



## INFORMATION REPORT

TO: The Halifax Board of Police Commissioners

FROM: Supt. Andrew Matthews, Integrated Criminal Investigation Division

DATE: September 27th 2023

SUBJECT: **Environmental Scan for VACR**

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### **Background:**

The Halifax Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC) have requested an update on the environmental scan conducted by the Halifax Regional Police relating to the proposed Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review (VACR). The objective of this environmental scan was to gain insights into the VACR process across various Canadian agencies. Key areas of focus included entities responsible for reviews, impact on investigative outcomes, and shifts in staffing and administrative resources.

### **Findings:**

#### **Participating Third-Party Organizations:**

The number of agencies engaging in third-party reviews varies widely, from one to six entities, reflecting a diverse range of participating organizations. Notable examples include Anova (Women's shelter), Atlohsa (Indigenous women's shelter), LAWC (Women's shelter), St Joseph's Regional Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Program (hospital), and Belleheumer Law (Independent Legal Advice lawyer/victim advocate).

#### **Workload Changes:**

While three agencies did not conduct formal workload evaluations, the London Police Service proactively addressed this by increasing their Sexual Assault Section by three members. This decision was influenced by feedback emphasizing the need for specialized training in handling these cases.

#### **Improvements in Investigative Outcomes:**

Participating agencies unanimously reported substantial improvements in investigative outcomes. Benefits include strengthened collaborative ties with community partners, enhanced investigative quality, and elevated standards in conducting investigations.

### Resource Allocation:

All agencies acknowledged that participation in the VACR program has increased their workload and placed strains on administrative resources. Despite this, agencies unanimously affirmed that these challenges are outweighed by the substantial benefits derived from participation.

### Responses from Specific Agencies:

#### *London Police Service:*

Six organizations regularly participate, including women's shelters, an Indigenous women's shelter, a regional sexual assault program, and an independent legal advice lawyer/victim advocate.

Increased Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Section by three members, in response to reviewer feedback on specialized training needs.

#### *Ottawa Police Service:*

Currently, three sexual violence agencies participate in reviews, with the potential return of a fourth (Indigenous) agency in the next review.

Workload changes not evaluated, but significant improvements in various aspects since the program's implementation were noted.

#### *Regina Police Service:*

Reviews conducted by the Regina Sexual Assault Centre (RSAC).

Observed continuous improvements in the number of files returned for revisions. Initiating a specialized training program in patrol.

#### *Saskatoon Police Service:*

Reviews conducted by the Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre, with 4-6 reviewers sent based on file volume. No formal evaluation conducted, but positive feedback provided to investigators. Noted quality improvements in investigations.

#### *Ontario Provincial Police:*

The Ontario Provincial Police's VACR initiative operates across five distinct regions with varying participating agencies, including child protection organizations, indigenous child protection agencies, general and indigenous women's shelters, and Crown Victim Services. Quantifying the exact number of cases is challenging due to the broad coverage, ranging from swift reviews with minimal paperwork to more complex ones requiring extensive scrutiny. Increasing staff would enhance the committee's capacity for effective case review. An expansion initiative already added police officers and support staff, and further increases are being considered for handling these cases.

### Conclusion:

The responses received from participating agencies affirm the positive impact of the VACR initiative. Notable improvements in investigative outcomes, coupled with enhanced collaboration with community partners, demonstrate the significance of this program. While increased workload and resource allocation challenges were acknowledged, agencies unanimously emphasize that the benefits far outweigh any associated drawbacks.