



Report on mass victimization in Canada: what we have learned so far

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Executive summary

Mass victimization incidents, defined as the deliberate targeting of large groups of individuals through acts of violence, remain a persistent and troubling concern within Canadian society. These acts not only cause profound grief and disruption in the lives of those directly affected, but they also ripple outward, impacting communities, institutions, and societal perceptions of safety.

This report provides a comprehensive review of 15 major mass victimization events that have occurred in Canada over the past 50 years. Drawing from a variety of grey literature and peer-reviewed sources, this synthesis examines commonalities and unique features across these tragedies to identify patterns apparent in these incidents, as well as explore recommendations from inquiries and reviews after the incidents, aimed at preventing such incidents and providing victim-centred responses in the immediate, short- and long-term aftermath of mass violence. Note that this report does not include all mass victimization events in Canada in the last 50 years, only the mass victimization events that met all inclusion criteria for this report.

The following Canadian mass victimization events were included in the analysis:

1. Air India Flight 182 bombing (1985)
2. École Polytechnique shooting (1989)
3. Giant Mine disaster (1992)
4. Vernon massacre (1996)
5. Mayerthorpe shooting (2005)
6. Calgary stabbings
7. Moncton Attack
8. Ottawa shooting (2014)
9. Edmonton mass shooting (2014)
10. The Renfrew County triple murder (2015)
11. Quebec Mosque shooting (2017)
12. Toronto van attack (2018)
13. Nova Scotia mass shooting (2020)
14. London truck attack (2021)
15. James Cree Smith Nation stabbings (2022)

These incidents span a range of settings and motives, underscoring the complexity of modern threats and the need for multidimensional responses.

Although each case presents its own context and specificities, several commonalities emerged from the review:

- The attack modalities identified in this report include nine incidents involving shootings, two bombings, two vehicle-ramming attacks, and two stabbings.
- Assailant characteristics: All perpetrators were male, ranging in age from 20 to 50 years old. A majority (11 out of 15 incidents) were identified as white.
- Motivating Factors:
 - Domestic violence/criminal history (n=5)

- Political extremism (n=2)
- Misogyny (n=3)
- Racism/xenophobia/Islamophobia (n=2)
- Mental health struggles (n=1)
- Workplace grievance (n=1)
- Unknown (n=1)
- Victim Targeting Patterns:
 - Women were the primary victims in four cases.
 - Muslim communities were affected in four cases.
 - Those of Indian descent were targeted in one case.
 - Law enforcement officers were directly targeted in two cases and indirectly targeted in an additional two cases.

The evidence reviewed herein suggests that Canadian efforts to address mass victimization require a two-fold approach centred on: i) responding with compassion and support for victims and survivors, as well as the wider circles of impact that include family members, witnesses, communities, and responders; ii) while proactively working to prevent future tragedies through system-level change. Review of the relevant literature points towards several victim-centred recommendations/lessons learned, highlighting overall the necessity of a survivor-informed approach to prevention, immediate- and short-term response and long-term recovery.

All recommendations/lessons learned presented in this report are quoted or summarized directly from the original source materials, including federal and provincial inquiries, coroner inquests, judicial reports, and government publications, peer-reviewed articles, and non-government publications. No recommendations have been generated independently by the authors.

The following strategies highlight effective response practices drawn from past events:

1. Mental health and emotional support

- Provide on-site and long-term trauma counseling for survivors and affected communities.
- Establish Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) teams and peer support groups.
- Create resiliency centres and informal healing spaces to promote community cohesion and recovery.

2. Communication and transparency

- Maintain regular, clear communication with victims' families during and after incidents.
- Involve survivors and families in public memorial planning to foster collective remembrance and healing.

3. Financial and legal assistance

- Ensure government funding covers immediate and long-term expenses for victims, including legal aid and funeral costs.
- Support advocacy groups that help families secure fair compensation and legal representation.

4. Community-based and culturally sensitive support

- Partner with culturally appropriate service providers, especially for immigrant and equity-denied communities.
- Provide educational and therapeutic resources in relevant languages and cultural contexts.

5. Trust and inclusion

- Involve victims and frontline service providers in policy development and safety planning.
- Deliver evidence-based trauma-informed training to first responders, healthcare professionals, and justice system actors. Ensure that this training is developed by credible experts.

Our review also identified several prevention-centred recommendations that leverage lessons learned from past mass victimization events in Canada. It is apparent that preventing future mass victimization events requires investment in coordination, infrastructure, education, and risk monitoring.

1. Improved coordination and communication

- Develop centralized threat assessment tools and national protocols for violence prevention.
- Strengthen interagency collaboration, including shared databases and referral systems for high-risk individuals.

2. Security infrastructure and training

- Enforce robust gun control measures, including background checks and safe storage laws.
- Strengthen airport, public, and parliamentary security.
- Expand active shooter training, including updated protective gear and tactical protocols for officers.
- Integrate urban design strategies that reduce vehicle attack vulnerabilities for pedestrians.

3. Education and public awareness

- Implement anti-violence programs in schools and campuses, using trauma-informed pedagogy.
- Launch public campaigns against hate, misogyny, and Islamophobia.

- Promote media literacy and online safety to combat radicalization and misinformation.
- Confront bias in policing and justice, especially in response to crimes against marginalized communities.
- Fund grassroots initiatives that are working to build inclusive, hate-free communities.

4. Risk assessment and monitoring

- Use consistent and validated risk assessment tools for domestic violence, hate crimes, and threats.
- Train health and social service providers to recognize warning signs and intervene appropriately.

In addition to the recommendations reviewed above, there are significant gaps in the current literature and available public discourse surrounding mass victimization. These include:

- 1. Recognition of the wider circles of impact.** Recognition that mass victimization events impact not only direct victims but also significantly affect the mental health and wellbeing of families, communities, and frontline responders.
- 2. Inclusion of psychosocial needs in simulation exercises.** Integrate psychosocial support considerations into all mass victimization preparedness simulations, using standardized and adaptable templates that reflect the needs of diverse communities and responder groups.
- 3. Identification and adaptation of extra-jurisdictional practices.** Identify and evaluate international best practices for responding to and preventing mass victimization events and adapt these practices to align with Canada's unique cultural context.
- 4. Age, disability, and culturally appropriate supports.** Develop inclusive, age-appropriate, and culturally specific supports for mass victimization response that address the unique needs of children, older adults, persons with disabilities, and individuals with diverse intersectional identities, including Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, LGBTQ2SIA+ individuals, and those in rural or Northern regions.
- 5. Identification of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offering support services.** Include NGOs in response planning to provide victim-centred support, ensuring their effective integration into immediate, short-term, and long-term responses to mass victimization events. We do note, however, that there is a Directory of Victim Services, managed by Justice Canada, which lists over 800 victim services providers who work with victims of crime (<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/victims-victimes/vsd-rsv/index.html>).
- 6. Long-term aftermath of mass victimization events.** Develop and implement long-term support strategies that address the sustained physical, mental health, and psychosocial needs of victims, their families, witnesses, communities, and frontline responders in the aftermath of mass victimization events.

While mass victimization incidents are rare, their impact is profound – and, at times, preventable. By learning from the past, we can action more responsive, inclusive, and proactive responses that protect communities and support healing in the face of tragedy.

Background

Over the past fifty years, Canadians have been exposed to several mass victimization events. As a result, multiple resources have been developed to prevent and respond to such events. In addition, a limited body of research explores the impact of firearms legislation on mass victimization events. To date, however, there is no one document that summarizes the literature on mass victimization events in Canada.

To address this research gap, the Trauma and Recovery Research Unit at McMaster University was contracted to conduct a two-phased research project to gain an understanding of the different responses to mass victimization events in Canada that have occurred in the last 50 years. This research project has focused primarily on 1) response to victims when such events occur; and 2) prevention efforts aimed at reducing the likelihood of occurrence of such incidents. As set out in the Request for Proposal, we attempt to answer the following questions:

- Since the start of the 21st century, which mass victimization events have had inquiries/investigations/follow-up after the event to review how the response unfolded and to learn from what happened?
- What have we learned from these events and these post-event inquiries?
- What have been the primary learning tools in the aftermath of mass victimization events in Canada?
- With the characteristics of these events so different, what similarities run through them and the learnings?
- Ultimately, what can we take away as key priorities for decision-makers in the coming years?

In Phase 1 of the project, we conducted a rapid online literature review in which we identified existing academic and grey literature concerning such mass victimization events in Canada, as well as published works concerning subsequent inquiries related to these events.

In Phase 2, we carefully reviewed and analyzed the literature identified in our Phase 1 search. This review was conducted to identify any similar themes and/or differences between the following variables:

1. Type of mass victimization event
2. Sex and gender
3. Cultural and ethnic identity
4. Religion
5. Sexual orientation
6. Indigenous identity
7. Age

Methods

Search strategy, screening, and data extraction

A search for empirical research with respect to mass victimization events was conducted through reputable search engines including PsycINFO, PubMed, OMNI, Google Scholar, and the Canadian Disaster Database (Public Safety Canada, n.d.). An Advanced Google Search was then conducted for each mass victimization event, using the key terms outlined in Table 1. For each event, the first five Advanced Google pages were searched, and relevant information was extracted. In addition to searching the grey literature, Covidence was used to identify relevant published papers on mass victimization events in Canada since 1975.

Table 1 lists the general search terms. The search timeline occurred between March 4 – April 17, 2025, and Table 2 lists the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the search.

Table 1. General database search terms

Study terms	Search terms
Mass Victimization	Mass victimization, mass fatalities, mass deaths, mass shootings, mass stabbings, mass casualty, van attacks, shootings, stabbings
Canada	Canada, Canadian
Location	Ottawa, Saskatchewan, Vaughan, Moncton, New Brunswick, Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Portapique, Ontario, Quebec
Specific mass victimizations	Air India Flight 182, Ecole Polytechnique, Giant Mine, Vernon Massacre, Mayerthorpe, Ottawa shooting, Edmonton shooting, Moncton attack, Calgary stabbing, Quebec Mosque, Toronto van, Nova Scotia shooting, London truck, Vaughan condo
Lessons learned	learnings, lessons learned, recommendations, inquiry, policy

Table 2. Inclusionary and exclusionary search criteria

Inclusionary criteria	Exclusionary criteria
Canadian mass victimization event	Non-Canadian mass victimization event
Published in English	Published in languages other than English
Published between 1975-2025	Published before 1975
Lessons learned related to event i.e., formal inquiries and/or published lessons learned available to the public.	No lessons learned related to the event i.e., no formal inquiry documents and/or published lessons learned available to the public.

Resources for this report include federal and provincial inquiries, coroner inquests, judicial reports, and government publications, peer-reviewed articles, and non-government publications. A qualitative analysis was conducted to identify any lessons learned and/or recommendations about (1) effective strategies for responding to victims of mass victimization events, and (2) prevention strategies for different types of mass victimization events.

All lessons learned/recommendations presented in this report are quoted or paraphrased directly from the original source materials. No recommendations have been generated independently by the authors.

Results

In total, 15 mass victimization events were included in this report: The Air India Flight 182 Bombing (1985), the Ecole Polytechnique shooting (1989), the Giant Mine disaster (1992), the Vernon Massacre (1996), the Mayerthorpe tragedy (2005), the Ottawa shooting (2014), the Edmonton mass shooting (2014), the Moncton attack (2014), the Calgary stabbing (2014), the Renfrew County triple murder (2015), the Quebec Mosque shooting (2017), the Toronto van attack (2018), the Nova Scotia mass shooting (2020), the London truck attack (2021) and the James Smith Cree Nation stabbings (2022). Each of these events were included because they met all inclusion criteria. Please note that this report does not include all mass victimization events in Canada in the last 50 years, only the mass victimization events that met all inclusion criteria for this report.

These events, as tragic as they are, have brought to light valuable information that might help (1) better prevent future mass-victimization events, and (2) put in place strategies to better assist victims in the future.

Mass-victimization events and lessons learned

This section answers the following key questions:

- Since the start of the 21st century, which mass victimization events have had inquiries/investigations/follow-up after the event to review how the response unfolded and to learn from what happened?
- What have we learned from these events and these post-event inquiries?

A table of the recommendations/lessons learned from each event can be found in Appendix A.

Air India Flight 182 bombing (1985)

The Air India Flight 182 bombing was the deadliest aviation terror attack before September 11, 2001. On June 23, 1985, a bomb exploded onboard an aircraft flying from Montreal, Canada to Delhi, India, killing all 329 people on board, including 268 Canadian citizens (Public Safety Canada, 2022). The bombing was carried out by Sikh extremists, believed to be affiliated with the Babbar Khalsa, a Sikh militant organization. The motive was linked to retaliation for Operation Blue Star, a 1984 Indian military operation to remove militants from the Golden

Temple in Amritsar. The main suspect was Talwinder Singh Parmar, along with Inderjit Singh Reyat, the only person convicted in the case (Public Safety Canada, 2022).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

In a public Commission of Inquiry (the “Inquiry”), the Honourable John C. Major (2010) acknowledged that the Government of Canada and its agencies were not prepared for a terrorist bombing in 1985. Consequently, numerous mistakes and poor decisions were made during the investigation and legal proceedings following the bombing, such as:

- Conflicts between agencies;
- Confusion about who held jurisdiction and responsibilities in the investigation;
- Overall poor communication between the investigating parties notably the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the RCMP (Major, 2010).

The Inquiry made numerous recommendations to help prevent similar failures in the future (Major, 2010). These recommendations included:

- Enhancing the role of the National Security Advisor in the Privy Council Office to better coordinate across the many agencies that have national security responsibilities;
- Modernizing the collection and retention of evidence in CSIS to avoid destruction of potential evidence;
- Security measures be applied in mutually reinforcing layers to address all vulnerabilities in the system;
- Government and other responsible parties to close gaps in the civil aviation security system, particularly with respect to air cargo and airport security measures;
- Development of national risk management protocol that includes all major players in the security system (intelligence, law enforcement, transport, air carriers, contract services).

The Inquiry also made many recommendations specific to enhancing aviation security (Major, 2010). These included:

1. Improving oversight of aviation security in Canada through:
 - Compliance with international civil aviation standards
 - Establishing and implementing a single written National Civil Aviation Security Program
 - Coordination between all industry and government entities responsible for civil aviation
 - Ongoing assessment of threats to civil aviation, effective security measures, policies and practices, and establishing a culture of security awareness
 - Review of aviation security every five (5) years
2. Improving risk management through:
 - Transport Canada adopting a national risk management protocol
 - The Minister of Transport annually reviewing the civil aviation security regime
 - Ensuring there are no gaps in civil aviation security

- Transport Canada and others responsible for civil aviation security fostering a culture of security awareness and constant vigilance
3. Improving the use of intelligence by having Transport Canada provide timely, relevant and actionable intelligence information to civil aviation stakeholders
 4. Improving airport security by:
 - Improving non-passenger screening
 - Improving perimeter security
 - Searching all vehicles entering airside and restricted areas at Class 1 airports
 - Implementing the Restricted Area Identification Card at airports
 - Transport Canada to improve policies and procedures governing transportation security clearances
 - Developing and implementing security measures to protect public areas of airports
 5. Improving passenger and baggage screening
 6. Continually assessing screening technology and expanding the use of explosive detection dogs
 7. Ensuring the highest quality of screening through the effective use of qualified screening officers and contractors
 8. Implementing a comprehensive system for screening air cargo for transport
 9. Developing a public warning system for threats against airline

Victim-centred strategies

The absence of victim-centred actions and leadership following the Air India 182 bombing highlighted a lack of communication, support and intention towards victims (Major, 2010). The recovery of victims' remains was difficult, and in many cases, incomplete. In addition, the identification and claiming of bodies was poorly managed, causing further trauma for many families (Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, n.d.). The Inquiry concluded that "the families of the victims of the bombing were poorly treated by their Government" (Major, 2010, p. 38) and that the Canadian government appeared to be "dedicated to self-justification and denial of fault that led it to cast a blind eye and a deaf ear to the suffering and the needs of families" (Major, 2010, p. 38). The commission further concluded that the Government of Canada wrongly treated victims as adversaries (Major, 2010).

Consequently, the then RCMP Commissioner William Elliot, during the Inquiry, commented that part of the lessons learned from this event was that the "RCMP need to do a better job" in communicating with the public and with victims' families (Major, 2010, p. 55). In the 1990s, the RCMP opened a dialogue with groups representing the victims' families and held meetings to discuss the investigation.

Additionally, actions have been taken to support the victims and families. These include:

- Honouring and remembering victims through the creation of The Air India Flight 182 Archive online site. This site was created by McMaster University in partnership with victims' families, with the objective to educate the public about the grief and loss of

families, as well as preserve and honour the memories of those who were lost on Air India Flight 182 (McMaster University, n.d.).

- Creating Air India Victims' Families Association (AIVFA) support groups for victims' families and loved ones (Gupta, 2006). The AIVFA has engaged a variety of actions to support victims' families including:
 - Liaising with the RCMP and the Attorney General of British Columbia in connection to the Air India investigation and prosecution;
 - Lobbying for fair monetary settlements for families of the victims, a day of remembrance, the establishment of memorials across major Canadian cities, and the calling of a public inquiry (McMaster University, n.d.);
 - Identifying a legal team to represent the interests of victims' families at the public inquiry (McMaster University, n.d.).

Major (2010) noted that it is necessary to remain vigilant for potential risks such as community backlash, escalated violence, and tensions. These issues should be monitored closely and addressed proactively to ensure the safety and well-being of all parties involved (i.e., victims, witnesses, community members, etc.), particularly during legal proceedings or ongoing investigations.

École Polytechnique massacre (also known as the Montréal massacre, 1989)

On December 6, 1989, Marc Lépine entered the École Polytechnique engineering school armed with a semi-automatic rifle and a hunting knife. Over approximately 20 minutes, he murdered 14 women and injured 14 others (10 women and 4 men) before taking his own life. In his suicide note, Lépine explicitly expressed hatred toward women, particularly those in traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering. His actions have been widely interpreted as an act of misogynistic violence and anti-feminist terrorism (Boileau, 2020).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

The École Polytechnique tragedy led to major social and legislative initiatives:

- The House of Commons Sub-Committee on the Status of Women was established in response to the tragedy (Hooks, LeClerc & Beaujot, 2005).
- Victims' families in Québec formed a foundation to support anti-violence organizations.
- In 1995, the Québec government adopted the Policy on Intervention in Conjugal Violence to address and prevent domestic abuse (Canadian Criminal Justice Association, 2012).
- These efforts helped create the Coalition for Gun Control, which led to passage of:
 - Bill C-17 (1992)
 - Bill C-68 (1995)

Both bills were introduced to ensure the implementation of new gun control measures, which included:

- Mandatory safety courses and background checks
- 28-day waiting period for new applicants
- Firearm registration and licensing
- Safe storage rules and ammunition controls
- Reclassification of certain firearms as restricted or prohibited (Canadian Criminal Justice Association, 2012)

Despite progress since the shooting in 1989, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) notes that gender-based violence continues with growing threats on Canadian university campuses, particularly to marginalized groups. Consequently, OCUFA recommends:

- Confronting sexism, discrimination against trans individuals, and gender-related violence in educational settings (e.g., college campuses) using trauma-informed approaches
- Implementing enhanced campus safety measures
- Advancing education on gender-based violence
- Involving faculty associations and unions in prevention efforts (Narain, 2023)

Giant Mine disaster (1992)

In 1992, the Canadian Auto Workers Local 4 at the Giant Mine in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories was striking against the mine's owner, Royal Oak Mines Inc., protesting issues such as wages, job security, and working conditions. The company's decision to bring in replacement workers fueled tensions and intensified the conflict. On September 18, 1992, a bomb planted in an underground tunnel exploded, killing nine replacement workers as they descended into the mine for their shift. The device had been triggered by a tripwire. In 1995, Roger Warren, a former miner and striking worker, confessed to planting the bomb (Foot, 2016).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

Following the Giant Mine bombing in 1992, survivors and families of the victims sued the mine's security firm, the territorial government, and the union, claiming they were negligent and failed to prevent the tragedy. In response, Justice Thomas A. Cromwell of the Supreme Court of Canada conducted a comprehensive analysis of the case (Supreme Court of Canada, 2010).

While the majority of the court's findings focused on questions of liability, the judgment also touched on potential prevention strategies, particularly regarding the role of the mine inspectors (Supreme Court of Canada, 2010):

- Inspectors are responsible for conducting regular site visits to ensure compliance with safety regulations.

- When those regulations are violated, inspectors have the authority to suspend operations until necessary corrective actions are taken by management.
- Inspectors identify and address all foreseeable risks to workers' health and safety, reinforcing their duty to act proactively to prevent harm before it occurs.

At the time of the incident, the *Mining Safety Act* primarily addressed risks associated with equipment failure or hazardous working conditions and did not explicitly extend to criminal acts such as violence during labour strikes (Supreme Court of Canada, 2010). As a result, inspectors were not legally mandated to intervene or prevent violence-related threats within the mine, and their focus remained solely on mining operational safety concerns. In the aftermath of the bombing, calls were made to broaden the inspectors' mandate to include oversight of any conduct—whether by management, coworkers, or third parties—that could endanger workers' safety (Supreme Court of Canada, 2010).

Vernon massacre (1996)

On April 5, 1996, Mark Chahal entered a residence in Vernon, British Columbia and killed his estranged wife, Rajwar Gakhal, along with eight members of her family. He later took his own life in a now-closed motel. The tragic incident occurred after reports from Gakhal to police and those around her about the physical abuse she had experienced at the hands of her estranged husband (Global News, 2013).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

An inquest into the Vernon massacre made 29 recommendations to the provincial and federal governments, police and other groups (Ministry of the Attorney General (BC), 1996).

Recommendations included:

- Providing more sophisticated interviewing, investigative and prosecution training opportunities for police, Crown counsel and victim service workers who deal with violence against women in relationships.
- Exploring new and better tools that can be used by police and victim assistance workers to ensure all evidence is gathered, assessed and presented. For example, the Ministry will develop a risk assessment tool for use with victims to help them fully recognize and assess their safety requirements.
- Developing strategies to link police computer data systems so that complaints from different jurisdictions involving the same complainant can be shared.
- Strengthening the screening process for obtaining firearms licenses in B.C.:
 - Ensuring that all firearms officers in B.C. are fully trained in screening applicants for firearms permits.
 - In consultation with the Ministry of Health and the B.C. Medical Association, investigating legislation to ensure adequate screening of an applicant's mental health.

- With the Ministry of Health, reviewing models of crisis services for assaultive men to develop cost-effective strategies for providing prevention and early intervention programs.
- Urging the federal solicitor general to integrate B.C.'s Violence Against Women in Relationships policy into the RCMP's national Violence in Relationships policy so that RCMP officers nationwide will receive training on issues of gender in relation to violence in relationships.
- Recommending to the federal Solicitor General, Minister of Justice and municipal chiefs of police:
 - Officers' inquiries concerning violence against women be linked on police information systems so that this information is available provincewide.
 - Police agencies consult with the present or former spouse or intimate partner of an applicant for restricted weapons permits and transport permits.
 - Up-to-date gun permit information be made available electronically throughout the province.

Mayerthorpe shooting (2005)

On March 3, 2005, four RCMP officers were fatally shot in Mayerthorpe, Alberta while investigating a marijuana grow-op and a stolen vehicle operation on a rural property belonging to James Roszko. Roszko had a long history of violence, threats, and encounters with law enforcement. The RCMP had secured the property the day before the incident and were monitoring it while awaiting the next steps in the investigation. Unbeknownst to them, Roszko had returned to his property in the early morning, evading detection. At approximately 10 AM, he ambushed the officers and fatally shot all four with a semi-automatic rifle before taking his own life (Pahl, 2011).

Lessons learned

Victim-centred strategies

In his post-incident report submitted under the *Fatality Inquiries Act* to Alberta's Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Assistant Chief Judge Daniel R. Pahl recommended the RCMP develop an Emergency Medical Response Team (EMRT) program, which would integrate trained paramedics into RCMP Emergency Response Teams (ERT). This measure would help ensure timely medical assistance for injured officers during high-risk operations, potentially saving lives in future incidents (Pahl, 2011).

Prevention-centred strategies

Pahl's report also offered several recommendations aimed at preventing similar tragedies. These recommendations include that the RCMP (Pahl, 2011):

- Implement a formal threat assessment system to guarantee immediate and comprehensive access to background information prior to any operation. In the Mayerthorpe tragedy, officers lacked crucial knowledge about the perpetrator's violent history, which compromised the safety and effectiveness of the operation;

- Detachments should appoint a Threat Assessment Coordinator (TAC) to manage threat-related files and ensure regular briefings for all personnel, especially new members;
- Develop detailed scene security protocols. These guidelines should consider factors such as an individual's criminal history and known access to firearms, as well as environmental conditions (e.g., urban vs. rural, fenced vs. open). Commanders should also assess personnel needs, required equipment, communication strategies, vehicles, and available weapons. A standardized checklist would ensure that all operational considerations are addressed;
- Create an Active Shooter Response Program to provide officers with timely access to appropriate weapons and training for handling high-threat situations;
- Invest in the development of improved body armor that balances protection with functionality.

Calgary stabbings/Brentwood tragedy (2014)

While attending a house party on April 15, 2014, university student Matthew de Grood retrieved a large knife and fatally stabbed five fellow university students. During his trial in May 2016, de Grood was found not criminally responsible due to a mental disorder (schizophrenia) which had triggered a psychotic episode at the time of the attack (Conlon, 2014).

Lessons learned

Victim-centred strategies

The University of Calgary implemented responses to support the mental health needs of its community after the events of April 15, 2014. As noted by the University president and vice-chancellor (Cannon, 2015), these responses included:

- Offering 24-hour counseling and grief support to students, staff, and faculty through the Wellness Centre
- Rescheduling exams for students who asked for this
- Reaching out to families and students who were witnesses to provide support

Prevention-centred strategies

As a result of the Calgary stabbings, the University of Calgary (University of Calgary, 2021) has implemented strategies designed to prevent similar events or to reduce the harm caused during such an event.

- Amending the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy to include prohibited conduct. Such conduct is explicitly outlined relating to the protection of individuals, the protection of property, protecting university functions, activities and services, providing false information and identification, possession of dangerous objects, drugs or alcohol, aiding in the commission of an offence, contravention of other laws and university policies, and failure to comply with a sanction (University of Calgary, 2021).
- Creating a video and infographic outlining how to react if there is an active assailant on campus (University of Calgary, 2025a). Three essential courses of action are identified:

i) Run (getting out if it is safe); ii) Hide (if you can't escape safely, hide in a safe spot and keep quiet); and iii) Fight (only as a last-resort response).

- Creating UCalgary Strong initiative. The aims of this initiative are to equip students with the skills they need to be grounded leaders, to help to build a cohesive community, and to develop personal resiliency in students to cope with the university life stressors (University of Calgary, 2025b). This also includes an annual festival that is meant to be an inclusive space that brings the campus community together to celebrate the last day of classes.
- Creating a Mental Health Task Force to develop a comprehensive strategy on mental health (University of Calgary, 2015). The resulting Mental Health Strategy comprises six interconnected focus areas: 1) raising awareness and promoting well-being; 2) developing resilience and self-management; 3) enhancing early identification and response; 4) providing direct services and support; 5) aligning institutional policies, processes and procedures; and 6) creating and sustaining a supportive campus environment.

Moncton attack (2014)

On June 4, 2014, in Moncton, New Brunswick, 24-year-old Justin Bourque launched a targeted attack against RCMP officers. Over approximately 28 hours, Bourque shot five officers, killing three and injuring two. Bourque's actions were fueled by anti-government sentiments and a desire to incite rebellion against what he perceived as an oppressive Canadian government. On June 6, Bourque was apprehended and later sentenced to 75 years in prison without parole (RCMP, 2014a).

Lessons learned

Victim-centred strategies

Following the shooting, the RCMP implemented a wide range of support services for those directly affected by the shootings (RCMP, 2014a; RCMP, 2014b; RCMP, 2016). Acknowledging the intense psychological toll of the event, the RCMP developed several initiatives to provide both immediate and long-term emotional support.

- Introduced the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Guide which outlined aftercare services such as counseling for officers, their families, and volunteers. In partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada, the RCMP also offered ongoing mental health support to ensure continuous care for affected personnel and families.
- Introduced the Revised Fallen Members Guide, which offered clear guidance on survivor benefits, regimental funeral procedures, and related supports.
- Established a dedicated CISM Team composed of psychologists and trained peer support staff. The introduction of the Post-Action Staff Support (PASS) program ensured that officers who participated in initial debriefings received follow-up mental health support.

Prevention-centred strategies

The MacNeil Report, an independent review led by Justice Michel P. MacNeil, highlighted several areas for improvement in the RCMP's response to the shooting (RCMP, 2014a; RCMP, 2014b; RCMP, 2017). These included:

- Urgent need for enhanced officer training specifically tailored to active shooter scenarios, ensuring that RCMP members are better prepared to respond effectively under high-risk conditions;
- Improving resource allocation, including access to appropriate equipment and tactical support, to reduce vulnerability during such incidents;
- Stronger inter-agency collaboration, noting that more effective coordination between law enforcement and emergency services is essential for timely and efficient responses to large-scale threats.

Ottawa shooting (2014)

On October 22, 2014, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau shot and killed Corporal Nathan Cirillo, a Canadian military member standing guard at the National War Memorial. Zehaf-Bibeau then entered the Centre Block of the Canadian Parliament building and opened fire, injuring two and causing chaos and panic. The Parliamentary Protective Service and RCMP responded quickly, ultimately shooting and killing Zehaf-Bibeau. It was later revealed that the perpetrator had been experiencing personal difficulties, including financial problems, and had shown signs of radicalization. Some sources indicated he had expressed interest in extremist ideologies, although his precise reasons for the attack were never fully determined (Goldmeier, 2023).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

Following the shooting, a range of educational and security measures were implemented to enhance prevention and public safety.

Educational Measures: The Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre (ACLRC) developed a curriculum titled *Beyond Blame* for secondary school students with the aim to reduce prejudice, prevent hate crimes, and promote understanding of the diverse beliefs that exist within ethnic and religious communities (ACLRC, 2017). The program:

- Addresses the dangers of assigning collective blame in the aftermath of terrorist attacks;
- Addresses the common challenge of differentiating between the violent actions and beliefs of individuals and those of others who share similar religious or ethnic backgrounds;
- Specifically targets young adults, who often struggle to process tragic events and may be more susceptible to harmful generalizations;
- Strives to foster a more just and inclusive society through youth engagement.

Security Measures: The House of Commons Protective Service conducted a comprehensive review of its security procedures in 2015 (House of Commons, 2015). Although the review found that many best practices were followed, it also identified areas for significant improvement, and the following was implemented:

- Improved operational and security coordination between the Senate, House of Commons, and the RCMP
- Enhanced radio communication systems for better coordination among security personnel during emergencies
- Equipped Protective Service members with firearms to improve their response capabilities
- Strengthened security awareness program, including regular drills, to prepare parliamentarians and staff for similar future incidents
- Tightened access to Parliament Hill, with increased visitor screening, restrictions on after-hours access, and limitations on bag sizes
- Increased visibility of security personnel at key entry points

Additionally, the RCMP's After Action Review (2015) noted the following limitations for preparedness/prevention and gave subsequent recommendations:

- Lack of Joint Training Exercises for law enforcement and security service providers to the Parliamentary Precinct
- Inability for first responders to deliver urgent trauma care in critical incidents
- Inability to conduct mass evacuations on the grounds of Parliament Hill and confusion surrounding access and evacuation routes within the Parliamentary Precinct

Edmonton mass shooting (2014)

The December 2014 Edmonton shooting, carried out by Phu Lam, resulted in the deaths of eight individuals, including Lam's wife, child, and several other family members. The attack was the tragic culmination of a longstanding pattern of domestic abuse. The perpetrator had a documented history of domestic violence, including threats and physical assault earlier that year, which ultimately escalated into murder (Family Violence Death Review Committee (FVDRC), 2021).

Lessons learned

Victim-centred strategies

This incident underscored the severe consequences of domestic violence and brought renewed attention to the limitations of existing support systems, particularly for immigrant families who may have different cultural understandings of abuse and fewer resources to seek help. In the aftermath, the Alberta government and various agencies initiated a review to examine the events leading up to the shootings (FVDRC, 2021). These efforts focused on:

- Addressing systemic gaps in the response to family violence through coordinated investigations;
- Improving service coordination among government and community agencies;
- Focusing on immigrant families who may face unique cultural and resource-related challenges in seeking help;

- Enhancing support systems to better protect individuals at risk of domestic violence.

Prevention-centred strategies

As part of the broader investigation, the FVDRC (2021) emphasized the importance of public education as a preventative tool. They recommended:

- Mandatory use of an objective, reliable and consistent domestic violence risk assessment tool during all intake and investigation;
- Expanding best practices training for healthcare workers providing care to suspected perpetrators and/or victims of family violence (including identifying risk factors and warning signs, duty to report, identifying and providing referrals for services and supports);
- A public education campaign as a proactive tool against family violence, including:
 - Developing culturally appropriate materials in multiple languages
 - Distributing resources through community hubs in partnership with local organizations
 - Informing the public about high-risk behaviors and warning signs of domestic violence
 - Empowering individuals and communities to recognize and respond to abuse early.

Renfrew County triple murder (2015)

On September 22, 2015, Basil Borutski murdered three women—all of whom were former intimate partners—in Renfrew County, Ontario. Borutski had an established history of intimate partner violence (IPV), probation violations, and prior convictions. The incident highlighted significant systemic issues in the monitoring and management of high-risk offenders. A coroner's inquest held in June 2022 examined the events leading up to the killings and issued 86 recommendations aimed at preventing future IPV-related tragedies (Lanark County Interval House and Community Support (LCIH), n.d.).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

The Renfrew County tragedy led to a multitude of prevention-centred strategies which included (Ontario Chief Coroner, 2022):

- Formally declaring intimate partner violence as an epidemic;
- Ensuring that IPV issues are addressed using an all-of-government approach across ministries, and cooperate and coordinate with federal, provincial, and territorial partners in seeking to end IPV;
- Encouraging that IPV be integrated into every municipality's community safety and well-being plan;

- Studying and, if feasible, implementing a system to allow justice sector participants access to relevant family and civil court findings in criminal cases, including at bail and sentencing, with clear guidelines on access, use, and information-sharing;
- Requiring all police services to immediately inform the Chief Firearms Officer (CFO) of IPV-related charges after they are laid, and provide any relevant records, including Firearms Interest Police information;
- Creating a universal records management system accessible to all Ontario police services and key IPV stakeholders to ensure consistent sharing and updating of IPV-related information;
- Conducting annual reviews of public attitudes on IPV and updating education materials based on research, expert input, and best practices;
- Using and building on existing age-appropriate education programs for primary and secondary schools, and universities and colleges. Such programs should include violence prevention, recognizing healthy and abusive relationships, identifying subtle indicators of coercive control, understanding risk factors (e.g., stalking), managing and processing feelings, dispute resolution, community and bystander obligations, the need for safety planning and risk management, and the unique experiences in rural and urban settings;
- Providing professional education and training for justice system personnel on IPV related issues;
- Providing specialized and enhanced training of police officers with a goal of developing an IPV specialist in each police detachment.

Measures addressing perpetrators of IPV:

- Establishing a province-wide 24/7 hotline for men who need support to prevent them from engaging in IPV;
- Providing services aimed at addressing perpetrators of IPV (e.g., group-based interventions, in-custody IPV programs, etc.);
- Supporting IPV service providers by funding training, supervision, and mental health resources to strengthen perpetrator intervention work;
- Removing barriers and improving early, repeated access to community-based services for IPV perpetrators to promote accountability and engagement;
- As new services are funded, including aims and outcomes associated with building an underlying network of specialized services to address IPV perpetration and developing messaging around its availability;
- Ensuring that IPV-related public education campaigns address IPV perpetration and should include men's voices, represent men's experiences, and prompt men to seek help to address their own abusive behaviours;
- Addressing risk factors for IPV by reducing perpetrators' financial, housing, and mental health instability—especially in rural areas;
- Exploring amending the *Family Law Act*, following meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including survivors and IPV service providers, to provide authority to order counselling for the perpetrator where IPV findings are made by the family court

- Developing a standardized IPV risk assessment framework through consultation, grounded in victim-centred, trauma-informed, and evidence-based principles;
- Co-training justice system personnel and IPV service providers on the risk assessment framework and tools so that there is a common understanding of the framework and tools for those who support or deal with survivors;
- Clarifying and enhancing the use of high-risk committees (e.g., by strengthening provincial guidelines by identifying high-risk cases that should be referred to committee);
- Setting policies to exclude high-risk individuals or those accused of strangulation from early intervention and requiring Crowns to consider IPV history regardless of convictions;
- Ensuring that OPP conduct a study on improving tactical response timelines as it applies to rural environments generally and in IPV cases;
- Setting up satellite offices for police officers to work safely and comfortably to spread police resources more evenly over wide rural areas;
- Encouraging Crowns to consult with the Regional Designated High-Risk Offender Crown for any case of IPV involving a high-risk offender that may meet the criteria for dangerous or long-term offender designations;
- Strengthening annual education for Crowns regarding applications for dangerous and long-term offender designations in high-risk IPV cases;
- Commissioning a comprehensive, independent, and evidence-based review of the mandatory charging framework employed in Ontario, with a view to assessing its effect on IPV rates and recidivism, with particular attention to any unintended negative consequences;
- Conducting study of judges' decisions in IPV cases and tracking in longitudinal studies for recidivism, violence escalation, and future victims;
- Reviewing and updating bail and probation condition templates in IPV cases and create a risk-based framework in collaboration with justice and community stakeholders;
- Requiring that primary actors advise the CFO in a timely manner of expected and changed residential addresses of individuals who have been placed under weapons conditions;
- When evaluating the suitability of a prospective surety in IPV cases, Crowns should make inquiries as to whether residential sureties have firearms in their home or a Possession and Acquisition License (PAL);
- Developing a process, in consultation with the judiciary, to confirm that release conditions are properly documented;
- Ensuring that probation services reviews and, if necessary, develops standardized protocols and policies for probation officers with respect to intake of IPV offenders and with respect to victim safety;
- Reviewing the mandate of probation services to prioritize condition compliance, victim safety, offender rehabilitation;
- Establishing consistent guidelines for PAL decisions that prioritize IPV risk factors, mandating automatic PAL reviews upon IPV charges, requiring timely updates from applicants, and amending forms to disclose surety status (addressed to the Chief Firearms Officer);

- Strengthening Ontario's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee's (DVDRC) mandate and support, ensuring timely and free online publication of its reports and responses, and considering recognizing femicide as a manner of death category (addressed to the Office of the Chief Coroner);
- Working together with the Ontario DVDRC, justice partners and IPV service providers, to develop a plain language tool to empower IPV professionals to make informed decisions about privacy, confidentiality, and public safety (addressed to the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario);
- Exploring adding "Femicide" to the Criminal Code and consider amending dangerous offender provisions or creating a new offender classification to better address IPV-related risks and violence (addressed to the Government of Canada);
- Implementing the National Action Plan on Gender-based Violence in a timely manner.
- Including "coercive control", as defined in the *Divorce Act*, as a criminal offence on its own or as a type of assault under s. 265 of the *Criminal Code*.

Victim-centred strategies

The Renfrew County tragedy led to a multitude of victim-centred strategies (Ontario Chief Coroner, 2022) which included:

- Establishing an independent IPV Commission with authority, stable funding, and a mandate to advocate for survivors, raise awareness, ensure accountability, and work toward eradicating IPV;
- Creating the role of a Survivor Advocate to advocate on behalf of survivors regarding their experience in the justice system;
- Requiring that all justice system participants who work with IPV survivors and perpetrators are trained and engage in a trauma-informed approach to interacting and dealing with survivors and perpetrators;
- Exploring incorporating restorative justice and community-based approaches in dealing with appropriate IPV cases to ensure safety and best outcomes for survivors;
- Ensuring that survivors and those assisting survivors have direct and timely communication with probation officers to assist in safety planning;
- Reviewing and improving policies for timely, accurate public safety alerts, ensuring information is shared effectively—especially in areas with limited cell service;
- Establishing clear guidelines regarding the flagging of perpetrators or potential IPV victims in police databases, immediate dispatch and police access to the identities and contact information of potential targets, and how to notify those targets;
- Establishing a low-barrier emergency fund (e.g., "She C.A.N Fund") to provide financial support of up to \$7,000 for women experiencing IPV, with special consideration for rural survivors, no impact on social assistance, and annualized, sustainable funding;
- Reforming IPV service funding to provide consistent, equitable, and sustainable support across Ontario to prioritize flexible funding that reflects rural needs, reduces administrative burden, and ensures resources for survivor safety, staff wellbeing, and perpetrator intervention programs;
- Developing a plan for enhanced second-stage housing for IPV survivors;

- Funding for “safe rooms” to be installed in survivors’ homes in high-risk cases;
- Developing and implementing inclusive public education campaigns on IPV that highlight support options, warning signs, and community involvement, with messaging tailored to rural communities and delivered in multiple languages and formats;
- Ensuring that survivor-informed risk assessments are incorporated into the decisions and positions taken by Crowns relating to bail, pleas, sentencing, and eligibility for Early Intervention Programs;
- Studying and developing legislation enabling disclosure of an IPV perpetrator’s history to potential partners, drawing on models like *Clare’s Law*, and creating an interim draft policy to guide disclosures;
- Setting up IPV Registry for repeat IPV offenders like the *Sex Offender Information Registration Act* registry;
- Exploring the implementation of electronic monitoring to enable the tracking of those charged or found guilty of an IPV-related offence and enabling the notification of authorities and survivors if the individual enters a prohibited area relating to a survivor;
- Starting grassroots “Safe Spaces” program that businesses can participate in where survivors can feel safe and ask for information (i.e. pamphlets and handouts from women’s shelters, Victim/Witness Assistance Program (VWAP) and men’s programs);
- In referrals made by the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) to Victim Services, ensuring adequate information is provided, including relevant history, safety concerns and known risk factors;
- Expanding cell service and high-speed internet in rural and remote areas of Ontario to improve safety and access to services;
- Enhancing court supports for IPV survivors and developing an IPV-focused model for criminal courts like the Family Court Support Worker Program. Consideration should be given to the independent legal advice program for survivors of sexual violence as a model for IPV survivors;
- Ensuring Crowns actively oppose variation requests to have firearms returned for any purpose, such as hunting;
- Ensuring probation officers conduct timely and ongoing risk assessments, enforce conditions appropriate to risk levels, maintain regular communication with survivors about the offender’s status, and prioritize survivor safety in all supervision and enforcement decisions;
- Requiring probation officers to clearly communicate and document expectations for offenders to enable consistent enforcement and make this a focus of performance oversight;
- Ensuring collaboration between corrections and probation staff to improve rehabilitation and risk management services. Consideration should be given to two-way information sharing including of case notes, and opportunities to order treatment in institutions for those with existing probation orders who are on remand;
- Ensuring the Chief Firearms Officer works with relevant partners to review and improve the Spousal Support Line by renaming it for broader accessibility, ensuring 24/7 staffing, and increasing public and police awareness;

- Undertaking an analysis of the application of s. 264 of the *Criminal Code* with a view to evaluating whether the existing factors adequately capture the impact on survivors
Consider the removal of the subjective requirement that the action causes the victim to fear for their safety;
- Considering finding alternate means for survivors to attend and testify in court, such as by video conferencing;
- Establishing a Royal Commission to review and recommend changes to the criminal justice system to make it more victim-centric, more responsive to root causes of crime and more adaptable as society evolves;
- The parties to this inquest should reconvene one year following the verdict to discuss the progress in implementing these recommendations.

Quebec City Mosque shooting (2017)

On January 29, 2017, Alexandre Bissonnette opened fire during evening prayers at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City, killing six men and injuring five others. Bissonnette fled the scene but surrendered shortly afterward. He was later sentenced to life in prison. The attack, widely condemned as an act of terrorism, was motivated by Bissonnette's anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim views, influenced by far-right ideologies (Plante, 2018).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

The Government of Canada created the Action Plan on Combating Hate as a result of hate-motivated crimes and terrorist attacks, including the Quebec City Mosque Attack, the Toronto van attack, and the London terrorist attack (Government of Canada, 2024). This document lays the foundation to prevent and confront hate in Canadian communities. Canada's Action Plan on Combatting Hate has three main priorities for action through three priority areas: i) Pillar 1: Empower communities to identify and prevent hate; ii) Pillar 2: Support victims and survivors and protect communities; and iii) Pillar 3: Build community trust, partnerships, and institutional readiness (Government of Canada, 2024).

To prevent hate crimes like the mosque attack in Ottawa specifically, the Action Plan highlights the following strategies:

- Increase community security funding: Support religious and cultural institutions by funding safety infrastructure and emergency preparedness
- Empower communities: Fund grassroots organizations to counter hate, racism, and discrimination locally
- Combat online hate: Develop legislation to address harmful content on digital platforms and support media literacy programs
- Improve data collection: Enhance the tracking of hate incidents to better understand and respond to emerging threats
- Strengthen public education: Promote anti-hate education and inclusive narratives in schools and public institutions

Victim-centred strategies

Pillar 2 of Canada's Action Plan on Combatting Hate, which was launched in 2024, acknowledges that there are gaps and inconsistencies in available services for victims and survivors of hate-motivated crime, and focuses on providing resources to victims, survivors and communities to confront and address hate. Examples of victim-centred strategies include:

- Financial assistance: Budget 2024 announced \$28 million over six years to enhance provincial and territorial victim compensation programs through the Justice Canada Victims Fund. This funding aims to enhance financial assistance or compensation to victims of hate-motivated crimes, covering costs such as medical expenses, counseling, and other supports (Government of Canada, 2024).
- Enhanced victim services: Provide victims of hate crimes with comprehensive support, including psychological counseling, legal assistance, medical attention, and help navigating the criminal justice system (Ndegwa and McDonald, 2023).
- Community-based support: Establishing safe spaces and support networks within communities helps victims regain a sense of security. Engaging with community organizations can provide culturally sensitive support and foster resilience (Ndegwa and McDonald, 2023).
- Training for legal professionals: Budget 2024 allocated \$1.5 million over five years to develop specialized training for Crown prosecutors and raise awareness within the judiciary about the unique legal dynamics of hate crimes (Government of Canada, 2024).

Toronto van attack (2018)

On April 23, 2018, Alek Minassian deliberately drove a rented van onto the sidewalks along Yonge Street in Toronto's North York area (Rozdilsky & Snowden, 2021). Over approximately 10 minutes, he struck numerous pedestrians, killing 10 people and injuring 16 others. The victims were predominately women. Minassian was associated with the "incel" (involuntary celibate) movement, an online subculture known for its misogynistic views. He praised past attackers and cited a desire to spark an "incel rebellion." He was arrested on the same day (Rozdilsky & Snowden, 2021).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

In their analysis of the Toronto van attack, Rozdilsky and Snowden (2021) assessed the susceptibility of the location to such attacks. Specifically, they note that urban planning can play a crucial role in prevention. Using the FBI's Terrorism Self-Assessment Checklist, they found that the design of Yonge Street contributed to the attack's severity, identifying it as a "soft target" with wide, unobstructed sidewalks and minimal physical barriers. They recommended implementing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies to "harden" potential targets and reduce vulnerabilities. Rozdilsky and Snowden highlighted the urban design process adopted by Saskatoon, Saskatchewan that included 14 principles of CPTED, namely territoriality, natural surveillance, access control, image, conflicting user groups, activity

support, crime generators, land use mix, movement predictors, displacement, cohesion, connectivity, capacity, and culture.

Victim-centred strategies

In the aftermath of the Toronto van attack, the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) emphasized the need for timely, trauma-informed support for victims and their families given that such events can have emotional, psychological, physical, and financial impacts (CRCVC, 2019). Consequently, the CRCVC recommended that communities prepare comprehensive victim assistance plans that:

- account for both visible and invisible injuries, such as emotional trauma, hearing loss, and brain injuries;
- include compensation schemes that are accessible and responsive, consider long-term impacts and age-related needs;
- involve social workers or advocates, as needed, to help navigate challenges and support recovery (CRCVC, 2018).

Although not a response to the Toronto Van Attack specifically, the CRCVC (2018) highlighted the US Office for Victims of Crime (2004) best practice document for pre-crisis preparedness, immediate response, and longer-term responses.

Nova Scotia mass shooting (2020)

The 2020 Nova Scotia mass shooting stands as the deadliest mass killing in Canadian history, claiming the lives of 22 people over a 13-hour period on April 18–19, 2020. Gabriel Wortman began his attack in Portapique, Nova Scotia, on April 18, setting fires and fatally shooting multiple victims. The violence continued into April 19, as Wortman, disguised as a police officer and driving a replica RCMP vehicle, targeted additional victims across the province. Wortman was later confronted and fatally shot by the RCMP in Enfield, Nova Scotia. Most of the victims were selected at random, although some had prior connections to the perpetrator. While the exact motive remains unknown, Wortman's history of domestic violence is widely considered a contributing factor (Rozdilsky & Snowden, 2021; Hill, 2022).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

An independent public inquiry, the Mass Casualty Commission, was established to investigate the Nova Scotia mass shooting and offer recommendations to improve public safety. The final report (the "Report") spans approximately 3,000 pages and is publicly available.

Recommendations from the Mass Casualty Commission encapsulate multiple themes. We include relevant recommendations for these themes below.

Violence Prevention: The Report provides recommendations for addressing gender-based violence and integrating mass casualty responses with strategies addressing gender-based violence (Cunliffe, 2023). As noted by Cunliffe, evidence shows perpetrators of mass violence often have a history of IPV, suggesting such tragedies may be foreseeable if earlier red flags

are acted upon. The following recommendations were included in the Report (Mass Casualty Commission, 2023).

- Strategies for prevention of mass casualty incidents adopt a public health approach;
- Governments work with and support community-based groups and experts to develop and deliver prevention materials and social awareness programs that counter victim blaming and hyper-responsibilization of women survivors of gender-based violence;
- Federal government develop a common framework for women-centric risk assessments;
- Creation of safe spaces to report violence;
- Replacement of mandatory arrest and charging policies and protocols for IPV offences with frameworks for structured decision-making by police;
- Expanding the National Framework for Collaborative Police Action on IPV;
- Adopting and prioritizing women-centred strategies and actions to prevent, intervene in, and respond to gender-based violence;
- Establishing a National Accountability Framework with independent and impartial gender-based violence commissioner.

Community Safety and Wellbeing: The Report called for a shift towards a collaborative community safety and well-being approach to keep Canadian communities safe (Public Safety Canada, 2024). Recommendations are made for integrative approaches to community safety and improved preparedness and coordination among sectors during crises (Public Safety Canada, 2024). The Report includes the following recommendations to improve community safety and wellbeing (Mass Casualty Commission, 2023):

- Including rural communities more directly in decision-making processes to ensure fair access to safety resources and infrastructure;
- Establishing a National Resource Hub for mass casualty responses
- Reviewing public emergency alerting system;
- Creating a statutory framework designed to support and enhance community safety and well-being in every province and territory;
- Developing and implementing gender-based violence and bystander intervention awareness and education campaigns.

Gun Control policies: As noted in the Report, the perpetrator's pattern of violent and intimidating behaviours and illegal acquisition of firearms provided numerous red flags that were missed opportunities for prevention and intervention (Public Safety Canada, 2024). The Report highlights that Canada's existing firearms regime be evaluated in relation in conjunction with other aspects of public and community safety systems and recommends the following (Public Safety Canada, 2024; Mass Casualty Commission, 2023):

- Revoking licenses for those convicted of domestic violence;
- Suspending licenses for those suspected of violent behaviors, even if not yet convicted;
- Enhancing border controls to reduce gun trafficking;
- Strengthening firearms regulation enforcement;
- Applying a public health approach to gun violence prevention.

Victim-centred strategies

Many recommendations were made regarding victim-centred strategies as the result of the Nova Scotia shootings.

Policing reforms to support victims: The Report called for a fundamental shift in the way policing is structured and delivered (Public Safety Canada, 2024). As part of this shift, the Report outlined recommendations for supporting survivors and affected persons during mass casualty events (Mass Casualty Commission, 2023).

- RCMP and other police service adopt policies recognizing a duty of care in the provision of services to survivors and affected persons.
- RCMP and other police communicate with survivors and affected persons pursuant to trauma-informed and victim-centred principles, and that they receive the education, mentoring and support required to integrate these principles effectively.
- Holdback of information for investigative purposes be limited in time and scope to that which is truly necessary to protect investigative integrity.
- The RCMP update its description of the role and responsibilities of family liaison officers in consultation.
- The RCMP review and revise its next of kin notification policy and protocols and design an education module to facilitate its implementation.

Policing system reforms for working with victims: In addition to the recommendations for working and supporting with survivors and affected persons, the Report also recommended system reforms that would improve their ability to work with and support survivors and affected persons during mass casualty events (Mass Casualty Commission, 2023).

- Critical incident command groups to include a member dedicated solely to victim management and that the critical incident plan include a victim crisis response component to meet the information needs of survivors and affected persons during a major event or emergency.
- The victim crisis response should include: a dedicated telephone line for individuals seeking information about family or friends; a website platform; a multidisciplinary victim response team; and protocols and guidelines, including for the establishment of a family assistance centre.
- The time standard for mobilizing the victim management response plan should be 90 minutes from the time a critical incident response is activated.
- Victim management response should be a component of annual table-top critical incident response preparedness exercises.
- When an active threat to the public exists, police agencies should share the best available information about the nature of the threat and how to remain safe with the public as soon as possible.
- Establishing a phone line and website that can be used by community members to report non-urgent information during a critical incident and to obtain further information about how to respond to a public warning.

Community mental health: The Report made a number of recommendations to support Canadians' mental health both during a mass victimization event and generally (Mass Casualty Commission, 2023):

- Federal, provincial, and territorial governments should develop a national action plan to promote better integration of preventive and supportive mental health care into the Canadian healthcare system.
- Developing a public education and awareness campaign to foster greater literacy about grief, bereavement, trauma, and resiliency.
- Developing a national policy, protocols, and program to provide a range of health and social support services required by those most affected by a mass casualty.

As outlined by Cunliffe (2023), key barriers that prevent victims from reporting gender-based and intimate partner violence include lack of trust in law enforcement, widespread disbelief of women's accounts, and an insufficient understanding of trauma within police services.

Recommendations to address these barriers included:

- Strengthening collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to implement public education programs that combat victim-blaming and promote trauma-informed practices among both the public and law enforcement (Public Safety Canada, 2024).
- Improving access to justice by ensuring that survivors' voices are meaningfully included throughout legal processes (Cunliffe, 2023).
- Centring survivors and professionals who work directly with them in community safety planning, risk assessments, and funding decisions, as their lived experience offers critical insight for more effective and responsive policy development (Cunliffe, 2023).

In her expert report as part of the Joint Federal/Provincial Commission into the Nova Scotia Mass Shooting, Schildkraut (2022) outlined both formal and informal strategies to support affected communities after a mass casualty event, including:

- Implementing informal approaches, such as resiliency centres and peer support groups, to promote mental health in safe, approachable, and non-clinical settings for individuals coping with trauma.
- Engaging survivors and families in memorial planning to facilitate healing through creative outlets and to ensure that victims' legacies are meaningfully honoured.

London truck attack (2021)

On June 6, 2021, Nathaniel Veltman deliberately drove his pickup truck into a Muslim family in London, Ontario. Four members of the family were killed, while a 9-year-old boy survived but sustained serious injuries. Veltman was arrested shortly after the attack and was later sentenced to five life terms. The incident was widely condemned as an act of terrorism driven by Islamophobia and prompted widespread calls for stronger measures to combat hate crimes and protect religious communities in Canada (Riess, 2021).

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

Following the 2017 Quebec City Mosque shooting and the 2021 London truck attack, the Canadian House of Commons issued several recommendations aimed at preventing future hate-motivated crimes, with particular emphasis on protecting the Muslim community (House of Commons, 2024). These include:

- Implementing all recommendations outlined in the 2023 Senate Report on Islamophobia and fulfilling the commitments established during the 2021 National Summit on Islamophobia. These recommendations consist of 13 specific actions, including:
 - Implementing regular training for all federal employees and members of the judiciary on Islamophobia and unconscious bias
 - Developing educational campaigns and classroom resources to raise awareness about Islamophobia
 - Allocating additional funding to prevent hate crimes and support affected communities and police
 - Amending the *Criminal Code* to include specific hate-motivated offences
 - Evaluating the effectiveness of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission in its broadcasting policies (do they represent racialized and marginalized communities?)
 - Reintroducing a human rights complaint process for online hate
 - Reviewing national security legislation with particular attention to systemic Islamophobia
 - Incorporating an intersectional perspective on Islamophobia into financial risk assessments
 - Requiring the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to publish audit data on religious organizations to reduce potential bias
 - Evaluating how the CRA's Review and Analysis Division ensures fairness and transparency
 - Establishing an independent appeal process to impartially review and resolve charity-related disputes with the CRA
 - Modernizing the *Employment Equity Act* to include intersectionality and Islamophobia
 - Investing in the collection and dissemination of disaggregated data at Statistics Canada to improve understanding and policy response to Islamophobia
- Formally acknowledging anti-Palestinian discrimination as a unique issue; funding research to explore its links with Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism; and creating a detailed action plan in collaboration with impacted communities;
- Denouncing Islamophobia, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian discrimination in all public communications;

- Developing initiatives (with community input) to promote cultural understanding, challenge stereotypes, and foster empathy toward Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian communities;
- Funding civic initiatives that promote critical thinking, digital literacy, and resilience against all forms of hatred and extremism, in collaboration with provinces and territories;
- Developing legislation or policies to increase transparency of social media algorithms and content policies and hold platforms accountable for the harm they might cause;
- Developing legislation to address online hate and prevent the suppression of legitimate speech, with input from Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian communities;
- Enhancing Public Safety Canada's Security Infrastructure Program by assigning a liaison officer to assist with emergency applications;
- Providing more resources for community-based programs to support research and data collection addressing Islamophobia, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian discrimination;
- Creating and funding dedicated police hate crime units across the country;
- Improving understanding and response to Islamophobia and related discrimination in federal workplaces, by revising policies and professional development;
- Increasing resources for the Canadian Human Rights Commission and federal agencies to create programs addressing antisemitism, Islamophobia, and related forms of discrimination in the workplace;
- Supporting educational institutions in protecting expression and academic freedom, increasing representation of Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab faculty, and designating special advisors to address civil liberties and discrimination-related issues;
- Funding quantitative and qualitative data collection regarding experiences of discrimination on university campuses;
- Establishing a national review committee comprised of government and academic stakeholders (e.g., municipal representatives, university administrators, faculty, students) to evaluate discrimination on campuses and provide non-binding recommendations designed to create more inclusive campus settings.

James Smith Cree Nation stabbings (2022)

On September 4, 2022, Myles Sanderson went door to door stabbing people in the James Smith Cree Nation and the village of Weldon, Saskatchewan. This rampage resulted in 11 deaths and injuries to 17 other victims (Government of Canada, 2024b). Myles Sanderson had a history of violent assaults and was a federal offender on statutory release in the community. The incident was one of Canada's worst mass stabbings. The Saskatchewan Coroners Service (2024) conducted two inquiries into the event. In addition, the Parole Board of Canada and the Correctional Service of Canada convened a National Joint Board of Investigation.

Lessons learned

Prevention-centred strategies

The Saskatchewan Coroners Service (2024) released a report of jury findings that recommended the following actions to prevent similar deaths in the future:

Correction Services Canada:

- Where feasible and subject to security concerns, offenders be assigned a consistent individual who can provide continuity as they progress through their time spent in a specific facility or specific community on conditional release as the offender reintegrates back into society.
- More Elders be hired in all federal corrections centres.
- Program availability and the number of ongoing programs be increased and decrease the case load on facilitators and elders involved.
- Increase focus by assigned parole officer be designated to locating offenders through contacts within the first month of them being deemed unlawfully at large.
- Community parole officer's follow-up with offenders' access to medical care to ensure the offender is receiving support in accessing appropriate medical care.

Federal Ministry of Public Safety:

- A national alerting system be established in consultation with law enforcement on a platform where the public can sign up to receive broadcast immediate alerts.
- A dangerous person alert category be created within the alerting system.

RCMP:

- Any photo of an individual on a police database or police access tool must display the date of the photo in a prominent way.
- Make it mandatory to provide more resources to specialized RCMP teams, such as the drug enforcement team, to dedicate more services to apprehending individuals involved in the trafficking of drugs.
- Collaborate and attend at community events, such as ceremonies and celebrations, to foster positive relations and trust between parties.

James Smith Cree Nation:

- Evaluate community programming and consider programming related to: addictions and substance abuse, victim services, adverse childhood experiences, domestic or intimate partner violence, traditional parenting, as well as programming for children. Additionally, a community resource package or brochure be made and distributed to all community members and offenders being released back to James Smith Cree Nation, as well as that all available programs are openly advertised to all.
- All houses be mandated to have house numbers posted on the front of the buildings in an easily visible location as well as that street signs be installed for all roadways. Additionally, mapping be updated and distributed to all emergency service as well.
- The community provide further funding and training to the James Smith Cree Nation security force to ensure the safety and security of all within the community.
- Leadership to continue the process of establishing the James Smith Cree Nation Police Force in a prompt and timely fashion.

The Saskatchewan Coroners Service (SCS, 2024) also released the following Inquest Coroner Recommendations in the interest of preventing similar deaths in the future:

RCMP:

- Immediately adopt and implement best practices and technologies that will make available to patrol officers the most current photo, including but not limited to the Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI) photo, of a queried person.

RCMP, F Division Commanding Officer:

- Take all reasonable measures to ensure that the Warrant Enforcement & Suppression Team (WEST) is fully staffed and consider expansion beyond the current establishment of positions.
- Take all reasonable measures to ensure that the Saskatchewan Trafficking Response Team (STRT) is fully staffed and consider expansion beyond the current establishment of positions.
- Take all reasonable measures to ensure that the Crime Reduction Team (CRT) is fully staffed and consider expansion beyond the current establishment of position.

RCMP, WEST Commander:

- Provide a list and details of their most wanted (60 highest priority targets as established by WEST) to all Saskatchewan RCMP detachment commanders on a regular basis and no less than quarterly per year.
- Adjust the WEST matrix to prioritize apprehension targets so that individuals who are repeat domestic offenders are ranked higher.

RCMP, Detachment Commanders:

- Where a most wanted target is affiliated with or is a member of a First Nation within their detachment area, and subject to situations that might compromise an underway investigation or apprehension, the detachment commander shall liaise with the First Nation's Leadership or Justice Designate to advise them of the wanted status of that individual.

James Smith Cree Nation (JSCN) Leadership or Justice Designate:

- Where a police service informs the First Nation of a wanted individual in accordance with above, JSCN shall canvas community members for information on their whereabouts and provide a timely response to the police service in regard to any information that may assist in the apprehension of the individual.
- Promote to their citizens that the timely and accurate reporting of crime to police services is critical to community safety. Further, encourage citizens who may be uncomfortable, and/or intimidated from reporting such activity, to utilize anonymous reporting channels such as Crime Stoppers.

RCMP, Melfort Detachment Commander and JSCN Leadership:

- Meet on a regular basis, and no less than quarterly per year, to establish and implement a public safety strategy for James Smith Cree Nation.

Correctional Service of Canada

- Offenders with a history of domestic violence, either on their current offence or in their offending history, should, to the extent practical, be required to complete programming specific to breaking the cycle of domestic violence prior to release.
- When a warrant of apprehension is issued for an offender on conditional release, and that offender has self-identified an affiliation to a First Nation, provide notification to the police service or RCMP detachment that has jurisdiction over that First Nation.
- Make proactive efforts to engage with First Nation communities to recruit and fill elder vacancies and expand that program to ensure ratios of elders to offenders according with best practices for successful programming and rehabilitation outcomes.
- Make proactive efforts to recruit personnel and fill vacancies to fully staff and offer the complete complement of health programming, including mental health programming such as psychology or psychiatric services.
- Develop and make available programming that will enable support persons to provide a healthy and successful environment for the offender to be released into and actively encourage offenders and (subject to security concerns) their support persons to participate in such programming. This programming should be offered to immediate family and/or community members that are providing support to the offender.

The Correctional Service Canada (CSC) and Parole Board of Canada (PBC) convened a National Joint Board of Investigation (BOI) to analyze investigation areas related to the James Smith Cree Nation stabbings and make recommendations to enhance CSC and PBC policies, practices and the spirit/mission of conditional release (Government of Canada, 2024b). Some of these recommendations were redacted and not included in the list below.

CSC:

- Develop policy to address the assessment of suicidality for offenders under community supervision and that the Integrated Mental Health Guidelines be updated to address mental health assessment offenders with a history of suicide attempts upon release.
- Consider the possibility of reinstating the Community Corrections Liaison Officer Program.
- Review the option of a standardized set of directions or training program for all staff involved in assessing risk level related to domestic violence, and to develop content guidelines that detail what factors are to be considered and how domestic violence factors are to be considered in making overall risk assessment.
- Review and develop standardized approach to ensure all psychologists trained on how to administer the most valid and reliable psychological measures for domestic violence.

PBC:

- Review the wording in Policy 2.1, Assessment for Pre-Release Decision, paragraph 7.

- Review its procedures and training to ensure PBC Board members' authority on case readiness is understood by PBC staff and Board members.
- Expand its guidance on reprimands and be sure to include the meaning, intent, and adherence to legal criteria within the documented reasons for the decision.
- Document and communicate procedures or guidance to address requests for increasing quorums for all types of reviews. Increase the quorum for the post-release suspension class of cases to a minimum of two PBC Board members to constitute a panel.
- Review the list of minimum required documents that are to be submitted by SCS for decision-making to include official documents for offenders with lengthy criminal histories or for past offences with violence.
- Consider implementing PBC Board members' training specific to domestic violence that is empirically derived and incorporates history, as well as risk and propensity for domestic violence.
- Review the scheduling guidelines to include specific time for decision writing after a panel hearing.

Similarities between mass victimization events

Although the 15 mass victimization incidents examined in this report vary in setting, method, and motivation, common threads emerge. To answer the question, "With such diverse characteristics, what similarities exist across these events—and what can we learn from them?", we analyzed recurring themes in three key areas:

- Effective strategies for supporting victims during and after mass victimization events
- Prevention strategies that have been implemented or recommended
- Shared patterns in event modalities, motives, and victim/perpetrator demographics

We also identify lessons related to sex and gender, cultural and ethnic identity, gender identity, Indigenous identity, and age.

Overview of victim services recommendations/lessons learned

Among the 15 incidents reviewed, several victim-centred practices were consistently recommended or implemented. These practices focused on minimizing harm, restoring agency, and fostering long-term recovery. These strategies are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of victim-centred recommendations/lessons learned

Strategy	Explanation	Events
Enhance communication between law enforcement and victims during investigations. Communication should	Poor management of investigations caused delays in victim identification, lost evidence, and limited updates to families. Providing regular updates (even without new information) and setting	• Air India bombing • Nova Scotia shooting • James Smith Cree Nation stabbings

Strategy	Explanation	Events
be timely, transparent, and compassionate.	expectations for future communication reduces distress.	
Provide training for law enforcement and legal personnel to promote unbiased, respectful treatment of victims.	Events reveal a need for training on gender-based violence (e.g., misogyny, incel ideology) and racism (e.g., Islamophobia). Incorporating these topics into training can improve awareness and responsiveness.	• Nova Scotia shooting • Quebec Mosque shooting • Renfrew County triple murder
Include families and victims in post-tragedy decision-making, including investigations and memorial planning.	Involving survivors and families promotes healing, validates lived experience, builds public trust, and ensures policies are relevant and effective.	• Air India bombing • Nova Scotia shooting
Enhance coordination among government entities to reduce confusion.	Fragmented responses have left families uncertain where to seek support. Establishing a centralized, consistent point of contact improves access to resources and information.	• Edmonton shooting • Nova Scotia shooting • Ottawa shooting
Ensure prompt access to trauma-informed psychological support following an incident.	Delays or lack of support have worsened mental health outcomes. Rapid access to therapists, resource links, and local safety organizations can mitigate trauma.	• Calgary stabbing • Moncton attack • Nova Scotia shooting • Toronto van attack • James Smith Cree Nation stabbings
Provide long-term, adaptable support for victims and families.	Recovery involves prolonged legal, financial, and psychological challenges. Sustained and flexible support is critical to meet evolving needs.	• Moncton attack • Toronto van attack • James Smith Cree Nation stabbings

Overview of prevention recommendations/lessons learned

Prevention-focused recommendations were often informed by identified gaps in law enforcement response, public awareness, and systemic coordination. These strategies are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of prevention-centred recommendations/lessons learned

Strategy	Explanation	Events
Provide specialized, scenario-based training	Many police forces lacked the capacity to confront heavily armed attackers.	• Moncton attack • Mayerthorpe tragedy

Strategy	Explanation	Events
for law enforcement to respond to active shooter situations.	Despite discontinued rifle training, the persistence of illegal firearms indicates a need to reinstate Active Shooter Response programs, tactical units, and hate crime teams.	• Ottawa shooting • London truck attack • James Smith Cree Nation stabbings
Improve security measures in public, workplace, and transportation settings.	Lapses in security played major roles in events: airport security (Air India), mine safety (Westray), public streetscapes (Toronto van), and crime scene management (Mayerthorpe). Strengthening protocols could prevent future tragedies.	• Air India bombing • Giant Mine bombing • Toronto van attack • Mayerthorpe tragedy
Enhance law enforcement policies and procedures to improve responsiveness.	Delayed or inadequate responses were linked to perpetrator profiles (e.g., race, class). Failures in screening, training, and complaint tracking point to the need for reform.	• Vernon massacre • Nova Scotia shooting • London truck attack • James Smith Cree Nation stabbings
Expand public education and campaigns about gender-based violence, racism, and hate.	Greater awareness of these issues, especially through school curricula and public outreach, can help prevent violence against women and racialized communities.	• Ottawa shooting • Quebec Mosque shooting • École Polytechnique massacre • Calgary stabbing • London truck attack • Renfrew Country triple murder
Strengthen firearm screening, licensing and restrict access when warning signs are present.	Events showed that perpetrators acquired firearms despite red flags (e.g., domestic violence history or illegal weapons). Stronger screening, enforcement, and border controls are required.	• Mayerthorpe tragedy • Nova Scotia shooting • Vernon massacre
Improve communication and interoperability between all levels of government, police, and community agencies.	Poor communication led to mistakes and poor decisions during events, investigations, and legal proceedings, Poor communication also left victims being unsupported.	• Air India bombing • Edmonton mass shooting • Nova Scotia shooting

Event modalities and patterns

When reviewing the methods used in mass victimization events, some clear trends were identified:

- Shootings were the most common modality (9 of 15 events).
- Bombings occurred twice (1985, 1992), with no recent recurrence.
- Vehicle attacks emerged more recently (2018, 2021).
- Stabbings occurred in two cases.

These shifts may reflect broader social and political dynamics, including the relative accessibility of weapons and vehicles, as well as evolving ideologies around how attackers seek to inflict harm or garner public attention.

Assailant characteristics

All identified perpetrators were male, predominantly white (11 out of 15), and ranged in age from their 20s to early 50s. Most acted alone, with the exception of the coordinated Air India bombing.

Motives varied but clustered into the following categories:

- Domestic violence/criminal history (n=5)
- Political extremism (n=2)
- Misogyny (n=3)
- Racism/xenophobia (n=2)
- Mental health struggles (n=1)
- Workplace grievance (n=1)
- Unknown (n=1)

Outcomes also differed. In several cases, perpetrators died by suicide or were killed during the incident. Others were arrested, and in the Air India case, suspects were charged but ultimately not convicted.

In three of the four events involving non-white perpetrators, perpetrators committed family-related attacks followed by suicide. These events stood apart from the rest in that some or all victims were family members of the perpetrator. These cases may point to cultural differences in how distress or violence manifests, particularly where mental health stigma, family dynamics, or domestic violence may be underreported or poorly addressed. This supposition is tempered, however, by the very low rate of frequency of events involving non-white perpetrators, with the majority of mass victimization events involving white perpetrators (11 out of 15).

Victim characteristics

Most victims were unrelated to the perpetrator and were targeted in public settings, including city streets, schools, and workplaces.

- Sex and gender: Women were disproportionately affected in several incidents and explicitly targeted in three.

- Religious identity: In two of the incidents, victims were targets because of their religion, being Muslim.
- Cultural and ethnic identity: Victims also were targeted because of their culture, ethnicity or nationality, particularly those from Indian communities. In two events, law enforcement officers were the intended targets.
- Sexual orientation: Sexual orientation did not appear to be a motivating factor in any of the incidents reviewed.
- Indigenous identity: There were no clear indications that Indigenous identity influenced victimization in the events studied. Assaultants did not express motives related to Indigenous populations, nor were these communities disproportionately affected.
- Age: While age was not a direct motivator, some events (particularly those in schools) disproportionately impacted younger individuals. This appears to be a function of the setting rather than an intentional targeting of age groups.

Gap analysis

A review of the literature shows that only 9 of the 15 mass victimization events resulted in recommendations or lessons learned for supporting those affected by the event. Instead, the recommendations and lessons learned primarily focused on changes that could prevent similar events or allow the investigations to run more smoothly. Although these recommendations are important, we note the following areas that will benefit those affected by mass victimization events should they happen in the future.

Recognition of the wider circles of impact

There is increasing recognition that mass victimization events impact more than the primary victims. In fact, family members, close friends, witnesses, broader communities, and responders can all experience significant mental health and wellbeing impacts from mass victimization events. Responders include individuals working in public safety, the justice system, and the healthcare sector (Government of Canada, 2016). As such, recommendations and lessons learned to support victim mental health should be expanded to all affected people.

Inclusion of psychosocial needs in simulation exercises

Although active shooter preparedness training was recommended (e.g., the Moncton attack), there was no discussion of including the psychosocial needs of affected persons in the training. Currently, preparedness efforts for mass victimization events focus primarily on ensuring physical security and providing physical care to victims and the community. However, it is essential that planning exercises such as table-top simulations incorporate considerations for the psychosocial needs of all affected groups. Ideally, such planning could use standardized templates that can be adapted to meet the specific needs of individual communities and cultural groups (Collins et al., 2022).

Identification and adaptation of extra-jurisdictional practices

Many countries have experienced a higher frequency of mass victimization events than Canada. It is therefore critical to identify and analyze global practices and lessons learned in other jurisdictions. These practices could then be adapted and tested within the uniquely Canadian context (Gabbe et al., 2022).

Age, disability, and culturally appropriate supports

Many of the recommendations in the literature referred to “victims” or “affected people”. However, the diversity of Canadians means there is a need for diversity in the supports offered. Specifically, supports should be provided that are appropriate for age, ability, and culture. For instance, the specific needs of Canadians with disabilities are often overlooked, despite their increased vulnerability during such events. This vulnerability may be exacerbated by factors such as power outages, limited mobility, and heightened fears related to their safety.

Furthermore, culturally specific supports and recommendations must be developed to address the intersectional identities of Canadians. These identities include, but are not limited to, Indigenous identity, racial and cultural identity, membership in the LGBTQ2SIA+ community, socioeconomic status, geographic location (rural, urban, or Northern), age, sex, and gender.

Identification of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offering support services

An asset that was not included in the recommendations was the use of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) when responding to mass victimization events. NGOs can play a vital role in providing victim-centred support in the immediate, short-term, and long-term aftermath of mass victimization events. Including and coordinating with NGOs could provide affected persons with greater, and possibly, faster support after a mass victimization event. We do, however, note that there is a Directory of Victim Services, managed by Justice Canada, which lists over 800 victim services providers who work with victims of crime (<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/victims-victimes/vsd-rsv/index.html>).

Long-term aftermath of mass victimization events

The recommendations include in this review focused on the immediate and short-term impacts of mass victimization. However, it is essential to develop and implement long-term support strategies that address the ongoing physical, mental health, and psychosocial needs of primary victims, their families and close friends, witnesses, communities, and responders in the public safety, justice, and healthcare sectors (Government of Canada, 2016).

Summary and conclusions

This report reviewed 15 major mass-victimization events in Canada from 1975 to 2025. Using systematic review methods, including Covidence and advanced search tools, the team analyzed available documentation and extracted key learnings.

Several core themes emerged:

- The urgent need for timely psychological support following mass violence;
- The value of holistic, long-term legal, financial, and emotional victim support;
- The importance of hate crime prevention, especially targeting anti-Muslim and gender-based violence;
- The critical role of police training, proactive community engagement, and rapid response capabilities;
- The need for stricter firearm regulations and enhanced border surveillance;
- The benefit of community resilience-building, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and anti-hate initiatives;
- The necessity of early intervention strategies for individuals at risk due to violent ideologies or untreated mental illness;
- The impact of education and public awareness, including programs like bystander intervention training.

Our review also identified key gaps for urgent action that include:

- Recognition that mass victimization events impact not only direct victims but also significantly affect the mental health and wellbeing of families, communities, and frontline responders;
- Integrate psychosocial support considerations into all mass victimization preparedness simulations, using standardized and adaptable templates that reflect the needs of diverse communities and responder groups;
- Identify and evaluate international best practices for responding to and preventing mass victimization events and adapt these practices to align with Canada's unique cultural context;
- Develop inclusive, age-appropriate, and culturally specific supports for mass victimization response that address the unique needs of children, older adults, persons with disabilities, and individuals with diverse intersectional identities, including Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, LGBTQ2SIA+ individuals, and those in rural or Northern regions;
- Include Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to provide victim-centred support, ensuring their effective integration into immediate, short-term, and long-term responses to mass victimization events;
- Develop and implement long-term support strategies that address the sustained physical, mental health, and psychosocial needs of victims, their families, witnesses, communities, and frontline responders in the aftermath of mass victimization events.

In conclusion, the recommendations and lessons learned reviewed in this report offer valuable insight into how Canada has responded to mass victimization and where further progress is possible. Moving forward, a multidimensional approach that prioritizes both prevention and recovery is essential. This includes advancing inclusive public policy, strengthening institutional supports, and empowering communities to stand resilient in the face of hate and violence.

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Appendix A

Recommendations/lessons learned by event

Event	Prevention-centred recommendations/lessons learned	Victim-centred recommendations/lessons learned
Air India bombing	- Improving oversight of aviation security (including government & industry coordination/communication) - Improving risk management - Improving intelligence - Improve airport security	- Created of archive to honour victims - Created Air India Family Association to: - Liaise with RCMP & AG - Lobby for fair monetary settlements
École Polytechnique	- Social and legislative initiatives, including - House of Commons Sub-Committee on the Status of Women - Establish Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women - Establish foundation to support anti-violence organizations - Adopt policy to prevent domestic abuse, which help to create the Coalition for Gun control - Confront sexism, discrimination and gender-based violence on university campuses - Enhance University campus safety measures - Advance education on gender-based violence in universities	
Giant Mine disaster	- Safety and prevention strategies, including: - Inspectors be responsible for regular site visits to ensure compliance with safety regulations - Inspectors have the authority to suspend operations when safety violated	
Vernon massacre	- Improving police and Crown training to deal with violence against women - Enhance police computer data systems - Strengthening screening process to obtain firearm licenses	

Event	Prevention-centred recommendations/lessons learned	Victim-centred recommendations/lessons learned
Mayerthorpe shootings	• RCMP implement a formal threat assessment system to obtain background information • RCMP appoint a Threat Assessment Coordinator • RCMP develop detailed scene security protocols • RCMP create an Active Shooter Response Program • RCMP invest in improved body armor	• RCMP develop an Emergency Medical Response Team Program for ensure timely medical assistance
Calgary stabbings	• Including "prohibited conduct" in Non-Academic Misconduct Policy • Create materials on how to react if there is an active assailant on campus • Create initiative to build cohesive community on campus and develop personal resiliency • Create Mental Health Task Force	• Offer 24-hour counselling and grief support to students, staff and faculty • Reschedule exams for students who need it • Reach out to provide to families and students
Moncton attack	• Enhance officer training for active shooter scenarios • Improve resource allocation to access appropriate equipment and tactical support • Strengthen inter-agency collaboration	• Introduced Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Guide and established CISM team • Introduced Revised Fallen Members Guide
Ottawa shooting	• Developed a curriculum for secondary school students to reduce prejudice and hate crime • Improved inter-governmental operational and security coordination • Tightened security on Parliament Hill, including enhanced radio communication and a security awareness program for parliamentarians and staff	
Edmonton mass shooting	• Public education as a prevention tool for domestic violence, including ○ Use of domestic violence risk assessment tools ○ Expand best practice training for healthcare workers to provide care to suspected perpetrators and/or victims of family violence ○ Create a public education campaign as a proactive tool against family violence	• Coordinated investigations to address gaps in response to family violence • Improve service coordination between government and community agencies • Focus on immigrant families • Enhance support systems to protect those at risk of domestic violence

Event	Prevention-centred recommendations/lessons learned	Victim-centred recommendations/lessons learned
Renfrew Country triple murder	• Declare intimate partner violence (IPV) an epidemic, create a provincial IPV Commission, and adopt an all-of-government approach with formal oversight and compliance reporting on recommendations • Improve information-sharing between criminal, family, and civil courts; create a universal police records system; strengthen firearms reporting to the Chief Firearms Officer; and enhance PAL (firearms licence) screening tied to IPV risk • Integrate IPV prevention and healthy-relationship curricula in schools and post-secondary institutions, with trained teachers and IPV professionals delivering content • Provide specialized, mandatory IPV training for police, Crowns, probation officers, and other justice personnel; establish IPV specialists in each police detachment • Fund and expand services for offenders (e.g., counselling, group programs, hotline for men), address root causes like housing and financial instability, and ensure cross-agency service coordination • Strengthen high-risk offender committees, develop standardized IPV risk assessments, review bail/probation conditions, and enhance rural police resources for quicker tactical response • Explore creating a femicide category, adding coercive control as a criminal offence, reviewing the mandatory charging framework, and amending laws to support stronger offender management	• Establish an IPV Commission with stable funding, appoint a Survivor Advocate, and ensure survivors inform risk assessments and justice system decisions • Require direct survivor–probation officer communication, ensure timely public safety alerts, and expand safe rooms, second-stage housing, and IPV registries • Create an emergency fund for survivors, improve equitable rural IPV service funding, and expand cell/internet access in remote areas for safety and service reach • Develop IPV-focused court models, allow remote testimony, enhance court supports, and consider restorative justice in appropriate cases while prioritizing survivor safety • Implement electronic monitoring for high-risk offenders, ensure survivor notification of breaches, and oppose firearm return requests in IPV cases • Launch inclusive, multilingual IPV awareness campaigns tailored to rural realities, create “Safe Spaces” in businesses, and improve OPP–Victim Services information flow • Reconvene stakeholders one year after verdict to review progress and consider a Royal Commission to make the justice system more victim-centric and responsive
Quebec Mosque shooting	• Government of Canada created the Action Plan on Combating Hate to prevent and confront hate in Canadian communities. Activities include:	• Action Plan on Combating Hate includes victim services, such as: ◦ Financial assistance through Victims Fund

Event	Prevention-centred recommendations/lessons learned	Victim-centred recommendations/lessons learned
	○ Increased community security funding ○ Funding grassroots organizations to counter hate and racism ○ Enhancing tracking of hate incidents ○ Strengthening public education by promoting anti-hate education	○ Enhanced victim services including counseling, legal assistance, medical attention, and help navigating legal system ○ Community-based support by establishing safe spaces and support networks ○ Specialized training for Crown prosecutors
Toronto van attack	● Implementing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design strategies	● Prepare comprehensive victim assistance plans that include: ○ Account for visible and invisible injuries ○ Accessible and responsive compensation schemes ○ Involve social workers or advocates as needed
Nova Scotia mass shooting	● Violence prevention strategies to address gender-based violence, including adopting a public health approach, creating safe places to report violence, and replacing mandatory arrest and charging policies and protocols ● Community safety and wellbeing strategies, including developing gender-based violence and by-stander intervention education campaigns and including rural communities in decision-making procedures ● Gun control policies, including revoking or suspending licenses for those suspected of violent behaviour and reducing gun trafficking	● Policing reforms to support victims that address duty of care and communication when working with victims ● Policing system reforms for working with victims, including victim management responses and communication systems ● Developing a national action plan for mental health care, mental health literacy, and support services for victims ● Addressing barriers reporting gender-based and intimate partner violence ● Strategies to support affected communities, such as creating peer support groups
London truck attack	● Address Islamophobia through training, education, and updating government policies and procedures ● Education around Islamophobia ● Develop legislation addressing online hate and social media algorithms ● Develop police hate crimes units	

Event	Prevention-centred recommendations/lessons learned	Victim-centred recommendations/lessons learned
	• Increase funding to initiatives addressing Islamophobia	
James Smith Cree Nation stabblings	• Assign consistent correctional case managers, increase elder and program availability in corrections, ensure domestic-violence-specific programming before release, and improve health/mental health service staffing • Fully staff RCMP specialized units (Warrant Enforcement, Crime Reduction, Trafficking Response), prioritize high-risk domestic violence offenders, and share “Most Wanted” lists with detachments and First Nations leadership • Create a national alerting system with a dangerous person category; ensure house numbering, street signs, and updated mapping for emergency response • Standardize domestic violence risk assessment tools for CSC and PBC staff, train psychologists in validated DV assessment methods, and improve Board member training on DV risk factors • Notify local police and First Nations when offenders with community ties are unlawfully at large; engage First Nations in elder recruitment for rehabilitation programs • Expand community-based programs addressing addictions, adverse childhood experiences, IPV, traditional parenting, and victim services; advertise services to both offenders and residents • Develop programs for family and community support persons to help create safe reintegration environments for offenders • Build sustained RCMP–community relationships, encourage safe/anonymous crime reporting, and	

Event	Prevention-centred recommendations/lessons learned	Victim-centred recommendations/lessons learned
	maintain regular updates between police and leadership on public safety threats • Increase hiring of Elders in corrections and expand culturally relevant programming for Indigenous offenders to reduce reoffending and strengthen community healing • Ensure offenders and communities have access to timely medical and mental health care, with follow-up by parole officers to support continuity of care • Provide residents with community resource guides, ensure visibility of available services, and promote community-wide engagement in safety planning	