

Community safety and well-being plans: what are they and how can we make sure gender- based violence is included in them?

What are community safety and well-being plans (CSWBPs)?

In 2018, the Ontario government passed the *Safer Ontario Act*. It's a massive piece of legislation, one section of which mandates the creation of CSWBPs:

Section 195(1): Every municipal council shall prepare and, by resolution, adopt a community safety and well-being plan.

Plans were to be in place by July 2021, but not all municipalities have met this deadline.

The legislation is vague on the details of what these plans are to include. More information is available from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, which has created a Framework to assist municipalities. It sets out the purpose of the plans, the legislative mandate, benefits to communities of having a plan and the elements to be contained in the plan. You can find the Framework at: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/community-safety-and-well-being-planning-framework-booklet-3-shared-commitment-ontario>

How do I know if my community has one?

The easiest way to find out if your community has a CSWBP is to do a google search, entering the name of your municipality, township and/or county and the phrase "community safety and well-being plan."

You could also ask one of your municipal councillors or staff.

Do all plans include a focus on gender-based violence?

No, but a number of them do. Lanark County's plan, for example, contains a comprehensive section on domestic violence and sexual assault and is an excellent guide if you want to talk to your council about including a section on gender-based violence: <https://www.perth.ca/en/live-and-play/resources/Documents/CSWB-Plan-for-LC-and-SF-final.pdf>

What should a CSWBP include about gender-based violence?

This will depend, to some extent, on your municipality, but some common themes include:

- Background information about GBV in your community, such as statistics, patterns, increases or decreases in rates, and unique issues that makes GBV different in your community than it might be elsewhere
- Services already available
- Existing collaborations
- Gaps in services
- Common challenges for survivors as well as for perpetrators
- Strategies for responding to and addressing GBV so community safety and well-being is enhanced

How should I go about trying to have gender-based violence included in my municipality's CSWBP?

The best place to start is to create a working group/steering committee (WGSC) to coordinate and guide the work to include GBV in your municipality's plan. If you have a Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee, it could reach out to others to join a WGSC.

Ideally, members would include those in your community who are affected by or who play a role in GBV issues: representatives from the police and others in the criminal system, community agencies, health care, education, social services, housing, victim services, violence against women services, Indigenous organizations, survivors and, of course, the municipal government.

The first task for the WGSC is to determine whether or not your municipality has completed and adopted a CSWBP.

If it has, read it carefully to see if it already includes any references to community safety and GBV. If GBV is not included or you are not satisfied with how it is addressed, see if the plan includes any information about a review process. If there is one, you can focus your work on that, but if it does not, you can approach the person within your municipal government who has responsibility for the CSWBP to let them know you would like to propose some additions/revisions to the plan.

If your municipality has not yet adopted its CSWBP, speak to the clerk of the council to find out who is leading the work to develop one and how you can get involved.

What are some practical suggestions?

Once you know where your municipality is at in its work to adopt a CSWBP, you can get down to the work of ensuring that GBV is profiled appropriately in the plan.

If your municipality has a CSWBP in place, you should design the GBV section to mirror the structure in the existing plan. If not, you might be able to suggest a structure to the municipality's CSWBP working group.

The Lanark County CSWBP uses the following structure within each topic it is addressing:

1. Overview/background: Include information about the community and GBV, including statistics
2. Key issues: Try to limit the number of key issues to no more than six
3. Background information on each issue: Include both local and more general information
4. Actions: See below
5. Desired outcomes and performance measures: What you want to achieve and how you will know you have achieved it

It's a good idea to designate a lead individual or organization within your WGSC so communication and tasks are coordinated.

Research is critical. This might include such activities as examining community strengths and gaps through consultations with key stakeholders. These consultations could include surveys, focus groups and interviews as well as a review of statistics and agency annual reports

Once you have this background information, you can identify the key GBV priority areas in your community.

The Framework provided by the government strongly encourages CSWBPs to include four areas for action:

- Social programming
- Prevention
- Risk intervention
- Incident response

You might find it helpful to review the recommendations from the 2022 CKW Inquest for ideas about what you could include in the action areas of your CSWBP. You can find the recommendations here: https://lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CKW-Inquest-Verdict-Recommendations-SIGNED_Redacted.pdf

What you include will depend very much on what you learn through your community-engaged research, but here are a few general ideas:

- Social programming could include activities related to raising public awareness through education, as well as school programming. Perhaps your community would like to institute a Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign:
<https://www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca/about/index.html>
- Prevention could include such activities as education in schools and programs for girls and boys about healthy relationships
- Risk intervention could include enhancing the work of your community's high-risk team, coming to a shared community understanding of effective information sharing to keep survivors safe as well as focusing on programming for those who have engaged in harming behaviours
- Incident response actions could focus on building stronger relationships with policing services and increasing communication and information sharing

There is no requirement that particular activities be included in your CSWBP: you need to base your plan on what your community needs. You might also find it helpful to talk to VAW folks in

other communities to find out whether their CSWBPs include a focus on GBV and, if so, what they include.

How do we convince our municipality to include GBV in its CSWBP?

Generally, building a positive relationship with your municipal council is critical:

- If you don't already do this, ask to speak at council meetings at least once a year to make sure councillors and municipal staff are aware of your organization and the issue of GBV in your community
- Include councillors and key staff in your organization's regular communications
- Invite them to special events
- Publicly recognize their efforts to support your work and to address GBV in your community

Specifically with respect to the inclusion of GBV in the CSWBP:

- Include councillors and/or municipal staff in your process to develop the GBV section
- Ask for their input and feedback
- Make sure they understand why this is important
- Let them know other municipalities are also doing this
- Develop allies on council so you have someone in place to bring a motion to approve inclusion of GBV in the CSWBP
- Be prepared to, non-defensively, argue for what you want

We've got GBV in our CSWBP – now what?

First, take time to celebrate your achievement. Then, make sure the community knows that GBV is part of your CSWBP: engage the media, use social media and public events to spread the word.

You will need to monitor implementation of the GBV provision and track activities to see if your outcomes are being achieved. Be ready to do back to council to remind the politicians of the work they have committed to doing, but also ensure that you and other community organizations and services are doing what you and they need to do.

Community safety and well-being plans on their own will not end GBV, but they can play an important role in helping raise public awareness about GBV and encourage greater collaboration at the community level.