Lived Experiences Fishbowl Exercise**

The day started with everyone present hearing the voices of 8 community Table members through a fishbowl exercise. This exercise is an innovative, trauma-informed, survivor-centred approach to creating a listening space, for sharing stories and experiences about complex, sensitive topics, ensuring Table member voices are heard, building trust and creating a shared understanding of the issues.

Members spoke candidly about their lived experiences navigating health and justice systems, offering real-world insight for ministers and senior officials to take back to their departments. There was strong alignment on the need for prevention, education, and coordinated approaches, with success defined by survivors being safe, supported, housed, and able to make meaningful choices. The exercise was concluded with participants offering one word of reflection which included: grace, inspiration, growth, accountability, reconciliation, courage, and vulnerability.



## **Ministers' Remarks**

Minister Leah Martin, Minister Scott Armstrong, and Minister Michelle Thompson spoke at the meeting:

- They expressed gratitude for the vulnerability and courage of those willing to share experiences and expertise. They noted this is instrumental in helping uncover what needs to change, and in moving from conversation to action.
- They noted that lasting change requires the kind of collaboration we are moving to with a multi-sectoral, government-wide approach to gender-based violence.
- They highlighted the work that has been done since the first and second Table meetings, including the legislative change in the emergency protection order process to 90 days.

## **Discussion Areas**

The meeting agenda focused on three key areas:

1. Action Group reporting back:
  - a. How We Work Together Guidelines
  - b. Domestic Violence Intervention Act – Emergency Protection Orders
2. Action Sessions:
  - a. Supportive Housing and Homelessness Policy Framework
  - b. Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency Priority Access Policy
  - c. Employment Supports and Income Assistance Gender Based Violence Protocol
  - d. Sector Mapping and 211
  - e. Federal Men and Boys' Health Strategy
3. Restorative Justice

### **1a. How We Work Together Guidelines**

The updated How We Work Together Guidelines co-created by all Table members were presented. The guidelines reflect member feedback and have been strengthened through equity and gender-based analysis plus review.

The guidelines act as the essential document – the backbone – for how the Table works, and how Table Members interact with each other. It ensures productive, meaningful collaborative relationships between government and community. The guidelines were agreed on and finalized, recognizing it is a living document that will be revisited regularly.

#### ***Action Items:***

*Consensus and agreement were reached, and a yearly review will take place in the fall.*

### **1b. Domestic Violence Intervention Act / Emergency Protection Order Action Group**

The Action Group gave an update on how they are examining current processes and identifying opportunities to improve clarity, accessibility, and effectiveness.

#### ***Action Items:***

*The Action Group will finalize draft proposed options for amendments. These will be shared with Table members for feedback in advance of the September 2026 meeting.*

## **2. Action Sessions**



In the afternoon, more than 10 government and community partners led interactive action sessions, drawing on Table members' expertise and lived experience to refine the policies and initiatives they are developing and ensure they remain survivor-informed and survivor-centred.

### **2a. Supportive Housing and Homelessness Policy Framework**

The Department of Opportunities and Social Development presented on the framework. Members discussed how it should reflect prevention, strong supports, and the realities of gender-based violence while balancing individual needs and community safety. A key insight was to ensure the policy framework is in alignment with human rights and accessibility.

### **2b. Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency Priority Access Policy**

The agency facilitated a discussion on its Priority Access Policy. It is being updated to remove barriers and accelerate access to deeply affordable rent-g geared-to-income public housing for survivors of gender-based violence. A key insight was the need for education and awareness around the agency and this policy.

### **2c. Employment Supports and Income Assistance Gender Based Violence Protocol**

The Department of Opportunities and Social Development facilitated a discussion on modernizing the protocol. Members provided input, including applying intersecting lenses and perspectives to help caseworkers better respond to the needs and realities of individuals experiencing family violence. A key insight was the needed emphasis on intergenerational trauma, debriefing processes, and understanding red flags, particularly when supporting youth.

### **2d. Sector Mapping and 211**

The Department of Justice and 211 facilitated a journey mapping project to identify barriers to seeking help. Members contributed insights on lived experience, system gaps, and clearer, more accessible language. A key insight was that navigation systems that exist need to do a better job of meeting people where they are, taking the burden off those seeking help.

## **2e. Men and Boys Health Federal Strategy**

The Office of Addictions and Mental Health, Executive Council Office, and the Department of Health and Wellness led a discussion on key issues shaping a federal Men and Boys Health Strategy and how this work can support prevention and broader system change. A key insight was the importance of culturally appropriate supports, programs and services for men and boys.

### **Action Items:**

*Each session generated clear action items, and hosts will follow up with the Table to share ongoing engagement opportunities, outcomes, and next steps.*



## **3. Restorative Justice**

The day ended with a preview presentation to Table Members about restorative justice in Nova Scotia and future opportunities to reopen dialogue on the use of restorative approaches in cases of sexual violence and intimate partner violence related harm.

### **Action Items:**

*Ongoing engagement and learning will be taking place, as well as an in-depth discussion on this topic at the next Table meeting.*

**The third meeting of the Ministers' Table on Gender Based Violence is scheduled for Tuesday, September 8, 2026.**