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**MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY, FAMILY  
AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

## **4.05—Violence Against Women Program**

**(Follow-up to VFM Section 3.05, 2001 Annual Report)**

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### **BACKGROUND**

The Ministry's Violence Against Women (VAW) program funds transfer-payment agencies that provide safe shelter and other support services to women who have experienced violence or abuse as well as to their children.

For the 2002/03 fiscal year, ministry spending on this program totalled approximately \$90.7 million, with ministry spending on this program being approximately \$82 million for the 2000/01 fiscal year. For 2000/01, the Ministry provided approximately \$64 million to nearly 100 community-based non-profit agencies that operated shelters providing temporary accommodations and security to approximately 15,000 women and 13,000 children during the year. The Ministry also provided approximately \$18 million during that year to more than 100 other community-based non-profit agencies that did not operate a shelter but provided other support services such as counselling, violence prevention, and public education programs.

At the time of our 2001 audit, we concluded that the Ministry's monitoring and assessment practices did not ensure that the services provided by the transfer-payment agencies we reviewed were of an acceptable and consistent quality standard or that they represented value for money spent. We also concluded that the Ministry's policies and procedures were not adequate to ensure that transfer payments to agencies providing services were in all cases reasonable and sufficiently controlled. In particular, we found that:

- In some cases, women and children were turned away from shelters, and waiting times for other services were lengthy.
- The amount of funding provided to transfer-payment agencies was not based on an assessment of what costs would be reasonable for the services to be provided. As a result, the cost of similar services varied significantly among agencies.
- The Ministry's annual process for reconciling an agency's actual expenditures against funds provided was in many cases deficient in identifying inappropriate or ineligible expenditures as well as funding surpluses that should have been recovered.

We made recommendations for improvements in each of these areas and received commitments from the Ministry that it would take the necessary corrective action.

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## CURRENT STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry's internal audit services reviewed the status of the Ministry's actions in response to our 2001 audit recommendations. We reviewed their work and determined that we could rely on it. We found that the Ministry has made limited progress on implementing our recommendations. The current status of ministry action taken on each of our recommendations is as follows.

### MONITORING OF SERVICES PROVIDED

#### Service Quality Standards

##### Recommendation

*To ensure that services provided by all transfer-payment agencies under the Violence Against Women program are of an acceptable and reasonably consistent quality standard and that they represent value for money spent, the Ministry should:*

- *establish and communicate its expectations for acceptable quality standards of service in each of the following areas: core services to be provided; minimum staffing levels and staff qualifications; admission criteria; acceptable waiting times; the physical security of shelters; and service co-ordination with other providers; and*
- *periodically assess whether the services provided by agencies are meeting ministry expectations and take appropriate corrective action if necessary.*

##### Current Status

In February 2002, the Ministry sent out a letter to all regional offices that included a statement of what a shelter's core services should be, admission criteria, and an overview of the serious occurrence reporting procedures. In addition and as a result of its hearings into our 2001 report, in December 2002 the Standing Committee on Public Accounts requested that the Ministry report on its progress with respect to defining core services and developing a policy to clarify the services not offered by shelters. In February 2003, the Ministry responded to this request by providing a listing of the major components of a shelter's service and other ancillary services that may be offered by a shelter.

The Ministry advised us that it is currently reviewing shelter staffing information and will assess the feasibility of developing a program guideline regarding staffing levels and core competencies.

The Ministry also developed and distributed the Children's Aid Society/VAW Shelter Collaboration Agreement Template and Guidelines to promote collaboration between the two sectors. The Ministry anticipates that agreements between them will be implemented across the province by spring 2004.

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The issue of acceptable standards with respect to acceptable waiting times and physical security of shelters has not yet been specifically addressed. However, the Ministry advised us that it has allocated \$5 million to enhance the safety, accessibility, and security of shelters.

Only at such time that acceptable quality standards of service have been established and communicated can compliance with them be assessed.

## Quarterly Reporting

### Recommendation

*To ensure that the quarterly reporting process for the Violence Against Women program enables effective monitoring of expenditures and service delivery during the year, the Ministry should:*

- *provide direction to all agencies to ensure that they report financial and service information on a consistent basis;*
- *ensure that agencies explain and describe appropriate plans of action for all significant variances, as required; and*
- *promptly evaluate and, where warranted, approve any corrective action proposed and ensure that it is undertaken.*

### Current Status

In order to assist regional offices to more effectively monitor agency expenditures and service delivery, the Ministry revised and expanded the type of information to be reported by agencies. For instance, the Ministry introduced the Transfer Payment Business Cycle Checklist in September 2001. In February 2002, the Ministry sent a letter to regional offices reinforcing the use of this checklist.

However, the Ministry's internal audit services found that this checklist was either not being used by ministry staff, or when it was used, it was not fully completed. By not using the checklist or by not fully completing it and documenting the necessary analysis, the Ministry did not have the assurance that its business practices were being followed by the agencies being funded.

## Serious Occurrences

### Recommendation

*To enhance the effectiveness of the serious-occurrence reporting-and-review process for agencies funded under the Violence Against Women program, the Ministry should ensure that:*

- *agencies have a clear understanding of how the criteria for serious occurrences are to be applied;*
- *all verbal notifications of serious occurrences are logged so that it can reliably determine whether written follow-up reports are received as required; and*

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- *appropriate corrective action is taken as a result of all serious occurrences that take place.*

### **Current Status**

As of April 1, 2003, new forms for the reporting of serious occurrences were implemented. The forms included an area to document the name of the ministry employee who received initial notification of the serious occurrence and how the employee acknowledged the receipt of this information. The Ministry's internal audit services examined the serious-occurrence report process in three regional offices. It found that the forms were being used as intended and that these offices logged all serious occurrences to ensure that the reporting process was adhered to and timely follow-up occurred, if necessary.

## **TRANSFER-PAYMENT AGENCY ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE**

### **Recommendation**

*The Ministry should improve the governance and accountability of Violence Against Women agencies by implementing the requirements of its Governance and Accountability Framework.*

### **Current Status**

Beginning in the 2001/02 fiscal year, the Ministry required agencies to affirm that their boards of directors had the expertise and experience necessary to discharge their responsibilities and that they also had an appropriate governance and reporting structure in place.

We were advised that, as of May 2003, the Ministry had finalized a governance and accountability framework for transfer-payment agencies, but it had yet to send the framework out to the agencies. We were also advised that a resource manual for boards of directors was being developed and was expected to be completed in fall 2003.

## **PROGRAM FUNDING**

### **Funding for Shelter Services and Funding for Counselling and Other VAW Services**

#### **Recommendation**

*To help ensure that funding for services under the Violence Against Women program is commensurate with the specific needs of each agency, the Ministry should:*

- *ensure that agency funding requests provide information that is sufficiently detailed and relevant to allow the Ministry to make informed funding decisions; and*

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- *critically assess all requests for funding and ensure that amounts approved are commensurate with the demand for services and the actual services provided.*

### **Current Status**

The Ministry's internal audit services examined a sample of ministry files and found that the funding requests still did not contain sufficiently detailed and relevant information to allow the Ministry to make informed funding decisions. Therefore, the Ministry has yet to address this recommendation effectively.

## **Annual Program Expenditure Reconciliations**

### **Recommendation**

*To better ensure that the Annual Program Expenditure Reconciliation (APER) process for the Violence Against Women program identifies both inappropriate and ineligible expenditures, as well as surpluses, and better supports future funding decisions, the Ministry should:*

- *clearly define eligible program expenditures and communicate that information to agencies;*
- *ensure that agencies provide financial information in their APERs that is sufficiently detailed and linkable to audited financial statements; and*
- *thoroughly review the information submitted in APERs and perform any necessary follow-up.*

### **Current Status**

The Ministry acknowledges the need for strong financial accountability processes and has taken steps to improve the Annual Program Expenditure Reconciliation (APER) form and process. For example, the Ministry's 2001/02 APER package provided to agencies included updated definitions of admissible and inadmissible expenditures.

However, the Ministry still does not ensure that the APERs submitted by agencies include sufficiently detailed and relevant information to improve the effectiveness of the APER process. Therefore, the Ministry is still not in a position to identify both inappropriate and ineligible expenditures. With respect to excess funding, surpluses self-identified by agencies were being returned to the Ministry within 24 months of each agency's year-end, in accordance with Ministry policy.