

Building a Movement

Mobilizing more men for violence prevention, gender equality, and social justice in Canada

Recommendations for the Government of Canada

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Note to the Reader

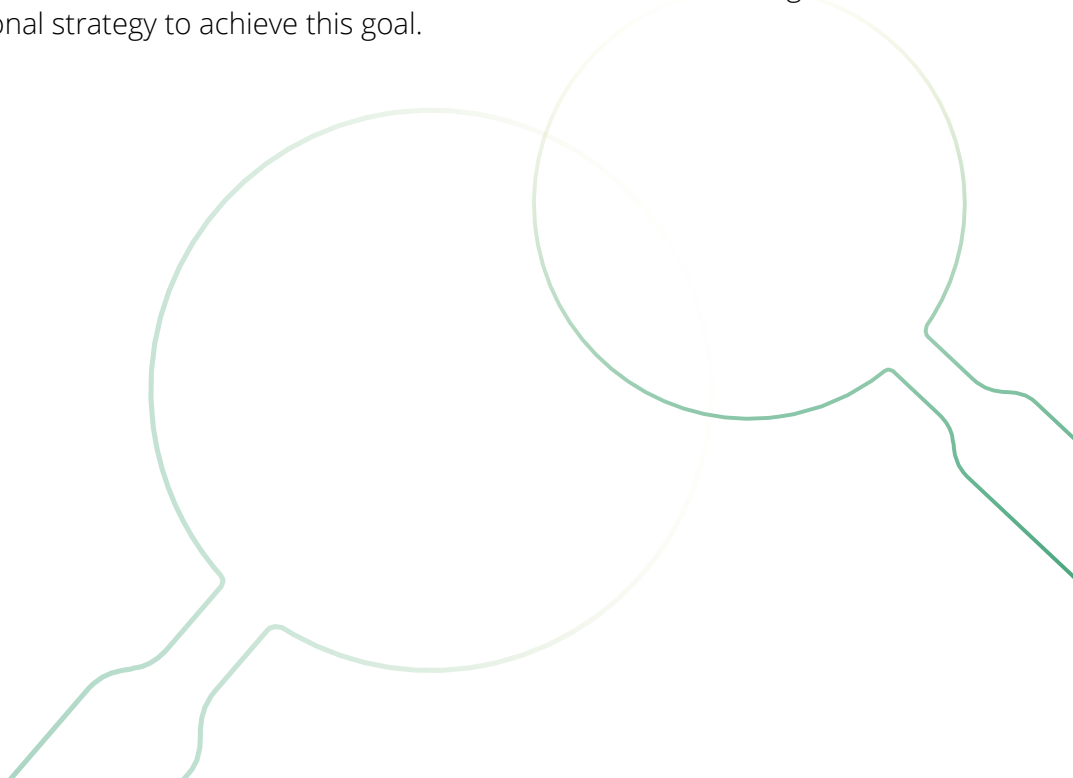
The following report builds on previous recommendations made to the Government of Canada and Women and Gender Equality Canada on what they can do to support the engagement and mobilization of more men and boys to stop violence before it starts and achieve gender and social justice.

The primary recommendation stands, *that* the:

Government of Canada develop a sustainable, evidence-informed funding model that powers a national strategy that supports innovative ways to get more men and boys invested and involved in violence prevention and gender equality.

This national strategy should support research, collaborations, partnerships, network-building, capacity building, and processes to help integrate evidence into practice in all sectors. Investment in these activities will leverage existing momentum in Canada.

We believe that when we meet men and boys where they are at, and work with them in the places where they live, learn, work, worship, and play, while framing and priming engagement in loving and compassionate ways, we can foster change that is swift and transformative. The opportunities and recommendations provided in this report are intended to support the Government of Canada to create a sustainable funding model and implement a national strategy to achieve this goal.



Background

For 12 years, the University of Calgary’s primary prevention research hub called Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence (Shift) has conducted research and supported advocacy efforts to engage and mobilize men as stakeholders, co-beneficiaries, partners, leaders, and advance gender equality.

Our research and partnerships focus on advancing *primary prevention* approaches, meaning those that address the *root causes* of violence, discrimination, and gender inequality. We have been involved in multiple projects that have produced a wealth of rigorously developed materials and tools that focus on engaging men and boys in the primary prevention of violence and advancement of gender justice.

This report stems from our recent work funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada in 2020, titled *Calling In Men: Mobilizing More Men for Violence Prevention and Gender Equality in Canada*, a knowledge synthesis project. As part of *Calling In Men*, nine rapid evidence reviews were conducted on evidence-informed primary prevention approaches to engage and mobilize men to prevent violence and advance gender equality. We commend the Government of Canada for investing in research that pulls from other disciplines to draw in relevant evidence to more impactfully and meaningfully work with men. The gaps and recommendations presented here are also informed by other work by Shift, namely the:

- [Action Plan to Engage Men and Boys to Stop Violence Against Women](#) (2015) submitted to the Government of Alberta
- [Tomorrow’s Men Today: Canadian Men’s Insights on Engaging Men and Boys in Creating a More Gender Equal Future](#) (2019) supported and submitted to WAGE
- [Supporting Best Practices: Guidelines for Funding Programs that Engage Men and Boys in Violence Prevention](#) (2020)
- [Changing Contexts: A Framework for Engaging Male-Oriented Settings in Gender Equality and Violence Prevention – Practitioners’ Guide](#)

The evidence is undeniable. Engaging, motivating, and working with men and boys to prevent violence and advance gender equality must be our priority. First, systems of oppression like patriarchy, capitalism, and colonization harm everyone, not just women and girls. Second, while men are the primary perpetrators of violence against women and girls, men are also the primary perpetrators of violence against *men and boys*, which also makes them frequent victims of violence and subject to trauma. Male-perpetrated violence against women (and people of all gender and sexual identities) is intimately intertwined with

men's violence against men, just as efforts to prevent violence and advance gender equality are inextricably linked. This is because violence is a learned behaviour, and the roots of violence are the result of social conditions that perpetuate and reinforce gender and social injustices.

At a time when hope and embracing possibility are needed more than ever, we believe that more needs to be done **NOW**. We need to meet men where they are along a spectrum of change, recognizing that learning includes making mistakes along the way, *and* that behaviours are more likely to stick and spread if they are addressed in the social contexts which influence them, namely in the places and spaces men already gather and have relationships.

Research also continues to affirm that “cancelling” individual men is a temporary solution to a systemic problem and fails to address the wounds and trauma that so often drive men's use of violence and dehumanization of others. It also does little to cultivate the next generation of boys and men invested in achieving gender and social justice.



What is needed to build a *movement* of men and boys committed to violence prevention and gender equality?

To start, we must reorient ourselves from seeing men as the *problem* to part of the *solution*. Research shows that men will have limited engagement if they cannot see their own vested interest in working towards an equal and just world.¹ To make this shift, **we must fundamentally change the way we think about why and how to engage men and boys**, including what it takes to bring about concrete and transformative cultural, structural, and systems-level change to support and reinforce gender justice, inclusion, and nonviolence in all parts of society.

We have a solid understanding of where the current state of evidence is and where the strategic opportunities are to catalyze this small field into a sustained and profoundly impactful movement¹ of nonviolent men committed to gender and social justice.

Currently, the Government of Canada is investing in efforts to engage men and boys, although often in siloed and episodic ways. The time **is NOW to create a more cohesive strategy so that the shared vision is clear and work with men and boys can be collective, generative, and catalytic**. Canada is in a prime spot to become a global leader by funding a government-led national strategy to engage and mobilize men and boys to prevent violence and advance gender equality. The following recommendations outline where more research, funding, policies, capacity, and support are needed to do just that.

¹ We define “movement building” as the galvanizing of “individuals and organizations around a shared vision to achieve large-scale, systematic change—rather than incremental improvement. Movement builders seek to drive forward progress towards this shared mission through activities involving advocacy and activism. Rather than rallying round one leader, movement building is about rallying around a cause or injustice and working towards changing it.” Taken from: Shift design. (2022). *Making collective progress: Towards shared ambitions for social change*, p. 11. Shift Design. [shiftdesign.org/content/uploads/2022/02/Making-Collective-Progress.pdf](https://www.shiftdesign.org/content/uploads/2022/02/Making-Collective-Progress.pdf)



Recommendations for the Government of Canada

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION:

Develop a sustainable, evidence-informed funding model that powers a national strategy that supports innovative ways to get more men and boys invested and involved in violence prevention and gender equality.



RECOMMENDATION:

Research agenda:
Build the evidence base



RECOMMENDATION:

Invest in partnerships
and build networks of men



RECOMMENDATION:

Support the integration
of evidence into practice



Research agenda: Build the evidence base

A comprehensive research agenda is instrumental in developing a clear road map for where we are, where we want to go in engaging and mobilizing men (and why), and how to get there.

We are inspired by [CIHR's](#) 11 years of funding to advance men and boys' health, which is a great example of the Canadian government recognizing the need to address men and boys' health in order to advance health and equality for all.

We have identified the following four key areas where research and funding are urgently needed:

1. Collect more data (quality and quantity) on trends, attitudes, behaviours, practices, and public perceptions relating to gender, violence, and equality.

To achieve this:

- **Invest in both cross-sectional and longitudinal research.**
 - **Cross-sectional research:** Invest in the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), in partnership with Promundo.
 - **Longitudinal research:** On men's health, such as Australia's [Ten to Men](#) study on male health, which would help in understanding how gender and social inequalities also impact men and boys.
- **Fund public perception research.**
 - **Canada should replicate [VicHealth Australia's](#) investment.** Conduct primary and secondary research on Canadian media, gender equality advocates, and the public to understand and test positive framings of masculinity and gender equality to use in mass media campaigns and public engagement.
- **Invest in research on men and boys who feel disengaged from prosocial movements.** We are seeing a troubling global rise in white supremacy, antisemitism, terrorism, and other hate-fueled groups and movements. We need more research that:
 - **Targets male populations most likely to join these groups** (e.g., rural men, working class men, men in military and paramilitary settings) to understand, from a place of compassion, what the pressing issues are (e.g., employment, mental health) for them and how to better meet them where they're at.

- **Investigates how right-wing and extremist groups frame and message issues** to better understand how to strategically resist them and reframe prosocial efforts to resonate with these populations and cultivate a sense of belonging in promoting peace, healing, and nonviolence. For example, Oxfam’s research on masculinity and the far-right offers valuable insights that could be built upon.

2. Gather more data on the strengths, needs, and experiences of Indigenous and equity-deserving male populationsⁱⁱ

and then test approaches to meet them where they’re at. The following populations are currently underrepresented:

- Men in rural settings, as much of the work to engage men in Canada is in urban settings.
- Men from racialized communities.
- Indigenous men.
- Men in communities of faith.
- Trans men.
- Men with non-physical disabilities and men as partners to persons with disabilities.
- Men who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence.
- Older men.
- In fatherhood research: Indigenous, newcomer, and immigrant fathers, single fathers (as a result of choice, divorce, or being widowed), fathers in non-heterosexual relationships, trans fathers, fathers with disabilities, and fathers of children with disabilities.
- Understanding the intersections of violence prevention, gender equality, and diversity, justice, and inclusion from the perspectives of diverse male populations.

3. Invest in more research on *how we can engage men and boys for lasting and meaningful change with the greatest ripple effect.*

Canada is behind globally on research in this area. The time is now to invest in comprehensive efforts that locate, test, implement, and scale up evidence-informed approaches for engaging men and boys in violence prevention and gender equality. For instance:

- **Invest in Canadian efforts to implement social norms approaches,ⁱⁱⁱ virtual reality, and the bystander approach.** They must be within a multi-pronged approach (as the evidence does not support the bystander approach as a stand-alone intervention).

ⁱⁱ Equity-deserving groups are groups of people who have historically, persistently, and systematically experienced barriers in participating in society based on age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation and transgender status, etc. These groups include women, racialized populations, 2SLGBTQIA+ populations, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, seniors/older adults, people living in rural and remote areas, etc.

ⁱⁱⁱ Encouragingly, PHAC just funded the testing of a social norms approach in a Canadian policing organization.

- **Increase and expand the use of gamification, nudge, data science, and calling in approaches in Canada to reach and mobilize men for violence prevention and advancing equity.** Post-secondary environments and workplaces are promising places to invest in these efforts. Priority funding should go to efforts that integrate these approaches into changing contexts (norms, processes, systems), not just individuals.
- **Research trauma and its impacts among men and boys.** Men are more likely than women to encounter traumatic events;² this is particularly true for Indigenous, Black, and racialized men and boys.³ Research is needed to understand the impact of trauma on men and boys and how trauma manifests through a gender lens, including how rigid male gender norms may produce their own traumatic consequences.⁴ Research is also needed on how to improve men's help-seeking behaviour in response to trauma and set up services so that men will use them.

4. Fund research that expands the knowledge base and visibility of men and male-identified allies who already embody the values to role model and build a movement.

- **Research questions needing answers:** What are the protective factors that can be cultivated to promote prosocial behaviour in men and male-identified people? What is already happening in Canada that we want to see more of? What are the building blocks for cultivating healing, accountability, repair, and resilience skills at the individual, family, community, and systems levels?
- **Fund work by men to create and sustain ethical spaces and opportunities for men and boys to envision and play** with potential new ways of being, relating to others, and contributing to a just, equal, and safe world, and support them in documenting and sharing their vision and findings with others engaged in this work.
- **Fund research and efforts that use transformative justice and other alternative justice approaches in communities, institutions, the criminal legal system, and outside the criminal legal system** so that men are not only held accountable but done so in a way that deepens their connection to and investment in gender and social justice.



Invest in partnerships and build networks of men

We recommend the following strategies to strengthen partnerships and build the necessary networks to catalyze shared learning and growth in work to mobilize men and boys for gender and social justice:

1. Cultivate cross-sectoral collaboration:

Integrate violence prevention, gender equality, and justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (JEDIB) work:

- **Invest in research, training, and learning exchanges** to build the capacity of multiple social justice sectors to collaborate and learn to talk across these issues in ways that build the capacity of all stakeholders, including men and boys, to end oppression of all forms.

2. Provide sustained investment for communities of practice, a national network, and learning exchanges to inspire nonviolent men and boys as leaders and role models.

- **Continue to invest in a national network** of male-identified leaders alongside feminist leaders.
- **Invest in a variety of community of practices** to strengthen evidence-informed practices and expand capacity among those working with or interested in working with men and boys.
- **Promote and support the creation of more male ally spaces** (e.g., events and opportunities that bring men and boys together).
- **Fund learning exchanges with other countries advancing the field and movement of engaging men**, such as Australia.

3. Fund and support diverse and Indigenous male leadership.

To start, we recommend you:

- **Invest in Indigenous community leadership** to develop and implement culturally appropriate responses to violence against women, such as initiatives that focus on traditional healing and holistic approaches.⁵
- **Invest in equity-deserving leadership** so that equity-deserving populations have inspiring examples of men who are supported to be change agents in their own communities and contribute their expertise in the broader movement to mobilize men.

4. Develop a repository of research and practical tools on engaging men.

Well-organized and accessible research is key to bridging the research to practice gap and strengthening work in this field. We recommend you make a website that:

- **Includes findings from regular internal audits of all research and initiatives targeting men and boys** for violence prevention and advancing gender equality.
- **Shares key learnings** from all the initiatives you fund that include engaging and mobilizing men.
- **Showcases accessible resources to inform and support change efforts by leaders** — see #4 in *Integrating evidence into practice* for more details.
- **Is collaborative.** For example, this website should include shared data collection standards, shared principles, and portals for community networks.
- **Those in the movement to engage men should also partner with data science experts** to build the capacity of the sector to use technology to advance social justice.





Support the integration of evidence into practice

We commend the work by the Canadian government to support and advance the field of engaging men.

The next step is to advance skills on how to change the contexts in which men live, work, learn, play, and worship to enable nonviolence and support gender equality. Investment in male leadership is key. To do this, we recommend you:

1. Build the capacity of the public and private sectors to see, frame, and engage men and boys as part of the *solution*.

Specifically, this means:

- **Frame this work for men and boys as their own liberation and humanity and not only for the benefit of women and others.** This means changing the messages in our campaigns from diagnostic to hopeful and prosocial.
- **Invest in practitioners learning how to practice restorative and transformative justice approaches where possible.** Engaging with men in loving and compassionate ways shows far greater potential to inspire men to change and be invested in gender and social justice work than taking a harsh and blaming approach.
- **Invest in initiatives that focus on changing *contexts*.** We need to increase our focus on contexts and utilize evidence-informed levers that can accelerate change towards our vision of a just and equal world. Shift's *Changing Contexts*⁶ provides useful guidance.

2. Invest in and scale up what we already know works to engage and mobilize men and boys:

- A. WHEN:** Efforts that leverage key life transition stages, namely fatherhood, adolescence, and experiences of trauma.
- B. WHERE:** Efforts that reach men where they already gather.
- C. WHAT:** Efforts that utilize evidence-informed approaches to engaging men.
- D. WHO:** Initiatives that understand the power of the messenger.
- E. TYPE:** Sustained programs and systems-oriented work instead of one-off psychoeducational programming.
- F. PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION:** Sustained and easily accessible funding for customizable programming for Indigenous and equity-deserving populations.

The following provides additional detail on how to leverage these ingredients:

A. WHEN: Our research identified three life transition points that are particularly likely to accelerate progress in mobilizing men and boys as co-beneficiaries, allies, and advocates:

- Fatherhood
- Adolescence
- Experiences of trauma

Fatherhood^{iv}. In the Canadian context, targeting fatherhood as a violence prevention and gender equality strategy is one of the most effective entry points, yet it is still underfunded and deprioritized.⁷ To increase opportunities for positive fatherhood, we recommend you:

- Legislate fully paid, non-transferable paternity leave.
- Invest in and incentivize gender-responsive family-friendly workplace policies that support all parents in caring for their children while providing job protection.
- Collect gender-disaggregated data on unpaid care work to monitor progress.
- Identify and facilitate pathways for men to train and work in paid care work.
- Engage fathers through health systems, schools, and places where fathers already congregate.
- Expand evidence-based father-focused and father-inclusive programs at the community level.
- Create a specific fund for public health and grassroots organizations to access so they can create, support, and sustain peer groups for new dads at the local level.
- Conduct father-friendly organizational assessments of organizations' readiness to provide services to fathers and father figures.
- Reexamine investment in parenting programs and fund positive fatherhood involvement among nonviolent men as a key primary prevention strategy.
- Invest in a [Canadian MenCare](#) or similar public awareness initiative.

Adolescence. The earlier in life prevention starts, the more effective it is.

We recommend you:

- Invest in more trauma-informed efforts to engage adolescent boys in places they already gather, for example schools, sports, in their family unit. Canada's investment in and scaling up of Wiseguyz, the youth-focused gender transformative program by [Next Gen Men](#) is one such example.

^{iv} Positive father involvement refers to responsive, consistent, and nurturing interactions that promote a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical health as well as having a respectful and non-violent relationship with the child's mother or co-parent (Dozois E., Wells, L., Exner-Cortens, D., & Esina, E. (2016). *No Man Left Behind: How and Why to Include Fathers in Government-Funded Parenting Strategies*. Calgary, AB: The University of Calgary, Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence).

- Target young men in post-secondary environments, for example by **supporting the adoption of a similar policy to the United States' 2013 Sexual Assault Violence Elimination Act (SaVE)** which mandates eligible universities to provide students with primary prevention and awareness programs.

Experiences of trauma. We live in a society that struggles to see men and boys as victims. This is a glaring gap in the capacity to reach men and stop cycles of harm. We recommend you:

- **Fund mental health services for men:** This includes the development, coordination, and operations of a national men's help line, phone app, and virtual interventions to support mental health and well-being. Alberta's [Men &](#) initiative and Nova Scotia's [211](#) are two excellent Canadian efforts to build on. Another example is Columbia's "antimachismo" [free hotline](#).
 - **Integrate trauma-informed approach to work with men.** Invest in building the capacity of those working with and wanting to work with men to utilize a trauma-informed approach.
- B. WHERE:** Fund efforts that reach men where they already congregate, including the places where they live, work, worship, socialize, and play⁸—and do so in a sustained way. These efforts are currently few and far between in Canada.
- C. WHAT:** Invest in efforts that utilize evidence-informed approaches to engaging men, including virtual reality, gamification, nudges, social norms approaches, and calling in. Refer to #3 in the *Research Agenda* of this report for more details.
- D. WHO:** Fund initiatives that leverage the power of the messenger. We have learned a lot about the power of the messenger in communicating information,⁹ yet this research is still not well taken up in Canada. Invest in efforts that:
- **Leverage peers, near-peers, role models, parent-child relationships, intimate relationships, male leaders, or other formal or informal key influencers** in men and boys' lives to communicate information and build positive and supportive connections.
 - **Leverage key influencers within diverse networks** to prevent violence and support prosocial norms and behaviours.
 - **Focus on positive male leaders and champions** and support them to influence other men, such as connecting fathers with other fathers.
- E. TYPE:** Prioritize sustained programs and systems-oriented work instead of one-off psychoeducational programming. Increase project cycles to allow sufficient time for upfront investment and iterative learning cycles, orienting to the specific context, and adapting and responding to innovation.
- F. PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION:** Sustained and easily accessible funding for customizable programming for Indigenous and equity-deserving populations. Tailor programming to the specific culture, structure, strengths, priorities, and challenges of each group¹⁰ and ensure these funds are easy and straightforward to obtain.

3. Increase the sector's capacity for evaluation practices that are oriented towards innovation and measuring change in dynamic social environments.

To do this:

- **Invest in evaluation training and capacity-building** for those working with men, such as on developmental evaluation and utilization-focused evaluation to better equip those in the field to design, plan for, implement, and capture innovation and prosocial change.
- **Fund and support efforts that utilize these innovative evaluation practices**, including by lengthening project cycles to at least 3-5 years.

4. Invest in knowledge mobilization and translating research into practice:

Strategies to do this include:

- **Community-university partnerships**, including participatory action research.
- **Easily accessible online repository of best practices and evidence** on what works.
- **Simple and accessible online materials**, infographics, videos, and apps.
- **Public-facing engagement.**
- **Knowledge sharing opportunities.**

5. Intentionally cultivate the next generation of men and boys excited and onboard the shared vision.

Refer to the *Strengthening Partnerships and Building Networks* section of this report for more information. In addition, we urge you to:

- **Invest in community-based and online clubs and groups for men and boys** to participate in dialogue with one another about issues relating to gender, relationships, and their emotional lives without fear of judgment or shaming.
- **Invest in social norms media campaigns and other mass media efforts** that showcase male role models, male "champions," and floods Canadians with hopeful, positive, and uplifting images and stories of men and boys.
- **Support male gender equality leaders and champions** by investing in leadership capacities at the grassroots, community, and institutional level.

Conclusion

This report offers a clear guide to building a sustainable, evidence-informed funding model and national strategy that supports innovative ways to get more men and boys invested and involved in the movement to achieve gender and social justice.

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THE PROJECT TO END
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE