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**Submission to the Standing Committee On Justice Policy for its Study on Intimate Partner Violence**

*Aura Freedom is a grassroots, intersectional feminist organization working to eradicate male violence against women and human trafficking through advocacy, education, research, policy change, media reform and survivor support.*

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## ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW AND EXPERTISE

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### Aura Freedom Activities Include:

- *Education and Knowledge Sharing*
- *Awareness Campaigns and Special Events*
- *Workshops and Training*
- *Media Analysis and Reform*
- *Advocacy and Policy Work*
- *Grassroots and Community Data Collection and Research*
- *Partnership Building Within and Between Sectors*
- *Anti-Oppressive, Trauma-Informed Support and Access to Services for Survivors*

### Accomplishments In the Last Year Include:

- *Leading the successful Urgent Call to Action to have IPV declared an Epidemic in Toronto*
- *Conducting an award-winning Femicide Campaign that reached over 168 million in its first year*
- *Launching our WAGE-funded GBV In The Media project, which convened a National Network of 40+ GBV and Media experts to create media guidelines for better reporting on GBV in the media*
- *Continuing our GBV and HT Prevention Education Workshops and Events, which reached an additional 4,500+ community members, frontline workers, youth, school staff, and more in the last year*
- *Spearheading and collaborating on 50+ advocacy initiatives since 2023, including various brief submissions, consultations, community campaigns, and more, such as convening HT experts in Toronto on behalf of the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery*
- *Provided an expert witness testimony for the Standing Committee on Justice Policy's Study on Intimate Partner Violence for Bill 173*
- *Ongoing and regular advocacy, including of previous recommendations and consultations such as our work with MCCSS for their anti-trafficking strategy review, and our submissions to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, most recently for their study on Coercive Behaviour.*

**Aura Freedom** is a grassroots, intersectional feminist organization that has been working for over a decade to eradicate male violence against women and human trafficking through a multifaceted approach that includes advocacy, education, research, and survivor support.

Our vision is a world in which all women and girls live free from violence. Each and every one of our initiatives strives to one day make that vision a reality, doing so through creative and innovative prevention-focused projects that address root causes and center survivors. Today, we are seeing prevention efforts reflected as a pillar in both the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (“Pillar 2: Prevention”) and Ontario STANDS (“Prevent gender-based violence”). This is not a coincidence. In February and March of 2021, in partnership with Women and Gender Equality Canada and YWCA Canada, Aura Freedom held community consultations with community gender-based violence organizations and survivors to hear more of their recommendations, suggestions and insight in regards to the National Action Plan.

Grassroots and community organizations like Aura Freedom have been advocating for the Primary Prevention of gender-based violence for decades.

Addressing the root causes of gender-based violence (GBV) and human trafficking (HT) is a fundamental part of Aura Freedom's work. Working to prevent and end gender-based violence means addressing gender inequity, systemic racism, colonialism, ableism, homo/transphobia, and more. Women and girls living at the intersections of gender, race, ability, and socio-economic status experience the highest rates of violence. When addressing gender-based violence and advancing the feminist movement, Aura Freedom's work recognizes and centers the most marginalized women, including: Indigenous women, racialized women, single mothers, 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples, immigrant and refugee women, women living with disabilities, the Girl Child, and others. When we do not address the root causes, we commit to only ever responding to gender-based violence as opposed to preventing - and eradicating - it. By not addressing the root causes, we will simply be doing damage control for the rest of our lives.

We know that prevention starts with education, and education starts with awareness. To eradicate gender-based violence, the everyday person must be aware of its scope and depth in our communities, including its different forms, risks, and impacts. Aura Freedom's most recent public awareness campaign on femicide in Canada reached over 168 million in its first year. Similarly, in the last year alone, our education efforts - accomplished through various GBV and HT prevention workshops, trainings, and events - have reached over 4,500+ community members, frontline workers, youth, school boards, Police, and more. Aura Freedom's educational initiatives are effective, and award winning - our workshops preventing youth trafficking won a Mayor's Community Safety Award from the City of Toronto in 2021.

Aura Freedom is a champion for grassroots action. We excel at fostering collaboration, and strive to get unlikely colleagues to the same table to work together and break down silos, fostering systemic change. This year, we officially launched our *GBV In The Media*<sup>1</sup> project, which successfully created a National Network of both GBV and Media professionals, bringing representatives from historically contentious sectors to work collaboratively. This WAGE-funded project resulted in the creation of a set of National Guidelines for better and more accurate reporting on gender-based violence in the media in Canada. This project builds upon years of partnerships and collaboration with gender-based violence organizations and stakeholders, including as a member of a number of networks, coalitions, and more that specifically target gender-based violence and human trafficking - such as through membership within Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) and WomanACT, and within the Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network. Beyond the sector, we often engage with civil society, government, the private sector, the community, and more to strengthen and mainstream the feminist movement.

Aura Freedom has also been recognized internationally for our feminist research on gender-based violence and human trafficking. In 2020, Aura Freedom submitted an official Beijing+25 Canadian Parallel Report with a focus on gender-based violence called *Relentless Resilience*<sup>2</sup>, which collected community research through interviews with frontline social workers and survivor stories. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is regarded as the most progressive global blueprint for advancing women's rights, and *Relentless Resilience* demonstrated how gender-based violence is impacting all 12 Areas of Critical Concern of this Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and hindering the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We then launched a multi-media GBV prevention campaign under the same name of *Relentless Resilience* to educate Canadians on GBV, demonstrate how GBV affects every single aspect of life in Canada, and provide survivors access to life-saving services. This campaign, which garnered over 1 million

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<sup>1</sup> Aura Freedom International. "GBV In The Media". March 25, 2024. <https://gbvinthedia.ca/>.

<sup>2</sup> Aura Freedom International – Kokkoros, M. (2020). *Relentless Resilience – Addressing Gender-Based Violence Through Grassroots Excellence*, A Beijing +25 Canadian Parallel Report.

impressions in its first year, was named one of Canada's Top 100 Recovery Projects from the Future of Good, for projects implemented during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The resources created from this campaign (which included 12 webinars and events, insight from 38 community partners, and a wealth of information on GBV with a Canadian context) was then made accessible virtually through an Online GBV Resource Centre. The year after, we extended this GBV Resource Centre, and launched our Human Trafficking Info Hub<sup>3</sup>, a grassroots hub of resources and knowledge on human trafficking - the first of its kind in Canada. This info hub has quickly become a trusted resource for frontline workers, school boards, police, and other community partners across Canada.

With over a decade of gender-based violence and human trafficking prevention, training, advocacy, research, and survivor support experience, Aura Freedom has consulted at the Regional, Provincial and Federal levels of government for gender-based violence prevention and anti-trafficking strategies and plans, advocating for approaches that use an intersectional feminist and human rights lens. Our expertise has been brought forward through various briefs, consults, roundtables, and more, including leading the successful Urgent Call to Action<sup>4</sup> to have Intimate Partner Violence declared an Epidemic in Toronto alongside Women's Habitat, and extending internationally as the organization entrusted by the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery to organize and consult on a roundtable of human trafficking experts and survivors in Toronto last year to inform his country report on Canada's efforts to end modern slavery.

Our work centers survivors because we are survivors. Survivor insight, knowledge, and expertise is incorporated in all our programming, all our services, and all that we do. Our team – like our work – is built by gender-based violence and human trafficking survivors. When we say we center the most marginalized groups, we mean that our people, from the Board of Directors to our Interns, reflect these diverse communities that we serve.

Inclusive and intersectional education addressing the root causes of gender-based violence and human trafficking is the most effective form of prevention. When this prevention work is barrier-free, trauma-informed, survivor-centered, and addresses the root causes of violence, we contribute to a future where all women, girls, and gender diverse people from all backgrounds and intersections live free from violence.

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<sup>3</sup> Aura Freedom International. "Human Trafficking Info Hub Part 1." November 11, 2022. <https://aurafreedom.org/relentless-resilience/human-trafficking-info-hub/>.

<sup>4</sup> Aura Freedom International. "An Urgent Call To Action." <https://aurafreedom.org/toronto-ipv-epidemic/>

## INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITTEN SUBMISSION

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### A Grassroots Lens Into the IPV and GBV Epidemic in Ontario

Intimate Partner Violence is not new - and it's not going away. Further, it is increasingly leading to the deaths of women and their children. The Canadian Femicide Observatory reports that femicides where women and girls were killed involving a male accused have increased by 27% since 2019.<sup>5</sup> According to OAITH's femicide reports, Indigenous, Black, and South Asian women continue to be overrepresented in the data.<sup>6</sup> Further, in the past 8 months in Ontario, nearly 1 in 5 victims of femicide are children.<sup>7</sup> We are seeing an increasing number of children killed in the context of IPV, often used as pawns to hurt their Mothers in the very worst way.

Many of our colleagues will share further context of the IPV and GBV epidemic in their submissions - and Aura Freedom has curated and shared countless resources that outline the staggering statistics that undeniably affirm the epidemic levels of IPV and GBV in Ontario. One notable resource by Aura Freedom is our brief for the Urgent Call to Action to have IPV declared an epidemic in Toronto.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, Aura Freedom also highlights the additional nuances, trends, and impacts we are seeing beyond the reported statistics. As the most extreme manifestation of Male Violence Against Women (MVAW), the increase in femicides we are seeing should be an indicator that Intimate Partner Violence is escalating exponentially, with more women and their children experiencing worsening violence behind closed doors, much of which will never be reported. Additionally, we have yet another generation of children in Ontario who must deal with the mental health impacts of witnessing their parents being harmed or worse - contributing to intergenerational violence, criminalization, homelessness, food insecurity, poor health outcomes, substance abuse, poor education results, unemployment, and more. Herein lies the epidemic of IPV. And the costs to us all, both fiscal and social, are immense.

Beyond this, we're also seeing an increase in tech-facilitated gender-based violence,<sup>9</sup> with Incel spaces flourishing, children's access to violent pornography skyrocketing, and online sexual exploitation of youth in Canada tripling in the last decade.<sup>10</sup> In Aura Freedom's years of working with sex-trafficked women and children, it is clear that many of them were exploited by men they considered to be intimate partners. Right now, in shelters in Ontario, we have residents who are fleeing both IPV and sex trafficking. We see survivors strategically criminalized by their traffickers, forced to recruit others and commit other crimes in order to isolate them further and keep them from reaching out for help.

Over the last decade, Aura Freedom's language on male violence against women has been consistent - it is a national emergency. We are all going about our days with a constant blaring alarm: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We find ways to deal with the noise, but have yet to truly address what is causing the alarm.

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<sup>5</sup>Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. "CFOJA Reports." December 8, 2023. <https://femicideincanada.ca/cfoja-research/cfoja-reports/>.

<sup>6</sup>Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH). More Than A Number: 52 Femicides in 52 Weeks in One Province. <https://www.oaith.ca/assets/library/MoreThanANumber.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup>Weingarten, N. "Report Warns Number of Young Femicide Victims in Ontario Rising." CBC News, August 24, 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-femicide-young-victims-1.7302542>.

<sup>8</sup> Aura Freedom International & Women's Habitat of Etobicoke. "An Urgent Call to Action: Recognition of the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic in Toronto, Canada." July 6, 2023. <https://aurafreedom.org/content/uploads/2023/07/Toronto-IPV-Epidemic-An-Urgent-Call-to-Action.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>Dodge, Dietzel, Dunn, Mendes, and MacCallum (2023). Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence Among Young People: Synthesizing the Research to Promote Digital Safety in Canada. Ottawa: SSHRC & WAGE. Report: [diydigitalsafety.ca](https://diydigitalsafety.ca).

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada. "Online Child Sexual Exploitation: A Statistical Profile of Police-Reported Incidents in Canada, 2014 to 2022." Government of Canada, March 12, 2024. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2024001/article/00003-eng.htm>.

## AURA FREEDOM'S RECOMMENDED FRAMEWORK

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### Looking Upstream

Aura Freedom's primary recommendation is the same one that we and many others have been advocating for time and time again. That is, for the Government of Ontario to look upstream and invest in Primary Prevention. We exist in a society in which fewer and fewer women, girls, and gender-diverse people live their lives never having experienced gender-based violence. How many - if any - families in Ontario can report that they have generations of women who have *not* been impacted by gender-based violence?

We know that Early Intervention (also known as Secondary Prevention) and Direct Response (sometimes known as Tertiary Prevention) are equally important and can indeed prevent escalating/additional violence or intergenerational violence. However, gender-based violence has already happened. Someone has already experienced it and been impacted by it, as have likely their children and other loved ones around them. To truly eradicate gender-based violence, we must ensure we are adequately investing in initiatives to prevent it from occurring in the first place.

Within this written submission, we will outline a proposed multi-pronged framework, and provide specific examples of effective interventions within both Primary and Secondary Prevention strategies that address the root causes and drivers of gender-based violence. These root causes include gender inequality, patriarchy, misogyny, colonialism, racism, ableism, and homo/transphobia.

It is important to emphasize that our recommendations for effective interventions, and this multi-pronged framework as a whole, do not suggest reallocating funding from frontline support to Primary and Secondary Prevention. Frontline services are vital and require robust funding and support, as they provide crucial assistance to individuals in immediate and ongoing need. However, equally important is the effort to prevent violence before it occurs. This proactive approach can prevent trauma from affecting families and perpetuating across generations - at a time where still, we are seeing one woman leave a shelter with her children, and another show up behind her. A preventative approach not only stops the violence from occurring, but creates ripple effects in communities as a whole, as we know that the impacts of gender-based violence also impact other areas of women's lives, and the lives of everyone around them, in areas such as housing, education, employment, healthcare, substance use, and more. Despite challenges in measuring the immediate impact of Primary Prevention (knowing we cannot "see" its impacts happening in real-time and it cannot be quantified in the same way as shelter beds, or counselling sessions), its long-term benefits are profound.

Ontario has an opportunity to be a leader in this space. But it will take patience, as there is no quick fix to gender-based violence. Further, it will take time, work, and research to put an exact price tag on the solutions needed. But, in the long term, Primary Prevention is the only approach that truly addresses violence at its roots. Primary Prevention uniquely focuses on creating communities where gender-based violence is no longer the norm and no longer able to thrive, and can also support those who have experienced violence already.

The recommendation is to start zooming out to stop that revolving women's shelter door. We need new and robust investments in Three Unwavering Pillars: Primary Prevention, Early Intervention (also known as Secondary Prevention), and frontline, Direct Response interventions, also known as Tertiary Prevention.

## “The Solutions Are There.”

As our Executive Director stated in her verbal testimony to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, **“The Solutions are there. It’s the investments - and really, the political will - that haven’t been.”**

When we say the solutions are there, we mean that this written submission will be added to the countless recommendations from gender-based violence researchers, advocates, and survivors, highlighting the critical importance of prevention-focused measures and systemic changes. We see the call repeated for Primary Prevention initiatives as methods of eradicating gender-based violence across its many forms, and across intersectional experiences. Importantly, we also see these recommendations coming from various Canadian and Ontario experts - recommendations tailored to local systems and processes from those who continue to work within them. Further, we similarly see prevention within various commitments made to work towards the eradication of gender-based violence at both the provincial and national level through Canada’s National Action Plan to End GBV, as well as Ontario STANDS. It is the adequate and long-term execution of these recommendations and commitments that remain.

Below, we highlight various recommendations that call for the implementation of Primary Prevention and Early Intervention initiatives, and the commitments made by both the Canadian and Ontario governments to prioritizing prevention within their frameworks to eradicate gender-based violence, which echo both the framework and suggested interventions outlined within this written brief.

Importantly, the *National Inquiry into MMIWG* Final Report Recommendations include “Theme 4: The need for public education and greater public awareness of violence against indigenous women and girls” and “Theme 8: The need for properly resourced initiatives and programming to address root causes of violence against indigenous women and girls.”<sup>11</sup> Included within the report is the recommendation to “invest in education to prevent violence”<sup>12</sup> such as conducting education and public information campaigns that “acknowledge and address the history of dispossession and marginalization of the aboriginal community, improve understanding of the impact of colonialism on the aboriginal community and address racism and sexism, with a view to eliminate negative stereotypes against aboriginal women.”<sup>13</sup> Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse communities experience gender-based violence at abhorrently high rates: Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be murdered than any other women in Canada, and experience spousal violence at a rate 3 times higher than non-indigenous women.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is vital that prevention initiatives include those intentionally aiming to prevent violence against Indigenous women.

Within the Renfrew County Inquest, recommendations include support for Primary Prevention through the development of new public education campaigns that would aim to promote awareness on IPV. Further, these recommendations outline the need for changes to education and curricula on IPV, such as “age-appropriate education programs for primary and secondary schools, and university and colleges.”<sup>15</sup> These would be accompanied by training for teachers to ensure they are equipped to deliver the IPV-related curricula, and would be supported by a series of resources available to support teachers in their delivery of school curricula when local IPV experts are unavailable.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted as well that the very first

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<sup>11</sup> National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. “Master List of Report Recommendations”. <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/National-Inquiry-Master-List-of-Report-Recommendations-Organized-By-Theme-and-Jurisdiction-2018-EN-FI-NAL.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Aura Freedom International – Kokkoros, M. (2020). Relentless Resilience – Addressing Gender-Based Violence Through Grassroots Excellence, A Beijing +25 Canadian Parallel Report.

<sup>15</sup> “2022 coroner’s inquests’ verdicts and recommendations.” Government of Ontario, June 28, 2022. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2022-coroners-inquests-verdicts-and-recommendations#section-4>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

recommendation to the Government of Ontario is to “Formally declare intimate partner violence as an epidemic.”<sup>17</sup>

The Mass Casualty Commission outlines the need for public education about public warnings, suggesting that public education campaigns should be included in schools, and public campaigns should both raise awareness and understanding of how to respond.<sup>18</sup> One suggested form of curriculum changes within schools are to include a mandatory gender-based violence and bystander intervention training curriculum within both elementary and secondary schools.<sup>19</sup> Similar to the Renfrew County Inquest, the Mass Casualty Commission recommends that all levels of government in Canada declare gender-based, intimate partner, and family violence to be an epidemic that warrants a meaningful and sustained society-wide response.<sup>20</sup>

Aura Freedom held community consultations with community and grassroots gender-based violence organizations and survivors to hear more of their recommendations, suggestions, and insight in regards to Canada’s National Action Plan to End GBV, coordinated into the report *Relentless Resilience 2: The Grassroots Speaks Again*.<sup>21</sup> Within the National Action Plan’s five pillars is the second pillar of “Prevention”, emphasizing Primary Prevention approaches that are inclusive, intersectional, culturally-informed, both trauma- and violence-informed, and address the root causes of GBV to stop violence before it occurs.<sup>22</sup> Further included within the National Action Plan is the commitment to develop both school and community-based initiatives that aim to prevent GBV through the education of children and youth.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Ontario STANDS highlights the goal to “Expand prevention programs and introduce innovative practices to stop gender-based violence before it occurs.”<sup>24</sup> This focus on prevention includes the need for ongoing education, training, and awareness within elementary and secondary schools on healthy relationships, personal safety, and more. Specific demographics and sectors outside of the education system that were outlined as requiring further prevention training include men and boys, the justice system, children’s aid societies, hospitals, and community services.<sup>25</sup> Aligned with the framework suggested below from Aura Freedom is the recognition within Ontario STANDS to focus on both a coordinated system of prevention as well as improved community-led and culturally responsive services that support survivors and provide long-term healing.

These recommendations by GBV experts, and commitments by both the Ontario and Canadian governments, convey that the solutions to eradicating GBV are indeed there - and most of them are unfunded. Aura Freedom has committed to prioritizing Primary Prevention work for years - a longstanding and vital recommendation and promise from various governments in Canada. However, much of our advocacy work is unfunded, and therefore, unsustainable and unscalable. Ontario has historically funded frontline organizations exclusively, wherein “prevention” is lumped into frontline work - the faults of which are outlined in this framework. Meanwhile, innovative and impactful Primary Prevention work such as Aura Freedom’s has reached millions across Canada, created notable changes and shifts in public perceptions and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> The Joint Federal/Provincial Commission into the April 2020 Nova Scotia Mass Casualty. “Final Report of the Mass Casualty Recommendations.” Mass Casualty Commission. <https://masscasualtycommission.ca/files/documents/Turning-the-Tide-Together-List-of-Recommendations.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Aura Freedom International – Kokkoros, M. (2021). *Relentless Resilience 2 – The Grassroots Speaks Again*.

<sup>22</sup> Government of Canada. “In Brief: National Action Plan To End Gender-Based Violence.” Government of Canada, 2022.

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/wage-fegc/documents/gbv/National%20Action%20Plan%20on%20Gender-based%20Violence%20-%20In%20Brief%20-%20English.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Government of Ontario. “Ontario-STANDS: Standing Together Against gender-based violence Now through Decisive actions, prevention, empowerment and Supports.” Government of Ontario.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-stands-standing-together-against-gender-based-violence-now-through-decisive-actions-prevention-empowerment-supports>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



understandings of GBV and IPV, and contributed to transformative culture change - but has never been sustained by ongoing government funding.

## Addressing the Data Gaps and Funding Limitations

The solutions are there. However, in order to identify and design the most effective interventions, we must address the gaps in data - and funding. Long-term, ongoing research of best practice interventions within these high-level solutions is scarce, particularly across intersections, settings, and forms of violence. Gender-based violence and intimate partner violence organizations are then left knowing what needs to be done to eradicate gender-based violence, but are not enabled to develop these initiatives through innovation and testing. For example, we know that Primary Prevention initiatives educating youth on healthy masculinity is vital, but we have seen some methods result in some young men feeling alienated.

These initiatives must be supported and sustained to conduct ongoing research, as it is the only way we as a sector and community will be able to develop the most successful and impactful interventions. Indeed, it is difficult to know “what works” when short-term project funding is the norm and organizations have little opportunity to develop robust, evidence-based programming. Therefore, the GBV sector must be enabled and funded to implement and test innovative practices for the long term - and avoid an ongoing “business as usual” approach to addressing gender-based violence.

This is done by addressing the funding precarity of the women’s sector and the gender-based violence sector, sectors that often operate on a project-by-project basis. This experience is a particular issue for prevention-oriented organizations, who do not have the same quantifiable numbers and direct impacts to survivors as frontline services to report to funders. It is imperative that funders recognize the women’s sector has experienced “several decades of erosion in funding in addition to, and perhaps because of this system that replicates underlying inequalities.”<sup>26</sup>

The lack of - and current approaches to - funding for the gender-based violence sector has resulted in “women employed in gender equity-seeking organizations [being] the lowest paid amongst the nonprofit sector.”<sup>27</sup> A framework working to eradicate gender-based violence can only be implemented when GBV advocates, survivors and experts are appropriately valued and compensated for their work, and when the organizations they operate within are provided core, long-term funding. This can be started through funding of organizations and survivors to work collaboratively with the Ontario Government as, too often, gender-based violence roundtables, consulting, and advocacy work in general go unfunded.

Only until we have a framework to eradicate gender-based violence that both incorporates a commitment to long-term, ongoing research as well as the long-term and sustained funding of innovative interventions, core-funding for GBV organizations, and adequate compensation and valuation of GBV and IPV expertise, will we be able to implement a successful framework to eradicate gender-based violence.

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<sup>26</sup> The Canadian Women’s Foundation, Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and Kathleen Lahey. “Resetting Normal: Funding A Thriving Women’s Sector.” Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2020. <https://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Resetting-Normal-Report-Womens-Sector.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## THE THREE PILLARS: A MULTIPRONGED APPROACH

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Gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms, such as intimate partner violence (IPV) and human-trafficking (HT), are complex issues tied deeply to systems of oppression (i.e. sexism and patriarchy, racism, colonialism, ableism, homo/transphobia, etc.) and normalized ways of thinking (i.e. about gender norms, gender roles, the status quo, power dynamics and hierarchies, victimization, etc.). As such, eradicating this long-standing and long-normalized human rights abuse requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach.

A multi-pronged approach is vital as gender-based violence can be best understood as “a continuum of behaviours and practices... [which] shows how forms of harassment and violence are interrelated and emphasizes their escalating nature, bringing attention to the necessity for early intervention...A continuum facilitates the examination of forms of harassment and violence ranging from covert to direct, and non-physical...to extreme forms.”<sup>28</sup> Intimate Partner Violence, for example, may exist on a continuum from coercive control (which is often an underlying component to all forms of IPV), to intimate partner femicide. An effective framework must therefore incorporate pillars addressing different stages and aspects of gender-based violence in order to be effective.

### Overview of the Three Pillars

Aura Freedom therefore recommends a Three Pillar Framework composed of the following pillars:

1. **Primary Prevention:** addressing root causes and preventing GBV/IPV before it occurs
2. **Early Intervention:** identifying and addressing early signs and risks of violence
3. **Direct Response:** providing immediate (crisis) support interventions for survivors, as well as long-term healing

Primary Prevention has often been lost in the equation, but is imperative to incorporate in order to build long-term change in societal norms. This is done alongside Early Intervention, which reduces identified risks and escalations, and Direct Response, which provides vital immediate support - creating a sustainable and responsive system. By integrating all three pillars, it is possible to create a more holistic and supportive environment for addressing IPV and GBV, ultimately reducing their prevalence and impact.

The successful implementation of the three pillars requires that:

- All pillars are robustly funded and resourced to the size and scale of the problem.
- All pillars are regarded with the same importance and value.
- All pillars are research-driven, large-scale, and sustained for the long term.
- All pillars are accountable and include time-bound goals and measurable outcomes.
- All pillars address systems as well as individual behaviours, such as education systems, child welfare systems, family court, criminal justice, and others.
- All pillars work together as a collaborative framework, which is created with community stakeholders at the table at every step and is intersectional, culturally and geographically targeted, and focused on the most marginalized communities.

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<sup>28</sup> MacQuarrie, Barb, Adriana Berlingieri, Alexa S. Clerke, and Loyce Mrewa. “Best and Promising Practices to End Gender-Based Harassment and Violence at Work: A Multi-Pronged Approach.” It’s Not Part of the Job, June 2023. [https://www.itsnotpartofthejob.ca/files/ugd/0deb55\\_b1265878f3d5480bb1c9cd7388f022e9.pdf](https://www.itsnotpartofthejob.ca/files/ugd/0deb55_b1265878f3d5480bb1c9cd7388f022e9.pdf)

The framework recommended by Aura Freedom recognizes the continuum of gender-based violence, as well as the distinct approaches taken to prevent and respond to this violence. It is designed with collaboration between the three pillars in mind, allowing for comprehensive approaches that target not only survivors and those at risk, but the greater community and society. It approaches the eradication of gender-based violence not only through the prevention of violence, but the prevention of escalating violence, recurring and ongoing violence, and intergenerational trauma.

The innovation within this framework is not simply through acknowledging the three pillars themselves - as Primary Prevention, Early Intervention, and Direct Response initiatives all exist presently - but in the way that these pillars are valued, funded, and actioned. We have not seen Primary Prevention and Early Intervention valued in the same way as Direct Response work, resulting in a failure of addressing the greater systems and society alongside the individual behaviours and experiences. This framework is innovative in that it requires the equal valuing and robust funding of all three pillars, where all pillars are supported to conduct long-term and sustained efforts in collaboration with one another - and not at the cost or reduction of support to another pillar.

## Ensuring Pillars are Resourced

**Today, Primary Prevention continues to go under-resourced.** While Direct Response and frontline services are crucial, they address the symptoms rather than the root causes of gender-based violence. Supporting survivors must go hand in hand with efforts to prevent future occurrences of violence. We must commit to the belief that every new survivor of gender-based violence should be the last. This necessitates a deep investment into the prevention of gender-based violence and, although the accurate cost of this will require thorough research to ascertain, we can start by ensuring there is additional funding allocated to Primary Prevention and Early Intervention in line with what we have seen consistently with Direct Response.

Additionally, we know that only 30% of intimate partner violence survivors will ever report their abuse to the police.<sup>29</sup> Many survivors will never receive support services due to stigma, fear, shame, lack of knowledge on services, barriers to access, systemic oppression, and more. We must ensure, therefore, through Primary Prevention and Early Intervention, that we also target the systems that survivors may access outside of GBV support services (i.e. legal, education, healthcare, etc.), and the broader community as a whole.

Further, resourcing along the pillars has a trickle-down effect and impact, such that, when Primary Prevention is under-resourced, demand exceeds for Early Intervention and Direct Response. When Early Intervention is under-resourced, demand and needs also exceed for Direct Response. Not funding Primary Prevention leads to increased incidences of violence due to persistent harmful norms and lack of education, and further leads to missed opportunities for Early Intervention. This culminates in greater demands on Direct Response services, where issues have often escalated in severity, duration, and complexity. The costs of this lack of funding to Primary Prevention are immense and can be seen in all aspects of life, beyond the \$7.4 Billion it costs Canada to deal with the aftermath of intimate partner violence yearly.<sup>30</sup> We see the impacts on the 64% of women who have experienced intimate partner violence and now exhibit symptoms of PTSD, the fact that women who leave an abusive partner are five times more likely to be poorer than if

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<sup>29</sup> Government of Ontario. "Intimate partner violence." Government of Ontario, April 30, 2020. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/intimate-partner-violence>.

<sup>30</sup> Government of Canada. "The economic burden of family violence." Government of Canada, August 4, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/economic-burden-family-violence.html>

they stayed, and the generational impacts on the hundreds of thousands of Canadian youth who witness intimate partner violence in their homes every year.<sup>31</sup>

When any one pillar is under-resourced, our efforts to eradicate gender-based violence are ineffective, as the pillars exist on a continuum. As a result, the entire approach is less effective as it fails to address all aspects of gender-based violence (i.e. before the violence occurs, when one is at risk of violence or perpetrating violence, when one is experiencing violence, and the long-term impacts post-violence). This, again, is particularly true when we fail to adequately fund Primary Prevention, as it is uniquely situated to end the cycle of violence through the prevention and eradication of gender-based violence.

**Primary Prevention:** When we do not adequately resource Primary Prevention, efforts to prevent violence from occurring have a limited reach and effectiveness. Educational programs and awareness campaigns may be less widespread and less impactful. This can result in missed opportunities to educate communities about the root causes of gender-based violence and important concepts such as consent, healthy relationships, and gender equality. This would then detrimentally impact the greater culture around gender norms and inequality, and allow continued acceptance of the current societal norms and attitudes that normalize and perpetuate violence. By not resourcing Primary Prevention, we accept gender-based violence as a “normal” part of society that is to be expected - and refuse to see its potential end.

**Early Intervention:** When we do not adequately fund Early Intervention efforts, this results in delayed identification of those who are experiencing risk factors or early signs of experiencing or perpetrating gender-based violence. Additionally, without adequate programs and tools for Early Intervention, we allow for those who are experiencing more covert, or early forms of violence to continue across the continuum of violence (i.e. those experiencing coercive control may then experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, or those who are experiencing physical/sexual violence may then be killed via intimate partner femicide). In the same way, we miss opportunities to intervene early with boys and youth at risk of committing violence (i.e. boys following incel culture, youth watching violent pornography, etc.)

**Direct Response:** When we do not adequately fund Direct Response services, survivors who are experiencing or have experienced violence do not receive the adequate support they need, jeopardizing their safety and wellbeing. Survivors may face increased difficulties accessing or qualifying for services, or increased difficulty maneuvering resources. The burden on survivors increases, resulting in them facing longer wait times, connecting with fewer supports, and resulting in exacerbated trauma and impacts in other aspects of their lives such as employment, substance use, housing, and more. Moreover, a lack of services can lead survivors to return to their abusers, perpetuating the violence against them and their children.

## Prevention is Key

While we advocate for the implementation of a distinct “Primary Prevention” pillar, we must also acknowledge that prevention is intricately tied to, and must be incorporated within, all pillars. At the same time, how prevention work is understood, implemented, and - notably - *what* these approaches are preventing is explicitly distinct between the pillars. For example, how prevention is approached, as well as its impacts, appears very differently between the “Primary Prevention” and “Direct Response” pillars.

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<sup>31</sup> Aura Freedom International. “Gender-Based Violence & The SDGs.” Aura Freedom International, 2022. <https://aurafreedom.org/relentless-resilience/gender-based-violence-and-the-sdgs/>

**Primary Prevention** works toward preventing violence from occurring in the first place. This prevention work targets everyone, and the greater systems that surround them, by addressing the underlying drivers and root causes of violence, creating a society and culture that does not allow for, and does not actively commit, the perpetuation of violence.

**Early Intervention** targets those identified as “at risk” of experiencing or perpetrating violence, and prevents violence from continuing and crossing generations. It can also prevent violence from escalating, and prevents those at risk from requiring further or varied Direct Response services. Early Intervention approaches change the trajectory of those at higher risk of experiencing or committing violence, both directly through programs for those at risk of being a survivor or abuser, and through equipping frontline and Direct Response workers with resources, tools, and training to identify and prevent violence.

**Direct Response** has the main function of providing frontline support during crisis, such as through shelter or counselling services, and seeks to hold those who have perpetrated violence to account. Therefore, its primary function is to support survivors or punish those who use violence after GBV has already happened. That said, Direct Response services *can* also be preventative in the long run, and preventative of continued violence, additional violence, worse violence, etc. and the intergenerational impacts that follow.

Therefore, when we highlight the Primary Prevention, Early Intervention, and Direct Response pillars and initiatives throughout this submission, we must continue to be aware that these, much like a venn diagram, overlap - which is why we also refer to Early Intervention as Secondary Prevention, and Direct Response as Tertiary Prevention.

The purpose, then, of creating a separate Primary Prevention pillar rather than implementing it within Direct Response services is to understand that even prevention-oriented programs within Early Intervention and Direct Response settings will often necessitate the individual targeted to have some interaction with GBV services - either as someone at risk of GBV, someone who has experienced GBV, someone who has committed GBV, or someone who works within the GBV space or is passionate about the subject. However, in order to successfully prevent GBV from happening in the first place, prevention initiatives must still reach those who do not work in the GBV space, those who are not identified as “at risk”, and those who have not yet received frontline GBV services. After all, we know that men/boys from all walks of life use violence, and women/girls from all walks of life experience violence. Therefore, a whole-of-population approach is necessary, with specific interventions tailored to specific communities and embedded in systems that individuals navigate on a daily basis (education, health, media, etc.). When we recognize just how many barriers to accessing services exist for survivors, we cannot afford to wait for them to reach out before we stand in solidarity with them, and further, we cannot continue to wait for women to experience violence before we decide their safety is important.

## How Pillars Overlap and Collaborate

These pillars reflect three points on the continuum of gender-based violence, and as such, are distinct and interconnected approaches. Therefore, initiatives falling under one pillar can overlap with other pillars - for example, Primary Prevention, in seeking to educate communities, can and do support individuals in their awareness and recognition of warning signs of violence, which is Early Intervention. Further, Primary Prevention and Early Intervention can encourage survivors to seek Direct Response support. These three pillars reinforce one another to effectively reduce both the prevalence and impacts of GBV.

Many of Aura Freedom's Primary Prevention activities can and do double as Early intervention initiatives. For example, our *For Her* campaign calling attention to femicide in Canada was also an Early Intervention, or Secondary Prevention, initiative. Our microsite housing relevant femicide information works to reach individuals who may be learning about femicide for the first time and come to identify that they are at risk. The same can be said for our Early Intervention initiatives, which may incorporate Direct Response services. A notable aspect of this is Aura Freedom's Human Trafficking Peer Prevention Project, which educated youth (a higher risk group) on human trafficking and sexual exploitation. These workshops resulted in a 50% disclosure rate of gender-based violence and, through this Early Intervention project, these youth survivors were connected with Direct Response supports such as trauma counselling and case management.

Further, as three points on the same continuum of gender-based violence, these pillars must work collaboratively to ensure comprehensive approaches to the eradication of gender-based violence, which can be fostered through the intentional establishment of communication channels between Primary Prevention, Early intervention, and Direct Response organizations.

Collaboration must incorporate the sustaining of knowledge-sharing across pillars, as community research, sector data, and available and accessible resources and programs can become fragmented and difficult to coordinate across pillars and across services. Further, training and capacity building can be conducted between pillars to ensure best practices are maintained, and comprehensive knowledge on the continuum of gender-based violence is shared. Collaboration should also be necessitated by including experts from all three pillars in collaborative-natured work such as networks, roundtables, coalitions, advisory tables, and more. The pillars must work collaboratively to identify necessary policy and legislative changes to ensure that all three - Primary Prevention, Early Intervention, and Direct Response - are considered in order for policies to be holistic and effective.

Project and program collaboration across sectors may look like community hubs or events that coordinate services across Primary Prevention, Early Intervention, and Direct Support. Further collaboration across pillars may also look like Primary Prevention and Direct Response working collaboratively on awareness campaigns to promote access to Direct Response services and programs, or Early Intervention developing risk assessment tools for Direct Response providers and establishing referral processes when identifying early signs of gender-based violence.

While we recognize that we are advocating for a framework incorporating three distinct pillars, we also recognize that gender-based violence is a continuum, and initiatives also exist on this continuum - such that overlap can and does occur between pillars. Further, this overlap of and collaboration between pillars reflects the need for a comprehensive approach to gender-based violence.

## Implementation of the Framework

Ideally, this framework and the implementation of it would be housed under a separate Ministry or Special Office with its own staff dedicated to the eradication of gender-based violence. This framework will require a coordinated effort across all levels of government and, importantly, the intentional incorporation of gender-based violence (GBV) advocates, survivors, and experts. This framework is high-level.

Implementation of it would require ongoing research into:

- an actionable process of implementation, including identifying stakeholders, roles, and more
- the specific initiatives that will be required and housed under each pillar
- pathways of coordination both between pillars and between the pillars and the government

- ongoing monitoring and evaluation of each pillar over time.

That said, we cannot wait. If we are to acknowledge the epidemic levels of GBV and IPV, we must take action now. Often, in the sector, we discuss the reimagining of systems in the same conversations as discussing what is possible to conduct and change within these systems, today.

We have seen similar efforts be overturned, both in terms of a dedicated ministry, such as the harmful changes made to the former Ministry of the Status of Women in Ontario, as well as dedicated roundtables and offices, such as the closure of the provincial HT Coordination office, and the dismantling of the GBV roundtable. To truly see an end to gender-based violence, these institutions and efforts - much like the resourcing of these pillars - must persist for as long as gender-based violence does.

Further, as Aura Freedom has advocated for when it comes to implementing any recommendations, such as those outlined in this submission, we must ensure that these recommendations are not conducted in silos, and that interrelated recommendations are coordinated, and implemented in a manner that prioritizes the well-being of survivors and prevents further harm.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Aura Freedom International – Kokkoros, M. & Warren, D. "Brief Submission to the Standing Committee on The Status of Women for its Study on Coercive Behaviour." Aura Freedom International, June 26, 2024. <https://aurafreedom.org/content/uploads/2024/07/Aura-Freedom-Brief-to-FEWO-on-Coercive-Behaviour.docx.pdf>

## PILLAR 1: PRIMARY PREVENTION

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**Primary Prevention** refers to strategies and actions designed to prevent intimate partner violence and gender-based violence from ever occurring by addressing root causes and contributing factors. These include patriarchy, misogyny, sexism, racism, colonialism, ableism, homo/transphobia, and more. Primary Prevention involves educational and community-wide initiatives to foster environments that do not tolerate violence, and focuses on addressing the root causes and drivers of gender-based violence, reducing risk factors, and promoting protective factors before any violence has taken place.

The need for Primary Prevention lies in that, while every Canadian has the potential to (and will likely be) impacted in some way by intimate partner violence (IPV), we know that because of systemic root causes, notably patriarchy and gender inequality, it is women, girls, and gender diverse people who disproportionately experience this abuse - with 44% of Canadian women and girls over 15 having experienced some form of IPV.<sup>33</sup> These rates of violence are even higher for Indigenous women, racialized women, migrant women, rural women, women living with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ folks, who experience intersecting systemic inequities.

Primary Prevention creates societal and cultural shifts around these systemic issues by addressing them through education and advocacy. Without Primary Prevention, we accept gender-based violence and intimate partner violence as the “status quo”: normal aspects of living in a society. However, gender-based violence is not a necessary facet of life - it is a systemically perpetuated one. When we do not conduct Primary Prevention, we commit ourselves to the cycles of violence, and enable further violence, and will continue to see waiting lists for shelter beds and trauma counselling. Without Primary Prevention, the need for survivor support services will never be reduced. Thus, it is not about providing more shelter beds and services, but about stopping that GBV shelter revolving door. This impact extends beyond direct GBV services, as we know the long-term impacts of gender-based violence continue to put strain on other services such as housing, employment, mental health, substance use, and more.

### Goals of Primary Prevention:

- *Increasing public awareness and education*
- *Challenging social norms and media narratives*
- *Increasing gender and racial equity*
- *Empowering individuals and communities by advancing equity*
- *Creating healthy and thriving communities*
- *Creating safe environments*
- *Strengthening policy and systems frameworks*

If Primary Prevention is carried out and sustained for the long-term, we will see the ultimate goal of eradicating gender-based violence and intimate partner violence through preventing incidences of GBV and IPV from occurring in the first place - leading to the reduced dependence and strain on frontline services and on associated systems, such as healthcare, legal systems, children’s aid services, and more.

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<sup>33</sup> Government of Canada. “Fact Sheet: Intimate partner violence.” Government of Canada, July 31, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intimate-partner-violence.html>



## Examples:

- *Public awareness campaigns*
- *School-based programs teaching healthy relationships, consent, and equity*
- *Creating public resources for education on GBV and IPV*
- *Engaging men and boys in conversations on preventing violence*
- *Initiatives that address the way GBV is portrayed in media*
- *programs that address rigid gender norms and the “roles” of girls and boys*
- *Policy reviews and advocacy*
- *Financial literacy programs*

## Aura Freedom Expertise and Insight:

Through over a decade of advocacy and education initiatives, Aura Freedom has extensive Primary Prevention expertise. Aura Freedom operates from the belief that prevention-focused work is uniquely able to eradicate gender-based violence by addressing root causes, shifting societal beliefs and understandings, and intervening before violence has occurred.

We may consider Primary Prevention as the cohesion of three subcategories: *Education and Awareness*, *Community Engagement and Research*, and *Systems Reform and Advocacy*.

>>> *Education and Awareness* <<<

Education and Awareness initiatives refer to those that develop and implement educational programs aimed at changing attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. Examples of initiatives may include public awareness campaigns specific to a particular demographic (i.e. Indigenous communities, rural communities, and more) or a specific form of gender-based violence (i.e. intimate partner violence, human trafficking, etc.).

Aura Freedom’s approach to Education and Awareness is to center the root causes of violence - because gender-based violence thrives in conditions of inequity. We believe that inclusive and intersectional education that addresses the root causes of gender-based violence is the most effective form of prevention, and we do our best to provide barrier-free, trauma-informed and survivor-centred education.

Knowledge is power. We cannot address what we do not understand, or cannot name. Instead, when we conduct public education and awareness campaigns, we empower survivors and everyone with education that promotes survivor recognition and empowerment, better access to services, and - ultimately - the prevention of violence.

Aura Freedom’s *Relentless Resilience* Campaign<sup>34</sup> is a prime example of an ongoing, comprehensive public education initiative focused on preventing gender-based violence. *Relentless Resilience* is a multi-media campaign that educates Canadians on GBV and its root causes, and demonstrates how it is affecting every single aspect of life in Canada - from housing and food security, to mental health and addiction, to education and the economy. In the span between October 2020 and September 2021, Aura Freedom conducted multi-media public education, webinars, live virtual events, social media engagements, newsletters, press, the publishing of a microsite, and more - reaching an incredible 1 Million in its first year. The launch of *Relentless Resilience* resulted in Aura Freedom receiving new disclosures of GBV from those

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<sup>34</sup> Aura Freedom International. “What Is Relentless Resilience?” Aura Freedom International, 2022. <https://aurafreedom.org/relentless-resilience/what-is-relentless-resilience/>

we reached. These Public Education campaigns work - one survivor reached out to Aura Freedom after having seen the *Relentless Resilience* video on marital rape and disclosed she was experiencing sexual violence by her intimate partner. All survivors who reached out were provided with trauma counselling and safety planning information, as well as emergency bags and warm referrals to ongoing community services. *Relentless Resilience* was further acknowledged in 2020 as one of Canada's Top 100 Recovery Projects. While the Primary Prevention goal of *Relentless Resilience* was to address and educate on root causes of GBV (such as through various assets on patriarchy, masculinity, and gender roles), we also know that it conducted Early Intervention through education on different forms of violence, risk factors, and more, and conducted Direct Response support through Safety Planning resources and access to other Direct Response services. This campaign continues today.

Aura Freedom has also conducted public education and awareness on specific forms of gender-based violence. Most recently, Aura Freedom launched a femicide awareness campaign called *For Her*, which was created to call attention to the prevalence of femicide in Canada. One woman is violently killed every 2.5 days in Canada, and killed by an intimate partner every 6 days.<sup>35</sup> Femicide is a national public health emergency, and this campaign calls for it to be treated as such. The *For Her* campaign reached over 168 million in the span of its first year, and provided a platform of over 10 media engagements last year, including a talk show spot on The Social CTV. In addition to traditional media avenues of public awareness, over 60 social media assets were created to raise awareness of femicide in Canada. The *For Her* Campaign has won 6 awards in 2024, including "Canadian Campaign of the Year" and "Public Education Campaign of the Year" at the North American SABRES Awards.

#### >>> *Community Engagement and Research* <<<

Community Engagement involves the collaboration between local organizations, stakeholders, survivors, and more in spreading prevention messages and coordinating community-led efforts. Community Research is often an extension of Community Engagement, in that it often involves the exchanging, curating, and sharing of insight and expertise from multiple community stakeholders such as frontline workers, advocates, survivors, and academic researchers.

Aura Freedom often leads in the coordination of community initiatives - bringing multiple, often unlikely, stakeholders to work together is a key part of what makes our projects innovative, an example of this being coordinating a National Network and Parallel Indigenous Network of both Media and GBV professionals for our *GBV In The Media* Project. Aura Freedom additionally collaborates on the networks, coalitions, and advisory teams of other agencies and institutions, including Toronto's GBV/IPV Working Group, the Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH), as well as an Action Coalition Commitment Member for GBV under UN Women's Generation Equality.

Further, we create spaces and avenues for experts to coordinate together, such as through our *Relentless Resilience* Reports 1 & 2, the first of which interviewed frontline social workers and collected survivor stories from grassroots organizations in Toronto to demonstrate how GBV impacts all 12 areas of Critical Concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and hindering the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>36</sup>. In 2021, the second *Relentless Resilience* Report outlined grassroots gender-based violence organization and survivor recommendations, suggestions, and insight in regards to the National Action Plan, collecting community research from survivor-led organizations, newcomer organizations, shelters, Indigenous organizations, LGBTQ2S+ groups, as well as survivors of violence and exploitation, single

<sup>35</sup> Aura Freedom International. "The Body Bag For Her." Aura Freedom International, 2023. <https://aurafreedom.org/forher/>

<sup>36</sup> Aura Freedom International – Kokkoros, M. (2020). *Relentless Resilience – Addressing Gender-Based Violence Through Grassroots Excellence*, A Beijing +25 Canadian Parallel Report.

mothers, rural educators, trauma counsellors, Gender-based violence experts, clinicians, advocates, activists, and more.<sup>37</sup>

Much of Aura Freedom's community research is readily available to the public. Grown from the Multi-Media Campaign, *Relentless Resilience* also became an Online GBV Resource Centre, which houses campaign content and provides a space where educators, frontline workers, survivors, youth, and the general public can find information, education, and resources on GBV - including access to various PDF resources, stats, videos, safety planning tips and resources for survivors, survivor stories and first-hand accounts from grassroots organizations, and more. Further, in 2021, we extended this GBV Resource Centre to create a Human Trafficking Info Hub, the first of its kind in Canada. This Hub quickly became a trusted resource for frontline workers, school boards, Police, and other community partners across Canada, and is presently our most visited microsite.

### >>> *Systems Reform, Advocacy and Movement Building* <<<

Systems Reform, Advocacy and Feminist Movement Building encompasses initiatives that work towards systemic change towards the eradication of gender-based violence. It may involve policy and legislative development directly through briefs, testimonies, consultations, and more, or indirectly by advocating for or against particular policies.

Since 2023, Aura Freedom has led or collaborated on over 50 advocacy initiatives - including various brief submissions to different governmental committees, various consultations with government stakeholders, community campaigns with other organizations, and more. Aura Freedom has been advocating for the recognition of coercive behaviour for over a decade, and since 2023, has submitted two briefs to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women outlining different recommendations when considering the recognition of coercive behaviour and control at the legislative level.

At the municipal level, Aura Freedom created the brief for the successful Urgent Call to Action to have IPV declared an Epidemic in Toronto, and co-led this call with Women's Habitat, a movement which garnered over 40 organizational endorsements in Toronto. Just two weeks after our Urgent Call to Action was released, Toronto's City Council voted unanimously in favour of the motion put forward by Mayor Chow to officially declare IPV and GBV an epidemic.

Further, after submitting a brief to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery ahead of his Canada visit, the UN Special Rapporteur, Mr. Tomoya Obokata, asked Aura Freedom to support him to organize and host a stakeholder meeting, where Aura Freedom was successful in bringing together more than fifty anti-human trafficking stakeholders in Toronto to consult for Mr. Obokata. We were happy to facilitate this meeting to allow the Toronto anti-human trafficking community to contribute to Mr. Obokata's country report on Canada's efforts to address modern slavery, which was published last month.

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<sup>37</sup> Aura Freedom International – Kokkoros, M. (2021). *Relentless Resilience 2 – The Grassroots Speaks Again*. [https://aurafreedom.org/content/uploads/2021/09/Aura-Freedom\\_Relentless\\_Resilience\\_Part2\\_2021.pdf](https://aurafreedom.org/content/uploads/2021/09/Aura-Freedom_Relentless_Resilience_Part2_2021.pdf)

## PILLAR 2: EARLY INTERVENTION

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**Early Intervention** (also known as Secondary Prevention) refers to the identification of and response to issues related to GBV and IPV at an early stage along the continuum of gender-based violence. Early Intervention is focused on providing support and resources to individuals at risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence, or showing early signs of violence. Initiatives within this pillar can work to identify and support systems, environments, and services (outside of those directly related to GBV) in recognizing and intervening where individuals are at risk of experiencing or committing violence, such as the legal system, police, healthcare, schools, parenting programs, and more. Examples of initiatives in this pillar are healthy masculinity and positive role model programs for young boys, group therapy and support for men who have experienced child abuse as children, sex trafficking education for youth in care, and parenting programs for new parents. Further, Early Intervention initiatives can be used to increase the capacity of frontline service providers by providing training, such as for different forms of gender-based violence (i.e. providing coercive control training or human trafficking training to an intimate partner violence shelter). Successful Early Intervention initiatives can have profound impacts on frontline services - we know the waiting lists are long for many GBV programs, and Early Intervention initiatives can prevent the escalation of violence and need for these supports for many survivors.

Early Intervention initiatives are vital to mitigating experiences and impacts of gender-based violence. Along with the understanding that gender-based violence is preventable, escalating and ongoing experiences of gender-based violence are preventable. By identifying warning signs, intervening early, and increasing the capacity of notable stakeholders (i.e. teachers, parents, healthcare providers, frontline workers, police, and more) to do the same, Early Intervention initiatives can mean the difference between someone at risk of violence and someone experiencing violence - and the difference between a survivor of intimate partner violence and a victim of intimate partner femicide.

The need for Early Intervention lies in the fact that 80% of survivors of intimate partner violence tell their family or friends of their experiences of abuse first.<sup>38</sup> This highlights the need for the greater community to be equipped with the awareness and understanding not just of resources and support available, but of the early signs and risks of perpetrating and experiencing violence. *How many in Ontario are presently equipped to have this conversation with a loved one who is at risk of or experiencing violence?* The Canadian Women's Foundation conducted a poll that shows only 1 in 5 people are 'very confident' in supporting someone who has experienced physical abuse - and even less are very confident in supporting someone who has experienced sexual or emotional abuse.<sup>39</sup> The statistics further suggest that there is a substantial discrepancy in how many people in Canada feel they are able to have these conversations, and how many survivors actually feel supported.<sup>40</sup>

Early Intervention initiatives acknowledge that there are multiple potential intervention points for those at risk of experiencing gender-based violence, and those who are more at risk of perpetrating GBV. Further, these initiatives increase the capacity (and thereby the success) of these intervention points.

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<sup>38</sup> Government of Ontario. "Intimate partner violence." Government of Ontario, April 30, 2020. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/intimate-partner-violence>.

<sup>39</sup> The Canadian Women's Foundation. "New research on awareness of gender-based violence and digital abuse." The Canadian Women's Foundation, November 30, 2023. <https://canadianwomen.org/blog/new-research-on-awareness-of-gender-based-violence-and-digital-abuse/>

<sup>40</sup> The Canadian Women's Foundation. "The Abuse Support Gap." The Canadian Women's Foundation, March 9, 2022. <https://canadianwomen.org/blog/abuse-support-gap/>

**Goals of Early Intervention:**

- *Identifying and addressing risks and early signs*
- *Providing immediate support at earlier stages*
- *Improving access to and effectiveness of direct services*
- *Enhancing competency of relevant systems and stakeholders*
- *Promoting safe reporting of IPV and GBV*

If Early Intervention is carried out and sustained, we will see would-be survivors and perpetrators changing the stories of their lives and exploring pathways away from violence. We would see those at risk accessing safer relationships and environments, reducing incidences of GBV and IPV, and at the same time we would see those experiencing early signs of violence accessing services earlier, reducing escalations of violence and intergenerational violence.

**Examples:**

- *School-based programs that support school staff to identify warning signs of youth at risk of GBV/HT*
- *School programs that advance equity and address harmful social norms*
- *School programs that improve GBV and HT competency within target sectors such as medical professionals, judges, police, and more*
- *Developing resources of early intervention for direct services such as femicide risk assessments and femicide training for police forces*
- *Creating resources and services for individuals at risk of experiencing violence (youth in care, youth experiencing homelessness, youth who have witnessed family violence, etc.)*
- *Creating resources and services for individuals at risk of perpetuating gender-based violence (support groups for men and boys who use violence, services for child abuse survivors, healthy masculinity education, etc.)*

**Aura Freedom Expertise and Insight:**

Aura Freedom's gender-based violence and human trafficking expertise has led us to conducting intentional Early Intervention initiatives in the form of two subcategories: *Anti-GBV and HT Training*, and *Resources for Those At Risk*.

>>> *Anti-GBV and HT Training* <<<

Through years of working with GBV survivors, frontline workers, advocates, and GBV researchers, Aura Freedom identified local trends in GBV and human trafficking, and target populations and sectors that require anti-GBV and anti-HT training. Through our years of advocacy, public education and awareness raising, and survivor support, we began to develop tailored and targeted training and resources. We identified the need for youth-focused training across elementary to post-secondary students, police, government representatives, school staff and admin, and frontline workers. Our anti-human trafficking youth-oriented training has reached over 2000 youth and students, and our frontline training for GBV sector workers has reached over 4500 new frontline workers in the last year. Last year, Aura Freedom presented at the 2023 Toronto Police Service International Human Trafficking Conference - enhancing capacity and awareness for over 100 police stakeholders. Tailored anti-GBV and anti-HT training must be developed and sustained for various target populations (specifically, populations at highest risk of GBV) and target sectors who can be leveraged to conduct Early Intervention for survivors (i.e. police, healthcare, school staff, etc.).

Aura Freedom additionally advocated for the ongoing need for particular stakeholders, sectors, and professionals to have dedicated, consistent, and mandated training. In particular, we advocated for and supported the passing of Keira’s Law, which required federal judges to be educated on intimate partner and family violence, including coercive control. We continue to advocate for the full implementation of this Bill, and the replication of similar legislation at other levels of government.

>>> *Resources for Those At Risk* <<<

Aura Freedom advocates consistently for the development of accessible services, resources, and tools for those at risk. With femicide rates increasing 27% in the last 5 years,<sup>41</sup> and with more and more femicide victims being children in the last few months in Ontario,<sup>42</sup> Aura Freedom has been most recently advocating and analysing risk assessment tools for early identification of risk factors and signs of potential violence, specifically femicide risk assessment tools. The development, implementation, evaluation and analysis of these tools will allow frontline services to provide tailored support to survivors, and identify those at highest risk to their safety.

In particular, Aura Freedom has been advocating for the screening of coercive control and behaviour in IPV risk assessments, as we have long known of this insidious form of violence - and how deadly it is. We know that coercive control is believed to be a consistent precursor to femicide - even in situations when there has been no other physical violence.<sup>43</sup> It is ingrained with our advocacy for the recognition and purposeful eradication of coercive control that Early Intervention tools, resources, and initiatives consider coercive control.

Aura Freedom has also carried out education for youth and those who support them that addresses gender inequality and harmful social norms like the hyper-sexualization of young girls and the glorification of violence/unhealthy masculinity. These topics addressing gender norms and patriarchy have been embedded in our anti-GBV programming for years and a permanent fixture in our GBV messaging and lens.

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<sup>41</sup> Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. “CFOJA Reports.” December 8, 2023. <https://femicideincanada.ca/cfoja-research/cfoja-reports/>.

<sup>42</sup> Weingarten, N. “Report Warns Number of Young Femicide Victims in Ontario Rising.” CBC News, August 24, 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-femicide-young-victims-1.7302542>.

<sup>43</sup> CBC News. “MPs vote unanimously to criminalize coercive control.” June 13, 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/coercive-control-laurel-collins-domestic-violence-1.7233526>

## PILLAR 3: DIRECT RESPONSE

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**Direct Response** (sometimes known as Tertiary Prevention) refers to the immediate and ongoing initiatives taken to address and respond to incidents of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence once they have occurred. It involves varied programs of support and intervention to survivors and their children, as well as programs and services that seek to hold those who perpetrate violence to account. This includes services such as shelter programs, legal aid, gender-based violence counselling, and PAR programs. Direct Response initiatives are unique in that they are geared towards responding to violence that has taken place - promoting healing and safety while also mitigating harmful impacts.

When we have failed to prevent gender-based violence, or its escalation from risk to occurrence, Direct Response services are able to act when gender-based violence survivors are identified, and coordinate various services that would allow for comprehensive support.

The need for Direct Response services lies in the understanding that gender-based violence will not be eradicated in our lifetimes. On the contrary - we are seeing the seventh consecutive year of gradual increase in police-reported intimate partner violence.<sup>44</sup> These numbers do not account for the countless women, girls, and gender-diverse folks experiencing intimate partner violence who will never report to the police.

Direct Response initiatives are the crucial frontline interventions that support survivors in accessing immediate crisis response such as shelters and medical care, avenues for ongoing safety, emotional and psychological support and long-term healing support such as housing, childcare support, financial assistance, education, and more. Direct Response initiatives also incorporate the legal, justice, and community programs and initiatives that seek to hold perpetrators accountable and prevent recidivism of violence.

### Goals of Direct Response:

- *Ensuring immediate safety of survivors*
- *Providing immediate support services and addressing immediate needs*
- *Coordination of services such as housing, legal aid, employment, and more*
- *Facilitating recovery, autonomy, and empowerment of survivors*
- *Addressing trauma and impacts to survivors*
- *Holding perpetrators accountable and reducing recidivism of perpetrators*

When frontline services are trauma-informed and survivor-centered, and incorporate long-term healing, they meet survivor's needs and thereby reduce the incidence of recurring GBV and IPV, and support the healing of survivors, reducing negative impacts on survivors and their children.

### Examples:

- *Emergency services, such as shelters and hotlines*
- *Crisis and long-term counselling for survivors*
- *Medical and reproductive care for survivors*
- *Support services for interconnected systems and supports (i.e. childcare, housing, etc.)*
- *Legal aid to support survivors through the legal systems (i.e. family court, criminal court, etc.)*
- *Restorative justice programs*

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<sup>44</sup> Statistics Canada. "Victims of police-reported family and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2021." Government of Canada, October 19, 2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221019/dq221019c-eng.htm>

## Aura Freedom Insight:

Aura Freedom’s anti-human trafficking educational workshops for youth in schools resulted in a 50% disclosure rate. That is, half of our human trafficking workshops for youth resulted in a youth disclosing that they, or someone they knew, were being trafficked. It is through our collaboration with Direct Response services that these youth were connected with immediate trauma counselling and support through an on-site trauma counsellor, in addition to being supported by the social workers in their schools and warmly transferred to ongoing support and services. The needs of each survivor, especially across the continuum and forms of gender-based violence, are unique. It is through the sustained and adequate funding of Direct Response services that these survivors may be supported to meet those needs. Not only do these services need to be trauma- and violence-informed, and incorporate the expertise of survivors, so too must their funders and their funders’ approaches to funding.

It is sustained, comprehensive, and accessible services that can lead to the prevention of recurring violence for survivors, and prevent intergenerational violence. Comprehensive services do not end at addressing all ways gender-based violence may impact a survivor (such as financial instability, poor mental and physical health outcomes, housing precarity, and more) - but must include interventions that prevent intergenerational trauma by targeting the children of survivors. We implore funders to ensure appropriate and available support services for children of survivors incorporated in all relevant GBV frontline services. We must ensure we are addressing the trauma of children coming to women’s shelters, who make up almost half of residents in shelter services for survivors of abuse.<sup>45</sup>

## A Note on Long-Term Healing

Direct Responses must incorporate and consider the long-term healing of survivors. Gender-based violence does not only impact women and girls, but families, communities, and our country as a whole. While global heads of state convene to discuss struggling economies, housing, disease, migration, poverty, and climate change, we know that the eradication of gender-based violence and the empowerment of women and girls can bring increased wealth, health, peace and climate justice to our communities. For more on this, Aura Freedom has created a resource outlining how gender-based violence has hindered the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>46</sup>

Direct Responses to gender-based violence are not limited to crisis calls or shelter beds, but holistic programs and initiatives that provide long-term support and healing for survivors, including counselling, housing assistance, medical care, legal assistance, social support, education, childcare support, job training, economic support, and more. We know that supporting survivors must mean recognizing that survivors are not healed simply by escaping violence, and that survivorship - alongside the impacts of experiencing gender-based violence - is often long-term. When survivors are supported in the long term, it fosters intergenerational healing and empowerment, which is key to preventing violence that is passed on from generation to generation.

*“Supporting survivors has meant understanding that we did not just survive an instance (or instances) of violence - we survived each and every impacted day thereafter. As a survivor, I am not untangling the web of how gender-based violence has touched each aspect of my life, but finding ways to thrive through that transition.” - Danielle Warren, Manager of Programs and Development at Aura Freedom*

<sup>45</sup> Statistics Canada. “Canadian residential facilities for victims of abuse, 2020/2021.” Government of Canada, April 12, 2022.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00006-eng.htm>

<sup>46</sup> Aura Freedom International. “Gender-based violence is affecting every aspect of Canadian life and hindering the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.” Aura Freedom International. [https://aurafreedom.org/content/uploads/2020/02/AF\\_RelentlessResilience\\_Beijing25\\_Cdn\\_ParallelRpt\\_SDGSnapShot.pdf](https://aurafreedom.org/content/uploads/2020/02/AF_RelentlessResilience_Beijing25_Cdn_ParallelRpt_SDGSnapShot.pdf)



## FIVE RECOMMENDED AVENUES FOR PRIMARY PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

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While recognizing there are numerous potential initiatives that are possible within the three pillars, Aura Freedom will be outlining five vital initiatives, or avenues, falling under the Primary Prevention and Early Intervention pillars - in which Aura Freedom has over a decade of expertise creating and facilitating trauma- and violence-informed, survivor-centered projects.

The Five Avenues that will be outlined in this written submission are **Education, Media, Public Campaigns, Cross Sectoral Training, and Technology**. These interventions have been consistently identified as vital points of prevention and intervention, and must be resourced and implemented immediately.

### Education

**Summary:** Developing and rolling out province-wide, school-based curricula on topics leading to gender-based violence prevention, identification, and response, while embedding a gender-based violence lens in current school curricula.

#### Identifying the Problem:

While we may want to protect our children from the realities of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, we exist in a society where children are so often the direct and indirect targets of gender-based violence. Hiding behind silence and inaction cannot protect children from the horrors they themselves are experiencing. Since 2009, there has been a 25% increase in police-reported family violence against children and youth in Canada.<sup>47</sup> In Ontario in particular, we have been seeing nearly 1 in 5 victims of femicide being children.<sup>48</sup> Further, over a quarter of human trafficking survivors in Canada are children, and when we know that a third of trafficking survivors were trafficked by someone posing as an intimate partner, it is vital that children are mandated to understand and be educated on topics such as healthy relationships.<sup>49</sup>

Even when children are not the immediate victims or survivors of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, they so often experience its impacts. Every 2.5 days, a woman or girl is killed by violence in Canada, and 90% of these women had at least one child.<sup>50</sup> Each year in Canada, roughly 362,000 children are witnesses to intimate partner violence in their homes - these children have twice the rate of psychiatric disorders as children from non-violent homes.<sup>51</sup> Children are directly and indirectly victims and survivors of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, and it is impacting all aspects of their lives.

Further, children - particularly boys - are targeted online by harmful ideologies related to gender-based violence. Online misogynistic cultures within what is entitled the “manosphere”, such as Alpha and Sigma culture, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and Red and Black Pill movements are all marked by extreme

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<sup>47</sup> Statistics Canada. “Victims of police-reported family and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2021.” Government of Canada, October 19, 2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221019/dq221019c-eng.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Weingarten, N. “Report Warns Number of Young Femicide Victims in Ontario Rising.” CBC News, August 24, 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-femicide-young-victims-1.7302542>

<sup>49</sup> Heidinger, . “Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2022.” Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-005-x/2023001/article/00002-eng.htm>

<sup>50</sup> Aura Freedom International – Kokkoros, M. (2020). Relentless Resilience – Addressing Gender-Based Violence Through Grassroots Excellence, A Beijing +25 Canadian Parallel Report.

<sup>51</sup> Aura Freedom International & Women’s Habitat of Etobicoke. “An Urgent Call to Action: Recognition of the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic in Toronto, Canada.” July 6, 2023. <https://aurafreedom.org/content/uploads/2023/07/Toronto-IPV-Epidemic-An-Urgent-Call-to-Action.pdf>

misogynistic values and messages, as well as the rejection of feminism and, in turn, women.<sup>52</sup> From a young age, boys are growing up being taught that their masculinity (and, they feel, their liberties and rights) are at risk. This early and often unregulated education and indoctrination of youth warrants intentional and coordinated efforts of the education system to address these growing movements.

Gender-based violence and intimate-partner violence education is a gap in our education system. Recent research led by Dr. Catherine Vanner of the University of Windsor analyzed the Ontario Secondary School Curriculum, gathering insight from Canadian educators and students aged 11-17, with their research confirming that while gender-based violence was a prominent issue in the lives of Canadian students, their families, and communities, these topics were underrepresented or simply not present in what students are most often being taught in schools.<sup>53</sup> Canadians want this education: eighty-eight (88) per cent of Canadians believe that ways to support those experiencing GBV should be taught in schools.<sup>54</sup>

### **Objectives and Goals of this Avenue:**

- *Conduct prevention of GBV through consistent youth education of various topics (gender equality, healthy masculinities, awareness of types of GBV, etc.)*
- *Ensure consistency in GBV knowledge and awareness for youth*
- *Promote awareness and understanding of GBV in Ontario youth*
- *Encourage cross-curricular links between GBV and other subjects, fostering critical thinking*
- *Empower students to navigate relationships and access support as needed*
- *Encourage positive behaviour and healthy relationships in youth*
- *Reduce incidents of violence for youth*
- *Create safer learning environments for youth*
- *Create a whole-of-society approach to eradicating violence for youth*

### **Proposed Solutions:**

Aura Freedom's Beijing+25 Canadian Parallel Report, *Relentless Resilience*, called for holistic change to address the root causes of gender-based violence and societal power imbalances, collecting insight from frontline social workers, survivors, and more. One pivotal recommendation from this report was to develop a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence (the NAP was not yet released at the time) that would implement "education to address consent, healthy relationships, healthy sexuality and awareness of gender-based violence"<sup>55</sup> and "address deeply entrenched and rigid social and gender norms that impede equity and dictate the way people behave. Topics should also include rape culture, toxic masculinity, and sexism in the media."<sup>56</sup> We further called for education that was age-appropriate and embedded throughout Canadian school curricula, from elementary to post-secondary schools. This report, and much of what we recommended, were key examples of Primary Prevention that utilized expertise from across all three pillars.

The Ontario government's implementation of the policy framework Memorandum 166, which mandates all school boards to have protocols, policies and mandatory learning in place to address sex trafficking in Ontario schools, was acknowledged as the first of its kind, and accompanied the updated 2019 curriculum that included mandatory learning to address healthy relationships. This example of policy can be built upon

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<sup>52</sup> O'Connor, C. "Hatescape: An In-Depth Analysis of Extremism and Hate Speech on TikTok." The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2021. [https://www.isdellobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/HateScape\\_v5.pdf](https://www.isdellobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/HateScape_v5.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Vanner, C. (2022). Education about gender-based violence: Opportunities and obstacles in the Ontario secondary school. *Gender and Education*, 34(2): 145-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2021.1884193>

<sup>54</sup> The Canadian Women's Foundation. "Almost a quarter of people in Canada feel gender-based violence is 'none of their business.'" Canadian Women's Foundation, March 7, 2022. <https://canadianwomen.org/gbv-survey-canada-2022/>

<sup>55</sup> Aura Freedom International – Kokkoros, M. (2020). *Relentless Resilience – Addressing Gender-Based Violence Through Grassroots Excellence*, A Beijing +25 Canadian Parallel Report.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

to incorporate protocols and processes that target intimate partner violence (and gender-based violence as a whole) in schools across Ontario. We recognize that Memorandum 166 includes the requirement of school boards to incorporate strategies that raise awareness and prevent sex trafficking - specifying processes to raise awareness among parents, caregivers and students, and include curriculum-based learning about such topics as healthy relationships, consent, mental health and well-being, coping, and others.<sup>57</sup> In order to truly end gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, we must ensure healthy masculinities, gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, gender and racial equity, and more are also topics discussed with children in classrooms.

Through Memorandum 166, there is existing policy in Ontario recognizing that physically and psychologically safe schools are critical to the success and nurturing of positive student experiences. Further, it acknowledges that “schools are ideally placed to respond to sex trafficking and are a key factor in helping survivors of trafficking heal and rebuild their lives. They promote safety by building a culture of caring and by taking meaningful, culturally responsive and consistent action to prevent and respond to issues of safety and inappropriate behaviours.”<sup>58</sup> This is not true exclusively for human trafficking, but for gender-based violence as a whole - and therefore we must enact similar policies and protocols to protect youth from further forms of gender-based violence. Similar to Memorandum 166, this GBV and IPV policy must guide school boards in Ontario to collaborate with community organizations and service providers, youth, families, child welfare agencies, and police services as needed.<sup>59</sup>

It should be noted that Memorandum 166 outlines initiatives reflecting Primary Prevention (i.e. curricula inclusions and awareness raising for parents and youth), Early Intervention (i.e. training for school board employees to recognize risks and signs of violence), and Direct Response (i.e. response procedures and connection with frontline services). We know that education and awareness of GBV (for students/youth, parents, and teachers) will come with an increase in disclosures made to school staff, as we have seen countless times in our own work. School boards must be supported in developing the capacity to handle these disclosures, and connected with sustained Direct Response resources to support identified survivors, or those at risk. Applying this framework intentionally in future GBV and IPV education policy will ensure that a comprehensive and holistic approach is taken to eradicating gender-based violence and intimate partner violence for students and youth.

Further, Aura Freedom calls for the embedding of curriculum throughout the year and throughout the students’ education, as opposed to the one-off assemblies or workshops that we see today. Societal norms around gender-based violence, as well as gender inequity and other root causes of violence, are embedded and ingrained in childrens’ daily lives - we must ensure structured gender-based violence prevention education is conducted in the same way (Primary Prevention). In that same way, we must ensure that gender-based violence and intimate-partner violence are understood cross-curricula, in that relevant courses such as history, social studies, social sciences and humanities, health and physical education, and literature all incorporate a gender-based violence and gender lens. For example, Canadian history should not be taught without the explicit teaching on colonialism and its gendered impacts - particularly, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).

### **Aura Freedom Expertise:**

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<sup>57</sup> Government of Ontario. “Policy/Program Memorandum 166.” Government of Ontario, July 6, 2021. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-166>.

<sup>58</sup> Government of Ontario. “Policy/Program Memorandum 166.” Government of Ontario, July 6, 2021. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-166>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Aura Freedom has worked to educate both the students and staff within Ontario schools in order to prevent, identify, and respond to gender-based violence and human trafficking.

Aura Freedom's award-winning Human Trafficking Peer Prevention Workshops trained, mentored and coached a team of young women from different marginalized communities to facilitate gender-based violence and human trafficking prevention workshops in schools and other youth spaces in Ontario - bringing life-saving Primary Prevention and Early Intervention education to over 2000+ youth. This for-youth, by-youth approach to preventing gender-based violence, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation brought in youth facilitators from diverse backgrounds and some with various lived experiences including human trafficking and violence, which gives them unique insight to address human trafficking in their communities. As a result of this project, 90% of youth attending agreed that awareness makes a difference and can help end GBV and human trafficking - and 100% felt they knew who to contact if they experienced physical or sexual violence.

Aura Freedom has worked with different Ontario school boards in Toronto and York Region to support and inform them as they developed and rolled out their anti-sex trafficking plans as per Memorandum 166. For the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Aura Freedom was their main partner for staff capacity building (Early Intervention). After a robust needs assessment of over five months with TDSB staff, administration and students, we designed and facilitated a comprehensive three-part training program for all TDSB staff that was tailored to their specific needs, working with different departments including the Urban Indigenous Education Centre, and others. We also supported TDSB to create and engage a group of community organizations which eventually became their Advisory Committee, upon which we still currently sit. Aura Freedom introduced TDSB to multiple community partners working on sex trafficking issues who became part of their committee. We also supported TDSB in creating sex trafficking resources for staff (Primary Prevention and Early Intervention), an online training portal for teachers (Early Intervention), and provided on-site support to survivors (Direct Response). For the York Region District School Board (YRDSB), we have trained staff and school administration, provided toolkits and resources for schools, made connections to YRDSB partners, and carried out student presentations and assemblies (Early Intervention). We have also supported YRDSB in their implementation of Memorandum 166 and currently sit on their YRDSB Anti-Sex Trafficking Steering Committee. That said, Aura Freedom's advocacy, advising, and consulting work is largely unfunded, and the implementation of current and future policy such as this, as well as the associated shifts in school curricula and school staff training, will not be effective unless funding is sustained for the ongoing work done by GBV organizations like ours.

## Media

**Summary:** Addressing and shifting the way GBV and IPV is portrayed in the media, creating transformative journalism and modeling cross-sectoral collaboration.

### Identifying the Problem:

The media plays a significant role in how gender-based violence is understood and talked about. Whose stories are told, and *how*? Whose stories are buried, and *why*?

The media tells the stories of our time, and therefore has played - and continues to play - a significant role in how gender-based violence is understood and discussed. The power that the media holds in any country is undeniable – and *‘with great power comes great responsibility’*.

Historically, gender-based violence has been misrepresented and underreported in the media. Media sources, intentionally or not, often uphold harmful stereotypes, overlooking the intersectionality of GBV and missing opportunities to educate the public on racial and gender equity. Media coverage can perpetuate the myth that GBV only affects “some women” instead of the 44% of women directly impacted by intimate partner violence *alone* in Canada.<sup>60</sup> While the Media has created public awareness, it has led to sensationalization and misinformation of GBV. Language used by media is often inaccurate and validates GBV (i.e. “honour killings” instead of femicide) and perpetuates harmful stereotypes, rape culture, and victim blaming. These narratives, terms, and framing of gender-based violence often both mirror and shape cultural understandings of gender-based violence.

That said, it is for these reasons that the media presents an opportunity to educate and empower people with accurate facts and information, and to shift the conversation around GBV in Ontario, ultimately leading to prevention. The media is rarely utilized as a tool to end gender-based violence. However, creating systemic change in Ontario media is possible. If we implemented proper gender-based violence reporting, and GBV information was mainstreamed in the media the same way, for example, COVID-19 information has been, we would change the entire narrative of GBV and the way Canadians look at it. Ontario’s understanding of gender-based violence could shift from something normalized, happening in the far-off corners of the world, to an urgent national issue requiring attention.

### Objectives and Goals of this Avenue:

- *Increase media attention on GBV and “mainstream” GBV information*
- *Challenge commonly held stereotypes and myths of GBV, and highlight supports*
- *Promote ethical reporting and informed coverage through Transformative Media*
- *Facilitating education and awareness of GBV through media*
- *Increase number of survivor-centred, trauma- and violence-informed media pieces*
- *Promote awareness of best practices for journalists and media professionals*
- *Implement and strengthen GBV policies and trainings for media professionals*
- *Encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing between media and GBV professionals*

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<sup>60</sup>Government of Canada. “Fact Sheet: Intimate partner violence.” Government of Canada, July 31, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intimate-partner-violence.html>

## **Aura Freedom Expertise:**

This year, Aura Freedom launched our *GBV In The Media* project, another pivotal Primary Prevention initiative, which seeks to transform media portrayals of gender-based violence in Ontario and Canada. Through regular consultations with a pan-Canadian advisory network of GBV experts, frontline workers, intersectional feminist advocates, survivors, Indigenous community leaders, academics, journalists/reporters, other guideline writers, and more, Aura Freedom has created a powerful set of media guidelines and other tools for journalists Ontario and beyond. Our rich advisory network sits at the heart of this project and its members have provided a diverse range of expertise, insight, and feedback on key project materials, including the final media guidelines. Through these guidelines and the creation of a strong, cross-sectoral network, *GBV In The Media* aims to inspire a movement for transformative media reporting that challenges harmful gender norms and debunks persistent myths about male violence against women and GBV, radically changing how they are addressed, and eradicating GBV through prevention.

Aura Freedom supported this work by conducting a Research Background and Literature Review to both inform the Guidelines and ground the consultations with the National Network. By analyzing existing guidelines and literature, Aura Freedom identified key questions and areas for transformation, explored how existing media guidelines reflect current research findings, and discussed ways to build upon this work and continue to push the boundaries of Transformative Media. Through the network cultivated, the guidelines created, and other project outputs, Aura Freedom is fostering a new relationship between journalists and GBV advocates – a relationship that has historically been strained. *GBV In The Media* represents a step forward in addressing systemic barriers to gender equality and works toward the ultimate achievement of a world free of all forms of gender-based violence.

Through partnering with media professionals, we have learned that media experts want to do better. What is missing are the tools, training, and opportunities to do so. This is why Aura Freedom created the National Network of GBV and Media Professionals, conducted a Research Background and Literature Review (which includes an Indigenous-specific Research Background and Literature Review), wrote the Guidelines on GBV in the Media, created a Journalist’s Scorecard to support the usage of Aura Freedom’s Guidelines, and published a microsite that houses all these resources and more.

The creation of this project is just the first step in inspiring a movement for transformative reporting of gender-based violence. The ongoing funding required to ensure the implementation and awareness of these guidelines, and the continuation of the National Network, would radically change the way gender-based violence is viewed and addressed in our communities. We have seen systemic shifts already occurring, with the project being presented at a UN Women event on successful violence prevention efforts globally, the online training of media professionals by Network members, and changes made to inclusivity Guidelines at a Network member’s news outlet, wherein a GBV section was created.

## **Proposed Solutions:**

Aura Freedom has created a transformational preliminary project to address the need for ongoing media reform in the way GBV is reported on through our *GBV In The Media* project, which is outlined above.

That said, systemic change does not occur overnight, and our *GBV In The Media* Project (which concluded in March of this year) was only Phase 1 of our ongoing plan to create transformative change through Transformative Media. We must ensure that these Guidelines and resources are not simply “left on a shelf” - and herein lies the next phase of *GBV In the Media*.

Aura Freedom is currently looking for opportunities to fund Phase 2 of *GBV In The Media*. This phase seeks to sustain the National Network of *GBV In The Media*, promote usage of the media guidelines published, and work with media to ensure media buy-in of these guidelines, increase capacity of media to implement/adhere to these guidelines, and raise awareness of the *GBV In The Media* for the public, as well as within targeted groups such as media professionals, journalism students and communications professionals.

Key aspects of this solution include:

- Obtaining media buy-in and usage of the Guidelines by promoting the *GBV In The Media* project through a variety of events, social media assets, campaign materials, and more. Leveraging media professionals to address GBV requires that they are aware of these guidelines provincially and nationally.
- Increasing capacity of media professionals, journalists, and newsrooms to implement and adhere to the Guidelines, thereby engaging in transformative, anti-GBV and gender equity-advancing media. This is done by developing capacity-building opportunities for media professionals and educational institutions. Through training, spot-checking of media pieces, and workshops, we will build the capacities of media professionals and students. This is also supplemented by the ongoing development of tools to support media professionals, similar to our Journalist's Scorecard.
- Fostering the National Network of GBV and Media professionals, thereby also fostering positive relationships between journalists and GBV advocates, offering opportunities of networking, learning, and collaboration. At the same time, growing this National Network to even better reflect all intersectionalities of Canadians and all forms of GBV.
- Ongoing public awareness of GBV, increasing access to support for survivors, and the prevention of GBV through public education. This is done by raising awareness of the *GBV In The Media* project, the Guidelines, the Research, the microsite, and the resources available through this project, and how they can support not only journalists, media professionals, and journalism students, but the greater society as a whole to critically assess media representations of GBV and IPV. This also further allows for increasing public awareness of various Direct Response services that are incorporated within the project.

Long-term funding of the *GBV In The Media* Project is crucial to ensure ongoing Primary Prevention opportunities for systemic change within media are identified and acted on, as well as to ensure ongoing updates and inclusions to the project, such as to Guidelines (for example, adding guidelines for specific targeted communities, for additional forms of GBV, or for additional forms of media such as social media). Finally, it is only with long-term funding that we can sustain the National Network of GBV and Media professionals, a resource of systemic change through networking and collaboration in and of itself.

## Public Campaigns

**Summary:** Implementing province-wide GBV and IPV public educational and awareness campaigns to drive societal change through continuous learning.

### Identifying the Problem:

While gender-based violence and intimate partner violence are pervasive, escalating human rights abuses that either directly or indirectly impact all those in Ontario, there is a substantial lack of understanding and awareness on gender-based violence within the public, allowing for the persistence of myths and misconceptions.

Canadians are increasingly aware of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, but their understanding may be superficial, as Canadians may have difficulty identifying the continuum of gender-based violence, what constitutes these forms of violence, and non-physical forms such as coercive control or psychological abuse. Further, important and relevant topics related to gender-based violence are not widely understood by Canadians, with only 1 in 3 Canadians understanding what sexual consent means.<sup>61</sup> Intersectional gaps in public awareness exist in that diverse forms of gender-based violence and impacts on diverse communities such as 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, Indigenous communities, women with disabilities, and more are less understood. A Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Report finds that Canadian youth struggle to define or identify gender-based violence in concrete terms, but nonetheless widely recognize it as a problem in Canada.<sup>62</sup> Canadians are able to recognize the importance of eradicating gender-based violence, but are not equipped with the knowledge or tools to truly understand, recognize, and address it.

Misconceptions and myths related to gender-based violence and intimate-partner violence still exist, which can result in blaming and shaming victims, underestimating the prevalence and impact of these issues, and more. When 30% of intimate partner violence survivors will never report their abuse to the police,<sup>63</sup> and 80% of survivors tell their family or friends of their experiences of abuse first,<sup>64</sup> the way that the general public understands gender-based violence and intimate partner violence is imperative to survivors disclosing their abuse. The Canadian Women's Foundation found that 35% of GBV survivors do not disclose their abuse because they feel there is no one they can tell, and a further 27% feel they would not be believed, with 32% of survivors feeling they would be judged, blamed, or shamed.<sup>65</sup> These reasons for survivors not disclosing their abuse and not connecting with support are preventable and can be addressed through sustained and impactful public education and awareness campaigns. Further, in reviewing current societal norms and beliefs, these impressions by survivors of not being believed or supported are substantiated. Research suggests that less than half of Canadian men agree or strongly agree that those who report sexual assault are almost always telling the truth, and only 62% of women believe the same.<sup>66</sup> Further, a 2015 survey from the *Canadian Women's Foundation* found that 1 in 10 Canadians believe consent is not required or don't know if it's required between spouses or long-term partners.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>61</sup> The Canadian Women's Foundation. "Only 1 in 3 Canadians Know What Sexual Consent Means." The Canadian Women's Foundation. <https://canadianwomen.org/about-us/media/1-3-canadians-know-sexual-consent-means/>.

<sup>62</sup> Women and Gender Equality Canada. "Attitudes and Awareness of Gender-Based Violence Amongst Youth in Canada." Government of Canada, May 13, 2022. [https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2022/fggc-wage/SW21-187-2022-eng.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/fggc-wage/SW21-187-2022-eng.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> Government of Ontario. "Intimate partner violence." Government of Ontario, April 30, 2020. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/intimate-partner-violence>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> The Canadian Women's Foundation. "Almost a quarter of people in Canada feel gender-based violence is 'none of their business.'" Canadian Women's Foundation, March 7, 2022. <https://canadianwomen.org/ebv-survey-canada-2022/>

<sup>66</sup> Cotter, A. & Savage, L. "Perceptions related to gender-based violence, gender equality, and gender expression." Statistics Canada, December 9, 2019. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-005-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm>.

<sup>67</sup> The Canadian Women's Foundation. "Only 1 in 3 Canadians Know What Sexual Consent Means." The Canadian Women's Foundation. <https://canadianwomen.org/about-us/media/1-3-canadians-know-sexual-consent-means/>.



Comprehensive public education campaigns work to shift both individual and societal attitudes and behaviours. Ontario government initiatives such as “Ontario’s Strategy to End Human Trafficking” and the “Action Plan for Women’s Economic Empowerment,” indicate an awareness of the importance of education and prevention, such as through public awareness and education campaigns. This belief and call for widely available public awareness and education is echoed in various ways across the Renfrew County Inquest, the Mass Casualty Commission, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and included in both Canada’s National Action Plan and Ontario STANDS.

#### **Objectives and Goals of this Avenue:**

- *Conduct prevention of GBV through sustainable and adaptable public education initiatives*
- *Ensure consistency in GBV knowledge and awareness for the public*
- *Promote Primary Prevention and Early Intervention strategies and reduce incidence rates of violence*
- *Empower and engage communities to participate in prevention and survivor support efforts*
- *Challenge harmful societal norms, myths, and misconceptions of GBV/IPV*
- *Create safer public and private spaces and strengthen networks of support for survivors*
- *Encourage continuous learning, and ongoing education on GBV, facilitating ongoing updated information*
- *Foster a whole-of-society approach to eradicating GBV and IPV in our communities*

#### **Proposed Solutions:**

Public Education Campaigns are vital for increasing public understanding, shifting societal norms and culture, addressing misconceptions and myths, empowering and equipping communities, preventing violence from occurring or being perpetuated, and connecting survivors with resources and services. While comprehensive and widespread public education on GBV and IPV are required across Ontario and beyond, so too are specific public campaigns that are innovative in their approaches and focuses.

Two such targeted public campaigns that we are seeing the need for are campaigns that address “Intimate Partner Femicide” and the “Root Causes and Intersectionality within IPV.”

Between 2011 and 2021, two-thirds of police reported femicides of women and girls in Canada were perpetrated by an intimate partner.<sup>68</sup> This equates to a Canadian woman being killed every 6 days by an intimate partner. This is an epidemic, yet many Canadians still do not fully understand the prevalence and severity of intimate partner femicide, and survivors are still facing ongoing barriers to reporting and disclosing their abuse. Moreover, there has been a collective hesitancy among police forces and media in Canada to adopt and use the term femicide, which further affects the way it is understood by the public. Some police forces say it is because they only use terms mentioned or defined in the Criminal Code, and media sources say that they only report what they get from the police. However, it is true that “domestic violence”, “domestic abuse”, “sex trafficking” and other terms are not named in the Criminal Code either, but are regularly used by Police forces and media across the country.

The public must be prompted to understand coercive control, stalking, strangulation, and other precursors to femicide, and be able to identify early warning signs for themselves or those close to them (Early Intervention). It is through public education that we mobilize communities and encourage action (whether that be empowering survivors to come forward, encouraging bystanders to intervene or report, or promoting community-based events and initiatives of solidarity). And it is through the mobilization of

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<sup>68</sup> Sutton, D. “Gender-related homicide of women and girls in Canada.” Statistics Canada, April 5, 2023. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2023001/article/00003-eng.htm>

communities that we shift societal norms and understandings of gender-based violence, shifting victim-blaming narratives and highlighting systemic issues related to IPV. Public Education with a focus on Intimate Partner Femicide has the ability to shift narratives from “why didn’t she just leave?” to an understanding of the barriers to leaving situations of IPV, such as coercive control.

The importance of creating public education campaigns on the “Root Causes and Intersectionality within IPV” is because violence against women and gender-based violence are intricately tied to patriarchy and gender inequality - it happens to women, girls, and gender-diverse people from all walks of life. In addition to these root causes, other systemic root causes put some particular groups at an increased risk, including indigenous women, racialized women, migrant women, rural women, women living with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ folks, and more. Public education campaigns must address that gender-based violence will exist so long as gender inequality, misogyny, sexism, racism, colonialism, homo and transphobia, and more, exist. In order to conduct Primary Prevention, the work must address the deeply ingrained beliefs held about women, women of colour, indigenous women, immigrant women, women with disabilities, trans women and more - as these norms create environments where women are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Public campaigns that address the root causes of intimate partner violence (IPV) while acknowledging intersectionality, help shift the focus away from victim-blaming and individualizing the issue. These campaigns promote a deeper understanding of IPV as the result of intersecting systemic inequities that disproportionately impact individuals based on their layered identities, rather than viewing it as an isolated or random occurrence. This approach highlights how social, economic, and cultural factors intersect to create different vulnerabilities and experiences of violence.

Public Education campaigns that not only engage in Primary Prevention of GBV, but incorporate practical applications of Early Intervention (i.e. ways to identify and respond to early signs and risks of violence) and facilitate survivor support through Direct Response services (i.e. counseling and legal support, helplines or support networks, shelters, etc.) will be the most comprehensive, and therefore effective, approaches to public awareness and education.

### **Aura Freedom Expertise:**

Aura Freedom has developed multiple nation-wide and award-winning public education campaigns on gender-based violence.

Our *Relentless Resilience* campaign, for example, combined a robust social media effort with live online engagements and videos explaining GBV and its root causes, reaching over 375,000 people across five social media platforms. Traditional media components, including Spotify ads, magazines, and billboards, added another 220,000 impressions in its first year. Focus groups from this campaign conveyed a significant impact on those it reached, with 100% of participants reporting a high or very high understanding of root causes of GBV after the campaign’s launch, up from 88% of participants who had initially rated themselves as having a moderate to very low understanding. Additionally, 88% of participants were more likely to advocate against GBV in their everyday lives - creating ongoing, societal changes.

Our *For Her* campaign, released last year to raise awareness of femicide in Canada, called on the Canadian government to recognize femicide in legislation and declare it what it is - an emergency. This campaign was created to show the sobering realities of femicide in Canada, and how it isn’t the same as homicide - drawing on traditional advertising tropes of gendered campaigns for ‘women’s products’. With the support and consultation of countless survivors, and the recognition of a number of awards, *For Her* was created to

to illuminate the fact that every other day a woman is killed in Canada, most often by a man, particularly highlighting that Indigenous women are murdered at the highest rates.

These hugely successful campaigns tie in with our recommendations for Ontario-wide public awareness on “Intimate Partner Femicide” and the “Root Causes and Intersectionality within IPV.” That said, both our *Relentless Resilience* and *For Her* campaigns are presently unfunded. Funding this avenue would be an opportunity to sustain these campaigns while addressing the need for two crucial gaps in public awareness.

## Cross Sectoral Training

**Summary:** Determining, training, and supporting relevant sectors to prevent, identify and respond to early signs and disclosures of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence.

### Identifying the Problem:

Cross-sectoral training identifies and enables relevant sectors to conduct Early Intervention approaches with survivors. It recognizes that survivorship, much like gender-based violence, is a continuum with multiple points of support.

Further, cross-sectoral training can alleviate some of the current demand on frontline services. Frontline and Client-Support Services are experiencing long wait-times, a lack of funding, and a lack of sufficient resources to meet demand. On a snapshot day in 2018, 669 women and 236 children in Canada were turned away from shelters - most commonly simply because the shelter was full.<sup>69</sup> In Canada, 80% of Sexual Violence Organizations have waitlists for at least some of their sexual violence services, with Sexual Violence Counselling wait times being the longest.<sup>70</sup> Impacts of this demand on frontline services resulting in longer and more wait times include: risking survivors experiencing (or continuing to experience) victim blaming/shame/stigma, further traumatization and ongoing violence, delays in services and support, the potential for survivors to no longer be ready for services when services are available, and exacerbation of trauma responses, leaving survivors to cope independently without support.<sup>71</sup> By intervening at earlier stages of gender-based violence and IPV through cross sectoral training, we commit to alleviating pressures on GBV frontline services to independently support survivors through their journeys of survivorship.

It must be stated that a number of survivors will never access frontline services. According to the General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization, in 2019, only one in five (19%) spousal violence survivors reported their abuse to the police, which was even lower than in 1999, 20 years prior.<sup>72</sup> It is vital that in order for more survivors of GBV and IPV to access support and services, other sectors must be equipped to identify survivors or those at risk, and support them in accessing these resources. It is through the training of these sectors that survivors can receive support at the point of early risks and signs of violence.

This need for capacity to address GBV and IPV across sectors is especially vital when considering the journey of survivorship, as not all survivors (whether through shame, stigma, self-blame, and more) consider their experiences “substantial” enough to qualify for GBV support. This means that while a survivor may not go directly to GBV services directly, another sector may support survivors in recognizing and validating their own experiences, and empower survivors to connect with resources.

Additionally, according to a report by West Coast Leaf, only 5% of survivors who identify as women report sexual assault to police - specifically identifying that a lack of training of those in the justice system was a significant barrier to reporting.<sup>73</sup> Sectors such as the justice and legal system, which are intricately tied to survivors’ experiences, disclosures, and healing journeys, must be especially equipped to support survivors. Further, sectors that are likely to interact with survivors, such as the healthcare sector - as research suggests

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<sup>69</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics. “Brief: Statistical profile of intimate partner violence in Canada.” Statistics Canada, February 15, 2022. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/FEWO/Brief/BR11575288/br-external/StatisticsCanada-Brief-e.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> Ending Violence Canada. “Brief #5: Waitlists.” Women and Gender Equality Canada. [https://endingviolencecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/BN5Waitlists\\_Final-EN.pdf](https://endingviolencecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/BN5Waitlists_Final-EN.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics. “Brief: Statistical profile of intimate partner violence in Canada.” Statistics Canada, February 15, 2022. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/FEWO/Brief/BR11575288/br-external/StatisticsCanada-Brief-e.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> Gurm, B. & Marchbank, J. “Chapter 8: Why Survivors Don’t Report.” Kwantlen Polytechnic University. <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/nevr/chapter/why-do-survivors-not-report-to-police/>

88% of trafficking victims access health care during their trafficking situation - can be leveraged as pathways out of violence, but only when sector workers are equipped and empowered to do so.<sup>74</sup> This cross-sectoral training must be tailored to the specific sector, as effective and impactful GBV training for judges and family court lawyers will look very differently than those for teachers and principals.

### **Objectives and Goals of this Avenue:**

- *Identify key sectors that are most effective in supporting the prevention and intervention of GBV/IPV*
- *Increase the capacity of relevant sectors through resource and framework support*
- *Integrating knowledge of GBV/IPV prevention, identification, and response across sectors*
- *Develop sector-specific training programs tailored to the needs of various relevant sectors*
- *Promote early detection and response to GBV/IPV across sectors*
- *Facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration to address GBV/IPV*
- *Create cross-sectoral support systems and pathways for survivors*
- *Foster an Integrated approach and unified strategy to address GBV/IPV across sectors*

### **Proposed Solutions:**

Cross-Sectoral Training is a vital aspect of Early Intervention, and must be conducted for target sectors. Further, competency of general and sector-tailored GBV and IPV awareness should be required within various professions that will interact with those at risk as well as survivors at different points along the continuum of gender-based violence. This can be implemented both through curriculum required within post-secondary education for specific professions, competency tests on GBV and IPV as a requirement for different licenses and designations, and ongoing training throughout one's career.

Identified sectors include:

- the healthcare sector (i.e. doctors, nurses, medical staff)
- mental health professionals (i.e. therapists, intake workers, psychologists)
- law enforcement and criminal justice (i.e. police officers, judges and legal professionals, and corrections officers)
- the education sector (i.e. teachers, school administrators, campus staff)
- the corporate/private sector (i.e. human resources, management)
- social service programs (i.e. OW and ODSP staff, case managers)
- child and family services (i.e. children's aid society and other child protection agency workers, family court judges, mediators, and staff)
- emergency response workers (i.e. firefighters, paramedics)
- hospitality and service industry (i.e. hotel and restaurant staff, hotel security)

Cross-Sectoral Training must be tailored to each sector, incorporating and outlining risks, signs, and responses that are relevant to each specific sector and would benefit from the consultation of survivors who may have been supported or missed by these sectors, as well as the insight of experts from these sectors who can identify implementable solutions into these sectors. This Early Intervention initiative must also coordinate and identify tailored Direct Response services relevant to these cross-sectoral trainings.

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<sup>74</sup> The Polaris Project. "Human Trafficking and the Health Care Industry."

<https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking-and-the-health-care-industry/#:~:text=But%20despite%20up%20to%2088.address%20a%20trafficking%20survivor's%20needs>

**Aura Freedom Expertise:**

Aura Freedom has a longstanding history of both collaborating across sectors to develop anti-GBV initiatives. Our *GBV In The Media* Project provides a potential model for how the GBV sector can work collaboratively with other sectors - even those wherein there may be a history of contention and can be replicated with sectors such as police, the legal system, child and family services, and more.

Aura Freedom has also conducted cross-sectoral training, workshops, and consultations on GBV and HT for years, developing and facilitating tailored training for government representatives, police, private and public sectors, educators, frontline workers, healthcare workers, parents and youth, and more. That said, we are only funded for this work on a project by project basis - with the most recent funding ending in 2025, and no continuation of funding confirmed. Some notable examples include contributions to a Multisector Community Response to Child Sex trafficking Toolkit for SickKids hospital's Lotus Health program, presenting at the Toronto Police Services' International Human Trafficking Conference, consulting for Federal, Provincial and Regional levels of government on strategies addressing GBV & HT, and consulting for the Toronto District School Board and York Region District School Board for efforts to combat GBV and HT at the school level. Our ongoing training for frontline service providers such as shelter workers, VAW counsellors, and more, has provided life-saving capacity building to thousands of staff. Currently, we are developing a tailored workshop for York Region's Public Health Office.

## Technology

**Summary:** Responding to the escalating rates of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) by addressing online misogyny, violent pornography, and holding tech giants accountable.

### Identifying the Problem:

Technology is rapidly developing, and so too are online spaces. These spaces often develop at a much faster rate than the regulations, policies, and practices set with the intent of keeping them safe.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence, (TFGBV) is described by UN Women as “any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools which results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm or other infringements of rights and freedoms. These are forms of violence that are directed against women because they are women and/or that affect women disproportionately.”<sup>75</sup>

The impacts of TFGBV can be just as traumatic, impactful, and harmful as gender-based violence committed offline, and further, can actually exacerbate offline forms of violence (i.e. sexual harassment, IPV, stalking, human trafficking or sexual exploitation) as technology may serve as a medium with which to facilitate violence and recruit, connect with and exploit potential victims.<sup>76</sup>

Children today are often navigating the online space as the first generation in their families who truly grew up with the internet right at their fingertips. Research suggests that half of Canada’s 7-11 year olds and 85% of teens have used social media in the past month.<sup>77</sup> Parents may be largely unaware of the risks associated with children’s use of social media, and the internet at large - and today’s youth may be uniquely equipped to bypass parental controls or restrictions.

Social media, although a space used by youth to connect with peers, facilitate their education, and more, is also a medium used to facilitate TFGBV, often targeted at children, particularly young girls. TikTok is the biggest social media platform used by kids, and an investigation conducted by *The Observer* has shown that TikTok is promoting misogynistic content to young people - despite its claims to ban it.<sup>78</sup> This is not the only social media platform where youth are at risk of TFGBV. Investigations by the Wall Street Journal, Stanford University, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst found that Instagram connects and promotes a vast network of pedophiles, and pedophilic content.<sup>79</sup> Within the sector, we are seeing a multitude of platforms and games, such as Roblox, Discord, Snapchat and more, utilized to facilitate Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence and sexual exploitation.

Moreover, the internet is being used as a medium to platform patriarchal and anti-women messages and movements. The patriarchy, we must remind ourselves and one another, harms not only women, but men, who are too often deprived of emotional expression and intimacy, leading some young men and boys to seek acceptance and belonging in harmful spaces such as within Incel Culture, or aligned with figures such as Andrew Tate, who often promote misogyny and violence. These toxic and hateful ideologies which are

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<sup>75</sup> UN Women. “FAQS: Trolling, stalking, doxing and other forms of violence against women in the digital age.” UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/tech-facilitated-gender-based-violence>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Summerfield, P “How Canada’s Youth Are Using Social Media.” Media In Canada, July 14, 2023. <https://mediaincanada.com/2023/07/14/how-canadas-youth-are-using-social-media/>.

<sup>78</sup> Das, S. “How TikTok Bombards Young Men with Misogynistic Videos.” The Guardian, August 6, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/aug/06/revealed-how-tiktok-bombards-young-men-with-misogynistic-videos-andrew-tate>.

<sup>79</sup> Blunt, K. & Horwitz, J. “Instagram Connects Vast Pedophile Network.” The Wall Street Journal, June 7, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/instagram-vast-pedophile-network-4ab7189>

further fostered online can and do fuel violence, as highlighted by the Toronto Van Attack, reinforcing the need for the regulation of harmful online spaces.

Further, we are seeing TFGBV on the rise in Canada. Cybertip, Canada's National Tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children, receives an average of 10 sextortion reports per day.<sup>80</sup> Between 2018 and 2022, the Canadian Centre for Children Protection (C3P) noted an 815% increase in reports of online luring through Cybertip.<sup>81</sup> Canadian statistics suggest that most (82%) of online luring is conducted against youth aged 12-17 years old, with 84% of these individuals being girls.<sup>82</sup>

Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence is preventable; however, the spaces in which it thrives online are largely unregulated - and there is little pressure in the way of substantive legislation in Canada to hold tech giants accountable. Those that have been brought forward do not address what we at Aura Freedom advocate for time and time again - the root causes. According to Natasha Tusikov, an assistant professor at York University and author of *Chokepoints: Global Private Regulation on the Internet*, the root cause of this failure to implement safer practices and regulations on digital platforms is the business model - to "maximize user engagement, whether the content is excellent, wholesome content or whether it's terrible, disgusting, hateful content."<sup>83</sup> Here, we see corporate greed as a root cause, one that has taken precedence over Canadians' human rights and safety.

#### **Objectives and Goals of this Avenue:**

- *Mitigate online misogyny and hate*
- *Improve avenues for reporting and addressing misogynistic content on online platforms*
- *Increase regulation of violent pornography and its distribution*
- *Support survivors impacted by violent pornography and online sexual image abuse*
- *Ensure policies and processes of digital platforms are survivor-centered*
- *Create safer digital spaces*
- *Reduce incidents and promote prevention of TFGBV*
- *Strengthen protection and safety measures of online platforms*
- *Encourage best practices by adopted by parents, youth, and tech giants*

#### **Proposed Solutions:**

Prior to outlining proposed approaches and solutions to addressing the growing rate of TFGBV, it must first be said that in order for these approaches to be effective, they must include the insight from youth and, of course, survivors of TFGBV. Today's youth are uniquely situated to speak to the experiences of growing up with the internet - including the risks and challenges they face. They offer valuable perspectives on the latest trends, threats, and safety concerns, and in turn, incorporating youth into these approaches and solutions empowers them to take ownership of the online spaces they occupy, while enhancing overall internet safety for future generations. Survivors of exploitation and violence online know first-hand the pathways and continuums that lead them to experience - and heal from - violence online, and can provide valuable insight on different points of prevention, intervention, and support.

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<sup>80</sup> Cybertip.ca. "Online Harms: What is Critical to Know?" Cybertip.ca. <https://cybertip.ca/en/online-harms/sextortion/>

<sup>81</sup> Savage, L. "Online child sexual exploitation: A statistical profile of police-reported incidents in Canada, 2014 to 2022." Statistics Canada, March 12, 2024. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2024001/article/00003-eng.htm>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Gilmore, R. "The dark side of social media: What Canada is - and isn't - doing about it." Global News, January 12, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8503534/social-media-influenced-government-regulation/>



### >>> *Regulation and Legislation* <<<

The eradication of TFGBV requires its intentional prevention. That is, governments must work to implement legislation that address harmful online content, regulate online spaces, and enforce the responsibilities of tech companies and their digital platforms. Most digital platforms have some sort of safety guidelines - but do not invest in the necessary processes, tools, or resources to uphold these guidelines. For example, TikTok has a “Safety Center” outlining their views on hate speech, suggesting they “do not allow hate speech and hateful ideologies, and will not recommend content that contains negative stereotypes about a person or group with a protected attribute,”<sup>84</sup> however, reviews of TikTok instead suggest the social media platform is used to freely promote white supremacy, racism, and misogyny.<sup>85</sup>

One consideration is to follow in Australia’s steps when they established the world’s first government agency “solely committed to keeping citizens safer online,” the eSafety Commissioner, in 2015.<sup>86</sup> That said, Canadian regulation and legislation must include the context of Canadian GBV experts, representatives from various TFGBV-related services in Canada, and both youth and survivors of TFGBV. This is to ensure that legislation and policy created and implemented with the intent of creating safer online spaces does so in the best interest of survivors and those disproportionately at risk - women and girls, particularly those living at the intersections. We are aware of efforts to do so, such as through Bill C-63 - but this is not sufficient. We must acknowledge that TFGBV is a gendered crime, and therefore the legislature must incorporate a gendered lens and gender-based violence lens in order to truly cultivate safer online spaces.

### >>> *Tech Company Accountability* <<<

Governments must invest in the development of Canadian risk assessment tools for online spaces as well as comprehensive screening and monitoring processes with TFGBV experts, researchers, survivors, and with youth - a key example of an implementable Early Intervention initiative. Further, Tech companies must be engaged by legislative stakeholders to ensure the implementation of tools and processes to prevent the spread of GBV-related material online - such as screening tools of content prior to their online posting - as well as protocols to ongoingly monitor for exploitation and hate. The goal must be that these processes are an embedded and required implementation of technology companies in Canada.

### >>> *Public Awareness* <<<

Public and targeted awareness programs must be implemented to ensure online safety and the prevention of TFGBV in our communities. A sustained public awareness campaign must be implemented to continually inform the public of ongoing trends, prevalences, risks and more of TFGBV, with the aim of shifting societal norms that currently accept the prevalence of TFGBV as a “normal” and unpreventable aspect of internet use. Further, public campaigns should target themes such as online misogyny, and violent pornography that underlie TFGBV and online exploitation.

Targeted campaigns must include those tailored to parents that raise awareness of online exploitation and risks, and must include practical and supported avenues to mitigate online risks for children while acknowledging the growing need to access online spaces in modern times. Additional campaigns must similarly be created for youth by youth, to support healthy online use for children. As anti-women movements grow, it is vital that both public and parent-targeted campaigns work to raise awareness of incel

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<sup>84</sup> TikTok. “What Is Hate Speech?” TikTok, August 14 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/countering-hate>

<sup>85</sup> Politico Europe. “Hate in Plain Sight: Extremists Unchecked Activity Spreads on TikTok.” Institute for Strategic Dialogue, August 25, 2021. <https://www.isdellobal.org/isd-in-the-news/hateextremistactivityvontiktok/>

<sup>86</sup> Gilmore, R. “The dark side of social media: What Canada is - and isn’t - doing about it.” Global News, January 12, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8503534/social-media-influenced-government-regulation/>

spaces online, and how parents can support their children who may encounter (or be actively engaging in) these online spaces. These Primary Prevention campaigns must additionally be paired with Direct Response resources to ensure that those who have made contact with the campaigns and identify experiences or risks of TFGBV have resources to go to.

### **Aura Freedom Expertise:**

Internet safety, creating safer online spaces for girls, and addressing online luring/grooming and sextortion are topics that have been part and parcel of Aura Freedom's human trafficking prevention training since its inception. Our Human Trafficking Info Hub, GBV Resource Centre, and other resources have always incorporated TFGBV information and our staff have spoken on the harms of online incel culture at events and in the media. For the last two years, Aura Freedom has been conducting dedicated community and academic research on Tech-Facilitated GBV, curating information from sources such as Western University's GBV Learning Network, CanWaCH, YWCA, United Nations Population Fund, global criminology and policy researchers, and more. This research is currently being developed to build upon Aura Freedom's repertoire of anti-GBV and anti-HT education and training programs and our online resource centres. We hope to gain funding so that this research can be used to introduce and train various sectors and populations on TFGBV, such as frontline workers, shelter workers, parents, youth, and more.

As a champion of grassroots and community research, Aura Freedom has always had our ears to the ground, and increasingly known of the exploitation pathways and hate-spaces being created online. With youth leaders on our team who have grown up with access to the internet, we are uniquely positioned to be aware of the experiences, opportunities, and methods for exploitation of youth online, and the ways that youth can unknowingly access these spaces. Additionally, our youth leaders have maintained a close eye on internet and influencer trends that are presently intersecting with TFGV and sexual exploitation, such as trends of internet influencers sexually exploiting their underage fan base online, the exploitation of OnlyFans workers by male influencers, and the use of unregulated social media platforms to foster the exploitation of parasocial relationships with influencers.

## **Looking Ahead**

We recognize that this is not a comprehensive list of initiatives or areas in which gender-based violence Primary Prevention and Early Intervention work is achieved. However, our work within these areas over more than a decade has shown us that the potential impact of these initiatives - with proper, ongoing resourcing - can and will last for generations to come. That said, we also recognize the diverse upstream initiatives that exist, such as mental health supports for men, parenting programs, financial literacy programs, and more. The impacts of gender-based violence can permeate all areas of a survivor's life and all those close to them; at the same time, the potential avenues for prevention and intervention can also permeate all areas of a survivor's life. It will take creative and innovative interventions within long-standing and repeated recommendations to eradicate gender-based violence.

While implementing such initiatives, we also want to recognize the need for long-term gender-based violence research both within the GBV sector and incorporated intentionally - and through the expertise of GBV advocates, survivors, and researchers - in all adjacent systems (such as healthcare, justice system, police data, etc.) to ensure research, data, and approaches reflect the realities of gender-based violence in our communities. Further, we advocate for special attention to be paid to researching the most marginalized communities, including Indigenous women and girls, women living with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women, and 2SLGBTQIA+ folks.

## CONCLUSION

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Aura Freedom is a women-led and survivor-led grassroots, intersectional feminist organization that has been working for over a decade to eradicate male violence against women through Primary Prevention. We co-led the Urgent Call to Action that saw IPV and GBV declared an epidemic in Toronto - and we are now looking to Ontario to make the same declaration, knowing that eradication starts with recognition. Almost half of Canadian women will experience some form of violence at the hands of an intimate partner, leading to one woman or girl being killed violently every 2.5 days in Canada. This GBV and IPV epidemic spans across all generations and facets of life. The safety of everyone in Ontario relies on the eradication of gender-based violence. It will require epidemic-levels of resourcing, attention, and effort to address the epidemic-levels of violence in our communities. Ontario must join the almost 100 municipalities within the province and declare IPV an epidemic.

This governmental recognition has the potential to fuel new and robust investments into a comprehensive framework to end gender-based violence in Ontario. Aura Freedom has put forward this framework of Three Unwavering Pillars: Primary Prevention, Early Intervention (also known as Secondary Prevention), and frontline, Direct Response Interventions (also known as Tertiary Prevention). We call for a Direct Response approach that understands supporting survivors must mean recognizing that survivors are not healed simply by escaping violence, and that survivorship - alongside the impacts of experiencing gender-based violence - is often long-term.

Primary Prevention is imperative to incorporate in order to build long-term change in societal norms - something that historically has never been recognized or funded in the way we are asking for today. This is done alongside Early Intervention, which reduces immediate risks and escalations, and Direct Response, which provides vital immediate support - creating a sustainable and responsive system. By integrating these pillars, it is possible to create a more holistic and supportive environment for addressing IPV and GBV, ultimately reducing their prevalence and impact.

We have seen increasing governmental recognition begin to fuel the public awareness and education, resourcing and funding, and political will that we so crucially need in order to develop and implement a framework for transformative change. The framework we outlined in this submission recognizes the continuum of gender-based violence, as well as the distinct approaches taken to prevent and respond to this violence. It is designed with collaboration between the three pillars in mind, allowing for comprehensive approaches that target not only survivors and those at risk (both of experiencing and perpetrating violence), but the greater community and society as a whole. It approaches the eradication of gender-based violence not only through the prevention of violence, but the prevention of escalating violence, recurring and ongoing violence, and intergenerational trauma. While we recognize that the three pillars within this framework are distinct facets of addressing the gender-based violence and intimate partner violence epidemics, this framework can only be effective when all pillars are enabled to work collaboratively with one another. Further, Aura Freedom has developed Primary Prevention activities that can and do double as Early Intervention strategies, as well as coordinate with Direct Response services to ensure survivors are connected with lifesaving services.

The innovation within this framework is in the way that these pillars are valued, funded, and actioned. Historically, we have not seen Primary Prevention and Early Intervention valued in the same way as Direct Response work, resulting in a failure of addressing the greater systems and society alongside the individual behaviours and experiences. This framework is ground-breaking in that it requires the equal valuing and

robust funding of all three pillars, where all pillars are supported to conduct long-term and sustained efforts in collaboration with one another - and not at the cost or reduction of support to another pillar. We see this framework and the implementation of it being housed under a separate Ministry or Special Office dedicated to the eradication of gender-based violence, with a coordinated effort across all levels of government and, importantly, the intentional incorporation of gender-based violence (GBV) advocates, survivors, and experts. Only until we have a framework to eradicate gender-based violence that both incorporates a commitment to long-term, ongoing research, as well as the funding of innovative interventions, core-funding for GBV organizations, and adequate compensation and valuation of GBV and IPV expertise, will we be able to implement a successful framework to eradicate gender-based violence.

While outlining this comprehensive framework, we must reaffirm that our primary recommendation is for the Government of Ontario to look upstream and invest in Primary Prevention. To truly eradicate gender-based violence, we must ensure we are adequately investing in initiatives to prevent it from occurring in the first place. In the long term, Primary Prevention is the only thing that truly addresses violence at its roots. Primary Prevention uniquely focuses on creating communities where gender-based violence is no longer the norm and no longer able to thrive, while also supporting those who have experienced violence already. Further, resourcing along the pillars has a trickle-down effect and impact, such that, when Primary Prevention is under-resourced, demand exceeds for Early Intervention and Direct Response. When Early Intervention is under-resourced, demand and needs exceed for Direct Response. Not funding Primary Prevention leads to increased incidences of violence due to persistent harmful norms and lack of education, as well as due to missed opportunities for Early Intervention. This leads to greater demands on Direct Responses, where issues have often escalated in severity, duration, and complexity. It is through the failure of violence prevention and intervention of perpetrators and survivors at early signs of violence that we find ourselves dependent on frontline work and services - when the violence has already occurred. When these opportunities are missed, we also miss out on the infinite talent, brilliance, and power that survivors can bring to our communities when they are not experiencing violence.

With the support, resources, and time required - step by step - we can turn this ship around. As Ontario works to address the root causes and drivers of GBV, we will begin to see benefits in all other areas of society. We will see Ontario flourish. Many of us doing upstream work have been told that Primary Prevention sounds idealistic, but that's because large-scale implementation over a sustained period of time has never been done in Canada.

## ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

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The following research, reports, briefs, and more are provided to support this written submission, as well as the ongoing study by the Standing Committee on Justice Policy into the epidemic of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Ontario.

### **Aura Freedom's Relentless Resilience Reports**

- [\*Relentless Resilience: Addressing Gender-Based Violence through Grassroots Excellence\*](#)
- [\*#EndGBVToAchieveSDGs: An Infographic\*](#)
- [\*Relentless Resilience 2: The Grassroots Speak Again\*](#)

### **Toronto's IPV and GBV Declaration Brief by Aura Freedom and Women's Habitat**

- [\*An Urgent Call to Action: Recognition of the IPV Epidemic in Toronto, Canada\*](#)

### **Aura Freedom's GBV In The Media (GBVITM):**

- [\*Guidelines for Reporting on Gender-Based Violence \(English\) and \(French\)\*](#)
- [\*GBVITM Research Background and Literature Review \(English\) and \(French\)\*](#)
- [\*The Journalist's Scorecard\*](#)

### **UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery:**

- [\*Brief Submission RE: Country Visit to Canada\*](#) by Aura Freedom

### **Briefs to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women by Aura Freedom:**

- [\*2024 Brief Submission for their Study on Coercive Behaviour\*](#)
- [\*2023 Brief Submission for their Study on Human Trafficking of Women, Girls and Gender-Diverse Individuals in Canada\*](#)

The following microsites house gender-based violence and intimate partner violence education, research, and more conducted and/or curated by Aura Freedom.

- [\*Relentless Resilience GBV Resource Centre\*](#)
- [\*Human Trafficking Info Hub\*](#)
- [\*For Her Microsite\*](#)
- [\*GBV In The Media\*](#)

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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We thank the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for considering this written submission and look forward to working closer with you in the future. For further information, please contact:

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