



REPORT:

Advancing Trauma- and Violence-Informed Responses to Gender-Based and Family Violence: An Exploration of Sustainability

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Abstract

Sustainability remains a challenge in Canada's efforts to address gender-based and family violence (GBFV). This report examines sustainability across two cycles of a Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) investment, the 2015–2022 *Supporting the victims of domestic violence and child abuse through community programs* cycle and the 2022–2026 *Preventing and addressing family violence: The health perspective* cycle. Our analysis draws from multiple data sources, including final reports from completed projects from the 2015–2022 funding cycle, interviews with project leaders from the 2015–2022 cycle three to four years after the end of funding, meeting notes and transcripts from sustainability Working Group meetings with representatives from the 2022–2026 cycle, and presentations about sustainability delivered by representatives from the 2022–2026 cycle. We explore the sustainability of these funded programs across four sustainability domains - (1) sustained outcomes for program clients; (2) sustained implementation of program (components); (3) sustained knowledge and skills for program staff and professionals; and (4) sustained relationships, collaboration, and capacity for organizations - which all require stable sources of funding. These domains might be useful to future researchers and program leaders seeking to plan for and assess the sustainability of GBFV and other health-related programs. We also make recommendations for PHAC and other funders related to fostering systemic change towards sustainable funding of effective public health initiatives and to working within current funding systems.

Introduction and Background

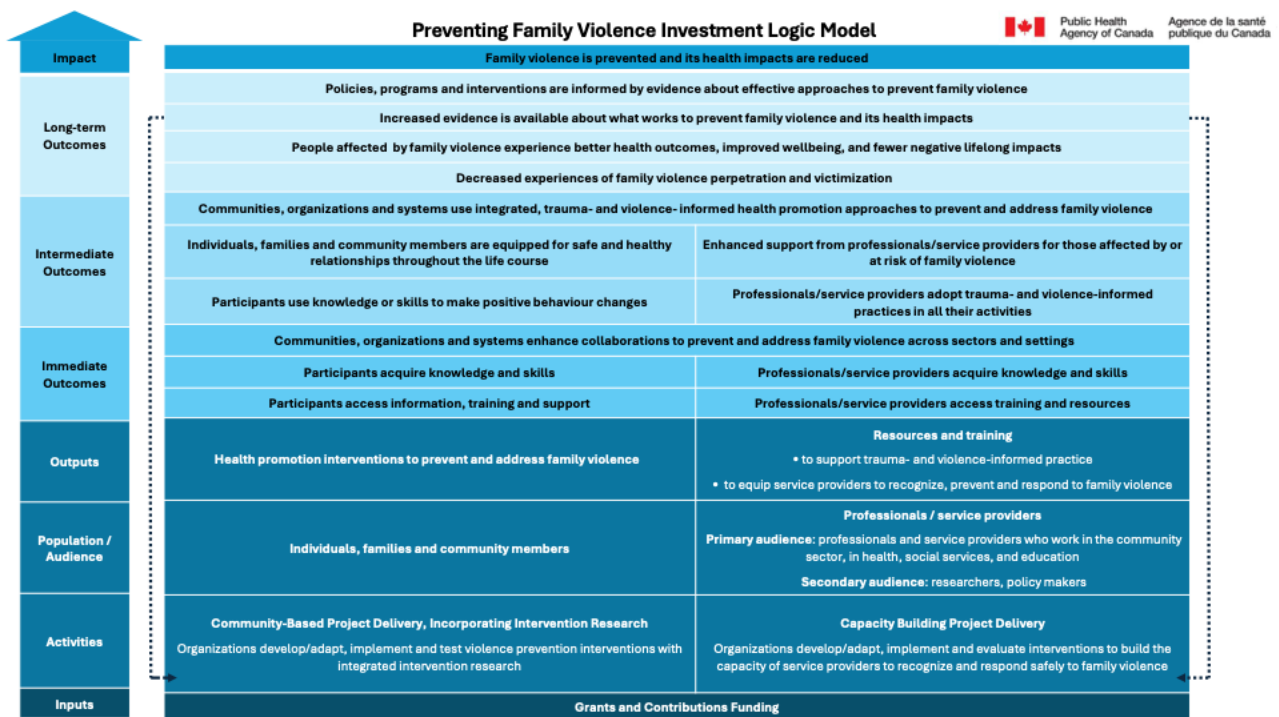
Public health approaches to gender-based and family violence (GBFV) aim to cultivate practices that challenge deep-seated social norms and systemic inequalities that drive violence and promote survivor-centered, trauma- and violence-informed responses. The success of programs designed to address GBFV depends on their ability to maintain their core benefits and functions beyond the expiration of initial funding or external support.

This report explores pathways of sustained improvements in the health outcomes of victim-survivors of GBFV associated with two cycles of a Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) investment: the 2015–2022 *Supporting the victims of domestic violence and child abuse through community programs* cycle and the 2022–2026 *Preventing and addressing family violence: The health perspective* cycle. In considering sustainability, the first critical question is “what” is being, or meant to be, continued over time. Although seemingly simple, in the context of program sustainability, many different perspectives and multi-factor operational definitions exist (see Cooper et al., 2015; DeMiglio & Williams, 2013; Pluye et al., 2004; Shediach-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). Literature is mixed regarding whether it conceptualizes sustainability in terms of the states or outcomes that are maintained or the process of sustaining those outcomes (Lennox et al., 2018). Most commonly in health promotion, sustainability is understood as program or innovation continuation (Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020; Scheirer & Dearing, 2011; Scheirer et al., 2008; Shelton et al., 2018). Other state or outcome focused definitions include the maintenance or continuation of (a) (health) benefits or other program outcomes for those accessing programs or services, (b) specific program activities or components, (c) community-level partnerships and coalitions, (d) attention to the issue being addressed (e.g., in media or policy agendas), or (e) community capacity (Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020; Scheirer & Dearing, 2011). Process focused definitions understand sustainability as the ongoing and adaptive activities and conditions needed to maintain program outcomes, including setting, measuring, and readjusting goals in collaboration with the communities being served (Johnson et al., 2004; Lennox et al., 2018, 2023; Office of Population Affairs, 2017; Sontag-Padilla et al., 2012). Whereas a focus on the maintenance of program states or outcomes is important for understanding and tracking ongoing existence and/or benefits of a program (possibly through quantitatively and qualitatively reportable measurement), a focus on process is important for understanding and tracking the processes necessary for maintaining those outcomes.

PHAC uses a multi-factor definition of sustainability. In their most recent call for proposals (2025), PHAC offered the following examples of sustainability: sustained knowledge, sustained capacity, sustained collaboration, sustained impact, or sustained implementation of effective approaches. Also relevant for the current consideration of sustainability are the aims of PHAC’s two violence prevention investment cycles. As shown in Figure 1, the ultimate objective of the investment cycles is to improve health outcomes for victim-survivors of GBFV. This long-term benefit for Canadians is hypothesized to flow from intermediate outcomes at the professional, organizational, and individual levels. At the individual level, program clients were expected to make gains in knowledge, skills, and health that would ultimately result in improved health and

prevention outcomes. For professionals, intermediate outcomes included increased access to, and use of, knowledge and skills to prevent and address GBFV. At the organizational level, intermediate outcomes included the development of new or enhanced collaborations and partnerships across settings and sectors, and the organizational adoption of trauma- and violence-informed health promotion practices and policies. These outcomes direct consideration of sustainability in collaborations and partnerships, as well as in the adoption of trauma- and violence-informed policies and practices (i.e., sustained collaboration and capacity).

Figure 1: Logic Model for the “Preventing and Addressing Family Violence: The Health Perspective” investment



Project plans to achieve sustainability beyond funding was an eligibility and assessment criterion from PHAC and was monitored during project implementation. Projects were also asked to report on plans to scale up or adapt aspects of their projects and on factors supporting their sustainability as part of their reporting to the funder. Despite the attention to sustainability in project application and reporting by PHAC and other funding bodies, sustainability remains a point of stress and challenge for projects and funders alike. Attracting sustainable funding is a recognized challenge within Canada’s government and the GBFV sector (Office of Audit and Evaluation, Public Health Agency of Canada, 2025). Women’s Shelters Canada emphasized the critical need for sector access to stable funding that is adequate to support core service work (Hoogendam & Maki, 2023). Similarly, based on analysis of core and supplemental funding of Canada’s sexual violence services, Ending Sexual Violence Association of Canada found that most sexual assault centres in Canada had to reapply for core funding every one to three years (Abji et al., 2023). Moreover, the “stable, core funding” received by these organizations only

covered a portion of the cost of providing sexual violence counselling services, with project-based funding, community fundraisers, and volunteer labour used as supplements to meet service demand. Both these national organizations emphasized the impacts of the funding shortfall, and its uncertain nature, for service to clients, staff recruitment and retention, and organizations' capacity to collaborate and innovate. Their analyses add to a foundation of policy analyses in Canada and abroad that have emphasized problems associated with inadequate amounts of funding for Canadian charitable and not-for-profit organizations (especially in the GBFV sector) and with the dominant structure of short-term, project- or program-based funding (see, for example, Imagine Canada's [policy statement on equitable and effective funding](#)).

Research finds that, across North America, only around 40% to 60% of effective public health programs are sustained beyond short-term, project-based funding cycles (Vitale et al., 2018; Scheirer, 2005; Stirman et al., 2012). As summarized by Bodkin and Hakimi (2020) in a recent systematic review of health promotion program sustainability, three serious problems result from lack of sustainability: (1) recurrence or continuation of the issue the program was established to address; (2) loss of human, fiscal, and technical capital and costs associated with funding being withdrawn before activities and outcomes have been fully realized; and (3) loss of community trust and support, especially in communities with a history of program termination due to lack of funding.

The potential loss of community trust highlights the connection between sustainability and health equity. Challenges associated with having to rely on short-term, project-based funding are typically intensified for organizations serving equity-deserving populations (Deutsch et al., 2023; Shelton et al., 2023). These organizations are often smaller, with lower levels of operational capacity and infrastructure. The communities in which they are working have fewer social and economic resources to draw from. At the same time, the populations being served by these organizations are generally facing more complex and chronic challenges to health and wellness resulting from structural violence and inequity. Moreover, building the trust and engagement necessary to launch new public health initiatives often requires more time in these communities because of prior negative service experiences. This combination of challenges creates a situation whereby the organizations that are working in the most complex service contexts are also those that experience the most strain in applying for, managing, and reporting on funding.

This broader funding landscape for health and social services addressing GBFV forms the backdrop for sustainability issues discussed in the current report. Representatives of projects funded by PHAC were appreciative of the relatively longer periods of funding granted through the two cycles of this investment (2 to 6 years). They were clearly committed to trying to sustain successful components of the programs that they were developing and researching and to ensuring that their work could have an impact both immediately and in years to come. At the same time, they were keenly aware that innovative community-research projects are often led or co-led by organizations that are themselves inadequately funded and are only sometimes in a position to influence government policy, allocate time and resources to successfully compete for other short-term funding opportunities, or attract other major external funding partners.

The present report uses the voices and perspectives of representatives of PHAC-funded projects to explore four key domains of sustainability, which may also be useful to future researchers and program leaders seeking to plan for and assess the sustainability of GBFV and other health-related programs. It was written in response to recommendations made as the result of an evaluation conducted on the overall PHAC investment (Office of Audit and Evaluation, Public Health Agency of Canada, 2025). As specified by our own funding agreement with PHAC, we aimed primarily to identify projects’ sustainability needs beyond the financial aspect and make recommendations to help clarify PHAC’s role regarding post-funding project sustainability in documents related to funding opportunities where appropriate. Our work went beyond this mandate to explore projects’ sustainability successes and challenges and outline various domains and considerations for sustainability.

Methods

This research involved members of the Communities of Practice associated with two cycles of a PHAC violence prevention investment. There were 14 projects funded only in the first cycle, 20 only in the second cycle, and 4 in both the first and second cycles (see Table 1).

Table 1. Projects funded by PHAC and included in the current research

<p>2015–2022 PHAC Investment Cycle: <i>Supporting the victims of domestic violence and child abuse through community programs</i></p>	<p>2022–2026 PHAC Investment Cycle: <i>Preventing and addressing family violence: The public health perspective</i></p>
<p>Bounce Back League (BBL): Trauma-informed sports activities for children and youth</p> <p>Building Internal Resilience Through Horses: Equine-assisted learning for young women who have experienced maltreatment</p> <p>Child and Youth Mental Health: An innovative set of evaluation and assessment tools to improve information sharing among professionals and improve mental health of children and adolescents</p> <p>Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Supporting women who have experienced female genital mutilation through arts-based activities and educating health care professionals</p>	<p>Art et contes en famille: Arts-based programming for families of immigrant background</p> <p>Building Opportunities for Women (BOW): Empowerment workshops for women in Northern Ontario</p> <p>Changing Contexts: The Art of the Nudge: Changing gender norms in male dominated work settings</p> <p>COMPASS: Evaluating the Lantern sexual violence prevention program adapted for children 6–12 years of age</p> <p>ConnectED Parents: Moving to Virtual Interventions to Engage Parents in the Prevention of Adolescent Dating Violence:</p>

<p><u>Inunnguiniq (Childrearing)</u>: Parenting program based on Inuit values addressing intergenerational trauma and its impact on family violence</p> <p><u>MindUP for Young Children</u>: A social and emotional learning program for young children delivered in schools and community settings</p> <p><u>Shape Your Life Project</u>: A trauma-informed boxing program for women who have experienced gender-based violence</p> <p><u>nato' we ho win (The art of self-healing)</u>: A trauma- and violence-informed artistic and cultural program for Indigenous women who have experienced family violence</p> <p><u>The P.E.A.C.E. Project (Peer Education and Connection through Empowerment)</u>: A peer mentorship program for adolescents and young adults who have experienced homelessness and sexual exploitation</p> <p><u>Reaching Out With Yoga</u>: A trauma-informed yoga program offered in domestic violence shelters and transition homes in British Columbia</p> <p><u>Safe and Understood</u>: Intervening with families involved with child protective services to promote healthy child outcomes and prevent abuse recurring for young child victims of domestic violence exposure</p> <p><u>Fostering Open eXpression among Youth (FOXY)</u>: A school-based intervention for Indigenous adolescent youth in Northwest territories addressing dating violence</p> <p><u>Sole Expression</u>: A trauma-informed hip hop dance program for youth who have experienced family violence</p>	<p>Helping parents to teach healthy relationship skills to their adolescent children</p> <p><u>Cross-Sectoral Solutions</u>: Providing intervention and supports for women who have experienced traumatic brain injury as a result of intimate partner violence</p> <p><u>Effets de l'initiative Espace Parents sur les immigrants</u>: a French parenting program with immigrants in the Greater Montreal region, Quebec</p> <p><u>Fostering Violence Prevention and Well-Being for Black Women, Families and Communities</u>: Empowering Black communities to be leaders in developing strategies to end domestic violence</p> <p><u>HEAL (Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life) to Prevent and Address Family Violence</u>: A community-based arts program for culturally diverse communities in Toronto, Ontario</p> <p><u>Kaskinomatasowin: Prévention et sensibilisation en matière de violence sexuelle</u>: Adapting and implementing the Lantern program for children in Indigenous communities in Quebec</p> <p><u>Kids' Club Mom's Empowerment</u>: A program for mothers and children who have experienced abuse in New Brunswick</p> <p><u>MODELSS</u>: A digital literacy program for women and youth living in transitional housing</p> <p><u>RISE</u>: A community-based elder mistreatment response program</p> <p><u>Safety and Repair</u>: Online prevention programming for rural communities in Atlantic Canada</p> <p><u>Sharing in the Healing Journey</u>: An arts-based intervention program for caregivers and their children</p>
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<p>TransFormed: Removing barriers to health care and social services for two- spirit, nonbinary, and trans survivors of intimate partner violence in Toronto, ON</p>	<p>Stories of Strength: Evaluating the Signs of Safety program as a multigenerational safety planning program</p> <p>Strong Women: Reducing the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence and Substance Use on Women’s Health: An intervention program for women who have experienced substance use and intimate partner violence</p> <p>The AIM Study: The implementation of an advocacy intervention for diverse women in midlife and older experiencing intimate partner violence</p> <p>Trauma and Violence-Informed Movement: Evaluating trauma- and violence-informed activity programming in communities</p> <p>Yukon First Nation Violence Prevention Program: Adapting and implementing a violence prevention program for men in Indigenous communities who have been abusive</p> <p>Recognize and Act on Elder Abuse in a Caregiving Context (ARMCAR): Implementing and evaluating a health promotion and abuse prevention program for older adults in caregiving settings</p>
<p>Building Connections / Connections for Breaking the Cycle (c-BTC) of Violence: Training staff delivering an intervention program to mothers and children to better understand and support the needs of families experiencing family violence</p> <p>iHEAL in Context / iHEAL: A nurse-led intervention program for women experiencing intimate partner violence</p> <p>STEP / Projet STEP: Adapting and implementing a parenting program for expectant parents who have experienced childhood abuse</p> <p>Knowledge Hub: Supporting funded projects through a Community of Practice</p>	

The Knowledge Hub (KH) at the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children at Western University was funded in both cycles and did not offer a public health

response or program; rather the KH was created to facilitate two consecutive Communities of Practice (CoPs) consisting of representatives from all other funded projects to bolster the combined impact of this work. The KH facilitated quarterly online meetings, annual in-person meetings, special interest working groups (including one on sustainability), and a variety of knowledge mobilization activities (e.g., webinars, a national conference, a web repository, and co-written guides and reports) to support projects in sharing knowledge with external stakeholders. The KH also functioned as a centre of collaboration and problem-solving among projects. One focus of ongoing problem-solving discussions was sustainability. The current report was authored by members of the KH team who led on conceptualizing, collecting, and analyzing data for the current report; however, the contributions of CoP members were significant. As outlined below, CoP members both provided data, and helped to interpret and consider information that was being collected.

Data Collection

We used five data sources in this research: (1) final reports written by the 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects; (2) interviews with representatives of the 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects three to four years after the end of funding; (3) publicly available information about 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects; (4) meeting notes and transcripts from CoP discussions about sustainability, including those of a Sustainability Working Group from the 2022–2026 cycle; and (5) project presentations on achieved and anticipated sustainability by representatives of the 2022–2026 PHAC-funded projects. Our results are based on a synthesis of information from all data sources.

2015–2022 final reports

Final reports were written by the 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects upon completion of projects, submitted to PHAC, and subsequently posted on the www.kh-cdc.ca website. Projects were asked by PHAC to report on “key activities and outputs” and “next steps.” To gather information about the achieved and planned sustainability of these past projects, KH team members read and coded the output, next step, and knowledge mobilization and resources sections of final reports. Sustainable or potentially sustainable outcomes were thematically coded according to the types of sustainability achieved.

Interviews with project representatives

To further explore the sustainability of the 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects, we interviewed project representatives in 2025, three to four years after funding had ended. The strong relationships built between the KH team and project representatives through the CoP facilitated contact, resulting in successful interviews with representatives from 14 of 17 projects. Interviews were held virtually, lasted 30 to 45 minutes, and were conducted with project representatives either alone or in pairs (from the same project). Some representatives had played a role in the implementation of their project’s programming, others in the research, and others spoke as organizational leaders.

Members of the KH team conducted the interviews using a semi-structured guide with questions about project elements that continued after funding ended, how they navigated financial or organizational challenges, the role of partnerships and organizational leadership, how the project may have evolved over time, the types of evaluation and communication strategies that were used, and whether and when sustainability had been considered. Project representatives spoke candidly, sharing successes, barriers, and lessons learned. Many reflected on what they would do differently if they could start over, and what kinds of support they wished they had received at key moments.

Review of publicly available information

Although most information about sustainability for the 2015-2022 projects was collected through interviews with project representatives, we sometimes supplemented with a review of public facing materials, particularly for the three projects with whom the KH was unable to connect directly (no response to our multiple contact requests) and for which conclusions had to be drawn exclusively from publicly available information. Of these three projects, FOXY is ongoing, continuing to deliver and evaluate its programming. Information about ongoing programming and funding is listed on its [website](#). TransFormed, situated in METRAC produced resources that remain [available online](#). The P.E.A.C.E. project was situated in Covenant House, a large youth shelter organization in Toronto, Ontario and after it ended, the individuals who led the project moved on to other opportunities. Some of the findings of the project were published in academic literature and other information about the projects was held internally by KH members.

Meeting notes and transcripts

Sustainability was a common focus of conversation at virtual and in-person meetings of the 2022–2026 CoP. A Sustainability Working Group was formed to explore this topic. This group met virtually four times between December 2024 and May 2025 with 8 to 10 CoP members participating in each meeting (participants varied from one meeting to the next). Sustaining program impact beyond the initial funding period was a key concern, with members emphasizing the need for practical strategies to continue their work with limited resources. Working Group members explored literature on sustainability, alternative funding sources, and strategies they were using to try to secure continued funding of their work. Transcripts and detailed meeting notes taken by the KH team were used as part of the current analysis.

2022–2026 project presentations

On September 30, 2025, the KH team hosted the final in-person CoP meeting with representatives of the 2022–2026 PHAC-funded projects. Representatives from 21 of 24 projects attended and delivered brief presentations about project impacts, lessons learned, and sustainability. A KH team member took notes during the presentations and coded and thematically analyzed projects' sustainability pathways and achieved or desired outcomes.

Results

Multiple Domains of Sustainability

Project representatives conceptualized sustainability in various ways, often in terms of maintained outcomes such as sustained funding, but also in terms of project benefits for clients, collaboration and knowledge sharing/mobilization, and engagement with clients and communities. They also reflected on process, including sustained impact through program effectiveness and expansion and through policy advocacy and change. As expressed by one participant, “did the program continue in some form? But then also, did you learn a thing that made your life better and is there some sustainable change in the community?”

Project representatives emphasized the importance of considering sustainability early and continuously: “If we want sustainability to happen, it can’t be thought of as an afterthought. It’s something that needs to be thought of, built in, and supported from the get-go.” Beyond emphasizing early planning, many identified sustainability as *the heart of their work*. For example, one individual told us, “[Sustainability] informs all the work I do.” Another shared, “In our worldview, there are four core laws, one of which is continually planning for the future. So, you never really go about anything without having some idea of the future.” This conceptualization of sustainability as both outcome and process was also apparent in project representatives’ discussions of different types of sustainability, captured in our descriptions of some of the sustainability domains below.

Based on project representatives’ perspectives, the extant literature, and PHAC’s logic model, we describe and explore four key domains of sustainability, which all require a foundation of stable funding sources (Figure 2).

- Domain 1: Sustained outcomes for program clients
- Domain 2: Sustained implementation of program (components)
- Domain 3: Sustained knowledge and skills for program staff and professionals
- Domain 4: Sustained relationships, collaboration, and capacity for organizations

Sustainability domains, as we define them, are simultaneously the outcomes that may be sustained over time and the internal and external processes and conditions that contribute to sustained outcomes and may themselves be maintained over time. While the domains are clearly outcomes to be maintained over time, they are also conditions or processes that feed into the other domains. In the next section, we describe CoP member views on sustainability in each of these domains.

Figure 2: Key Program Sustainability Domains of GBFV and Related Programs



Foundation: Stable Sources of Funding

Sustained funding, ideally via long-term, stable sources of money—that support ongoing programming *and* data-driven adaptation such that programs can evolve in response to changing contexts—was a primary need described by project representatives. They noted that their programs were often the only ones available in a community or even across the country that took a certain approach, addressed a particular problem, or reached a specific population. They articulated the ideal of having effective public health programs become standard practice within communities or sectors through long-term, stable funding. They also, however, described an uncertain, unpredictable, and instable funding landscape in Canada characterized primarily by short-term, project-based funding (see Domain 2: Sustained Implementation of Program (Components) for more information). Though project representatives recognized the value of Canada’s National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and the funding opportunities it has created, they were concerned that Canada’s focus on ending GBFV was fleeting and vulnerable to changing government priorities. They were unclear about how federal learnings were shaping provincial and territorial action plans associated with National Action Plan transfer payments. They also felt that innovations recognized at the federal level often do not have a

funding or policy “foothold” provincially. They saw no clear pathways from successful federally funded projects to applications for short-term or, ideally continued, funding from provincial sources.

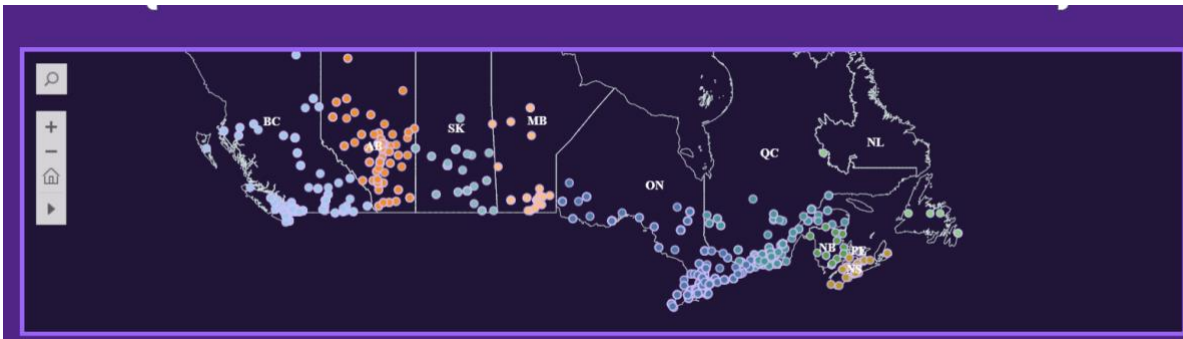
Foundations and private donors were also identified as potential, but limited, sources of funding in Canada. Members shared resources, such as a curated list of charitable organizations compiled by the KH team (see Box 1) and discussed the benefits and constraints of various forms of funding.

Box 1 Gender-based violence data platform

To explore funding options for services addressing and preventing GBFV, the KH team and other collaborators developed a [database](#) that identifies charitable foundations and organizations related to GBFV. The database was created to enhance understanding of the funding landscape of the GBFV sector across Canada. This database provides information on the location, funding, and staffing of charitable organizations that engage in GBFV services and foundations that fund GBFV work. It was built from information reported by Canadian charitable organizations on the T3010 form submitted annually to the Canada Revenue Agency.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE DATA PLATFORM

Western  Centre for Research & Education
Violence Against Women & Children
KNOWLEDGE HUB
CENTRE DE CONNAISSANCES



Review of this database highlights the relative lack of charitable foundations and funding opportunities in Canada for GBFV work.

Given funding challenges, leaders of PHAC-funded projects often felt a strong sense of responsibility for sustaining their services and found themselves moving out of program delivery and research roles (in which they were experts) and into activities and roles focused on trying to maintain funding. They explored several strategies to help make the case for the need for their programs and services, and for ongoing funding, including tools such as the [Program](#)

[Sustainability Assessment Tool \(PSAT\)](#) (see Box 2) and conducting costing analyses and social return on investment (SROI) models to demonstrate program value. Some projects described partnering with economists to quantify the impact of their services, while others explored business planning tools to show program feasibility and attract diversified funding.

Project leaders and their teams spent considerable time and effort, well beyond their work hours and roles and beyond the point of PHAC funding, trying to maintain their programs and impacts. One project representative recognized that many staff involved in their program were running it “in their spare time” and that “that’s unsustainable.” Another member disclosed, “I’ve spent most of my weekends at the program.” These actions were often undertaken with the view and hope that finding ways to sustain programming would help in making the case for another short-term funding opportunity and bridge the gap between one short-term project and another.

Box 2 – Program Sustainability Assessment Tool (PSAT)

The [Program Sustainability Assessment Tool \(PSAT\)](#) is an evidence-based instrument designed to evaluate and strengthen a program’s capacity for sustainability across sectors such as public health, social services, and education. Developed by the Center for Public Health Systems Science at Washington University, the PSAT is grounded in rigorous research and assesses eight domains that are predictive of a program’s capacity for success.



Among the predictors of sustainability emphasized in this model are planning for sustainability early, becoming evidence-based, drawing on community connections and engagements, garnering and identifying environmental support, strategic planning, and broad public communication.

Despite these efforts, CoP members overall were relatively pessimistic about the prospects for short-term funding, let alone ongoing funding for their programs. There was overall consensus that few, if any, opportunities exist that can provide the strong level and relatively long period funding support that PHAC grants had provided. Project leaders experienced ongoing uncertainty and significant worries about having the financial capacity to keep effective programs operational.

We situate sustained funding at the foundation of our model (Figure 2) given that it feeds into and is typically *required* to support all sustainability domains. Representatives of PHAC-funded projects noted that limited and short-term, project-based funding were major barriers to the other sustainability domains, particularly to sustained program implementation and relationship building. We describe some of these challenges in the sections below, and in greater detail in a companion position statement calling for stable, long-term funding with an intersectional lens for programs and services that effectively prevent and respond to GBFV.

We discuss the remaining four domains in greater detail given that they are within the realm of activity of those implementing programs, and further address funding and resource concerns within each section where relevant.

Domain 1: Sustained Outcomes for Program Clients

The ultimate goal of health promotion programs is to achieve better health outcomes for clients. PHAC-funded projects aimed to improve clients' knowledge and skills related to GBFV, health and wellbeing, and relationships, and, ultimately, to prevent or reduce GBFV. During project presentations, for example, project representatives described client outcomes including improved knowledge about and recognition of GBFV, available resources, and healthy relationships; improved confidence and skills disrupting problematic behaviour and teaching youth about healthy relationships; reduced feelings of helplessness and self-blame; increased mood and self-esteem; increased engagement in prosocial behaviour, use of coping and safety strategies, and engagement in conversations about GBFV; and reduced relationship conflict and GBFV severity, among many others. Projects have been working to create these outcomes in several ways. Across projects, the work funded by PHAC aimed for the following general impacts:

- Adults, children, and youth who have been victims of GBFV have access to physical activity and arts-based activities that are culturally embedded, trauma- and violence-informed, and contribute to their healing and resilience (e.g., physical activity, boxing, equine engagement, hip hop, arts activities, cultural connection activities, and others)
- Health and public health service settings have systems and services in place to provide the necessary trauma- and violence-informed support to people as they navigate and access the health system

- Health and public health systems have programs and services that are able to respond to victims of GBFV in circumstances where their needs are clearly overlapping (e.g., GBFV-related head injury, concurrent GBFV victimization and substance use, elder abuse)
- GBFV prevention activities reach new audiences and use new methods that most effectively reach focus populations

Some project representatives shared examples of ways that their programs continue to impact clients well beyond the end of programming. Angelique Jenney from Safe and Understood, for example, shared that program clients gained knowledge and capacity for forming closer parent-child relationships that would benefit both children and families throughout their lives. She also pointed out that program participants received children’s books that would “live on” in their homes, helping to support continued program impact.

The nato’ we ho win program was offered within the context of revitalizing Indigenous culture and traditional knowledge in Saskatchewan. Jo Ann Dusel and Crystal Giesbrecht shared that one woman began as a participant and, as she gained confidence, moved into a community leader role: “By round three [of the program], a woman who started as a survivor in Group One was acting as the Elder. She had the experience. She had the cultural knowledge.” To this day, this participant continues to contribute to GBFV prevention and response within her community.

The sustained outcomes to program clients that project representatives described are an important reminder of the value of longitudinal follow-up studies to assess impact for individual clients, their families, and their communities over time.

Domain 2: Sustained Implementation of Program (Components)

A central domain of sustainability (one of the most common conceptualizations of sustainability in the extant literature and a top goal for project representatives in the current research) is the continued implementation of programs or specific program components, especially beyond an initial funding period.

Of the 15 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects that provided client-facing services (thus, excluding KH, Flourish, and TransFormed, the latter two of which developed resources in support of professional training), nine (60%) continued program or service implementation (even if just a component) at the time this research was conducted and six either no longer existed or were available in very limited form (e.g., offered by one or two private practitioners). We noted that smaller organizations, often serving populations facing structural and intersecting forms of violence, tended to have fewer funding opportunities and be at greatest risk of termination. Below, we outline the funding models, and associated successes and challenges, used by the projects in the current research that were able to sustain client-facing programs and services.

2015–2022 short-term, project-based funding

Of the nine 2015–2022 projects that involved program implementation, three were funded again in the 2022–2026 PHAC investment, with new or adapted programming and expanded objectives centred in their work (Mothercraft: Breaking the Cycle, iHEAL, and STEP). Two additional projects continued with short-term research or project funding from other federal, provincial, or charitable foundations. [FOXY](#), for example, has continued with funding from a wide number of partners and funding agencies. Safe and Understood programming has continued through foundation-based funding ([Child Welfare Foundation](#)) and is now running in several locations in Ontario and Manitoba.

Participants in the 2022–2026 Sustainability Working Group noted that it often takes a minimum of 10 years to develop, implement, effectively evaluate a program, and identify what is needed to support implementation in different contexts. Supporting this developmental work through successive short-term projects and grants is time-consuming and challenging, exacerbated by the fact that funding calls often seek to support “new” projects rather than those already proven effective and seeking to continue or expand. Moreover, even with continued funding, project leaders noted challenges associated with moving from one funding cycle to the next. For example, representatives of Mothercraft: Breaking the Cycle described an “up and down” uncertainty between funding cycles. They explained that, even though they were funded in the first and second investments, there was a period of uncertainty in between which resulted in letting go of project staff. Project leaders explained that while the project didn’t start from “ground zero” in the second round, they still had to hire and train a whole new staff, which hampered a smooth transition.

2015–2022 combined project-based and social enterprise funding

A second model of funding for continuing projects is one that combines project-based funding with social enterprise. The Inunnguiniq and Child and Youth Mental Health projects are examples. The Inunnguiniq program has been sustained through the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, which is an independent, community-led research centre serving Inuit organizations, research, government, and community in Nunavut. This organization, in existence since 2006, has been highly successful in bringing research and training to Nunavummiut. The Inunnguiniq program continues to be profiled by the organization and is offered in workshop format on a fee-for-service basis or, when possible, via other government and charitable funding to the organization. This social enterprise model (adopted for other programs as well) has been used by the organization to raise money to build their own building. Gwen Healey of Inunnguiniq shared that having a permanent headquarters owned by the project “has stabilized us because now we’re not on the hunt for rent money.”

The Child and Youth Mental Health project developed and implemented the ChYMH, a standardized assessment of child and family needs which was included into the interRAI suite of assessments. InterRAI is a collaborative network of researchers and practitioners in over 35 countries who have been developing and disseminating standardized mental health-related assessments within health and social care settings. InterRAI has a hybrid financial model: part

revenue-driven (licenses), part short-term research and implementation projects, and part through government subsidies. Project leader Dr. Stewart reported that, “The suite of instruments [that InterRAI has] developed are now used across the province of Ontario. It’s pretty much a standard of care in most mental health agencies.”

2015–2022 embedded services

Two projects—MindUP and the Bounce Back League—were taken up as core services within host organizations with longer-term and at least partially stable funding (an arguably ideal setup for sustainability). The MindUP program embedded trauma-informed practices within the London District Catholic School Board and a community service organization. Program leaders emphasized that this integration ensured that the program’s principles continued to influence educational practices and student wellbeing even after the initial project phase. Karen Bax emphasized the importance of securing agreements for continued investment from large partner organizations right from the start of partnership, prior to even applying for funding: “part of the agreement [with our partner] was that, if we got some good data that showed it would be a helpful program, they would continue to run it. So, they have continued to run it...on their own dime.”

The Bounce Back League program has been similarly supported by its host organization, becoming a national program within the Boys and Girls Club and providing ongoing trauma-informed sports programs for children and youth across the country. Information, resources, and training developed during the investment period have been uploaded to an e-learning platform that all club staff can access (see Box 3).

Box 3. The Bounce Back League

The Bounce Back League, led by the [Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada](#), developed and evaluated a trauma-informed sport program that provides a safe, fun, and empowering environment for sports activities designed to improve health outcomes and healing from trauma through skill building and supportive relationships. Over the five years of PHAC funding, 13 Clubs from West (BC, AB, MB), to Central (ON), to Eastern (PEI, NB) Canada were engaged in running the Bounce Back League; 45 staff were trained; and 506 players were reached. Resources needed to successfully run the program, such as program manuals, materials, and training, were developed. At the end of the project, the Bounce Back League was designated by the Boys and Girls Club as a national program for Canada. As such, training and resources to support program delivery are available for all 774 Club sites to access and programs continued within Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada.

Even when programs become part of ongoing service and/or are supported by social enterprise models, allocation of ongoing funding for training, service delivery, and regular review and updating of programs and associated materials is needed. For programs delivered in a single community (such as MindUP) or within a single organization (such as the Bounce Back League),

it is fairly easy to envision models and methods for ongoing funding. For innovations that span different regions and different types of organizations, more complicated funding models are needed to ensure regular review and update of program materials.

2015–2022 core program funding

A final and possibly ideal model for sustaining effective programs is by allocation of funding by provincial, federal, or municipal governments as “standard” or “core” programs and made available to all victim-survivors of GBFV living in a particular region. None of the 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects were transitioned to such a funding model.

2015–2022 programs that did not continue

Six of the 15 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects that provided client-facing services were lost or severely scaled back once PHAC funding ended. These service losses are significant. While funded, Shape Your Life empowered 225 women through a boxing program; Building Internal Resilience through Horses supported 83 teen girls in rural areas; Sole Expression provided trauma- and violence-informed dance to 2810 youth; Reaching Out with Yoga provided trauma- and violence-informed yoga to 212 women and 59 children and young people in 21 shelters; nato’ we ho win supported up to 120 Indigenous women through their artistic and cultural programming; and the P.E.A.C.E. project supported 70 young people who participated in peer-led groups.

2022–2026 programs

Of the 21 2022–2026 PHAC-funded projects represented at the final in-person CoP meeting in September 2025, 14 (66%) stated that uncertain funding was a sustainability barrier and only two shared that they had secured additional funding at that time. iHEAL has been funded past the second cycle of PHAC support through short-term funding from the Ontario Gender-Based Violence Action Plan. RISE has received support and continuation through its partnership with Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario. Since that time, the Kids’ Club Moms’ Empowerment program has received funding to create an accompaniment guide for trainers, host a workshop and provide some additional training with the hope of expansion into shelters across New Brunswick.

Still, it is important to note that drawing conclusions about the sustainability, or lack of sustainability, of programs and program components in 2022-2026 projects is premature. At the time of finalizing this report, projects were nearing completion of their funding cycle from PHAC. Many had applied for additional funding through various short-term grant opportunities and were actively engaged in advocacy for funds to continue to offer services.

Domain 3: Sustained Knowledge and Skills for Program Staff and Professionals

This domain refers to the maintenance of knowledge and skills for those working to implement and support a program, as well as other professionals in the field. Although individuals can

sustain knowledge over time, more important is the creation and maintenance of a knowledge base in an area (e.g., effective GBFV prevention and support strategies) and of resources in support of sustaining knowledge and skills among service providers and other professionals.

Sustainability through knowledge mobilization

Data collected from the PHAC-funded projects included in this research highlighted the importance of knowledge creation and mobilization for sustaining the knowledge and skills needed to address GBFV. All 18 of the 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects engaged in knowledge mobilization activities to ensure the maintenance of at least some knowledge beyond project implementation. Most (19 of 21) of the 2022–2026 projects that attended the final in-person CoP meeting in September 2025 reported having already done significant work creating products to sustain knowledge, with others actively working to produce such products. This work was seen as important both for sharing information and ensuring work would not be lost even if funding ended.

General web presence was identified as one important way to create and sustain knowledge for professionals, especially after a program and/or its funding has ended. All 2015–2022 and 2022–2026 PHAC-funded projects have a presence on the KH’s [website repository](#), which houses basic information about and resources from each project (e.g., project videos, webinar recordings, final reports, KH Research Briefings) and co-created [knowledge products](#) related to trauma- and violence-informed practice. Many projects have also shared information on independent websites (see, for example, the Building Internal Resilience through Horses project’s [The Mane Intent website](#) and [Access Alliance’s new website](#)). Housed on these websites and other online platforms, projects put significant resources into developing (often freely available) knowledge products that described and supported innovations in practice, such as online repositories of resources, webinars, podcasts, videos, digital stories, infographics, policy briefs, guidebooks, program manuals, and training materials.

Two 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects were centrally focused on knowledge and resource creation. TransFormed developed resources to support health and service providers to effectively and safely respond to trans individuals experiencing GBFV. Webinars and resources are posted on their [website](#). The Flourish project led by Women’s Health in Women’s Hands developed a framework for compassionate service delivery for survivors of female genital cutting. Their [website](#) includes resources and knowledge tools such as webinars, podcast videos, digital stories, blog posts, risk assessment tools, and a geo-map of support services for women experiencing genital cutting.

Other examples of accessible, community-based knowledge mobilization efforts by 2015–2022 and 2022–2026 PHAC-funded projects include:

- The Reaching Out with Yoga project’s [resource library](#) designed to support universal delivery of trauma- and violence-informed yoga

- The Shape Your Life project’s self-guided [learning modules](#) for teachers and self-directed learners interested in implementing trauma- and violence-informed boxing for GBFV survivors
- The Trauma- and Violence-Informed Movement project’s [online learning modules](#) that provide self-directed learning about trauma- and violence-informed practice and the effects of trauma and violence on the body and brain
- The Strong Women project’s [workbook](#) and associated service provider and service user information sheets that support the implementation of virtual support groups for the recovery, growth, and wellness of women who have faced both intimate partner violence and problems with substance use
- The MODELSS project’s [handbook](#) that summarizes key background information, principles, and promising practices for implementing a trauma- and violence-informed approach in digital media literacy education
- The STEP project’s [ASTRA online training for service providers](#) who interact with parents during the prenatal stage who may have experienced trauma
- The Espace Parents project [website](#) that offers public information and a member-only section for people who have received training

Scholarly publications and academic conference presentations were identified as another important way to maintain knowledge. Almost all 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects have published results in academic journals, resulting in over 80 journal articles, chapters, and theses. These publications have helped to inform and shape work across Canada and abroad. Cathy van Ingen from the Shape Your Life project explained that she “rarely read[s] any literature about trauma-informed physical activity” that has not been “informed by and through [her project], whether it’s cited or not,” highlighting the substantial role Shape Your Life has played in reshaping how trauma-informed physical activity is conceptualized and implemented.

Knowledge evolution and accessibility

Although both past and current PHAC-funded projects have worked in creative ways to sustain knowledge produced through their work, they also emphasized that better outcomes for survivors of GBFV cannot be achieved through knowledge alone. Mary Motz and Bhupinder Heer observed that sustaining knowledge is not enough, noting: “There has to be the right level of funding to continue and evolve programs because our communities are evolving. If we look at intimate partner violence, it looks very different to what it did pre-COVID...We have all these fantastic papers and manuals, but we also have to change those [rather than] rely on information that might be outdated for the community we’re serving.” Continuously updated data and resources are therefore needed in the process of sustaining knowledge and skills for professionals to maintain relevance and effectiveness in the field. The Dynamic Sustainability Framework (Chambers et al., 2013) is one potentially useful tool for those working to sustain knowledge (and programs more generally). The framework highlights the constantly evolving nature of program contexts; suggests that programs (and knowledge about them) should be

continuously updated to optimize fit between the program and new and dynamic delivery context(s); and considers data-driven adaptation and evolution (to fit new and/or changing contexts) as key pathways to program sustainability. A representative from Flourish similarly reported, “The website content is there forever, but it’s always good to add new stuff [to maintain relevance].” Project representatives underscored the importance of recognizing GBFV as an ongoing, dynamic, and mutating issue. While GBFV is not a new topic and knowledge has been shared over many years, GBFV evolves, and knowledge needs to be updated to reflect that evolution. While it is important to maintain resources, the field cannot rely on old knowledge. New data, new knowledge, and new resources, all of which require continued funding to create, are ultimately required.

Knowledge accessibility is another important consideration. Resources such as manuals, guides, and other “gray literature” products can be difficult to find. These resources are often not indexed in academically focused databases and even if they were, community agencies looking for new programming may not have access to them. The proliferation of open access policies for digital publication is critical for helping to ensure that such information is available; however, the advantages of being able to self-publish and share also sometimes mean that there is so much existing information that it can be difficult to “stumble across” relevant foundational materials and resources. Having centralized repositories, such as the KH’s website housing materials for the projects that are part of its CoP, helps solve this challenge.

Project representatives also spoke of the role of informal, relationship-based information sharing. Several former project leaders talked about their commitments to making information available. For example, Cathy van Ingen from the Shape Your Life project, which is no longer available, explained that she “shares everything” with interested parties: “Our grants, everything, like, here’s how to run [the program]. Here’s how to structure a class.” Representatives nevertheless noted that, when responsibility for programs lies with a small number of individuals (as it often does in short-term projects), program knowledge can easily disappear when funding ends and/or staff leave. Sustained investment in service delivery, service adaptation, and posting comprehensive resources online partially mitigates this issue. For example, Hannah Lee shared that the outputs developed by the Reaching Out with Yoga project remain publicly available on the host organization’s website, even though project members may have moved on. The host organization provides ongoing support by continuing to print and distribute knowledge mobilization outputs to interested parties.

Domain 4: Sustained Relationships, Collaboration, and Capacity for Organizations

This domain of sustainability recognizes that sustainability may be rooted in the capacity to transform organizations and sectors through collaborations and relationships that ultimately embed new knowledge and practices into existing systems. Following PHAC’s logic model, one domain of sustainability may be operationalized as the development of new or enhanced collaborations and partnerships across settings and sectors, which ultimately contributes to organizational adoption of trauma- and violence-informed health promotion practices and policies. As such, for this domain, we look past the integration of the PHAC-funded innovation

into standard organizational practice (which is an ideal form of organizational change) to the more subtle and relational ways that projects might lead to sustainable changes in trauma- and violence-informed practices.

Relationships and collaboration

Project representatives highlighted the importance of several types of relationships as both sustainability outcomes and processes. Most notable was the role of partnerships between academic and community stakeholders for implementing and sustaining programs designed to address and respond to GBFV. For example, Jennifer Garland of Mane Intent in her "[Lessons Learned](#)" video spoke about the value of the relationship formed between her community-based service and university-based researchers for fostering attention to the value of equine-assisted models of intervention. Marilyn Ford-Gilboe from the iHEAL project, which has existed in various forms for more than 20 years, explained that partnerships sustained between universities and between key people involved since the project's outset continue to play a vital role, as the same individuals remain "committed to continuing to move the project forward together." Karen Bax from the MindUP project added that developing multiple partnerships (with organizations and community members) fosters widespread motivation to sustain projects once they are shown to be successful.

Program champions within organizations and communities were viewed by project representatives as particularly helpful for supporting relationships with service user communities and for building and maintaining support for projects. Relationships with champions also fed into other sustainability domains. For example, one project representative noted that their champion (an academic) was imperative for finding, writing, and securing grants to keep the program running. Representatives of another project reported that, of their program's three sites, the one site that continued programming (domain 2) was the site where the champion lived and maintained partnerships between funded and unfunded periods: "When the program ended, [the champion] continued to meet with some of the women and...they had beading circles in someone's home."

Project representatives often highlighted the importance of creating partnerships early in the program development and implementation stages, communicating with partners in a clear and timely fashion, and cultivating deliberate and strategic partnerships as well as those that are more informal and unplanned. They further noted the importance of taking time to develop relationships with service user populations and to demonstrate respect and trustworthiness, particularly when working with equity-deserving communities that have experienced structural violence.

Recognizing and emphasizing the value of partnerships, the Building Connections project created and published a model of multi-level research-community relationships needed to implement and sustain programs (see Box 4). Project representatives linked these multi-level relationships with the stages of project implementation to create a relational and trauma-informed framework to guide effective collaboration and community-based program delivery, research, and evaluation (Andrews et al., 2019).

Box 4 – Building Connections Multi-level Relational Approach

The Building Connections project involved implementation of a mother-focused intervention across multiple agencies in diverse areas in Canada. One key learning from this work was that strong research-practice partnerships were necessary but insufficient for successful implementation. Relationships needed to include community partners and service providers in decision-making processes. The multi-level relational approach that the project team developed emphasizes the need to highlight and support relationships among researchers, between researchers and community partners, among community partners, between organizations and communities, and across systems.



Figure 1. Conceptual framework for multilevel relational approach in the Building Connections initiative.

Although relationships were acknowledged as important by project representatives, they were generally not viewed as sustainability *outcomes*, but rather as essential ingredients or *processes* that contributed to other sustainability domains, including program implementation and maintenance and (sustainable) funding acquisition. Gwen Healey from the Inunnguiniq project, for example, shared that relationships helped support successful applications for ongoing funding. For the Inunnguiniq project, which is implemented in a small and tight-knit community, building relationships with key people such as the ministers of health and finance were crucial because they shared “a bigger vision for what needs to be happening in [the] territory.”

Inadequate and short-term, project-based funding were noted as major barriers to projects’ ability to develop and sustain relationships. 2022–2026 Working Group members noted that the overall lack of adequate funding for GBFV work in Canada has led to a significant reduction in

the capacity of community partners to support collaborative work across community and academia. Because community-based organizations running the projects were not themselves adequately funded, they had less capacity than in years past for supporting research partnerships, leading to challenges with recruitment of participants and in working together to problem-solve implementation issues. Program champions have often “stepped into the gap”, providing support for initiatives due to their passion and commitment, even when this role was not compensated. Relying on champions, however, results in significant program vulnerability. Programs often fold when a champion leaves. One individual explained that one of her champions was a woman in the host organization’s leadership. When this champion left the organization, so too did support of the program. This was not an uncommon experience. As explained by one project representative, “When the founding creator of this project left the organization...we were already in the pandemic. Programming had stopped...I just stepped in to sort of tie the loose ends up of this project [and ended the service].” Thus, although incredibly valuable, the presence of program champions can be precarious, particularly when funding is short-term.

Short-term funding is also a hindrance to relationship-building with service user populations, particularly from equity-deserving communities. Relationships with and within communities are harmed when programming is interrupted or abruptly ended, leading to hesitation to engage with future projects (Savaya & Spiro, 2012).

Organizational capacity and readiness

Building organizational readiness and support as part of implementing novel approaches to addressing GBFV is another relational component of sustainability that stems directly from enhanced collaborations and partnerships. 2022–2026 PHAC-funded projects representatives agreed that organizational readiness is critical to implementing programs in ways that are potentially sustainable. Project representatives emphasized that structures and supports need to be in place to provide trauma-based interventions effectively and safely. Everyone at every level of an organization must be trained, prepared, and ready. Consideration needs to be given to policies for program staff, other staff, and the entire organization. Trust and engagement need to be developed within communities and with service users who are expected to access the program (as noted above).

Aligned with recommendations of the implementation science literature, projects that were re-funded from the first to the second PHAC investment cycle with scale up objectives were particularly attentive to building relationships and readiness at the organizational levels. Mothercraft, for example, has continued to build on its strategies for developing and implementing the “Your Starting Point Story” organizational readiness assessment (see the project’s 2023 [webinar](#) for more information). This assessment includes 25 components necessary for successful implementation of the Breaking the Cycle program. Components are presented on a two-dimensional matrix, identifying trauma-awareness, skills and competencies, collaborations and connections, and safety components at community, agency, project, and individual staff levels. Example factors include having a formal relationship with child protection

services (collaboration/community), having appropriate policies (safety/agency), and existing programming for children and parents (skills/project), as well as training of individual staff in the intervention program. This readiness assessment is an example of operationalization of implementation factors beyond specific intervention activities.

iHEAL is on a similar pathway. Their team shared their view that sustainability goes beyond finding another grant to fund the service itself to putting in place the organizational conditions (such as policies, human resources, processes, and overall readiness) that allow the program to operate as a full, integrated model rather than a small project carried by program champions or individual program staff. Marilyn Ford-Gilboe talked about the recent development of iHEAL's organizational readiness document. She noted, "We realized success had less to do with the nurses and much more to do with the organizational conditions that needed to be negotiated up front." One of iHEAL's current objectives is to establish "a central structure that can support the program no matter where it is delivered." Ford-Gilboe further observed that the program had already begun to influence partners, transforming "not just the way the [partner] organization understood violence, but also...some of [its] practice."

Practical recommendations arising from literature on organizational readiness and from discussions of 2022–2026 Working Group members included ensuring that partnering agencies had the motivation, capacity, and resources to implement new programming, and that such conditions be in place before new services and new training was implemented. The Working Group discussed a "train last" philosophy, which emphasizes that training staff to engage in trauma- and violence-informed practices, without corresponding changes in organizational policies to allow them the necessary time and support to implement these changes, often leaves responsibility for change (and attributions of potential failures) on staff rather than on the absence of organizational policy needed to support this work (see Lowenthal, 2020).

All this said, the discussion of readiness, and of changes in organizational policies and practices, generally presupposed that a service, program, or innovation was being implemented. Without continued funding for the service, organizational changes in support of a program will not continue. The ideal would be for organizations to allocate stable, ongoing funding and resources (personal, leadership, financial resources) to continue delivery of services. 2022–2026 Working Group members emphasized that such integration of practice into organizations is a strong route to program sustainability not only because projects will be supported financially by an institution but also because the institution may offer some protection from policy changes and shifts in government priorities.

Relationships to support policy change

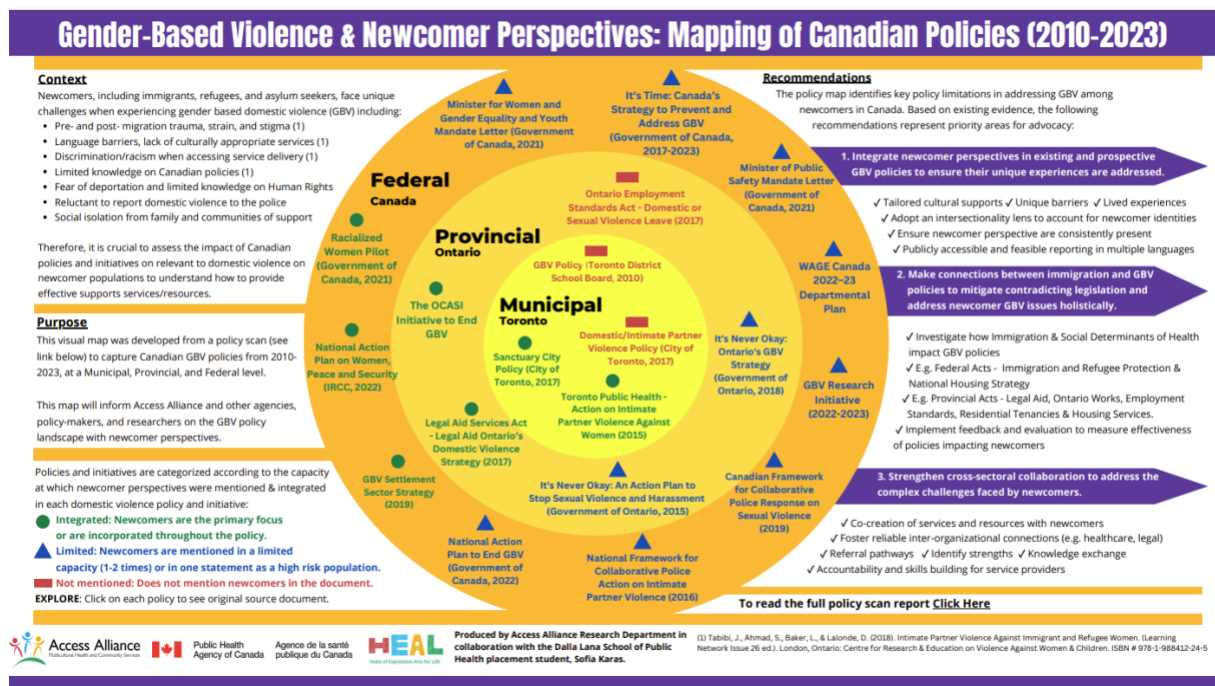
Another major theme of discussion related to collaborations and relationships was how, through community-researcher partnerships, organizations can advance change in broader policy, including policies on funding. Routes to sustainability through policy changes within governments were specifically explored in a 2022–2026 Working Group meeting where a PHAC representative shared information on the structure of government departments and how policies are developed within government. This discussion emphasized the value for researchers

and organization leads to understand what information needs to be collected and shared, and with whom, in order to have an impact on the ongoing development of policies within governments that support trauma- and violence-informed work.

2022–2026 Working Group members had varying levels of involvement in political and policy relationships. Several discussed building strategic relationships with policymakers as a key priority for their work. They emphasized the need to develop and present clear, concise messages as essential tactics for funding advocacy. Story maps and visual data tools were highlighted as powerful methods for communicating community experiences and supporting policy change.

Some projects were actively engaged in developing tools and resources that helped them identify and align with shifts in policies needed to sustain positive change. Akm Alamgir from the HEAL project shared the results of a [policy scan](#) that captured the municipal, provincial, and federal policies and initiatives addressing GBFV with a focus on newcomers including action plans, mandate letters, and government strategies (see Figure 3). Akm emphasized the value of this scan for helping their project align requests for ongoing funding with government priorities and recommend actions to better consider newcomer perspectives and intersectional complexities to address GBFV.

Figure 3: Policy Scan by the HEAL Project



2022–2026 Working Group members also recognized that, although potentially helpful, developing relationships with policy makers and politicians is time and resource intensive. There were also questions about roles. Within organizations and agencies, policy and funder connection was viewed as a role for Executive Directors or dedicated fundraisers, not

necessarily for program leaders whose job was to implement a new program. Academic partners, although often involved in consultations around policy development, pointed to the potential disconnects and conflicts between advising on general policy changes and improvements and advocating for funding to specific programs.

Despite these challenges, the 2022–2026 PHAC-funded project representatives recognized the value of collective expert consensus for policy makers. They decided to embark on a position statement on funding sustainability that would be submitted alongside the current report.

Discussion

The ultimate objective of both PHAC investment cycles and CoP members of funded projects is for *long-term positive change in health outcomes for victims and long-term prevention of GBFV*. PHAC-funded projects worked to achieve these outcomes via multiple routes, including increasing victim access to healing and health-promoting activities, promoting trauma- and violence-informed health and public health services, and developing and implementing collaborative and effective prevention and response to GBFV. To sustain positive outcomes for victims and prevent GBFV, effective programs and services must remain available to victims, families, and communities. As highlighted in this research, sustained knowledge for professionals, relationships, and organizational readiness are also important to achieving and sustaining these positive outcomes.

We estimate that 60% of the 2015–2022 PHAC-funded projects continued after PHAC funding ended. This success rate is on the upper end of the range (40%–60%) of effective North America public health programs estimated to be sustained beyond short-term, project-based funding cycles (Vitale et al., 2018; Scheirer, 2005; Wiltsey Stirman et al., 2012). The relatively long and generous funding provided by PHAC may have contributed to this relatively high success rate. Longer funding periods may enable programs to embed themselves in communities and build relationships and reputations, which can help generate new funding sources. Nevertheless, virtually all continuing programs from the 2015–2022 PHAC investment cycle remain precarious. Some continued with another round of short-term, project-based funding and few achieved stable, sustained funding. It is too early to assess the sustainability of programs and program components for the 2022–2026 PHAC-funded projects given that the funding period is ongoing. It is nevertheless concerning that, two months before the end of the PHAC investment, only a handful of these projects have confirmed funding to continue their work. Although projects in both funding cycles were highly successful at creating and sustaining (often publicly available) knowledge, there remain concerns with keeping that knowledge up to date as contexts and issues related to GBFV continue to evolve. Relationships, as well, will continue for a period, but are difficult to sustain without adequate, stable funding.

The current research report should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, we were not able to connect with all project representatives from the 2015–2022 funding cycle for individual interviews and not all representatives from the 2022–2026 funding cycle participated

in Working Group discussions. Our findings, therefore, may not represent the perspectives of all project representatives. A related limitation is the granularity of data available for past and present projects; specifically, that the 2022–2026 project representatives participated in *group* discussions and did not have the opportunity to share their *individual* perspectives in interviews as did 2015–2022 representatives. It is possible we would have heard new or diverging perspectives through individual interviews with 2022–2026 projects representatives.

Finally, as noted within, our observations about the sustainability of the 2022–2026 projects are preliminary given that the initial PHAC funding period is ongoing at the time of writing this report. Our description of the sustainability of the 2015–2022 programs and program components is also limited to a single point in time. Even today, leaders of these past projects remain highly committed to their work and they continue to apply and advocate for funding. In subsequent years, programs and program components that are not currently available may restart.

Implications for PHAC and other Funders: Advocating for Systems Change

The KH’s overall aim in embarking on this exploration of sustainability, as specified by its funding agreement with PHAC, was to identify projects’ sustainability needs beyond the financial aspect and to make recommendations around wording to clarify PHAC’s role regarding post-PHAC funding project sustainability in documents related to funding opportunities where appropriate. We can address these aims from two perspectives summarized by a 2022–2026 Working Group member: “What can we do within the existing system [and] how can the system be changed to accommodate sustainability?”

We start with the latter perspective and respond to the question: what changes can PHAC make, or advocate to make, to improve the existing system? The recommendations we list here are echoed and expanded in a companion joint policy statement on sustainable funding written and endorsed by CoP members from 2022–2026 PHAC-funded projects. Here and in the position statement, we point to a fundamental lack of opportunities and clear routes to sustained funding for public health programs that support healing from, and prevention of, GBFV. As summarized by project representatives, “if you want sustainability, you need some sort of funding base that never goes away” and such a base is virtually nonexistent in the Canadian GBFV field. Funding in this field is almost always short-term and project-based.

In this broader systemic context, even with very clear post-funding communication, projects will inevitably return to funders like PHAC for additional funding because choices for stable funding are limited or nonexistent. PHAC-funded project representatives recognized their role in planning and setting up for sustainability; however, they often felt that sustainability must be prioritized by governments so that effective programs are supported in broad implementation for maximum possible impact. Similar discussions are happening internationally as well. The [WHO Innovation Hub](#), for example, provides guidance on the many steps and processes for scaling successful innovations. Importantly, it emphasizes that such work requires strategic planning, organizational infrastructure, and planning and support for ensuring sustainable funding right from program beginning. This framework expands the role and responsibility of all

partners—program leaders, academics, organizations, and funders—to plan for sustainability from the very beginning of project work. It represents a fundamental shift from a process where long-term, stable funding is considered only after a program is fully developed, researched, adapted, and implemented, to one where sustainability and sustainable funding are integral to program development from the beginning.

We make the following concrete recommendations for PHAC (and other funders) to foster *systemic change* towards sustainable funding of effective public health initiatives:

- **Recommendation 1: Continue to articulate and differentiate between funding for innovation testing and funding for adaptation and implementation.** Over the past decade, PHAC has been increasingly clear in their funding calls about whether they are aiming to support novel programs and approaches, the testing of existing programs and approaches, or the adaptation and implementation of programs with an established record of success. This differentiation is useful.
- **Recommendation 2: Create and/or make visible pathways to stable funding for effective public health initiatives.** Currently, routes for developing programs, proving efficacy, and supporting widespread implementation and dynamic adaptation are poorly articulated and scarce. Grant calls that clearly distinguish innovation testing from broader implementation and adaptation (Recommendation 1) are part of the answer. We further recommend that PHAC (and other funders) create and publicize multi-year funding “routes” that would allow a larger group of projects to receive innovation and testing funding, and then support a subset of these projects through to broader implementation and adaptation. This could be a 10-year process, allowing programs to mature. Following program maturation, there should then be a clearly articulated route to stable, core funding – a way for programs to become part of standard services within communities.
- **Recommendation 3: Support coordination in federal and provincial priorities.** As noted, Canada needs routes for effective public health programs and services to become standard, core parts of available services. Current routes, if they exist, are mysterious. As 2022–2026 Working Group members noted, part of the problem is that much of Canada’s research and innovation in GBFV prevention and response is funded federally, but ongoing services are funded provincially/territorially. Thus, innovations recognized at the federal level often do not have a policy “foothold” provincially. Pathways from successful federally-funded projects to applications of short or ideally continued provincial funding are unclear. Thus, if government funding is going to be part of sustainable service, then there needs to be better support for coordination between federal and provincial priorities. A coordinated response across governmental bodies to the problem of GBFV would have a significant impact.
- **Recommendation 4: Use the power of government to introduce private funders to publicly funded programs.** A final recommendation for systems change is to use the power of government to convene other funding opportunities. Although government

actors may be limited in the kinds of agreements they can make, they can use their influence to bring together a wider range of public and private partners interested in specific issues as part of broader work to create funding streams that would support services aimed at preventing GBFV and supporting the health and healing of survivors.

A second set of recommendations outlines what PHAC may do within the current funding system. There is significant value to having PHAC invest in projects aiming to create change. As noted, the knowledge produced is significant. Moreover, this work may be sustained through other funding sources. To increase sustainability within the currently limited system, recommended actions include:

- **Recommendation 5: Continue to support a Community of Practice of funded projects and ensure sustainability is on the agenda.** Project representatives who participated in this research asserted the value of having discussions about sustainability that were supported by a CoP associated with the funder. There was strong endorsement of the value of being able to discuss sustainability together, share resources, discuss models and predictors, and otherwise receive support in considering sustainability. Such discussions should start as early as possible and be a consistent theme of discussion within the CoP.
- **Recommendation 6: Continue to support centralized knowledge mobilization to sustain and preserve the knowledge generated through investments.** As noted, it is useful to maintain resources in a centralized and publicly accessible location (e.g., online repository) to sustain the knowledge created through investments over time and inform future work in the field.
- **Recommendation 7: Require agency leaders who are responsible for ensuring sustainable funding to attend one CoP meeting per year.** As noted, one challenge with making sustainability a focus of CoP activities in our group was the fact that CoP members represented the program and academic leads rather than the agency and community leaders whose jobs are to make decisions about how work is funded within their agencies and to advocate with public and private funders. One suggestion is to require, as part of PHAC grants, that agency leaders who are implementing programs attend a meeting once per year to discuss sustainability.
- **Recommendation 8: Continue to share information about policy developments and potential upcoming funding opportunities as openly as possible.** CoP members recognized that government representatives were often limited in the amount and range of information they were able to share about upcoming policy priorities and funding; however, sharing information as openly as possible was viewed as helpful.
- **Recommendation 9: Consider potential sustainability as part of funding decisions.** PHAC might also consider the weight given to potential sustainability in funding decisions. Funding decisions should consider multiple sustainability factors, including whether the intervention or innovation is potentially scalable at a cost that can be reasonably envisioned.

- **Recommendation 10: Require annual reporting on sustainability and provide feedback.** Annual reports provide an important opportunity for projects to reflect on their progress in meeting project objectives. These reports should include a section on sustainability to provide programs with the opportunity and requirement to consider sustainability as early as possible and to receive funder feedback.

Conclusion

Sustainability is an important goal for projects addressing GBFV and should be at the heart of all GBFV work. Representatives of 2015–2022 and 2022–2026 PHAC-funded projects who participated in the current research emphasized that substantial changes to funding structures are needed to elevate the chances of stable funding to programs that promote healthier outcomes for survivors and that prevent GBFV. They stressed the importance of maintaining programs that are effective, frequented, and desired by the communities they are meant to serve. They asserted that when effective and relevant programs remain active, communities and survivors in need can continue to access important services with ultimate benefits to health.

This report examined various domains of sustainability for PHAC-funded projects. We hope to have offered the reader a sense of what sustainability means and can look like for projects involved in GBFV work. Using Working Group meeting notes, insights from project presentations and final reports, interviews with project representatives, and publicly available project information we have described the ways that projects have and have not been sustained and identified various barriers to sustainability. We have provided suggestions for leaders aiming to sustain their projects despite systemic constraints. We simultaneously note the need to radically remake funding structures to elevate sustainability chances for projects engaged in work imperative to individual and community flourishing, as GBFV work entails.

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