

# Social Services Workers on the Frontlines of Gender-Based Violence Response

— BRIEFING  
NOTE

The Social Services Workers on the Frontlines of Gender-Based Violence Response (GBV) is a community-based research partnership between the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society and researchers at Simon Fraser University. This research, conducted between 2023–2025, culminated in the publication of a report and action plan in February 2026, *Frontline Workers on the Back Burner*. The action plan puts forward recommendations to improve working conditions in the anti-violence sector. The action plan is grounded in research conducted with frontline workers, leadership, and policy makers relevant to gender-based violence response, building on their experiences and insights about change needed for safer and more sustainable service provision to survivors.

## Background

Every other day in Canada, a woman or girl is killed by femicide. The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability reported a 26% increase in male-accused killings of women and girls from 2019 to 2024.

From 2023–2024, Vancouver organization Battered Women's Support Society responded to 52,649 requests for service. In 2025, at least 37 femicides occurred in BC. Within the first week of 2026, we saw two BC women killed by former or current intimate partners – their names are Pamela Jarvis and Laura Gover.

In BC, rates of GBV and of survivors [seeking anti-violence services](#) have skyrocketed in recent years without a matched increase in funding for anti-violence organizations providing these life-saving services. As a result, some of the most vulnerable members of our community in BC fail to receive the support they need.

Frontline workers in the anti-violence sector engage in multiple roles to provide a continuum of care to survivors of GBV, including responding to crisis lines; involvement in

safety planning; providing housing, legal, and mental health support; and many other services. Despite their contributions to an urgent public safety, public health, and human rights issue, these frontline workers are rarely recognized or represented in policy deliberations, research, or public media. They work in silence and out of sight.

The Social Services Workers on the Frontlines of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Response project examined the multifaceted experiences and challenges of frontline workers in the anti-violence sector. Over the course of this 2-year project, 66 frontline workers contributed knowledge in focus groups, and 21 key informants, including anti-violence organizational leaders and policymakers, were interviewed.

Our research revealed a crisis in the sector with deleterious consequences for the survivors who rely on it. Despite long-standing calls for improvements, funding for the sector and GBV response services remains stagnant. The lack of a holistic government approach to GBV response, and the marked absence of sustained core funding, keep anti-violence organizations fragmented and struggling. Until GBV organizations and frontline workers receive the resources they need to keep afloat, some of the most vulnerable populations in Canadian society will continue to suffer.

## Unsustainable and Unaccountable Systems

The anti-violence sector in BC is struggling due to **critical underfunding** and the **unsustainability of the short-term, project-based grant funding model** the sector relies on to operate. As our most recent research [shows](#), organizations and workers are diverting valuable time and energy from service delivery to fundraising and other means of supplementing insufficient grant funding. The sector as a whole is thus poorly equipped and resourced to handle the increasing complexity of survivors' needs. At the organizational level, lack of funding leads to staffing and retention issues, insufficient staff supports, and low compensation for workers, among myriad other challenges. All of these challenges impact frontline workers' ability to continue working in the sector and help survivors.

Our [research](#), published February 2026, shows that the most pressing issues facing frontline workers in the sector are **insufficient and unstable funding, significant workload pressures**, and **affordability challenges for frontline staff**. At the organizational level, the research showed frontline workers are operating within underfunded, fragmented, and siloed systems – conditions that directly affect survivors and the care

they can access. These systemic constraints translate into overwhelming workloads, staffing challenges, high turnover, low wages, and a lack of physical and psychological safety for frontline staff.

## Action Plan Recommendations

Our [action plan](#) makes a series of 20 recommendations, informed by our research, to better support frontline workers, based on the needs identified by frontline workers and anti-violence leadership, for action at the systemic and organizational levels.

Implementation of the recommendations and actions in this plan would directly address needs and concerns raised by those working on the frontlines, by sector leadership, and by policy makers.

This action plan builds on not only our research but also a wealth of other research and advocacy, including the recent recommendations made in the 2025 legal systemic review by Dr. Kim Stanton, which the provincial government is in the process of implementing.

### *Systemic recommendations*

**Recommendation 1:** Increase and sustain funding for the anti-violence sector

**Recommendation 2:** Direct more funds toward long-term and core operational funding, rather than short-term or project-specific grant funding

**Recommendation 3:** Improve services that cater to survivors from underserved or marginalized groups without reducing existing services and funding streams

**Recommendation 4:** Support the role of frontline social services workers in the criminal and legal systems by continuing and expanding collaborations

**Recommendation 5:** Continue to research, develop, and evaluate alternative systems and approaches for both frontline workers and survivors as they respond to violence and crisis

**Recommendation 6:** Counter oppressive ideologies that contribute to gender-based violence through education and awareness

**Recommendation 7:** Increase opportunities for connection and coordination in the sector

**Recommendation 8:** Research effective collaborations between health and social services sectors

**Recommendation 9:** Ensure that all frontline workers in the anti-violence sector are paid a living wage to recognize the skill, experience, and emotional labour required to support survivors, and embed an accountability framework monitoring sector wages

**Recommendation 10:** Increase supply of and access to affordable housing for frontline workers and survivors

**Recommendation 11:** Improve protections for and education on frontline workers' right to unionize

**Recommendation 12:** Tailor WorkSafeBC standards to the anti-violence sector and include a trauma-informed approach to accessing benefits and services, including leaves of absence

**Recommendation 13:** Move toward long-term and stable jobs with access to benefits

To review the recommendations and the proposed actions in detail, please read the full action plan [Frontline Workers on the Back Burner: An Action Plan for Systemic Accountability in the Gender-Based Violence Sector](#).

## Looking to the Future

Anti-violence leaders and frontline workers were disappointed to see a lack of focus on GBV in the 2026 Budget, as it neither moved towards long-term, core funding for anti-violence non-profits, nor met another [community demand for a 15% increase in emergency funding](#). In fact, the Budget rescinds \$775 million for an essential Community Housing Fund, leaving non-profit organizations that spent thousands on applications unable to move forward in addressing BC's housing crisis.

*Frontline Workers on the Back Burner: An Action Plan for Systemic Accountability in the Gender-Based Violence Response Sector* offers a wealth of recommendations for improving the sector grounded in community-based research. We call on BC's provincial leaders to take accountability in protecting and supporting the anti-violence sector. Without meaningful systemic change and secure, stable funding, BC will continue to fail survivors of violence as organizations lack the staff, resources, housing, and core operational funding to support them.