

Brief for Study on Implementing a Red Dress Alert in Canada

Prepared by the Ending Violence Association of Canada (EVA Canada) for submission to the
Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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About EVA Canada

The [Ending Violence Association of Canada](#) (EVA Canada) is a national, non-profit organization that works to amplify the collective voice of those who believe it is possible to end sexual and gender-based violence. Through research, policy-change, and advocacy, EVA Canada is building and expanding national coordination to address and respond to sexual violence. EVA Canada works collaboratively with gender-based violence organizations from coast to coast to coast, and serves as an umbrella organization for provincial/territorial sexual violence networks, as well as other community-based organizations committed to ending sexual violence.¹

Introduction

The purpose of this brief is to lend the Ending Violence Association of Canada's support to the creation of a Red Dress Alert that is women-centered and Indigenous-led, and to amplify the voices of Indigenous organizations who have advocated for an urgent response to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse individuals (MMIWG) for years.

Support for the Red Dress Alert Initiative

Indigenous women's organizations such as [Pauktuutit](#), [NWAC](#) and Women of the Métis Nation have been raising awareness and calling for concrete actions to address the tragedy of MMIWG for years. It is appalling that four years after the release of the [Final Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG](#) in 2019, [only 2 of the 231 Calls for Justice](#) had been fulfilled.

Call for Justice 5.8 asks provincial and territorial governments to enact legislation for missing persons, while call 9.5 asks governments to standardize protocols to respond to cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse persons, including the creation of an emergency number. The Red Dress Alert has the potential to be an impactful part of this response to prevent further disappearances, violence and deaths.

Anticipated Positive Impacts

By assisting to quickly locate missing Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse persons, an emergency alert system such as a Red Dress Alert has the potential to prevent gender-based violence and femicide from occurring or escalating. It can also lead to earlier interventions and responses that rally supports around an individual at risk and their family, as well as increase public safety. A Red Dress Alert may also increase public awareness and increase public support around the plight of MMIWG, survivors and their families in the eyes of all Canadians. It may

¹ Although this brief is informed by the experiences of our member organizations in the sexual violence sector, our recommendations may not entirely reflect the official views of all of EVA Canada's member organizations. Any information about the official position of EVA Canada's member organizations should be directed to specific groups or organizations.

also act as an opportunity to collect more accurate and timely data on numbers of individuals who go missing and further shed light on the issue. Furthermore, a Red Dress Alert may act as a deterrent for those who target Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse individuals and take advantage of the fact that Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit individuals are systematically invisibilized, overcriminalized and marginalized in mainstream Canadian society.

Gender-Based and Sexualized Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls

Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse individuals are more likely to experience gender-based violence and sexualized violence. More specifically, [six out of ten Indigenous women experience physical or sexual assault](#) in their lifetime, including experiencing sexual assault at a rate [three times higher](#) than non-Indigenous women. This is especially a problem in [rural, remote and Northern areas including the territories](#), where distances are significant and services are scarce. Indigenous children and youth are also at [higher risk of being removed from their family through the child welfare system](#), while women, girls and gender-diverse individuals are more likely to go missing, be [trafficked](#), be [murdered](#), or [incarcerated](#) at alarming rates. These realities occur in a historical and ongoing context of colonization which has profoundly disrupted Indigenous peoples' ancestral way of life and systematically devalued and oppressed them, [in particular Indigenous women with intersecting identities](#), rendering them vulnerable to experiencing abuse.

Key Considerations

In this section we reiterate key considerations brought forth by expert witnesses who contributed to the present study on the Red Dress Alert at the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, such as the British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, the National Family and Survivors Circle, and Women of the Métis Nation.

First and foremost, a Red Dress Alert must be led, or at the very least co-led and co-developed by Indigenous women, gender-diverse people, survivors and families of MMIWG and/or frontline Indigenous organizations representing them. Due to law enforcement's history of [systemic racism, exploitation, abuses of power and overcriminalization](#) of Indigenous peoples, many Indigenous women have [little to no trust in the police](#), making it imperative for this alert be community-led, rather than administered by law enforcement agencies. There is also a need for a feedback mechanism to improve the system based on lived experience.

Furthermore, the alert system must take into consideration regional disparities, including realities of rural, remote, Northern communities, as well as those of Indigenous individuals living in urban areas. These disparities include connectivity issues and cell service ranges in remote areas. Taking into consideration accessibility of the information shared will be crucial in the implementation. For example, creative and alternative information-sharing measures should

be considered in various local languages and formats, such as reaching individuals using text, email, voice recordings, landlines, billboards, etc.

Moreover, it is important to consider establishing a mechanism to protect the agency of women who go missing and do not want to be found. Safeguarding their self-determination can be a matter of life and death, as they may be fleeing abuse themselves and their safety may depend on their not being found. Who can they inform and how can they safely and confidentially do so if they do not wish to be subject to an alert?

Lastly, consistent with Call for Justice 5.6, there needs to be comprehensive, culturally relevant and accessible supports in place for survivors and their families in cases where those who go missing are found, and for those who are impacted by the disappearance of a loved one.

Structural Changes Needed

Indigenous organizations are clear that the Red Dress Alert is a step that is urgently needed, but that it is only one piece of the needed response to MMIWG. In order to accomplish meaningful change on this issue there needs to be significant, ongoing investments into key prevention areas that address long-standing systemic issues such as affordable housing, economic security, safe transportation, and access to culturally relevant services and supports.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Ending Violence Association of Canada supports the initiative of creating a Red Dress Alert that is by and for Indigenous communities. Everything in the government's power must be done to work with Indigenous survivors and their families to remedy the crisis of MMIWG, answer the Calls for Justice, and prevent further violence.