

**Canadian Federation of University Women Ontario Council Speakers' Series -
Women in a Covid Economy
Saturday, Nov. 19, 2020
Event: 10 a.m.-noon**

Good morning everyone and thank you to the Canadian Federation of University Women for inviting me to be here. Today's agenda is so relevant to the work of the Canadian Women's Foundation, and I'm looking forward to hearing from fellow speakers and from those who've joined us in the Q&A.

I'm going to start by painting a picture of how the pandemic is impacting gender-based violence in Canada, and then talk about how the Canadian Women's Foundation is responding, and a few simple ways you can get involved.

So we're now about eight long months into living with the pandemic in Canada. For a while, we managed to flatten the curve, but the second wave is now triggering another round of social restrictions and lockdowns. The number of cases keeps increasing and it's hard to predict when this will be over.

Since the pandemic started, we've known that its impact is gendered - whether we're talking about its impact on the economy or how it's playing out in people's homes. And when we think about women, girls, trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary people who were living in violent or abusive family situations before the pandemic, it's absolutely heart-wrenching to think about the challenges they're up against now.

In a recent [news article](#), the Executive Director of Vancouver's Battered Women's Support Services said: "What women are saying is that it's like a pressure cooker in the house and there isn't a valve."

In homes where there's a baseline of misogyny, controlling behaviours, and violence, you can see how our current circumstances would put women and girls even higher risk. Families across the country are now coping with multiple stressors, including:

- job losses and reduced income
- food insecurity
- issues related to childcare and education
- fears about contracting the virus
- exacerbated mental health issues
- disrupted family routines, and reduced access to services and resources

Even before COVID-19, we faced an unacceptable level of gender-based violence in Canada. On average a woman is killed by her intimate partner every six days. And we know that some groups were at even higher risk of violence: women with disabilities, Indigenous women, young women, trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary people, just to mention a few.

Statistics show that in past pandemics and disasters, there has been a bump in terms of gender-based violence. With the necessity of physical distancing, women may now be trapped at home with abusers and controlled/monitored more, less able to escape, find reprieve, or reach out for help. A crisis call helpline in Quebec [has noted an increase in calls](#) from family, friends and employers of women living in abusive situations, because they recognize these women are more isolated and they are worried about what's going on. **This slide shows just a few of the statistics we're seeing about gender-based violence in Canada.**



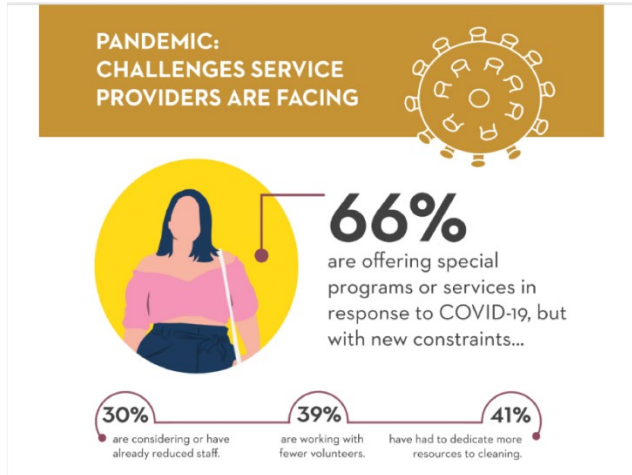
DURING THE PANDEMIC, THE RISK OF GBV HAS INCREASED

- The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses says 20 per cent of the 70 shelters it represents have had increased crisis calls. (City News)
- Domestic disturbance calls to police have gone up. (Statistics Canada)
- One in 10 women is concerned about the possibility of violence in the home. (Statistics Canada)

So these are just some of the impacts of the pandemic on those experiencing gender-based violence. But we also need to think about what staff at crisis lines, shelters, and other service providers are facing when it comes to providing these urgently needed services.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Foundation surveyed 120 organizations that offer services to women and girls, trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary people to get a better sense of what they're dealing with. Many of these are services that had been chronically underfunded and were struggling to meet demand prior to the pandemic.

The survey indicated that they quickly had to pivot to adapt their services while facing various new constraints, **some of which are illustrated in the next slide.**



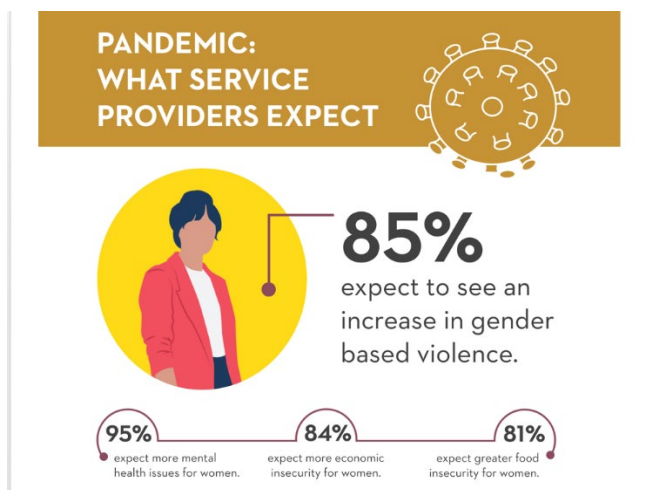
Those constraints include:

- Staffing and volunteer shortfalls
- Increased technology expenses related to providing services remotely
- Higher costs related to more rigorous sanitation protocols and protective equipment
- Lower capacity to hold events and fundraise in their own communities

In fact, 80 per cent of the survey respondents were concerned about their ability to continue offering services.

We also heard that programs we fund are doing their best to support their clients through the new pandemic-related barriers. For example, at women's shelters there's more uncertainty about when and where women can safely find longer-term housing, and when normal court processes can proceed - these are steps that are crucial to helping them rebuild their lives.

Other organizations are working to meet different needs than they usually do, perhaps helping to address food insecurity in the community, or working to make sure clients have tools like smartphones and tablets so they can continue to access services remotely. **At the same time, as this slide shows, the majority of** organizations expect to see increased demand, not only related to gender-based violence, but also to mental health and financial uncertainty.



So how is the Canadian Women's Foundation responding?

First, for those who don't know the Foundation, we are national leader in the movement for gender equality in Canada. Through funding, research, advocacy, and knowledge sharing, the Foundation works to achieve systemic change that includes all women. By supporting community programs, the Foundation empowers women and girls to move themselves out of violence, out of poverty, and into confidence and leadership.

Launched in 1991 to address a critical need for philanthropy focused on women, the Canadian Women's Foundation is one of the largest women's foundations in the world. With the support of donors, the Foundation has raised more than \$100 million and funded over 1,950 programs throughout the country.

One of the Foundation's key pillars of work is preventing and addressing gender-based violence. And we do that at various levels - from the grassroots right up to the federal government. Across Canada, we provide funding to programs and services that help to prevent gender-based violence, whether it's dating violence, sexual harassment or assault, intimate partner or family violence. We also fund programs and services that help women and children to rebuild their lives after leaving abusive situations.

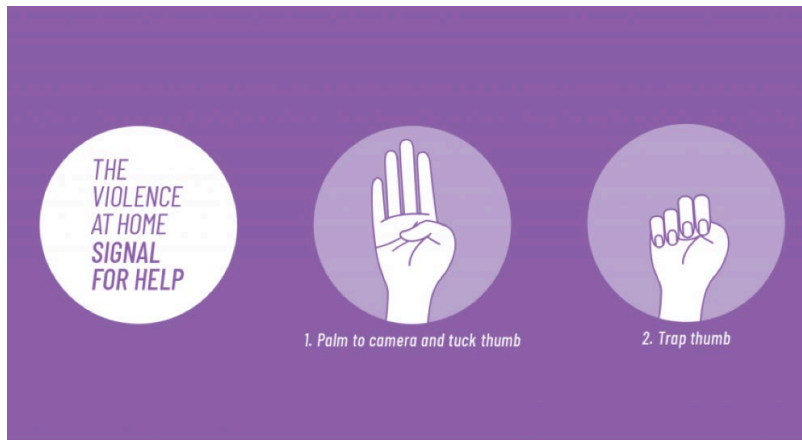
So, when the pandemic hit Canada, we launched an emergency, nation-wide Tireless Together Fund to help organizations meet their immediate needs, and we've been working to quickly distribute these funds.

We have also been honoured work with the federal government to move \$13 million in aid to sexual assault and other gender-based violence intervention services all over Canada, with the exception of Quebec where the emergency funds were distributed through other means.

Just this week, we learned that the Foundation has been designated approximately \$20 million more from the federal government to distribute to services related to

gender-based violence impacted by the pandemic. Those funds will help organizations not only deal with the impact of the second, and potentially third, wave of the pandemic, but also prepare them for sustainability in the aftermath.

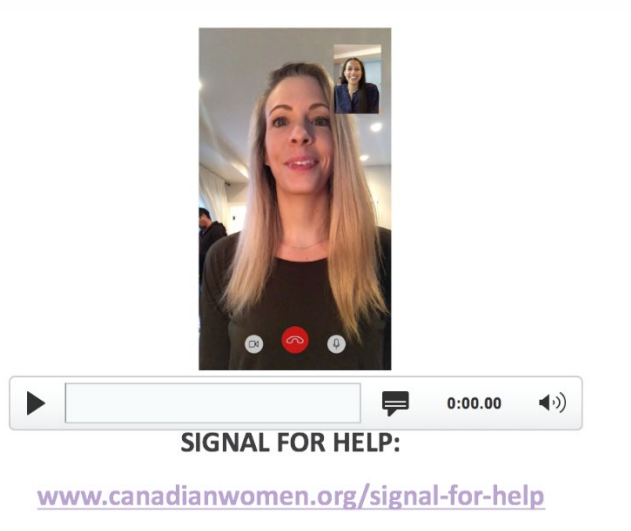
When it comes to violence, we know that raising public awareness about the higher risks is key, so we've launched the Signal for Help, a simple one-handed sign anyone can use in a video call to show they need someone to check in with them safely. In this slide, you can see what signal looks like it - you hold up your hand and trap your thumb.



SIGNAL FOR HELP:

www.canadianwomen.org/signal-for-help

I'd also like to take a moment to share a quick video that shows how the signal can be used in a call:



On our website, we list suggestions for how people can respond should someone give them the signal - so please share and spread the word about this tool. Since its launch in April, nearly one-third of people in Canada have seen ads or information about the signal. We are thrilled it has also been shared around the world and launched in more than 13 countries in Central and South America, Africa, Europe, and Asia.

Looking forward, we're working with The Body Shop Canada to launch a new campaign starting on Wednesday, November 25 to mark the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based violence. Together, we've created a 16-day calendar of ways to take action. One of the easiest and most important is to sign our letter to your government representative urging them to take the next step toward a National Action Plan to end gender-based violence - and you can see a link for doing that in this slide.



Advocates have been pushing for an inclusive, coordinated federal strategy that will help set the standard for provinces and municipalities across the country, bringing about systemic change that increases safety for ALL women, girls, trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people in every part of Canada.

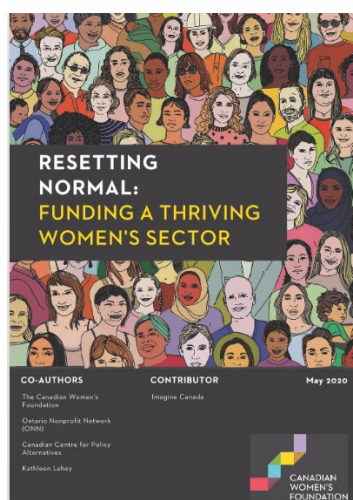
And they have taken the lead in figuring out what this plan should include. Women's Shelters Canada said it should focus on violence prevention and consent education efforts, better crisis response and help for those affected by violence, stronger institutional policies, and inclusive community consultations. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls also noted that a tailored plan has to be developed by and for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and Two Spirit individuals. In light of the pandemic, these same organizations are re-issuing their calls for action.

The impact of COVID-19 has made the need for the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence even more urgent. We were encouraged to see \$30 million promised towards this goal, and that the federal government restated its commitment to the

plan in the 2020 Speech from the Throne. Now, we need to ensure that they follow through. Again, taking a moment to sign this letter is a simple way to show your support for a national plan.

Lastly, as part of the advocacy work that we do, the Foundation is releasing a series of reports called *Resetting Normal*, which provide our roadmap for a pandemic recovery that centres gender equality and leaves no one behind.

The first report, shown in this slide, talks about the need for a new funding model for the women's sector - one that would provide more sustainable support to this chronically underfunded area of the nonprofit world.



OUR ROADMAP

for building gender equality into the pandemic recovery starts with strengthening the women's sector.

The second report looks at the role of caregiving in the economy and the need for policies that support both paid and unpaid caring labour. The third report, which is coming out very soon, focuses on gender-based violence. In a minute, you're going to see a quick video that sums up the *Resetting Normal* strategy but before I do that, I think it would be a good idea to take a step back.

I know that a lot of the issues we've discussed today can seem overwhelming and insurmountable. We're all faced with many new challenges because of the pandemic, and individually it can be hard to see what we can do. But, at the Foundation, we are motivated by a new collective sense of momentum and urgency toward systemic change. We're seizing this as an opportunity, and we know that together, with the support of people like you, we *can* advance progress.

Yes, our current circumstances have magnified social gaps and intensified them, but they have also shown us that we *are* capable of changing our behaviours, habits and systems when we work together for a common goal. So, in that spirit, we continue to work tirelessly toward achieving gender equality in Canada, and we hope you join us in this journey.

Thank you again for having me here today, and here's that video.



LET'S RESET NORMAL IN CANADA:

www.canadianwomen.org/resetting-normal/