

Ministers' Table on Gender-Based Violence

Meeting Summary – September 8th, 2026

The fourth meeting of the Ministers' Table on Gender Based Violence was held in Dartmouth on September 8th, 2026.

There were more than 65 people in attendance. The meeting included community members along with 5 ministers and numerous delegates and senior leaders from 9 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'nú Affairs
- Department of Health and Wellness
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Department of Growth and Development
- Office of Addictions and Mental Health

Sector Experiences Fishbowl Exercise

The day started with everyone present hearing the voices of six community Table Members through a fishbowl exercise. This exercise is an innovative, trauma-informed, survivor-centred approach that creates a safe space for Table members to share their stories and experiences on complex, sensitive topics. It ensures Table member voices are heard, builds trust and supports a shared understanding of the issues.

Members spoke from their sector and organizational experience including perspectives of municipal police, transition house services, immigrant and newcomers, youth, trans and queer, and men and boys. They spoke candidly about their sector experiences and the realities, challenges and opportunities, offering real-world insight for ministers and senior officials to take back to their departments.

There was strong alignment on the need for co-ordinated approaches for better system navigation for survivors, training and education, sector support, and prevention.

Fishbowl participants offered one word of reflection at the end of the exercise, which included: collaboration, hope, change, and action. Meeting attendees and Table members were then asked to reflect on what they heard, learned and what they were taking away from the experiences shared. Their responses included: collaboration, system navigation, understanding of intersectionality and cultural responsiveness, and ideas that focus on prevention and empowerment.

Ministers' Remarks

Minister Leah Martin and Minister Scott Armstrong spoke at the meeting:

Minister Armstrong highlighted the work that was done over the past year including the legislation passed on extending Emergency Protection Orders from 30 days to up to one year, and work ahead to make sure the Intimate Images and Cyber-protection Act continues to provide meaningful protections and supports as technology evolves.

Minister Martin highlighted milestones including the insights provided by the Table on Bill C-16, the Federal Men and Boys Health Strategy, and various housing initiatives and policies. Minister Martin also noted that her government caucus colleagues participated in Gender-based Analysis Plus Training.

Both ministers acknowledged the importance of the Table and the members' ongoing contributions and commitment, recognizing there is more work to be done in the year ahead.

Discussion Areas

The meeting agenda focused on five key areas:

1. Understanding the Restorative Justice Process through Front-line and Community-based Perspectives: A Panel Discussion and Small Group Dialogue
2. Action Session reporting back (from May):
 - 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. Action Sessions:
 - a. Intimate Images and Deep Fakes in the age of AI
 - b. Healthy Schools for Safe Futures Initiative
 - c. Engaging Nova Scotians on Restorative Justice and Gender-Based Violence: Engagement Design, Core Principles, and Shared Values
4. A Year in Review
5. Preview topics:
 - a. Newcomers and gender-based violence
 - b. Nova Scotia's response to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two Spirit Calls for Justice

1. Understanding the Restorative Justice (RJ) Process through Front-line and Community-based Perspectives: A Panel Discussion and Small Group Dialogue

Staff from Department of Justice's Restorative Initiatives Unit (RIU) provided a presentation on what the restorative justice process looks like in Nova Scotia and then facilitated a panel discussion with three leaders from community-based restorative justice agencies. The panel provided insight into what restorative justice looks like in the day to day, highlighting tangible examples and demonstrated what impact the process has for participants. Following the panel, members engaged in facilitated small group discussions where they shared their thoughts, insights, and highlighted areas for continued learning and exploration. Themes from these discussions included exploring how restorative justice may be applied in complex cases, considerations related to referral and support processes, approaches to accountability and repair, and the importance of capacity, safety, and culturally responsive practices.

Action Items:

A background document will be created to provide answers and additional information in response to the questions Table members raised during the small group dialogues.

2. Action Sessions Report back (from May)

2a. Supportive Housing and Homelessness Policy Framework

The Department of Opportunities and Social Development reported back that feedback from the May session reshaped how future engagement sessions frame safety and inclusion. They also confirmed that a robust engagement process gathered input from people with lived experience, sector leaders, and partner organizations, and the "What We Heard" report and policy framework (due later in the fall) will be shared with all Table Members.

Action Items:

The Department of Opportunities and Social Development will share the final Supportive Housing and Homelessness Framework publicly (and with Table Members) later this fall.

2b. Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency Priority Access Policy

The Department of Growth and Development reported back on Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency's new Survivors of Gender-Based Violence Priority Access Policy, informed by feedback from the Ministers' Table and implemented in September following Ministerial approval. The policy aligns with the Survivors of Gender-Based Violence Benefit and provides a clear, trauma-informed process for prioritization access to public housing for eligible applicants and tenants seeking transfer.

Action Items:

The Department of Growth and Development has shared the policy link to all Table members and thanked them for their expertise, insights and knowledge to ensure this policy meets the goals of removing barriers and accelerating access to deeply affordable public housing for survivors of gender-based violence.

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

The Department of Opportunities and Social Development shared that they have summarized and reviewed all feedback received and is continuing its work on revising the Gender-Based Violence protocol, with key changes that broaden the focus from intimate partner violence to gender-based violence, make the protocol user-friendly and practical for caseworkers, and identify clear referral pathways. They shared that Table member feedback is also helping inform related policy and procedure work.

Action Items:

A revised draft will go forward for internal consultation across Employment Supports and Income Assistance program areas and external consultation, with a working draft protocol to be shared in December with Table members.

2d. Sector Mapping with 211

The Department of Justice reported back on their partnership with 211 Nova Scotia and the sector-mapping exercise they conducted. This included the 211 NS database uses a 9000-term taxonomy from which an extensive and comprehensive list of gender-based violence specific and related terms were developed and resulted in a province-wide gender-based violence-responsive services and supports data set. They also highlighted seven key insights that included: under-served and under-represented communities face compounded barriers, people speak in stories -not service categories, and that services must be reachable, safe, appropriate, and responsive.

Action Items:

211 will continue to work towards refining the information.

2e. Federal Men and Boys Health Strategy

The Office of Addictions and Mental Health and the Department of Health and Wellness reported back on the insights gathered and which supported the finalization of a cross-government provincial response to the federal government. This included insights on the importance of culturally appropriate supports, programs and services for men and boys as well as stigma reduction.

Action Items:

The full federal strategy will be shared with Table members upon its release (anticipated in fall 2026).

3. Action Sessions

In the afternoon, more than 8 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.

3a. Intimate Images and Deep Fakes in the age of AI

The Department of Justice's CyberSCAN unit hosted an action session on understanding current legislation, and participants were invited to share their perspectives and consider the opportunities and potential implementation and operationalization considerations, risks, and barriers for change, including how to best support people who have been impacted by non-consensual intimate image sharing and/or cyberbullying.

The themes from the session included: improving awareness, capacity, coordination, and training related to cyber safety and legislation, including clearer police and referral pathways, frontline advisory feedback loops, easier access to provincial knowledge, and stronger school-age education. Participants also emphasized modernizing legislation and strengthening data, research, and partnerships to support online safety.

3b. Healthy Schools for Safe Futures Initiative

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development presented on their new project, Healthy Schools for Safe Futures, that will support educators in implementing the new Gender-Based Violence prevention curriculum. The action session focused on gathering valuable Table member insights to ensure that the training and resources are relevant, inclusive, trauma-informed, and informed by first voice and lived experience, community expertise, frontline practice, and research.

Themes and insights from the action session included: tailored supports for newcomer and English as a Second Language students, student and teacher feedback, safe spaces and trusted people, parent/community resources, and meaningful community involvement. It also stresses the need for educators to be equipped to have difficult conversations and understand duty-to-report responsibilities in culturally responsive ways.

3c. Engaging Nova Scotians on Restorative Justice and Gender-Based Violence: Engagement Design, Core Principles, and Shared Values

The Department of Justice's Restorative Initiatives Unit facilitated a discussion on planning for their upcoming engagement. Members provided input on the design and approach.

Action Items:

As the work progresses, updates will be shared with the Table.

4. A Year in Review

A short presentation was given highlighting the outcomes and milestones of the past year of the Ministers' Table. It included building the conditions to ensure meaningful participation and accountability through a shared way of working, taking an iterative, flexible approach, trauma-informed supports, and direct feedback loops. The milestones highlighted the policies, programs, and cross-government actions that the Table engaged on including: public housing priority access, Federal Bill C-16, Intimate images, Emergency Protection Orders, healthy schools for safe futures, 211 and journey mapping, and restorative justice (among many others).

Action Items:

Table Members will be engaged in reflection over the fall months to offer their feedback and insights on the past year, as well as planning for the year ahead.

5. Preview topics:

The day ended with two short presentations on preview topics that will be part of the agenda for following Table meetings.

5a. Nova Scotia Response to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two Spirit (MMIWG2S)

The Office of L'nu Affairs planted the seeds for the MMIWG2S agenda item expected in March 2027 by highlighting a short video clip about the National Inquiry and how L'nu Affairs is advancing this work forward with its partners.

5b. Newcomers and gender-based violence

Two Table members from the newcomer and immigrant-serving sector introduced the topic for December, emphasizing the need to deepen the Table's understanding of how settlement experiences and barriers to support can increase the risk of gender-based violence.

The fifth meeting of the Ministers' Table on Gender-Based Violence is scheduled for Tuesday, December 1st, 2026.