

Responding to Domestic Violence

Domestic violence has existed for generations but has only been publicly acknowledged as an important issue in the last few decades. Although numbers vary, it is estimated that, every 6 days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner, and approximately 22% of police-reported incidents are related to domestic violence.

Over the last 19 months, we have witnessed a pandemic *within* a pandemic. Physical and social isolation, economic stress, and the uncertainty of dealing with an unprecedented global health crisis have created a perfect storm for increasing domestic violence. The lockdowns imposed by governments to help restrict the rate of infections have made it harder for domestic violence survivors to seek help.

Liberal

In 2017, the Liberal government launched the Gender-Based Violence Strategy. Since then, it has committed \$200 million dollars to prevent gender-based violence, to support survivors, and to promote responsive legal and justice systems. It has committed to an ongoing \$40 million for the strategy. It is developing a 10-year National Action Plan to End Gender Violence and has committed \$601.3 million to this work. It plans to begin negotiations with the provinces and territories within a year.

The Liberal's 2021 budget has set out \$30 million over 5 years for the department of Women and Gender Equality Canada. This money is to support crisis hotlines in providing more robust services, resources, and assistance to prevent the escalation of gender-based violence. It provides \$50 million over 5 years for the Public Health Agency of Canada to design and deliver interventions to promote safe relationships and prevent family violence. The budget also included \$85.3 million over 5 years to support a national program for independent legal advice and legal representation for sexual assault victims and pilot projects for domestic violence survivors. The Liberal platform includes working with the provinces and territories to enact Clare's Law, which enables domestic abuse survivors to request information from the police about their partner's criminal history, including sexual assault, domestic violence, arrests, and restraining orders.

Conservative

The Conservatives' platform places a strong focus on strengthening the *Criminal Code* to impose tougher sentences on those who commit domestic violence. They plan on adding a provision in the Code to specify that domestic violence is an indictable offence and would include a minimum penalty of 2 years. They would prohibit anyone under a peace bond or protective order from possessing weapons such as fire arms. The platform also includes enacting Clare's Law.

To support survivors of domestic violence, the Conservatives' platform includes expanding the Canada Child Benefit by \$500 per month per child for the first year, and \$250 for the second year per child for women living in women's shelters with their children. The money is targeted to help women with transitioning to more long-term

housing. Given that both shelters and transition houses do not have the funds to house survivors for an extended period, the stipulation that survivors must be residing in a shelter limits the number of mothers that will be able to access it. The Conservatives also promise to provide funds to create a partnership among women's shelters and educational institutions and private sector organizations to provide career training to the women the shelters serve. They also promise to assist survivors in hiding their new location from abusers but do not state how this will be done.

NDP

The NDP is committing to provide stable core funding to women's organizations that support and advocate for domestic abuse survivors. They will deliver a National Action Plan to end gender-based violence that will include funding to shelters and programs to ensure that these shelters and programs are available throughout the country. They also plan on amending the *Canada Labour Code* to include 10 days of domestic violence leave.

Green

The Green Party's platform includes investing \$40 million over 4 years in the Shelter Enhancement Program to increase access to shelters. It will provide over 2,100 new and renovated spaces in first-stage shelters and hundreds of spaces in transition houses. It will develop a national action plan, in collaboration with women's and Indigenous organizations, to eliminate violence against women, girls, and gender-diverse people. It will have a timetable and dedicated funding.

Conclusion

Domestic violence continues to be an issue that has not been addressed adequately in Canada and globally. The survivors of domestic violence deserve to be protected, deserve to be able to escape violence and have the necessary assistance to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children. It needs to be a coordinated response from all levels of government, women's organizations, and labour.

To achieve this, there needs to be stable funding and support for shelters and transition houses that assist survivors. Appropriate funding and resources also need to be provided for mental health services, legal aid, affordable housing, and income supports. Also needed is labour legislation that includes job-protected leave for workers experiencing domestic leave, workplace protections, and occupational health and safety standards.

Finally, to end the cycle, there must be educational programs, mental health services, and resources starting within the school system, workplaces, and the justice system to address the root causes of domestic violence.

