

## **ACWS POSITION ON THE PROVINCIAL FAMILY VIOLENCE TREATMENT PROGRAM FRAMEWORK**

**ACWS supports the development and implementation of a coordinated community response framework for responding to family violence. Within that framework, programs for those who choose abusive behavior are but one part of a broader, integrated response involving law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, judges, communities of faith, schools, victim's services, health care professionals, correctional facilities, etc. The primary purpose of programs for those who abuse is to maximize safety for victims of domestic violence and to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence. The Provincial Family Violence Treatment Framework Program (PFVTPF) as developed by a Working Committee of the Provincial Government does not meet this criteria and does not have the support of ACWS.**

In early spring, 2003, ACWS received a copy of a document, the Provincial Family Violence Treatment Framework Program. After careful review with other stakeholders, some serious concerns were identified. A brief with comments and recommendations addressing these concerns was prepared and distributed.

Three concerns addressed in our brief are:

- the name of the proposed framework,
- the diagnostic or medical/mental health model suggested, and
- the responsibility for leadership and funding residing with the Alberta Mental Health Board.

### **The Name:**

While the document is entitled, Provincial Family Violence Treatment Framework Program, its stated focus is on programs for "victims and perpetrators of family violence who are directed through the criminal justice or *Protection Against Family Violence Act* for assessment and, where indicated, treatment." Since these programs are only a part of a much broader framework that is required to address the complexity of family violence as a social issue, we are recommending that the title be changed to more accurately reflect this particular population.

### **Treatment Model:**

The treatment model suggested in the framework document resembles a diagnostic or medical/mental health model. This "disease" model could imply that family violence is a medical or mental health issue rather than acknowledging its complex nature as a serious social issue requiring a coordinated, multi-faceted response strategy. ACWS and other stakeholders recommended that the framework promote a model of response to family violence that acknowledges the complexity of the issue and reflects a commitment to collaborative, community-based programming that is accountable to victim's services. We also recommended that a review of current literature on treatment models for batterers be done and that meaningful and effective consultation with those who are currently providing community based family violence intervention programming be established to explore the most effective way to integrate programs for court-mandated persons with a comprehensive framework for family violence programming.

## **Leadership responsibility**

Placing the program within the mandate of Alberta Mental Health leaves the impression that family violence is a mental health issue. Studies show that battering is NOT a mental illness nor is it an anger management issue; rather, it is a learned behavioral choice. Therefore, placing leadership for a family violence response model with Mental Health is inappropriate. ACWS and other stakeholders believe that a different model is necessary. We have recommended the creation of a Family Violence Commission to coordinate the development, delivery and monitoring of family violence treatment programs, of which programs for those who choose to abuse are one of many components.

## **List of Recommendations**

1. That the name be changed to Provincial Framework for Batterer Intervention Programs recognizing that it is one important component of an integrated, coordinated framework for responding to family violence.
- 2a. That part of the mandate of a 'family violence commission' be to provide a "single co-ordinating body accountable for the effective delivery and monitoring of treatment programs." We believe that the mandate for Batterer Intervention Programs should be with a Family Violence Commission or with Children's Services to avoid any misperceptions that may arise by the association with Alberta Mental Health alone.
- 2b. That the expertise that already exists in the community be integrated into the development, implementation and evaluation of the framework and that best practices from current literature reviews be incorporated.
- 3a. That the framework promote a model of response to family violence that acknowledges the complexity of the issues, reflects a commitment to collaborative, community-based programming and adheres to the beliefs stated on Page 15 of the Provincial Family Violence Treatment Program Framework.
- 3b. That a belief be added to those already listed on Page 15 and that it state " that treatment programs be accountable to victim's and women's services."
- 3c. That a review of current literature on treatment models for batterers be done and that there be meaningful and effective consultation with and involvement of those who are currently providing community based family violence intervention programming to decide on how current programming can most effectively be integrated into a comprehensive framework for family violence programming
4. That any reference to mandating victims for treatment be deleted from this and any subsequent framework documents.
5. That Batterer Intervention Programs for court mandated AND NON-MANDATED persons who choose abusive behavior be part of an integrated framework for responding to family violence, accountable to victim's and women's services.
6. That standards be developed through community consultation with input from appropriate stakeholders and consistent with best practices and current research. The draft standards prepared by HomeFront, Calgary, provide a basis to begin this discussion
- 7a. That the framework build on the relationship between the different players and that formalized links, through protocols and agreements, be established between the court and programs to ensure victim safety and batterer compliance.
- 7b. That for more serious offenses, appropriate counseling programs be part of the probation expectations after incarceration.

## Highlights of ACWS Activities on the Provincial Family Violence Treatment Program Framework

Date	Activity
April - July 2003	<b>“Response to the Provincial Family Violence Treatment Program Framework”</b> prepared by ACWS in partnership with other stakeholders. Copies sent to the stakeholders, Ministers and Deputy Ministers, Working Committee members
October, 2003	Meeting with Minister Evans and Hancock
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