



Safe Cities London Action Plan

2021 - 2024

Safe Cities London is committed to making London a safe city where women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors access public spaces and participate in public life without fear or experience of sexual violence.

A collaborative, city-wide initiative, Safe Cities London engages researchers, community leaders, service organizations, community members, and individuals with lived experience.

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Acknowledgments

Land Acknowledgment

Safe Cities London acknowledges the Indigenous peoples on whose traditional territory we gather and work. They include: the Anishinaabeg Peoples who include Ojibwe, Odawa, and Pottawatami Nations; the Haudenosaunee Peoples who include the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, Seneca and Tuscarora Nations; and the Leni-Lunaape Peoples, also referred to as the Delaware or Munsee.

We also recognize the three First Nations communities neighbouring the City of London.

- Chippewas of the Thames First Nation;
- Oneida Nation of the Thames; and,
- Munsee-Delaware Nation.

There are many long standing treaty relationships between Indigenous Nations and Canada. We recognize that all levels of government in Canada have a responsibility to honour these nation-to-nation relationships and that individually, we all have a role to play in honouring the treaties and contributing to reconciliation.

Gratitude

A special thank you to the individuals who gave their time and shared their experiences through the interactive online mapping tool and focus groups. Your stories, ideas, and insights have provided the foundation for this action plan.

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INTRODUCTION

United Nations Women Safe Cities Initiative

Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces (Safe Cities) is a worldwide United Nations Women initiative that draws attention to the issue of violence against women and girls in public spaces, such as the workplace, a school, a restaurant or bar, while using public transportation or recreational spaces, or in a park.

In 2013, sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces was identified as an area of concern by the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women, who called on governments around the world to prevent violence against women and girls.¹ The goal of the Safe Cities initiative is to empower women and girls and create safer communities by identifying strategies for preventing and responding to violence.

Safe Cities London

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A collaborative, city-wide initiative, Safe Cities London engages researchers, community leaders, service organizations, community members, and individuals with lived experience. The timeline below outlines the formation and evolution of Safe Cities London.

2017

London City Council unanimously endorsed the Safe Cities initiative. London became the third Canadian city to be part of the United Nations Safe Cities initiative, along with Winnipeg and Edmonton.

2018

London City Council allotted financial resources for the Safe Cities London scoping study. A Community Advisory Committee and Research Sub-Committee were created to guide the scoping study. The scoping study was conducted between July 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018.

2019

The Community Advisory Committee and Research Sub-Committee prepared the Safe Cities London Scoping Study which included local and national statistical data, results from the scoping study, and a series of next steps.

2020

The Community Advisory Committee worked collectively to develop the Safe Cities London Action Plan. The content of which is the focus of this document.

The Safe Cities London Scoping Study

United Nations Women states that, “Although violence in the private domain is now widely recognized as a human rights violation, violence against women and girls, especially sexual harassment in public spaces, remains a largely neglected issue, with few laws or policies in place to prevent and address it.”²

Further, when women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors feel unsafe in these spaces, it can limit their ability to freely navigate, enjoy, and actively participate in public life. For these reasons, the Safe Cities initiative focused on public spaces, such as parks, streets, public transit, community centres, etc.

Between July 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018, Safe Cities London conducted a scoping study to examine the incidence of sexual violence in public spaces in London (where, what, who, when), the factors women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors reported affected their sense of safety, and local and national trends.

The Safe Cities London scoping study sought to better understand the local context related to targeted acts of violence experienced by women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors, including sexual violence in public spaces, as well as factors that influence the perceptions of safety for women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors.

The Safe Cities London Scoping Study provides a summary of the results, including results from the participative mapping tool and focus groups.

Definitions

Sexual Violence: Sexual violence is a form of gender-based violence and is a broad term that describes any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. Sexual violence takes different forms and can include sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, stalking, trafficking, unwanted sexual comments or advances, cyber harassment, image-based sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, indecent or sexualized exposure, voyeurism, and degrading sexual imagery in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.

Public Spaces: Our strategic framework is set within the context of the following public spaces in London: in transit; parks, paths, and green spaces; residential areas; local businesses, shopping areas, and service centres; downtown; nightlife and entertainment spaces; campuses and schools; and online/virtual spaces.

Intersectional Approach: It is important to consider the intersection of gender with other inequalities and oppressions (e.g., sexuality, gender identity, ethnicity, indigeneity, immigration status, disability, etc.) to understand the context of violence against women, girls, nonbinary, trans and survivors.³ An intersectional approach recognizes that all oppressions exist simultaneously and create unique experiences of violence for women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors. As stated by Kimberle Crenshaw: “Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, or a class or LGBTQ problem there.”⁴



United Nations Women Safe Cities Initiative: Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces (Safe Cities) is a worldwide United Nations Women initiative that draws attention to the issue of violence against women and girls in public spaces, such as workplaces, schools, restaurants or bars, while using public transportation or recreational spaces, or in public parks. In 2013, sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces was identified as an area of concern by the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women, who called on governments around the world to prevent violence against women and girls.⁵ The goal of the Safe Cities initiative is to empower women and girls and create safer communities by identifying strategies for preventing and responding to violence.

Women, Girls, Nonbinary, Trans, and Survivors: This work focuses on those who have felt unsafe in public spaces because of their gender or because they have experienced sexual violence already. Statistically, we know that women, girls, nonbinary, and trans people are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence and thus have reported feeling weary, unsafe, and/or unable to freely navigate, enjoy, and actively participate due to their gender.

"[This work] is essential. Particularly for those who have been through sexual abuse, to have access to safe spaces in their communities because to us, the world as a whole, is not experienced as safe. We have to live with the knowledge that we are at risk of violence because of our gender. We are taught from a young age that we need to be hyper vigilant and know how to protect ourselves. For those who have been the targets of sexual abuse, this is even more of a reality. When we do not feel secure in our surroundings, we are not able to be our authentic selves, especially as Indigenous women, to reach our full potential or to heal from our experiences. For me, Okaadenige is my only safe space in London and surrounding area. This speaks volumes to the need."

- An Okaadenige Member



A CALL TO ACTION

Why a Safe Cities Action Plan for London

When women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors are not safe in public spaces, it has a significant adverse effects on their lives. Both the threat and experience of sexual violence affects their access to social activities, freedom of movement, education, employment, leadership opportunities, and psychological well-being.

From the scoping study, we know women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors in London experience sexual violence in public spaces, ranging from unwanted sexual remarks to sexual assault. This aligns with the data and testimonies shared by organizations in London that serve individuals who have experienced sexual violence. The experiences of women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors in London demonstrates the urgency of providing effective, comprehensive, and innovative solutions to this pressing issue.

Addressing sexual violence against women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors is an increasingly complex and interconnected challenge. Siloed solutions do not work. A systemic, collaborative approach is required to create the change that is urgently needed. Our system change approach will be a deliberate process to transform individual, organizational, and system level behaviours in order to establish new, comprehensive, and sustainable solutions.

While our work is focused on public spaces, we have structured our strategic framework to develop a comprehensive approach rather than targeting specific public locations and spaces. In this way, we have furthered our commitment to comprehensive system change. Our annual actions, however, will address specific public spaces through place-based initiatives.

Why this Approach is Unique for London

1 in 3 Londoners⁶ who are women will experience sexual violence. This statistic has not changed in decades.⁷ We need coordinated, bold, decisive action today so that London can become a safe city where women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors access public spaces and participate in public life without fear or experience of sexual violence.

In London, there are significant efforts being implemented to address sexual violence in private spaces. It is important work that is much needed in our community. The Safe Cities London Action Plan will build on this great work, with a focus on reclaiming public spaces.

Safe Cities London is the first-ever city-wide initiative that brings together service providers, researchers, community, and individuals with lived experience to address sexual violence in public spaces. This new approach extends beyond UN Safe Cities requirements and is designed to meet the specific needs of the London community.



How the Action Plan was Developed

The development of the Safe Cities Action Plan was an intensive, collaborative process led by the Safe Cities London Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee members conducted research, reviewed documentation, and prepared content for the Action Plan. Over a period of six months, Advisory Committee members engaged in critical analysis, challenging debate, and robust dialogue.

The following five phases guided the development of the Safe Cities Action Plan from August 2020 – February 2021.

Phase 1

Review of scoping study results

Phase 2

Development of core areas of focus

Phase 3

Identification of expected results and strategies

Phase 4

Creation of initial actions

Phase 5

Review and approval of the Safe Cities Action Plan

Advisory Committee members are representative of community leaders, service organizations, researchers, and individuals with lived experience. The following Advisory Committee members were involved in the development of the Action Plan during the six-month development period.



Kerri Arthurs, Western University

Joanna Bedggood,
King's University College

Sharon Bernards, Centre for
Addiction and Mental Health

Lesley Bikos, Women & Politics

Nancy Collister,
London Public Library

Vanessa Di Marcelli, London District
Catholic School Board

Ashton Forrest, Community
member and advocate for issues
relating to (dis)ability

Doris E. Hall, Canadian Coalition to
Empower Women

Joe Henry, King's University College

Erin Huner, Western University

Ben Kitching, King's University
College Students' Council

Leah Marshall, Fanshawe College

Starr Megahey Albert, Thames
Valley District School Board

Mackenzey Metcalfe, Western
University Student Council

Shawna Lewkowitz,
Urban League London

Britt O'Hagan, City of London

Kelly Paleczny,
London Transit Commission

Doriana Rosati, Thames Valley
District School Board

Elyssa Rose, Atlohsa Family
Healing Services

Caroline Roy,
London Transit Commission

Tracey Stub, YMCA of
Southwestern Ontario

Jaclyn Siegal, Western University,
PhD Candidate

Rachel Taylor, Student, Women
in Civic Leadership, Brescia/King's
University College

Carolyn Temple,
Brescia University College

AnnaLise Trudell, Anova, Safe Cities
Advisory Committee Co-Chair

Samantha Wells, Centre for
Addiction and Mental Health

Rosanna Wilcox, City of London,
Safe Cities Advisory Committee
Co-Chair

Chief Steve Williams,
London Police Service

THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Vision

London is a safe city where women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors access public spaces and freely participate in public life without fear or experience of sexual violence.

Guiding Principles

The following principles will guide how we work together to implement the Safe Cities London Action Plan.

Intersectionality

We will prioritize the use of an intersectional lens.

Accountability

We will take responsibility for actions and outcomes.

Innovation

We will take calculated risks and implement innovative approaches.

Collaboration

We will provide strategic guidance and share roles and responsibilities.

Evidence-Informed

We will make decisions based on evidence.⁸

Accessibility

We will ensure that everything we do is in an accessible format.⁹

Trauma-Informed

We will embed a trauma-informed lens in our work.

Areas of Focus

The Safe Cities London Action Plan has three areas of focus:

- **Social Norms**
- **Policy and Practice**
- **Collaboration**

Each of these areas of focus have corresponding outcomes, expected results, strategies, and initial actions.



Areas of Focus: Social Norms

Outcome: Londoners have a comprehensive understanding of sexual violence in public spaces that inspires individual and community action to make public spaces safe for women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors.

Expected Result 1: Increased knowledge of what sexual violence is, what causes it, its effects, and intersectional impacts.

Strategy	Initial Actions
<p>Provide education, tools, and resources about sexual violence. ¹⁰</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a community-wide understanding about sexual violence through education. 2. Provide education about trauma responses and the impacts on women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors. 3. Implement a campaign to raise awareness of the effects of sexual objectification (i.e. catcalling). 4. Offer education to London-based organizations about online sexual violence and how to create and maintain safe online spaces for women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors. 5. Develop a template for community guidelines, norms, and behaviours in online spaces.



Expected Result 2: Increased skill and desire to take appropriate action.

Strategy	Initial Actions
<p>Prepare and implement space-specific bystander intervention training.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare online norms for bystander intervention and disseminate this information. 2. Design, implement, and amplify bystander education and intervention training programs in bars/clubs, public transportation, and post-secondary institutions. 3. Integrate bystander intervention training into the City of London Ambassador Program.
<p>Address a consent culture in the city.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide education related to harmful masculine norms and expectations. 2. Engage men and boys from high risk groups in education efforts as allies.
<p>Engage men as allies and hold men accountable to end sexual violence.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leverage the social capital of men and boys and engage them to speak out publicly.

Areas of Focus: Policy and Practice

Outcome: Evidence-informed policy and practice that shifts culture, mindset, and behaviour to make public spaces safe for women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors by creating a community in which sexual violence is not accepted or tolerated.

Expected Result 1: Increased use of an intersectional gendered lens in policy development related to public spaces.

Strategy	Initial Actions
Support the review and update of current guidelines, policies, and practices to include the use of GBA+.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrate the use of GBA+ in policy development. 2. Provide resources, templates, and training on how to use GBA+ in policy development.

Expected Result 2: Improved use and monitoring of new and existing policies to support behaviour change.

Strategy	Initial Actions
Strengthen and design new mechanisms to enforce policy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review existing policies and assess whether mechanisms exist for them to be enforced. 2. Create tools and resources for organizations to review and revise their own policies to ensure enforcement.
Create new policies that drive system change.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with people with lived experience to determine policies that are required. 2. Look at enforcement rates, analyze why policies are not being enforced, and develop recommendations to improve enforcement rates.



Expected Result 3: Improved evidence and understanding of the impact of policy use.

Strategy	Initial Actions
Measure the implementation of policies and behaviour change.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explore whether organizations are collecting data and make recommendations for data to be collected. 2. Recommend a framework where data is collected in the same way and analyze aggregate data to determine change across the city. 3. Create tools to measure policy enforcement and behaviour change.

Expected Result 4: Increased use of environmental design¹¹ as a tool to promote safety.

Strategy	Initial Actions
Integrate GBA+ in environmental design and address identified gaps.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incorporate GBA+ analysis into the review and development of policies and plans that impact the design of the built environment. 2. Explore the application of a GBA+ lens in the completion of a safety audit for the downtown core.

Areas of Focus: Collaboration

Outcome: A responsive and preventative collaborative system¹², with community partners working together to make public spaces safe for women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors.

Expected Result 1: Increased collaboration among system partners.

Strategy	Initial Actions
Create collaborations that leverage unique strengths, differences, and contributions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify community partners to engage in this work. 2. Create common messaging for all service providers to use when addressing sexual violence in public spaces.
Establish a commitment to shared learning.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a process to allow for regular sharing of information. 2. Create a community of practice to allow for shared learning opportunities.

Expected Result 2: Improved awareness and understanding of the system and its gaps.

Strategy	Initial Actions
Raise awareness of services and supports available across the system.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create an online resource that outlines bus safety protocols in partnership with London Transit Commission.
Identify gaps and emerging needs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Map all services and supports available for women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors who experience sexual violence in public spaces.



Expected Result 3: Increased capacity to create change.

Strategy	Initial Actions
Bring new people to our work and create allies to enhance impact.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Set criteria and a process to determine who needs to be engaged in this work and how they will participate.
Develop and scale innovative solutions to address gaps and drive system change.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Explore alternative ways to report sexual violence that have been successful in other communities.2. Pilot an alternative reporting project.





MOVING TO ACTION

Action Plan Implementation

The success of the Safe Cities Action Plan requires commitment and contributions from individuals, organizations, and businesses connected to this work.

A governance structure has been developed to oversee and guide the Safe Cities Action Plan. It includes an Advisory Committee that will be responsible for overall outcomes and Action Teams that will be responsible for the implementation of strategies and actions.

On an annual basis, work plans will be developed with critical timelines to deliver on specific initiatives and actions.

Action Plan Monitoring and Evaluation

Safe Cities London will monitor and measure the performance and impact of the Safe Cities London Action Plan and report to the community.

Further, the Safe Cities London Action Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis and updated based on new data to ensure the action plan continues to effectively address evolving and emerging issues.



Endnotes

1. UN Women. (2019). Flagship Programme Brief. Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/creating-safe-public-spaces>
2. UN Women. (n.d.). Creating Safe Public Spaces. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/creating-safe-public-spaces>
3. Imkaan. (2019). The Value of Intersectionality in Understanding Violence Against Women and Girls. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2019/10/the%20value%20of%20intersectionality%20in%20understanding%20violence%20against%20women%20and%20girls.pdf?la=en&vs=3339>
4. Coaston, Jane. (2019). The Intersectionality Wars. The Vox. <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>
5. UN Women. (2019). Flagship Programme Brief. Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/creating-safe-public-spaces>
6. Statistics Canada. (2018) Gender-based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00017-eng.htm>
7. Department of Justice. (2019). Just Facts. Sexual Assault. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/jf-pf/2019/apr01.html>
8. Evidence includes, but is not limited to academic studies and the experience and expertise of researchers, practitioners, and individuals with lived experience.
9. This includes compensating individuals with lived experience for their contributions to this work.
10. This includes, but is not limited to, topics such as what counts as sexual violence, myths about sexual violence, where sexual violence occurs, who is at a higher risk of sexual violence, and intersectional impacts of sexual violence.
11. Environmental design is the process of addressing surrounding parameters (natural and built environment) when devising plans, programs, policies, buildings, or products.
12. “System” in this context refers to the people, groups, and organizations that are connected to and invested in creating safe public spaces for women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors.



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