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Health Canada's role is to foster good health by promoting health and protecting Canadians from harmful products, practices and disease. Violence against women, a prime area of concern as a health issue, is rooted in the social, economic and political inequality of women. Health Canada's activities through the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence focus on synthesizing and disseminating best practices to prevent and treat family violence, including violence against women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

How is Violence Against Women Defined?

Acts that result, or are likely to result, in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to a woman, including threats of such an act, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life.

The Impact of Violence on Women's Health

Violence is a major factor in women's health and well-being. The measurable health-related costs of violence against women in Canada exceed \$1.5 billion a year. These costs include short-term medical and dental treatment for injuries, long-term physical and psychological care, lost time at work, and use of transition homes and crisis centres.

Current Situation

■ Statistics Canada's 1998 report *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, which analysed data provided by 154 reporting police agencies, shows that:

- women continue to outnumber men nine to one as victims of assault by a spouse or partner;

- in 1996 half of all family homicides involved spouses;
- between 1977 and 1996, three times as many women were killed by their spouses as were men killed by their spouses;
- girls are at greatest risk of sexual assault by a family member while between 12 and 15 years of age;
- in 1996 nine of ten crimes committed against older adults by family members were physical assaults.

Promoting Women's Health

Ignoring violence as a factor in women's health and well-being not only leads to misdiagnosis and inadequate treatment, it also disregards the full extent of the personal and social consequences of violence. Women will not be free from violence until they achieve equality with men, and equality cannot be achieved until violence and the threat of violence are eliminated from women's lives.

Federal Government Initiatives

■ On behalf of the federal government, Health Canada coordinates the **Family Violence Initiative** involving 12 departments and agencies. The Initiative complements other federal government strategies (such as the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime

One in a series of fact sheets prepared for the



Prevention) to reduce violence in the family and in society generally.

■ To enhance treatment and prevention, Health Canada undertakes research on the population health consequences of violence against women and children and on abuse and neglect of older adults. The Department also manages the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.

■ The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence is a national resource centre for all Canadians seeking information about, and solutions to, violence within the family. It shares the latest research findings and information on all aspects of prevention, protection and treatment so Canadian communities can find solutions.

■ Through the current Family Violence Initiative:

- **Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation** (CMHC), through delivery of the Shelter Enhancement Initiative, provides capital funds for upgrading of emergency shelters and second stage housing to meet health, safety and security standards, and to address the special needs of women and their children, people with disabilities and older clients.
- The Women's Program, **Status of Women Canada**, provides support to women and other voluntary organizations to address the causes of family violence in ways that lead to systemic changes and the development of alternative, long-term prevention strategies.
- **Justice Canada**, undertakes criminal legislative and policy reviews and reforms, conducts research, provides project funding to community and other organizations, and provides public legal education and information support for initiatives that address the needs of women, children and youth as victims of family violence.
- **Canada Heritage** supports community-based projects initiated and managed by Aboriginal women's groups off-reserve, supports programming through ethnic broadcast media and English/French as a Second Language organizations, and conducts research and evaluation related to family violence.

Accomplishments

■ Statistics Canada's Violence Against Women Survey 1993 is the first of its kind to collect data on violence against women. Approximately 12,300 women over the age of 18 were randomly selected and interviewed.

■ The 1993 report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence — Achieving Equality 1993*, provides comprehensive documentation on violence against women in Canada from a variety of perspectives and makes recommendations for government and private-sector action at all levels.

■ Amendments to the *Criminal Code* increase protection to women and children in many contexts.

Sources:

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maintain and improve their health

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Health Canada