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Coalition on Community Safety, Health and Well-being  
Coalition pour la sécurité, la santé et le bien-être des communautés



## ***Community Safety Round Table III***

### ***Survey of Coalition Partners***

#### **Background:**

In 2006, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police hosted two Community Safety Round Tables. Since that time, Coalition partners have not met together. The Coalition Steering Committee decided that November 2011 was an opportune time for another Round Table which would energize the Coalition, give members an opportunity to discuss its strategic direction and develop an action plan, including the identification of the theme for the next Coalition national consultation, to be held in 2012-13.

A survey of Coalition partners was undertaken in order to determine if the changing environment was affecting member organizations' capacity to meet their objectives, what steps they were taking to respond to the challenges they were facing, what partnerships they had entered into and what else they thought might be done. The responses from twenty-three members of the Coalition – fifteen non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and eight police services – as well as five other representatives of the Crime Prevention Committee, the standing committee that speaks to the CACP Board on behalf of the Coalition – have been summarized in this compilation which will serve as a background document for Community Safety Round Table III. The individual responses grouped below have not been attributed at the specific request of some respondents.

#### **Question 1: Is the environment in which your organization works changing and if so, how?**

All respondents, whether from the NGO community or the policing sector, noted that the environment in which they deliver their services has changed markedly. In most cases, NGOs reported that funding has decreased or is only available for small, short-term projects; more and more time is spent chasing funding opportunities and writing proposals. Lack of sustainable funding means that worthwhile initiatives are not pursued. While workloads have risen, staff numbers are not increasing and staff and volunteers struggle to make up for funding shortfalls. Although more staff are aware of occupational health and safety provisions, burnout is becoming a serious risk. At the same time, there is an increasing demand for quick access to knowledge, data and information and a need to keep up with rapid advances in information technology.

Society is becoming more polarized with growing gaps between the rich and the poor and a disappearing middle. Competition is intense for the limited resources available for community or collective action. Local governments, facing their own financial challenges, focus less on the "community" and the "citizen" and more on the "taxpayer". Children and youth from marginalized neighbourhoods cannot participate in city and community programs because their families are struggling with financial, cultural and transportation barriers. Schools, once places of safety and security, are becoming more dangerous: more weapons

are available and being used; female violence, including use of weapons, is increasing; and cyber bullying is a serious issue with the legal remedies regarding suspensions that boards apply likely to be challenged. One NGO providing services in eleven low-income communities in four provinces noted that the issue of community safety is paramount in all of their neighbourhoods, with program staff discussing the impact of family concerns about safety, bullying, conflict and violence, including gun violence. Greater attention is being paid to mental health issues. Public expectations have risen as governments have retreated from support for and involvement in many social development areas.

With the “tough on crime” agenda, emphasis is placed on retribution and punishment, rather than diversion and rehabilitation. Measures in omnibus Bill C-10 do not address the need for complex and integrated prevention and work on poverty, trauma related addictions and anger management. The addicted, wounded victim of child abuse who has become an offender due to drug use and unresolved trauma issues is being thrown out with the sociopathic personality who may indeed need to be incarcerated. Distinctions have to be made and balances struck which reflect the real needs for safety from some offenders and the need for treatment of others. Building capacity within the people served by many NGOs has become more challenging.

Although there is a growing focus on policy work in many NGOs, there seems to be less opportunity to engage governments. Those NGOs pursuing an advocacy agenda have to be nimble and nuanced – able to work with all political parties without being diverted by partisan considerations. It is necessary to assess opportunities and threats presented by the emerging policy landscape, then cobble together responsive strategies that maximize NGOs’ influence in promoting a crime prevention agenda. In facing issues of community safety and health, there is a need for “new blood” around the table; unfortunately, new people do not always see the value of strategic partnerships and networks or recognize the importance of collaboration, especially with organizations from outside their sectors.

Police services echoed the concerns about fiscal constraints and the injunction to do more with less. There is sometimes pressure at the local level for police services to reduce their budget demands; however, although crime rates have fallen, about 80% of police work is not actual crime fighting, but rather maintaining public order, by-law enforcement, crime prevention, enforcing provincial statutes and assistance to the public. Police services which have embarked on the costly improvements to information technology required by modern policing often have no choice but to continue along that path, even if they have little control over costs. Advances in information technology have also resulted in new types of crime for whose investigation police services are often not funded.

Legislative changes to practice and policy can require police services to divert capital/operating dollars (e.g., introduction of CCTV). The investigation of serious crimes has become more complex and costly as a result of court decisions, case law and rules around disclosure, taking statements and gathering evidence. Governments have downloaded responsibilities to the local level without providing resources (e.g., closing of mental health facilities). Cuts at the local and provincial level affect the ability of communities to make investments in social programs; budget reductions for social agencies with whom the police have partnered make it more difficult for front-line officers to find places to refer individuals at risk.

Demographic changes have had a major impact on police services, with communities constantly evolving. Fast growth and urban sprawl have increased the number of calls to

police. The proportion of older persons and various ethnoracial groups in communities is rising. The media's love of sensationalism when crimes occur leads to feelings of insecurity and unrealistic demands on police. It is difficult to reach consensus regarding the policing of frequent public demonstrations due to the variety of political and philosophical points of view in communities.

Within police ranks, there has been a change in attitudes. Management has to contend with personnel who want greater purpose in their jobs and steady advancement. Recruits are being taught more about the social and health issues that must be considered in their approach to community-based problem-solving and how such underlying issues intersect with traditional policing. More emphasis is placed on good communication with the community. At the same time, social media and advances in technology mean that there is greater scrutiny of police and demands for greater accountability; police-public relations are affected negatively when video and audio clips of officers' actions are shared widely without contextual information. Police services face intense scrutiny of how they do their business and the costs associated with policing, including contract settlements and budgets.

It is challenging to link causation and crime prevention and resource intensive to prove that prevention is the key to enhancing community safety; nevertheless, while there are fewer grants and contributions available to community groups and police services for crime prevention through social development, commitment to that approach and community policing remains strong.

## **Question 2: How is this impacting your organization?**

The NGO respondents reported that they are changing how they operate and seeking innovative ways to meet their clients' needs. Networking is very important, but partnering takes a lot of time and energy to be done well. Many respondents reported that they try to stress partnerships and collaboration, although it was pointed out that limited staffing means they cannot be at all the tables where they should be present and thus many opportunities are missed.

Chasing dollars can result in "mission drift". Advocacy work in some cases has been limited, partly because so much time is being spent managing grants and writing proposals or dealing with overwhelming demands for services and partly because of potential threats to funding as a result of policy changes. Funding often comes with many conditions and restrictions, especially with regard to responding to visible and proven needs rather than investing in preventive measures and emerging issues. Limited capital funding means that organizations have to invest resources in capital funding drives for their aging buildings, campaigns that end up competing with other partners for limited community donations.

Programming choices and location for community-based programs are affected by community fear; it is often difficult to find inviting, open and "safe" spaces for activities. Sometimes, NGOs are measured against programs from other jurisdictions or those from the past and are not given the opportunity to clarify what they are doing and why. Helping people to become accountable for the choices they have made is not always easy and can often be seen by the general public as uncaring.

In some cases, services provided to members of organizations have been reduced. Increasingly, the focus is on promoting knowledge transfer activities and providing simple, straightforward messaging. The amount and scope of research conducted to provide expert

advice may increase. On-line support services are more in demand. One NGO reported a slight decrease in attendance at its national conferences; another noted the need to constantly update its conference and training offerings. Crime prevention conferences focusing on one topic attract people working in that area; this creates a very competitive environment for police department budgets and often partners from the policing world cannot attend conferences.

On the policy front, NGOs are concentrating on fewer areas and assessing carefully their roles. One partner noted that it tries to have policy statements issued from a coalition, not as stand-alone pronouncements. Short-term projects and reduced funding have resulted in greater staff turnover and less expertise in content development.

Federal priorities make it more difficult to get resources shifted to community-based programs and supports for those at risk. Less acceptance of the social development model may have an impact on the mandates, plans and roles of some NGOs. One partner noted that the current lack of a democratic process for discussing all costs and aspects of omnibus Bill C-10 make it difficult to speak up for fear of loss of funding or not being listened to at all; as a result, the effectiveness of that organization's work and its ability to be heard are affected. Media focus on the vulnerabilities of some people (e.g., older persons, immigrants), not their strengths, makes these individuals seem to be an economic drag. Pressure on provincial budgets means that departmental officials cannot continue to participate in networking (e.g., sitting on multi-sectoral committees and working groups).

The police, too, are reacting to changes in the environment in which they deliver services. The most significant change has been the economic situation. Police chiefs are cognizant of the fact that their requests for additional funding to ensure that they can keep pace with new demands and changing communities put a burden on other municipal services. Being asked to hold the line on costs may impact some aspects of service delivery. Proactive crime prevention can be limited, as both police services and community organizations have fewer resources. Operational models have to be reevaluated constantly with strategic repositioning as necessary (e.g., regional integration, organizational decentralization to bring police closer to neighbourhoods, partnerships with government agencies and social service organizations, etc.) to maximize service delivery, in particular to the most vulnerable.

Within police services, some organizational changes challenge the status quo regarding the very practice of policing. Efforts to modify the approach of "old school law enforcement" can be met with scepticism and resistance. Recruitment and retention can become problematic if personnel determine that their needs are not being met and career development has slowed. Dollars and human resources may have to be reallocated or realigned to support the best means of ensuring safe, healthy communities at the root level of crime and disorder. Staffing levels may not be sufficient and as a result, the "front line" is stretched. Enforcement and education programs take time and effort, especially with regard to the issue of drug use. The move to restorative justice programs with their healing circles involves more time on the part of investigating officers if they are to make a worthwhile contribution to the process. Diversion programs implemented in conjunction with social services have a significant impact on internal policy and procedures.

On the other hand, a more collaborative approach with a focus on crime prevention through social development broadens staff perspective on policing and sparks a more creative dialogue on crime and its underlying complexities. Decentralized police services emphasizing partnerships and dialogue with citizens and the community become flexible

organizations able to absorb change, provide better services and operational approaches and collaborate effectively with other policing organizations.

Changes in the community can have a significant impact on police services. Increases in the Violent Crime Severity Index increase fear in the community, resulting in negative media attention and demands for more effective police and community response. Some cultures distrust the police and have a limited understanding of the resources available to them in the community. Community service providers, some of whom have lost funding, can turn to the police to fill the gap, while new community groups want to enter into partnerships with the police; in both cases, police services are stretched to respond positively when their own resources are thin.

Finally, changes in political platforms can impact police services. The stronger emphasis on “get tough” pushes other areas aside (e.g., gun registry, crime prevention initiatives not focusing on the current government priorities).

### **Question 3: What are you doing to respond to this environment?**

The NGOs responding to the survey reported several approaches to dealing with the challenges they face. A key objective is to focus on strategic priorities, programs and projects, aligning staff and resources accordingly. Good policy work can increase memberships and demonstrate to constituents that organizations are relevant. Internal budgetary increases are kept to a minimum while some benefits are still offered to members so that they see the value in maintaining their memberships. Attempts are made to diversify revenue sources (e.g., private sector) and business lines and knowledge products developed. It is important to work with funders to ensure that good data are provided on the programs offered, their impact on clients served as well as the community and their cost. Programs no longer needed or offered in a different manner are closed, while others are sometimes turned over to other organizations to run. Many NGOs receive significant funding from the public through small individual donations. In some cases, to ensure a safe environment for youth accessing programs, commercial rented space is being used, particularly for programming that takes place in the evening.

Developing partnerships is crucial. Networks are used to maximize funding possibilities and share costs (e.g., hosting benefits and conferences). Utilization of information technology and information management is improved by partnering with organizations that have strong information management infrastructures. Broadening the partnership base by connecting with other organizations across the country raises visibility and profile. Adaptability is promoted more than ever; for example, youth-serving organizations try to build partnerships with everyone impacting on the lives of young people: service providers, neighbourhood partners, other community agencies, funders, donors and sponsors and governments.

It is important to advocate for social justice wherever the NGOs can, forming coalitions to act on common issues and, if possible, receiving support from the police for campaigns to challenge the move from fostering social supports to punitive responses. Providing alerts to the public and interest groups to promote thoughtful reflection on policy alternatives, making research and publications available for discussion, hosting public meetings and events to present restorative justice options and encouraging participation in the legislative process are ways to respond to the current environment. In order to communicate information that is valuable and ensure proper response to identified needs, research requirements should be examined. One NGO reported using the Internet to provide more information to the public

about its mandate and programs as well as for donations and complaints; in some cases, organizations partner to set up web-based networks (e.g., Manitoba Shelter Network which helps to build bridges between shelters and agencies and may support centralized intake). Using social media also permits wide distribution and more open sharing of information.

Respondents from the policing sector emphasized that while they carry out their core enforcement duties and continually evaluate their service delivery model in the context of their fast-growing and increasingly diverse communities, they are not changing their commitment to community policing and crime prevention through social development. It is a challenge to maintain staffing levels in the face of financial restraint so that police services do not lose the ability to be proactive. If necessary, officers are redeployed from specialized functions to front-line patrol and sworn and civilian strength increased. Efforts are made to carry out research and assess future needs.

Partnerships are key, with ongoing efforts to strengthen relationships with community agencies, municipal crime prevention councils, leaders of various ethnoracial and religious communities, health care specialists, school boards, government and other police services and first responders. More information is provided to the community through social media, crime mapping and police service websites.

Within police services, training of staff to respond to the needs of growing and diverse populations and understand best practices on community-based solutions to safety and health issues is important. Emphasis is placed on recruiting qualified individuals from diverse groups and ensuring continual two-way communication with specific sectors of the community (e.g., ethnoracial groups, older persons). More training is offered to members and more liaison undertaken with organizers of public demonstrations. While police understand their important role in social development strategies, they also stress the value of situational crime prevention whereby opportunities for criminal acts can be reduced and people taught what steps they can take to protect themselves and their property.

#### **Question 4: Who has your organization partnered with?**

The NGOs and police services submitted lists of the varied organizations with which they are collaborating. Partners ranged from other professional associations (e.g., the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Medical Association) to organizations concentrating on specific areas (e.g., Mental Health Commission of Canada, Alzheimer's Society, Centres of Excellence on Children's Well-being, National Alliance on Children and Youth, PrevNet, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, Multicultural Association of Fredericton, YOUNCAN, National Associations Active in Criminal Justice) to municipal councils (e.g., Social Planning Council of Winnipeg) and provincial government agencies to universities and colleges (e.g., Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, Canadian Research Institute on Law and the Family, Canadian Institutes for Health Research) to school boards and educational interests to international agencies (e.g., World Health Organization, UNICEF, Pan American Health Organization).

Respondents stressed the importance of the partnerships which they enjoyed with community-based agencies. One NGO noted regretfully that the organizations with which they partner do not think of police services as allies. Another NGO reported that it had formed a coalition of thirty national organizations supporting a strong public health focus and helped establish a multi-sectoral council on health literacy.

Unlike the NGOs, police services also reported frequently that they have developed partnerships with individual businesses and business associations. As expected, they cooperated closely with crime prevention associations, community coalitions, local and provincial governments and other police services. Approaches to crime prevention developed by one service are often implemented by police in other communities. Given the number of demands for them to participate in partnerships and coalitions, police services have to be selective, taking into account how to make the maximum impact on their communities while maintaining efficiencies in their operations.

### **Question 5: What else do you think could be done?**

Most of the NGOs offered suggestions emphasizing organizational focus, collective action and police-NGO partnerships, engaging the private sector, finding more resources and enhancing communications. It is important to be open to fresh, innovative approaches to policing and public and community safety. Policy development and strategic planning should be priorities, with organizations going where the need is greatest. When services are expanded, care should be taken to ensure no duplication of programs; this requires collaboration among agencies with similar mandates to map current services, identify gaps and coordinate efforts to deliver programs, especially in neighbourhoods at risk. Focusing on solutions at the community level will usually make a bigger impact.

Organizations involved in crime prevention need to make and nurture links with other sectors such as health and education. A strategy on communicating this multi-sectoral approach for building safe, healthy and inclusive communities to the general public needs to be developed so that NGOs and police are not pressed for solutions that run counter to all the evidence available. There is a need to redouble efforts to support collective action targeting those populations where that approach at the community level can make a difference. Creating safe places within the neighbourhoods where low-income families live is critical, particularly since they usually do not have access to cars and must rely on walking or public transit. Police services need to be seen as contributing to solutions to social breakdown, not solely as law enforcers. While recognizing that police services also have resource issues, it is frustrating to have officers come to work with community groups then not be able to continue attending meetings because of too many other demands on their time; that becomes a lost opportunity to improve understanding by the police service and bridge the divide between the communities concerned and police.

Resources are a perennial problem, with many NGOs facing diminishing financial support. Areas mentioned where more support from the federal government would be welcome included early intervention and prevention for school-aged children, diversion programs for youth, voluntary organizations serving victims of crime and preventive treatment measures focused on child abuse prevention and parenting skills, trauma therapy and fetal alcohol syndrome. More funding is needed to support social issues such as ending poverty and supporting lower offender recidivism rates through re-integration programs like those available through Stride, Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) and the Elizabeth Fry and John Howard Societies. There is a need to use technology and resources for maximum impact. Communities and decision-makers need to hear about more success stories and examples of innovative practices. Use of social media permits faster, broader communication. NGOs have to market themselves and their programs to engage the corporate sector; it is important to demonstrate the value that they can provide to business interests.

Finally, we need to continue to build broadly based coalitions. It is crucially important that the Coalition on Community Safety, Health and Well-being not be taken off course, but rather maintain its focus on safe, healthy and inclusive communities and the promotion of crime prevention through social development.

On the policing side, it was pointed out that all people need to be educated and engaged so that they understand and support the notion that healthy, safe communities are dependent on strong partnerships and social development. There should be a move to a focus on a “whole of government approach”, with community safety no longer seen as the sole responsibility of the police. Police services need to continue to seek out partnerships with agencies in the areas of mental health, addictions, education and literacy, housing and any other sectors that impact on crime prevention through social development. The various levels of government need to be lobbied to support those agencies and seek solutions holistically.

Sometimes, police services face unintended consequences of legislative decisions. Communities, especially those troubled by substance abuse, demand vigorous action against the drug culture, but several years ago, Parliament changed the laws regarding marijuana possession and decriminalized what they deemed minor infractions involving soft drugs. This decision which implies a societal change in attitude and a level of acceptance inconsistent with the public’s continued lobbying against drug use can present police with a dilemma.

Ongoing outreach to community partners and service providers is essential; officers need to be knowledgeable about available community resources so that they can make effective and timely referrals. Leveraging community assets can reduce the resources required for the police to respond to demands for some services. Increased outreach by officers from diverse backgrounds can not only educate ethnoracial communities in Canadian values and laws, but also encourage recruitment from those communities. On the other hand, greater experiential and educational opportunities for police at all levels helps them to understand and contend with varying political and philosophical views.

There are many issues that should be addressed by police services working in partnerships to develop solutions: the effect of demographic change (e.g., aging population, greater diversity), the contribution of youth, mental health, racial profiling, the influence of social media, cyber crime, globalization and the impact of international events. It is necessary to maintain mechanisms to listen effectively to people in communities and understand their needs. Environmental scans are important since they can help police react to issues “upstream”; police services can embark on predictive policing when their knowledge of types of crime and demographic data can help not only to prevent, but predict criminal activity.