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Albertans express concern over province's new regional victim services model

The Government of Alberta introduced a new regional victim service model to the province. The changes took effect on October 1st, as the province ended funding to RCMP-based victim service programs and switched to a regional model. Under this new system, victim services in Alberta are divided into four regions: Eastern, Western, Central, and Southern. The new victim service model serves the Alberta community following guidelines set out by the *Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act*.

The [Alberta Regional Victim Serving Societies](#) provide a system of services and supports under 6 pillars of service delivery:

- Meet with victims of crime and/or tragedy as an essential service responder, with or without volunteer advocate assistance
- Mitigate on behalf of their clients, mitigate the immediate aftereffects of an event (for example, information on services and supports, etc.)
- Refer, as a warm handoff, clients to appropriate government, non-government, community, and professional resources and supports
- Accompany clients through the ensuing criminal justice system process, from the initial police investigation, through pre-trial, criminal prosecution and sentencing
- Coordinate services across the region including local teams of staff and volunteer advocates
- Engage with communities at various levels including partnership development, outreach activities, information sharing, and attending local celebrations, cultural events, Indigenous ceremonies, etc.

The previous victim service model in Alberta, saw local boards run by paid staff and volunteers assist victims with understanding the criminal justice system. The Government of Alberta proposed these changes to provide a victim service program with more consistent funding, allowing the province to hire more full-time victim service employees and to serve communities that have lacked adequate assistance. The office of Alberta's Public Safety and Emergency Services Minister Mike Ellis announced that the change would see an increase of full-time employees from 130 to 153 positions. Ellis also announced that the Government of Alberta will increase funding to victim services to \$27.4 million, up from \$20 million.

Despite the updates to Alberta's victim service capabilities, some community leaders are worried about the introduction of the new model. Paul McLauchlin, the president of Rural Municipalities of Alberta and Reeve of Ponoka County, raised concerns over the new system's ability to provide services for the smaller communities. When talking to [CTV News](#) about the town of Rimbey, located in Ponoka County, he stated that while more full-time employees are being hired, the number of full-time equivalents who can interact with victims of crime in their community is decreasing.

Carolyn Kung, a former victim services program manager in the town of Three Hills, also noted that the new system will have changes that may hurt small communities. With the system being reshuffled, towns like Three Hills will lose their local victim services volunteer boards, a committee tasked with fundraising to ensure that their community has a full-time victim service worker. Kung is worried that the switch in systems will leave some towns without these support systems and may limit the ability of victim service providers to serve their communities.

Nova Scotia Introduces Increased Support Services for Victims of Crime

At the beginning of October, Nova Scotia's Department of Justice announced that it is expanding and improving its support and services for victims of crime and their families with regards to increased funding, extending the period services can be accessed, and offering more flexibility for those that need additional support.

The [Criminal Injuries Counseling Program](#) pays for survivors' professional counselling services if they are a victim of a violent crime. As of October 22nd, the amount of funding and the length of time to access care is increasing for victims and families:

- Survivors of human trafficking will be able to access \$8,235 over three years, increasing from \$2,000 over two years
- The immediate family of a homicide victim can access \$8,235 over three years, an increase from \$4,000 over two years
- A victim of a compensable offence can access \$4,118 over two years, increasing from \$2,118.

In addition, counsellors who are a part of the program will see an increase in pay to more closely reflect current industry standards. The pay increases hope to aid in the recruitment and retention of more counsellors. Effective October 22nd, the new rates are:

- \$160/hour for registered counselling therapists
- \$175/hour for registered social workers (at the Master's level)
- \$210/hour for psychologists (at the Master's and PhD level)

These changes follow a [2022 announcement](#) stating that the Government of Canada will provide a total of \$6,210,000 over five years beginning in April 2021 for victims and survivors of crime in Nova Scotia. This

includes \$3,530,000 of funding for Nova Scotia's Enhancement of Services of Crime program and \$2,680,000 for Nova Scotia's Sexual Offence Legal Representation program. The Government of Canada's goal is that victims will have a more effective voice in the criminal justice system through enhanced support and improved access to justice.

For more information, all services and programs offered by Nova Scotia's Department of Justice can be viewed [here](#) along with [contact information](#) for various provincial victim services.

Victims of Crime in Quebec at a Loss

In 2021, the Province of Quebec introduced new limitations on financial assistance to victims and survivors of crime provided by the [Indemnisation des Victimes d'Actes Criminels \(IVAC\)](#), and victims will soon feel its large effect. The adoption of [Bill 84](#) in 2021 eliminated the possibility of lifetime payments. Section 51 caps the period of financial assistance to a maximum period of three years. Now, in 2024, Quebec victims and their families are confused and concerned about how they will be able to support themselves.

While there are few legal avenues available to challenge the law, survivors who are affected and looking for support can join a Facebook group called "[Victimes abandonnées par IVAC](#)."

The IVAC program works to provide financial assistance and support to victims of crime and their families to help them overcome any physical, psychological, or financial barriers and consequences that were a result of the crime they experienced or witnessed.

However, Bill 84 also abolished the list of eligible criminal offences and [expanded their definition](#) of "victims of crime" to include all crimes covered in the *Criminal Code*. As a result, a wider range of victims and survivors will be able to access necessary assistance. This also includes Quebec residents who are victims of a crime that occurred outside of the province.

The bill also increased the timeframe from two to three years so that victims of crime can continue to apply for assistance. For those who were victims of violent crime during childhood, this period does not apply and an application can be filed at any time.

Survivors and victims can contact IVAC [here](#) and visit their [website](#) for more information.

How fraudsters are targeting Canadians in 2024

As the world becomes increasingly digitized, fraudsters are finding innovative ways to scam Canadians. As these criminals look for new ways to target victims, the government and law enforcement have been urging the public to remain vigilant of financial scams and other schemes that seek to defraud Canadians.

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (CAFC) recently put out a warning to residents after receiving hundreds of reports of an online extortion scam that uses victims' full names and pictures of their homes as an intimidation tactic. Speaking to [Global News](#), OPP Detective Sergeant John Armit stated that the force received over 400 reports concerning extortion emails containing personal information such as the recipient's full name, phone number, home address and even a screenshot of their residence on Google images. Law enforcement speculated that this information was collected through a data breach and that the scammers are an international network.

The fraudsters claim to have sensitive information about the victim's internet history and threaten to release it to their contact list unless they are paid in cryptocurrency. The extortion scheme sees victims being forced to pay amounts starting at \$190 USD and ranging to as high as \$2,000 USD. These criminals use their victims' fear against them, with Armit stating "They're hoping when they send these mass letters out that it's a law of averages that they'll hit let's say 10,000 people, and maybe they get 10 people that will pay the cryptocurrency".

Fraud remains a consistent issue in Canada, with Statistics Canada [reporting](#) that rates have increased over the 10 years between 2013 and 2023 from 260 to 501 cases per 100,000. Not only have fraud rates increased, but they also now come in new forms. The CAFC published a [bulletin](#) earlier this year addressing how fraud schemes have changed in recent years.

They listed 5 major forms of fraud and how they are committed in the modern day:

Investment Fraud

- Then: traditional scams such as Ponzi schemes and fake investment opportunities conducted over the telephone using high-pressure sales tactics
- Now: criminals use social media, dating sites, and email to lure investors into fraudulent cryptocurrency investments. The CAFC estimates that in 2023, more than 50% of \$309 million in reported losses were related to cryptocurrency scams

Emergency Fraud

- **Then:** usually involved contacting an individual claiming to be a loved one in need of immediate financial aid following an emergency, often in the form of a medical or legal crisis, and requesting money through financial services such as Western Union
- **Now:** emergency scams have largely stayed the same, but now occurring through mediums such as e-transfer or through requesting payment in the form of cryptocurrency

Job Fraud

- **Then:** came in the form of fraudulent job postings in newspapers and on job posting boards. Would often involve the victim paying a fee to access non-existent training materials, postings, or other services
- **Now:** these schemes now occur digitally, with fraudsters using the names of real companies in Canada to offer victims job opportunities to “promote” products and apps using software created by the fraudsters. After the victim installs the software and creates an account, they receive tasks they must complete to get “paid”. Victims are told they can earn higher commissions by boosting more products but need to pay fees to gain access to the additional work. Victims are then asked to deposit their funds into crypto accounts or wallets. Victims will see funds in their crypto account, but will not have the ability to withdraw the funds they have deposited and earned

Service Fraud

- **Then:** done over the telephone or through door-to-door salesman, this tactic involved fraudsters selling a service to victims that is either non-existent or of poor quality
- **Now:** in the modern day, scammers use social media, email, and search engine optimization to continue this scheme. Common “services” that are sold to victims are internet service providers, fraudulent tech support, and fake immigration and visa websites

Phishing

- **Then:** in the mid-2000s, phishing scams were still in their infancy and remained relatively simple, often involving deceptive emails made to appear as if sent by legitimate banking and financial institutions. The goal of this scam was to convince victims to click on a link and provide sensitive information
- **Now:** phishing scams are more complex in the present day, with fraudsters using automation to send out scam email templates and text messages to hundreds at a time. Designed to appear to be sent by banks, service providers, and government agencies, scammers send out malicious links that attempt to dupe victims into giving up personal information and possibly infect their devices with malware

The CAFC recommends individuals protect themselves through the following methods:

- Never click links or attachments from unknown sources
- Be cautious when transferring cryptocurrencies – a completed transaction is unlikely to be reversed
- Opportunities to “boost” apps or other products are often fraudulent
- If you receive a suspicious call claiming to be from a loved one, hang up and contact them directly on the number you have for them on your contact list

Quebec Women’s Advocacy Group Educates on Coercive Control

A Quebec-based domestic violence advocacy group developed a much-needed tool to spread awareness of a subtler form of intimate partner violence (IPV). *Regroupement pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale* (RMFVVC) has created a web page to help victims recognize the signs of coercive control. While the website is French, the group is in the process of developing an English version.

Coercive control is a broad term used to describe a pattern of behaviour that occurs within intimate partner relationships that aims to control and manipulate the target. This is done in several ways, including:

- Threats of violence, including self-harm
- Denying or downplaying abusive behaviour
- Isolation from family or friends
- Economic or financial control
- Stalking or monitoring the partner

The advocacy group launched the website to help victims of IPV understand the more nuanced ways in which they may be experiencing abuse. The RMFVVC focuses on 3 main principles in their fight against coercive control

- Education on what coercive control is
- How to effectively spot coercive control when it occurs
- How to act against attempts to use coercive control

The manipulative nature of coercive control can make it difficult to identify. To address this, RMFVVC provides a large number of articles and information guides to help victims navigate the complex subject. The site offers a plethora of material to aid victims of IPV and coercive control such as an FAQ and a resource library designed to inform the public of the reality of coercive control.

A central feature of the website is an interactive experience where users can flip through a variety of scenario cards, each scenario designed to appear innocuous at first glance only to reveal a much darker hidden form of abuse. The stories provided in the scenario cards serve to demonstrate the ways coercive control manifests by giving users a firsthand account of victims' experiences, helping them understand the reality of IPV and the manipulative tactics that abusers use to maintain control over their victims.

Coercive control is an issue the CRCVC discussed earlier this year in the [March 2024 EMPOWER](#) newsletter. CRCVC called attention to [Bill C-332, An Act to amend the Criminal Code \(coercive control of intimate partner\)](#), as it was introduced and made its way through Parliament. The Bill seeks to address the issue of coercive control, adding behaviour such as the repeated use of threats or social isolation of an intimate partner to the *Criminal Code*. Bill-C-332 would expand protections for victims of IPV, making it possible for police to lay charges against abusive partners even when physical abuse has not yet occurred. As of October 2024, Bill C-332 passed the Third reading stage in the House and is in the process of the Second reading stage in the Senate

Including Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in Bill S-233

On October 8th, Dr. Benjamin Roebuck appeared at the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance on behalf of the Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime (OFOVC) to bring attention to intimate partner violence in Canada regarding [Bill S-233](#). This bill, which was introduced by the Honourable Kim Pate in December 2021, proposes a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income for all Canadians over the age of 17.

Dr. Roebuck hopes further development of Bill S-233 will include and consider the needs of those who are victims and survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Canada. A [2021 study](#) conducted by the Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE), found that about 95% of women survivors of IPV experience economic abuse, despite it often being an "invisible form of abuse."

Despite disproportionately impacting women, people of all genders can and do experience IPV. In 2022, there were approximately [117,000 reported victims of IPV](#) in Canada with just under 80% of all victims being women and girls. In many cases, IPV isolates women and girls from the workforce and the world, meaning that they may have difficulties supporting themselves and any children without the necessary resources. The [Canadian Victims Bill of Rights](#) guarantees that victims of crime have the right to protection from intimidation and retaliation, but victims and survivors also deserve the right to financial independence and safety.

Created in 2007, [OFOVC](#) is an independent institution that facilitates awareness, access, and assistance for victims and survivors of crime to ensure their voices are heard, their needs are always met, and their rights are always upheld at the federal level. A large part of their mandate is to ensure policymakers are regularly aware of the systemic issues that negatively affect victims and survivors of crime, and that they understand their obligations regarding the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights*.

Victims and survivors can [contact OFOVC](#) at any point to learn more about their rights under federal law and all available services, or to [make a complaint](#) regarding any federal agency or legislation regarding victims of crime.

Upcoming Events

Homicide Support Group

Our Homicide Support Group is for family members, friends, and close loved ones of homicide victims and is intended to offer peer support to those dealing with violent loss. This support group is offered nationally meaning that we can connect with and support survivors from across the country. *English only.*

When: Thursday, November 28th, 2024 at 6:30PM

Where: Virtually

To RSVP: Email us at crcvc@crcvc.ca or call us at 1-877-232-2610



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