

Violence Against Women

Background

In Ontario, a wide range of ministries, sectors, professionals and community members are involved in providing services and supports to women and their children who are fleeing violence. These include shelters and counselling services, child welfare workers, police, health-care professionals, the justice sector and social assistance and housing. In the 2010/11 fiscal year (the latest year for which data was available), the province estimated that it spent a total of \$220 million across all ministries dealing with the issue of violence against women (VAW). Two-thirds of these costs were for VAW programs and services that were administered by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services (Ministry) provides community programs and services aimed at helping women and their children who are victims of domestic violence find safety and rebuild their lives free of violence. The programs also serve adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The objectives of the Ministry's VAW programs and services are to:

- increase the safety of women who are experiencing violence and their children by providing safe shelter, safety plan development and crisis counselling;

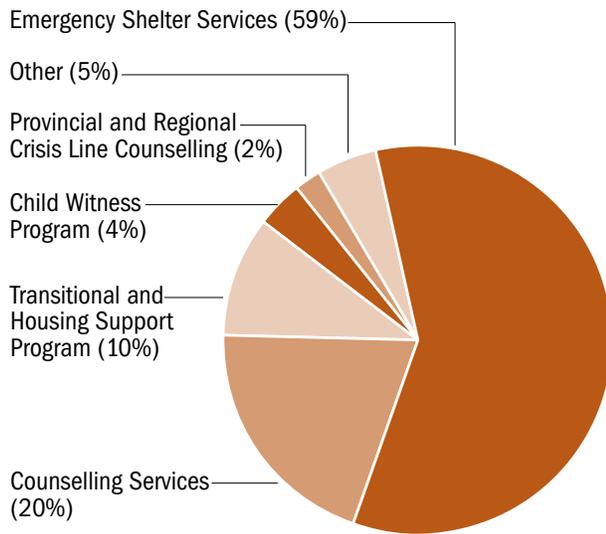
- assist women experiencing violence and their children by enhancing self-esteem and supporting them to access resources to live independently; and
- enhance the co-ordination of VAW services at the community level.

The Ministry provides transfer payments to more than 200 not-for-profit agencies within local communities to deliver supports and services to abused women and their children. These agencies are governed by volunteer boards of directors. The Ministry is responsible for prioritizing and co-ordinating local service delivery, as well as for allocating public funds in response to priorities identified by VAW agencies and the local community. The Ministry's head office establishes program policies and procedures, and its nine regional offices oversee funding and program delivery for the agencies in their respective jurisdictions.

In the 2012/13 fiscal year, the Ministry spent \$142 million in transfer payments. Of that amount, approximately \$82 million went toward the operation of 95 shelters. The remaining \$60 million was for other supportive services, including community-based counselling, telephone-based counselling (crisis help lines) and connecting women with supports to help them secure more permanent housing. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of transfer-payment funding for VAW programs and services.

Figure 1: Ministry Funding Allocation to Violence Against Women Programs and Services, 2012/13

Source of data: Ministry of Community and Social Services



In the last decade, the province released two multi-ministry action plans to deal with the issue of violence against women: the Domestic Violence Action Plan (2004) and the Sexual Violence Action Plan (2011). As well, in 2009 the Domestic Violence Advisory Council (Council), created by the Minister Responsible for Women’s Issues, released a report with 45 recommendations for improving the system of services for abused women and their children. The Ontario Women’s Directorate, a government office reporting to the Minister Responsible for Women’s Issues, is responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the action plans and the Council’s recommendations across the government.

Audit Objectives and Scope

The objective of our audit was to assess whether the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ontario Women’s Directorate had adequate mechanisms in place to meet the needs of abused women and their children cost-effectively, and to measure and report on the effectiveness of services and initiatives aimed at curtailing violence against women and at helping victims of this type of

abuse. Senior management at both the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ontario Women’s Directorate reviewed and agreed to our audit objective and associated audit criteria.

This audit focused on VAW programs and services administered by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and on the co-ordination efforts of the Ontario Women’s Directorate.

In conducting our audit, we reviewed relevant documents; analyzed information; interviewed appropriate ministry, directorate and agency staff; and reviewed relevant research from Ontario and other jurisdictions. Our audit work was conducted primarily at the Ministry’s head office, at three of the Ministry’s nine regional offices, and at the Ontario Women’s Directorate. We also visited six women’s shelters to gain a better understanding of the services provided and to review selected procedures, and met with the chairs of four Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees. We followed up with the Ministries of the Attorney General and Municipal Affairs and Housing on select issues. We also followed up on the status of all action plans released by the government over the last decade that were relevant to the issue of violence against women and on the Domestic Violence Advisory Council’s 45 recommendations. This audit excluded programs and services for victims of rape or sexual assault, which are funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The internal audit team for the Ontario Women’s Directorate conducted a risk assessment on the grants process in 2008 and reviewed a sample of grant files in 2011. We reviewed its reports and considered its work and any relevant issues identified when planning our audit work.

Summary

Effectiveness of the Multi-ministry Domestic Action Plan

During the last decade, Ontario developed action plans to address violence against women: the

Domestic Violence Action Plan (released in 2004) and the Sexual Violence Action Plan (released in 2011). Nine years after the release of the Domestic Violence Action Plan, we would have expected the government to have assessed whether the plan was meeting its objectives of preventing domestic violence and improving supports for abused women and their children. However, the progress reports publicly issued to date by the Ontario Women's Directorate have been mainly anecdotal, with no clear indication of each commitment's implementation status or of what outcomes have been achieved. In this regard, Statistics Canada data on the prevalence of domestic violence before and after the 2004 plan showed some change in Ontario: the percentage of women who reported experiencing spousal abuse decreased, from 7% in 2004 to 6.3% in 2009 (latest available information). Moreover, the Ontario rate for self-reported spousal abuse in 2009 was in line with the national rate.

VAW Programs and Services Administered by Ministry of Community and Social Services

For programs and services funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services (Ministry) to assist women and children who are fleeing domestic violence, we found that the Ministry did not know whether services were sufficient to meet the needs of abused women and their children and did not have sufficient information to properly assess the effectiveness of the VAW programs and services offered.

Our more significant observations included the following:

- The Ministry does not have the information needed to identify the unmet demand for VAW services and in turn allocate resources to close the gap. For example, in the 2011/12 fiscal year, emergency shelters reported that they initially turned away almost 15,000 women in total, or 56% of women who sought help from them. However, this figure overstates unmet demand because the Ministry does not track how many of the women who were turned away were referred to another agency

where they did receive services. The Ministry also has no information on how many of these women were turned away because the shelter was full and how many were turned away because they had not been abused and were therefore ineligible for VAW services. Emergency shelter directors said that if their shelter is full, they refer abused women to other emergency shelters first, followed by homeless shelters, because homeless shelters do not have appropriate supports for abused women and their children. And, as noted, neither the shelter directors nor the Ministry knew whether the women who were referred elsewhere ultimately received services.

- Despite the recommendations made in our 1994 and 2001 audits of VAW programs and services, the Ministry still has not developed any standards, service directives or guidelines for services provided under VAW funding, such as minimum staffing levels, admission criteria and exit criteria for emergency shelters.
- The Ministry's monitoring efforts are not sufficient to identify possible service gaps, inefficiencies in service delivery and inequities across agencies and regions. For instance, although agencies that deliver the same type of service are required to report on the same types of data, the Ministry does not compare the results of one agency to another. Instead, the Ministry's analysis is limited to totalling reported results by region and for the province overall, but only for select types of data. The types of data that are not analyzed, but that could provide useful insight, include the number of women not served by service type, and the proportion of women served who found housing.
- Ministry funding to transfer-payment agencies is generally historically based, with little or no correlation to identified needs or past performance. As a result, we found significant variations in actual unit costs among agencies providing similar services. To illustrate, in

2011/12, Ministry-approved annual funding for 10-bed emergency shelters ranged from \$334,000 to \$624,000. Consequently, the per-day cost of care at emergency shelters ranged from \$90 to \$575.

- The Ministry's client satisfaction survey, conducted to assess users' perceptions of VAW services, provides limited value because of a low response rate and the limited number of agencies represented. For example, the response rate in 2011/12 could have been as low as 4% if women followed the Ministry's requirement of completing a separate survey for emergency shelter services, counselling services and services from the Transitional and Housing Support Program. In addition, no surveys were completed for 20% of agencies, and fewer than 10 surveys were completed for an additional 40% of agencies. The survey results' usefulness was also limited because responses to the survey were consolidated irrespective of the nature of the service being provided. Consequently, it is not known to which specific service the survey responses pertained. Most agencies we visited conducted their own satisfaction surveys or exit interviews with clients, but in general they did not compile or analyze the responses to identify areas for improvement.
- In 2009, a Building Condition Assessment of VAW shelters (which included a security assessment) identified more than 500 safety and security items that required attention across all VAW shelters. As of March 31, 2012, which was the latest available status update, the Ministry had provided funding for only 10% of the identified safety and security deficiencies, but did not know whether the funded projects had been completed or whether the agencies themselves had paid to fix any of the remaining 90% of the identified deficiencies. The Ministry does not perform site inspections. Therefore, it might not know

the true status of safety and security issues at VAW shelters until it performs another Building Condition Assessment of VAW shelters, which is expected to occur by March 2019.

- For approximately 20 years, Statistics Canada has been surveying all residential facilities providing services to abused women and their children across Canada and collecting information on both the services provided and the clientele. This survey, currently called the Transition Home Survey, collects information that the Ministry would find useful in helping it assess its programs' effectiveness, such as the number of repeat users, the number of women turned away from shelters and the reasons for their being turned away, and what service gaps and other challenges are faced by shelters and residents. Since Statistics Canada publicly reports only select information that may or may not have been included in a previous report, the Ministry would be well served to request more detailed survey results in order to best identify where improvements are needed in Ontario and how it compares to other jurisdictions.

OVERALL MINISTRY RESPONSE

The violence against women (VAW) program provides a system of support services that are designed to meet the diverse needs of women and children at the local level, including emergency shelter, counselling, child witness program, transitional and housing support, and provincial crisis line services. Programs are delivered by non-profit, volunteer boards of directors that are accountable to the Ministry for the effective use of public funds.

The Ministry appreciates the findings and recommendations of the Auditor General that build on improvements under way:

- In 2010, the Ministry developed a resource guide to assist shelter agencies with the

development of their policies and procedures. It is intended to help agencies provide high-quality services.

- In the 2012/13 fiscal year, the Ministry updated the Transfer Payment Governance and Accountability Framework in order to support the implementation of new data reporting requirements and has implemented standardized expenditure categories in order to provide better analysis of agency costs.
- Reporting requirements for transfer payment agencies were changed for 2012/13 and 2013/14 to improve the Ministry's ability to collect accurate information on factors that affect program costs and to compare costs between agencies providing similar programs. These changes will provide more consistent, meaningful and reliable data to measure the performance of programs and support the program planning needs of the Ministry and agencies.
- The Ministry is also reviewing the Transfer Payment Risk Assessment Methodology and Tools to improve its effectiveness.

The Ministry is developing an Asset Management Framework to better support capital funding decision-making and will complete Building Condition Assessments of all Ministry-funded sites over the next five fiscal years.

The Ministry agrees that the co-ordination of services could be strengthened through building on existing forums and established relationships. The Ministry will develop a strategic plan to identify priorities for areas such as regional planning activities, provincial reporting and enhanced service system co-ordination across sectors. To improve client evaluation, the Ministry is assessing ways to capture the impact of VAW programs on women escaping abuse who may not be willing or able to recount their experiences.

Detailed Audit Observations

PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES

Over the last decade, the provincial government has released two action plans to help prevent violence against women and improve supports for those affected:

- the Domestic Violence Action Plan (2004), and
- the Sexual Violence Action Plan (2011).

The two action plans were developed by the government after consultation with survivors/victims, front-line service providers and other experts in the health, education and justice sectors, as well as in the community. Both plans outlined commitments that were initially expected to be implemented over a four-year period.

In 2007 the government also posted on its website the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women, which was developed by aboriginal organizations after consultation with aboriginal community leaders. Although the Domestic Violence Action Plan is intended for all women, the aboriginal community believed that a separate strategy was required because aboriginal women suffer higher levels of abuse than non-aboriginal women. To illustrate, in 2009, the most recent year for which data was released, Statistics Canada reported that on a national level aboriginal women were almost three times more likely to experience domestic violence than non-aboriginal women, and more than 40% more likely to suffer injury from that abuse. The government has not made a commitment to implement the recommendations of the strategic framework, but it has endorsed the framework's overall objectives and approach as a useful tool for planning and establishing government priorities.

Figure 2 summarizes the objectives, areas of focus and commitments for both action plans and the strategic framework.

Responsibility for implementing the action plans rests with the Ministerial Steering Committee on Violence Against Women (Committee), which comprises 13 ministers and is chaired by the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. The Committee is supported by the Ontario Women's Directorate (Directorate), which is responsible for co-ordinating the action plans' implementation across the ministries. With respect to the strategic framework, the Committee established a Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women to identify priorities and opportunities for support, development and implementation of policies, programs and services that prevent and reduce violence against aboriginal women and their families.

We requested a status update from the Directorate on the various commitments and recommendations under the action plans and the strategic framework and noted the following:

- The Directorate maintained an internal tracking report for the Domestic Violence Action Plan that outlined commitments, implementation status and achievements by ministry for each focus area. This internal tracking report was last updated in 2008, even though the latest progress report on the action plan was released in 2012. The Directorate informed us that after 2008, it had ongoing verbal communication with the ministries to update the status and achievement for each commitment. According to the 2008 tracking report, 75% of commitments were completed, 20% were in progress and 5% were outstanding. The status of commitments in 2012 was unclear because the publicly released progress report is mainly anecdotal and does not include a clear listing of commitments.
- The Directorate has been tracking the stage of completion for each commitment in the Sexual Violence Action Plan. At the time of our audit fieldwork, the last update prepared by the Directorate was as of January 2013; this assessment indicated that 60% of commitments were completed and 40% were in progress. Subsequent to our fieldwork,

the Directorate publicly released a progress report. Similar to the 2012 publicly released progress report on the Domestic Violence Action Plan, the report is mainly anecdotal and contains no clear listing of commitments or their status.

- Action taken to address concerns raised in the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women has been slower than expected. The Ministerial Steering Committee established the Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women in fall 2010, three years after the framework was developed. In May 2012, the working group developed a work plan, and in September 2012, it released its first progress report, covering initiatives undertaken between 2010 and 2012. We reviewed the work plan and the progress report and noted that work was in progress for all actions in the work plan.

The establishment of the action plans, including the collaborative process used and the government's recognition of the strategic framework for aboriginal women, are steps in the right direction with regard to helping reduce violence against women and attempting to provide a more accessible and responsive system for those who experience abuse. However, neither the overall plans nor the individual commitments within these plans had any specified measurable outcomes against which to assess their effectiveness in preventing violence or improving services for those affected. The status updates generally reported achievements in the form of activities, such as an increase in number of shelter beds, number of women served or number of safety plans completed. To illustrate:

- The Domestic Violence Action Plan included a commitment to increase funding to community-based counselling services in order to address wait lists and gaps in service for specific populations. The status update reported an increase in the number of people counselled, but made no determination on whether the wait lists and gaps in service were addressed. Moreover, the Ministry did not

Figure 2: Initiatives Developed to Address Violence Against Women

Prepared by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario

Initiative	Objective/Purpose	Areas of Focus	# of Ministries with Commitments	Commitment (\$)
Domestic Violence Action Plan (2004)	To bring a collaborative approach focused on preventing domestic violence and improving supports for abused women and their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify women and children at risk and intervene earlier Change attitudes to prevent violence from happening in the first place Provide better community-based supports for victims Improve access and equity to services Strengthen the justice system response Provide better access to French-language services 	7 ministries and the Ontario Women's Directorate	\$113M (\$87M new funding and \$26M reallocation of existing funding)
Sexual Violence Action Plan (2011)	To take a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to prevent sexual violence and improve education, justice and service supports for women who have experienced sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent sexual violence Train front-line service providers Improve services provided by sexual assault centres and domestic violence centres Help survivors navigate the system of supports Improve supports for aboriginal women Improve access to services for francophone women Improve access to interpreters Respond to victims of human trafficking Strengthen the criminal justice response Reform legislation and hold offenders accountable Community collaboration 	3 ministries and the Ontario Women's Directorate	\$18M (\$11M new funding and \$7M reallocation of existing funding)
Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women (2007)	To have the government work collaboratively with aboriginal organizations and communities to develop a "continuum of care" to address issues related to violence against aboriginal women	<p>The following are not ministry strategies, but have been proposed by the authors of the framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake comprehensive research and data collection on issues related to aboriginal women and violence Legal reform and legislative change Creation of a comprehensive policy to target and address violence against all aboriginal women in Ontario Creation of a sustained policy and program infrastructure Public education campaign to raise awareness of violence against aboriginal women Build and sustain aboriginal community and organizational capacity, as well as government capacity to end violence against aboriginal women Support and build community leadership that works toward ending violence Ensure accountability for a broad commitment to the strategy 	None directly	None

have information on what the wait lists and gaps in service were.

- Under the focus area of strengthening the criminal justice response, the Sexual Violence Action Plan included a commitment by the Ministry of the Attorney General to provide enhanced training to justice personnel in order to improve their understanding of the impact of sexual assault on victims and in turn improve the criminal court system's response to sexual assault. The status update noted that a two-day training program was held for Crown attorneys, police and co-ordinators of Domestic Violence Treatment Centres. However, there was no assessment of how this action improved the criminal court system's response to sexual assault.

The Directorate told us that individual ministries were responsible for setting their own targets and tracking their progress. However, our audit work at the Ministry of Community and Social Services indicated that the Ministry had not done this for its own commitments.

Domestic Violence Advisory Council

In addition to the action plans and the strategic framework, in 2007 the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues established the Domestic Violence Advisory Council (Council), which comprises primarily stakeholders and researchers, to provide advice on how to improve the system of services to better meet the diverse needs of abused women and their children without incurring any additional costs for the government. In May 2009, the Council released a report that contained 45 recommendations in the following priority areas: government leadership, access to and equity in delivering VAW programs and services, education and training for professionals and the public, child welfare, legal response to violence, and threat assessment and risk management to identify those who are most dangerous to women. Most of the recommendations were directed toward the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Directorate. At the time

of our audit fieldwork, action was still in progress on three-quarters of the recommendations.

Change in Prevalence of Violence Against Women

Because the progress reports on the Domestic Violence Action Plan and the Sexual Violence Action Plan are silent on whether there has been any change in the prevalence of violence against women since the plans were created, we reviewed the latest available data from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey to assess their impact, if any. As shown in Figure 3, the percentage of women in Ontario who reported having experienced spousal violence within the previous five years decreased by 0.7 percentage points, from 7% in 2004 to 6.3% in 2009. Moreover, self-reported spousal abuse has been declining across the country, and in 2009, Ontario's rate was in line with the national rate. As a result, it is not clear whether this co-ordinated effort by the province has made a difference in the prevalence of domestic violence.

At the time of our audit, no statistics were available to determine whether the prevalence of sexual violence against women in Ontario has changed as a result of the Sexual Violence Action Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 1

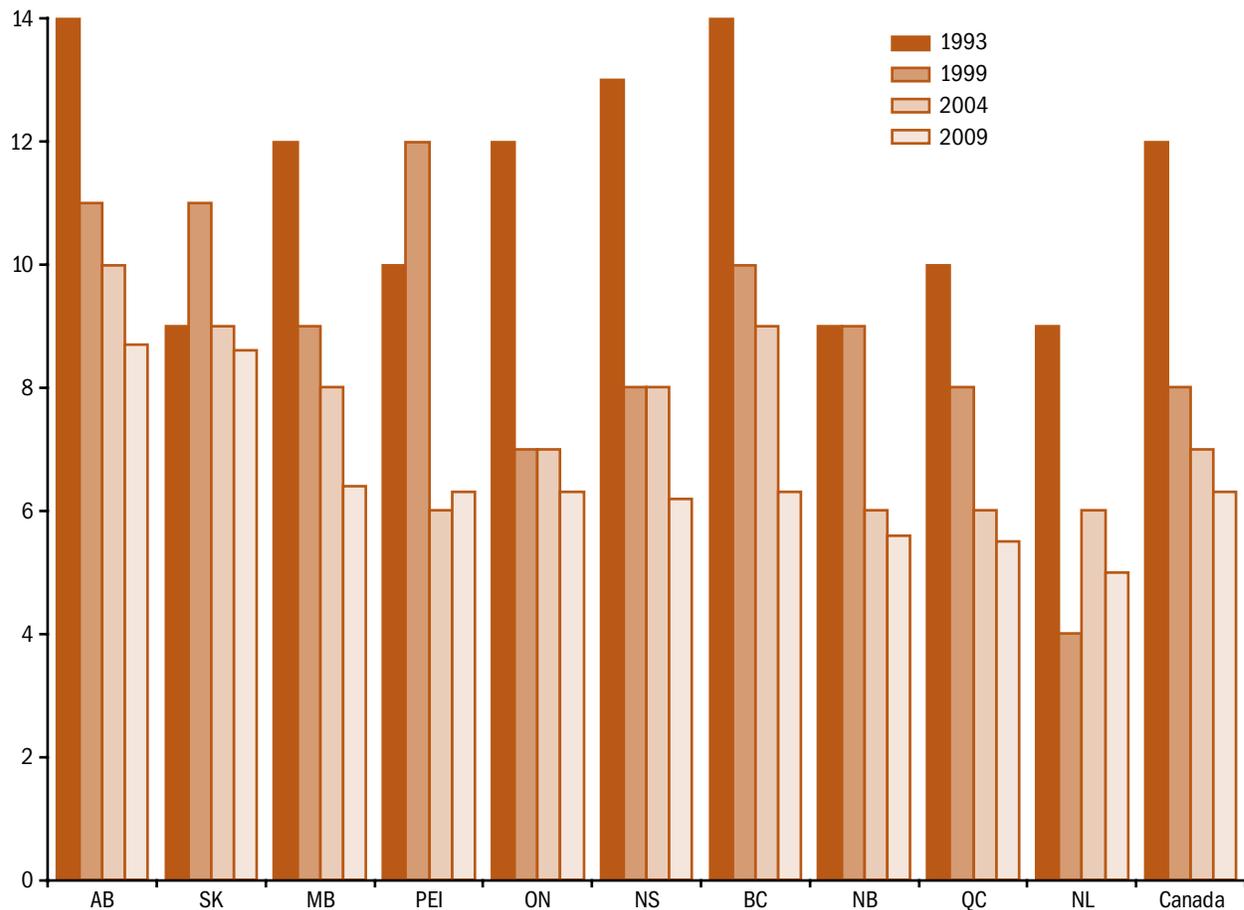
To assess whether the province's Domestic Violence Action Plan and Sexual Violence Action Plan have reduced domestic and sexual violence and improved supports for women who have experienced violence and their children, the Ontario Women's Directorate should ensure that the commitments contained within the action plans have measurable goals or targets attached to them and that progress is regularly assessed and reported.

ONTARIO WOMEN'S DIRECTORATE RESPONSE

The Ontario Women's Directorate acknowledges the recommendations made by the

Figure 3: Percentage Rate of Self-reported Spousal Violence, by Province

Source of data: Statistics Canada



Auditor General of Ontario, and welcomes her input on how it can further improve its tracking and reporting on initiatives aimed at improving supports for victims and preventing domestic violence and sexual violence in Ontario.

Domestic violence and sexual violence affect women and girls across Ontario. While progress is being made, there is much more to be done.

The Ontario Women's Directorate appreciates that measurable goals and targets are necessary for assessing progress. In response to the recommendations, the Ontario Women's Directorate will work with ministries to determine ways to refine existing goals and targets, and improve the assessment and public reporting on progress.

SHELTER/HOUSING AND COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Overview of Service Delivery

Women who are experiencing domestic abuse (that is, abuse by a partner, a significant other or a male family member) and who wish to leave a violent domestic situation can access community-based emergency shelters and crisis support services for themselves and their children. Although women may be referred by health professionals or social workers, abused women can also access VAW services directly. Emergency shelters, which are intended only for women who have experienced domestic abuse and their children, provide safe temporary lodging and crisis counselling. Staff at

the shelters develop personalized safely plans to help women stay safe, provide esteem building and offer crisis counselling.

Many emergency shelters provide additional services for which they are funded separately—for example, counselling services and transitional and housing support services, which aim to help connect the shelters' clients with community supports for the purpose of finding and maintaining housing in an effort to live independently and away from their abuser. Many emergency shelters also provide services to children who have witnessed abuse at home and whose mothers are receiving supports through the VAW program, to help them heal from the harmful effects of witnessing violence and thus avoid the need for more intensive supports in the future. If shelters do not provide these services in-house, they can refer abused women to other agencies for service. Emergency shelters also provide crisis phone-counselling assistance to abused women who are still at home by informing them of their rights and options and of services available to help them manage their situations. In contrast, women who have become homeless for any reason other than domestic abuse are typically served in homeless shelters, which are administered by municipalities. Homeless shelters, which may house both men and women in the same facility, do not offer the supports and services available in emergency shelters.

In the 2012/13 fiscal year, shelters in Ontario that provided temporary accommodation and security to women and children fleeing violence had a total capacity of approximately 2,000 beds. In 2011/12 (the latest year for which occupancy and length-of-stay information was available at the time of our audit), the shelters' average annual occupancy rate was 82%, and the average length of stay at a shelter was one month.

Standards for Service Quality

In our 1994 and 2001 audits, we noted that the Ministry had not developed any standards, service directives or guidelines for services to be provided

under VAW funding. We recommended that the Ministry develop such standards and regularly monitor agencies' performance against them. In 2010, the Ministry created the *Resource Guide to VAW Shelter Policy and Procedure Development* to assist VAW shelters in providing consistent high-quality services to women and their children who access Ministry-funded shelters across the province. This document is intended to be a resource for VAW shelters in developing and/or refining their current policies and procedures. It is not intended to be a directive or a set of standards that the Ministry expects all VAW shelters to meet. The guide encourages service providers to have policies in several areas (including governance, admission criteria, staffing and physical security). However, the guide does not indicate what the standards or guidelines should be. Its application is therefore unlikely to result in consistent province-wide service quality.

For the three regional offices we visited, we saw no evidence that the Ministry reviewed whether agencies had in fact put policies in place as outlined in its guide. The Ministry's position is that each agency's board of directors is responsible for the day-to-day management of the shelters, including admission criteria, and operating policies, including staffing levels. During our visit to select agencies, we noted that these agencies had established policies in many areas. However, none of the agencies we visited had policies on staffing levels represented by minimum staff-to-bed ratios, or policies aimed at ensuring that women who were referred elsewhere for services due to overcapacity actually received services. Moreover, we noted a number of inadequate and differing policies across the agencies we visited, a situation that could lead to inconsistent access to services and that did not permit useful comparisons of service-level data. For example:

- *Admission Criteria:* One shelter told us that it accepted women who were homeless but not abused, whereas others indicated that they accepted only women who were fleeing domestic violence, as intended by the Ministry. Based on the Transition Home Survey

conducted by Statistics Canada to collect data on residential services for abused women, more than 20% of women who sought shelter in Ontario on April 15, 2010, did so for reasons other than abuse. One shelter accepted only women with children, whereas most shelters accepted abused women with or without children. In the latter case, some agencies would not house a woman without children in the same room as a woman with children, but others would. The age at which male children could not be admitted also varied, ranging from 15 to 18.

- *Exit Criteria:* Although most agencies had discharge policies stating that specific behaviours—such as violence, drug use or weapons possession—would result in immediate discharge from a shelter, we noted that others stated only that women were allowed to remain in the shelter until housing or other alternatives were found in the community. Only one agency had established a length-of-stay policy.
- *Staff Screening:* All agencies we visited required that employees undergo a background check through the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC), including Vulnerable Sector screening, before being hired. However, only 69% of the employee files we reviewed included a CPIC check. As well, three-quarters of the agencies we visited did not require employees to get an updated CPIC check after being hired. As a result, some CPIC checks on file were more than a decade old.

RECOMMENDATION 2

To help ensure that the services provided by transfer-payment agencies to abused women and their children are of an acceptable and reasonably consistent quality standard, the Ministry of Community and Social Services should:

- establish acceptable quality standards for shelter services, particularly with regard to

admissions, minimum staffing levels and periodic Canadian Police Information Centre checks for shelter staff; and

- regularly monitor agencies' performance against standards and take appropriate corrective action if necessary.

MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry balances the need for VAW shelters to be accountable to the Ministry with the need for VAW shelters to be reasonably autonomous and flexible in carrying out their day-to-day responsibilities. This includes allowing shelters to develop their policies and procedures for responding to the unique needs of their communities. Each shelter has an independent board of directors that is responsible for the day-to-day management of the shelter, including setting admission criteria and policies for residential operations such as staffing levels.

The annual service contract between the Ministry and each agency sets out the requirement for agencies to evaluate the quality of service delivery according to the objectives set out in the service contract. The Ministry will strengthen its monitoring of agencies' performance against agency-established standards and take appropriate action if necessary.

The Ministry will also require Canadian Police Information Centre checks for shelter staff every three years.

MONITORING SERVICE DELIVERY AND EXPENDITURES

The Ministry enters into an annual service contract with each of its VAW transfer-payment agencies that, among other things, outlines the services to be provided, the amount of annual funding, and the service-level targets to be achieved. Agencies are required to submit quarterly reports that compare actual expenditures and service-level data against

targeted amounts, and provide explanations for significant variances.

Ministry monitoring activities do not include site inspections of VAW agencies. One-third of the agencies we visited told us that regional ministry staff had not come to their facility in more than a year. Where regional ministry staff did visit an agency, it was to help provide clarification on changes to service-level data requirements or to attend a board meeting. Most VAW agencies we visited told us that within the previous year a ministry representative had attended at least one of their board meetings, which don't necessarily occur at the shelter.

We reviewed the Ministry's monitoring activities and analyzed the data submitted by agencies for the 2011/12 fiscal year, and noted the following:

- Although all agencies had submitted quarterly reports for 2011/12, almost 20% of the quarterly reports we sampled did not contain all required variance explanations. In addition, we noted that where explanations for significant variances were provided, they often provided little insight into the cause, and that the Ministry's regional staff did little or no follow-up.
- The Ministry does not have adequate procedures in place to verify the accuracy or reasonableness of the data received from agencies—a situation that could lead the Ministry to make decisions based on unreliable data. For instance, we saw no evidence that the Ministry spot-checks supporting information. We compared a sample of the 2011/12 data contained in the Ministry's information system with records maintained at the agencies we visited and found that 42% of the data sampled did not agree with the agencies' internal records. Moreover, agency staff were not able to reconcile the figures. The Ministry also does not analyze the service-level data for reasonableness. As a result, we found that 36% of shelters reported preparing more safety plans than the number of clients they served, and one agency providing services under the Transitional and Housing Support Program reported finding housing for more women than it reported actually serving.
- We noted that the Ministry's analysis of service-level data was not sufficient to identify possible service gaps, inefficiencies in service delivery, and inequities across agencies and regions. Although agencies that deliver the same service are required to report on the same types of data, the Ministry does not compare the results reported by one agency to those reported by other agencies. For the 2011/12 fiscal year, the Ministry's analysis consisted of totalling reported results by region and for the province overall—and only for selected types of data. Although the Ministry analyzed the number of service providers by service type, the number of women served by service type, and occupancy rates and average length of stay for emergency shelters, it did not analyze the number of women not served (because of either ineligibility or lack of capacity) by service type, and the proportion of women served who found housing.
- We also found that some of the information collected had limited usefulness. For example, until 2011/12, each emergency shelter was asked to report the number of women it did not serve (that is, turned away) but was not asked to report the cause. Therefore, it is not known how many women were turned away because they were ineligible for service and how many were eligible and were ultimately served by another shelter. Starting in 2012/13, each shelter was asked to report the number of women referred to more appropriate services (that is, how many were turned away because they were deemed ineligible for emergency shelter services or because, even though eligible, they required services in French) and the number of women referred elsewhere due to service capacity (that is, eligible women who were turned away because that shelter was full). However, the

Ministry still does not know whether eligible women who were turned away from one emergency shelter were ultimately served by another. In another example, occupancy rates at emergency shelters are calculated based on the number of beds occupied. However, a shelter may be considered full even though all beds are not filled—as would be the case, for example, where a woman and her child or children occupy a room with more beds than the number of family members. Given the existence of such scenarios, shelters may frequently reach capacity, yet occupancy rates would seldom reflect that.

RECOMMENDATION 3

To better ensure that the quarterly reporting process for transfer-payment agencies providing services to abused women and their children furnishes sufficient information to enable cost-effective monitoring of expenditures and service delivery, the Ministry of Community and Social Services should:

- require transfer-payment agencies to submit only data that is useful for analyzing service costs and gaps in services; and
- develop procedures, such as periodic spot checks of submitted data, to ensure that data reported by transfer-payment agencies is accurate, consistent and reasonable.

MINISTRY RESPONSE

In the 2012/13 fiscal year, the Ministry made changes to the type of data transfer-payment agencies are required to submit for monitoring purposes. These changes are expected to enhance the Ministry's ability to examine value for money and explain significant variances. The Ministry will monitor whether the new data requirements are useful in analyzing service costs and gaps in service, and will make changes as necessary.

In addition, in the 2013/14 fiscal year the Ministry implemented standardized expenditure categories that are in line with the Ministry's Chart of Accounts. The standardization of accounts allows for cost comparisons between agencies. This information is currently uploaded into the Ministry's centralized information system, which will allow Ministry staff to develop reports.

As well, for a number of years, ministry staff have had the ability to generate business reports that allow them to identify missing data, data anomalies and significant variances reported by agencies. The Ministry will assess the feasibility of developing further procedures, including periodic spot checks at VAW agencies, to ensure that data reported by agencies is accurate, consistent and reasonable.

As improvements are made, the Ministry will continue to provide staff training to ensure a consistent approach to contract management and analysis of quarterly reporting information.

MONITORING QUALITY OF SERVICES PROVIDED

Satisfaction Surveys

Since June 2010, the Ministry has been conducting a client satisfaction survey to assess client perceptions of VAW services. The survey is voluntary and intended for women who have accessed emergency shelters (11,600 women in 2011/12), counselling services (48,000 women in 2011/12) and/or the services of the Transitional and Housing Support Program (22,000 in 2011/12). (Since abused women can access more than one VAW service, these numbers should not be added to yield the total number of women receiving VAW services.) The survey aims to assess whether the programs have increased women's safety, well-being and sense of empowerment, as well as increased accessibility and responsiveness of VAW services. Women

can complete the survey anonymously, either online or in paper format at the various agency locations. The Ministry pays agencies an annual total of \$430,000 to administer this survey.

The 2011/12 survey results indicated that almost 90% of women who responded to the survey felt safer, more confident and better able to make decisions and set goals for themselves after receiving VAW services. Regarding access to services, 54% of respondents said that the agency had helped them find a safe place to live and 72% of respondents said that the agency had helped them find other services in their community. When asked about waiting times, 53% of respondents said that they were able to get help immediately from the agency, an additional 25% were served within a week, and the remaining 22% said that they had waited more than one week.

Although the survey is available in approximately 15 languages, the response rate has been low. In both the 2010/11 and 2011/12 fiscal years, only 3,200 surveys were completed. Assuming that a woman completes a separate survey for each VAW service she has accessed in the year, as stipulated under the Ministry's service agreements with agencies, the client satisfaction survey participation rate may be as low as 4%. Furthermore, respondents did not answer every question on the survey, with the number of responses per question often being only half the total number of survey respondents. In addition, most responses came from women served by a limited number of agencies. For example, in 2011/12, no surveys were completed for 20% of agencies, and fewer than 10 surveys were completed for an additional 40% of agencies. These agencies were nevertheless paid almost \$260,000 in total to administer this survey. Therefore, the survey results may not be representative of the women served or of the agencies providing VAW services.

Because many agencies provide multiple VAW services, it is not always clear to which specific service the survey responses pertained. The Ministry also told us that it does not review results by

agency, even though the computer system could generate such reports if requested. As a result, the Ministry could not assess satisfaction with the services for each agency.

Program Evaluations

Contracts require agencies to outline how they will evaluate each VAW program or service they offer. However, we found that the evaluation methods varied widely among agencies. For instance, some agencies listed the Ministry's reporting requirements as the only method of evaluation (for example, reporting against service-level targets or having clients complete the Ministry's client satisfaction survey), whereas others listed more comprehensive evaluation methods (such as internal program reviews, focus groups with staff or former clients, and exit surveys). Under the terms of the contracts, agencies are not required to submit their program evaluations to the Ministry as evidence that their programs and services have been evaluated. In addition, the Ministry has no other procedures to ensure that programs and services are being evaluated as stipulated in the contracts.

For the agencies we visited, where the program evaluation methods were other than or in addition to the regular reporting requirements, only half provided us with evidence that they completed the evaluations as stated in their contracts. No agency had voluntarily submitted any program evaluations it had completed, and there was no evidence that the Ministry had requested the evaluations for review in an attempt to assess quality of service, determine areas for improvement, or highlight best practices that could be shared with other service providers.

Most agencies we visited indicated that they conduct their own satisfaction surveys or exit interviews with clients, but two-thirds did not compile and analyze the responses to assess satisfaction with services and identify areas for improvement. For the two agencies that did compile and analyze survey and interview responses, one of the agencies informed us that it provided a summary to its board

of directors, and the other said that it did not do this and had not been asked to do so by its board.

Risk Assessments

Ontario's Transfer Payment Accountability directive requires ministries to establish risk criteria for assessing the ability of service providers to meet service-delivery objectives. To this end, the Ministry has developed a risk-assessment questionnaire to be completed by service providers. The Ministry uses the agencies' self-assessments to determine their overall risk level. All agencies were assessed in the 2011/12 fiscal year, and almost all assessed themselves as low risk, yet three-quarters of all agencies did not meet their service-level targets as set out in their contracts for more than 50% of the programs and services the agencies were contracted to provide. In addition, for a sample of agencies in the three regions visited, we noted that although all agencies with identified risks or problems had developed action plans for mitigating those risks, the Ministry had requested verification of corrective action taken in only one-third of these cases.

Security Assessments

Providing a safe and secure environment for women in emergency shelters is paramount in helping them overcome the trauma associated with the violence they and their children have experienced.

In 2009, the Ministry completed a Building Condition Assessment of VAW shelters, which included looking at facility security measures (such as site surveillance cameras, motion sensor lighting, enclosures for outdoor areas, security windows, interior security systems, entrance supervision and door locks). This assessment identified more than 500 safety and security items that required attention across all VAW shelters. The estimated cost to upgrade or install these security measures totalled \$10.3 million. Each item that was identified was labelled either low, medium or urgent priority. We reviewed the status update on the security assess-

ment as of March 31, 2012, the latest available during our audit, and noted that the Ministry had provided funding for only 10% of the identified safety and security issues, regardless of priority level, but did not know whether the projects had been completed, as illustrated in Figure 4. Urgent-priority items that had not been funded by the Ministry and could still be outstanding included fire alarm systems and emergency power systems. The Ministry informed us that the decision to fund a project was based not on its assigned priority level from this assessment, but rather on what the agencies put forward through the annual infrastructure survey. In addition, the Ministry informed us that it is aware of only those capital projects it funds directly, and that more safety and security deficiencies may have been addressed if they were funded directly by the agencies through their operating funds or other sources. Because the Ministry does not perform site inspections, it might not know the status of safety and security issues at VAW shelters until it performs another Building Condition Assessment of VAW shelters, which is expected to occur by March 2019.

RECOMMENDATION 4

To ensure that the services being provided to abused women and their children are meeting their needs and are delivered in a safe and secure environment, the Ministry of Community and Social Services should:

- consider ways to increase the response rate on the client satisfaction survey, and analyze results by the nature of the service being provided;
- require agencies to periodically submit their program evaluations for ministry review, and subsequently ensure that areas requiring attention are corrected and best practices are shared with other service providers; and
- implement a plan for correcting significant safety and security deficiencies identified in the Ministry's 2009 Building Condition Assessment.

Figure 4: Status of Ministry Funding of 2009 Recommended Safety and Security Installations/Upgrades for Emergency Shelters, as of March 31, 2012

Source of data: Ministry of Community and Social Services

Priority Level	Safety and Security Deficiencies	Funded by Ministry	Not Funded by Ministry	% Not Funded by Ministry
Low	307	18	289	94
Medium	66	9	57	86
Urgent	133	9	124	93
Total	506	36	470	93

MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry is currently assessing ways to capture the impact of violence against women (VAW) programs on women escaping abuse who may not be willing or able to recount their experiences. The Ministry will work with agencies with the expertise on the dynamics of violence against women to help make improvements to client-based outcome tools such as the client satisfaction survey.

The Ministry acknowledges the need to have agencies periodically submit their program evaluations for ministry review. The Ministry will ensure that areas requiring attention are corrected and, where possible, share best practices among agencies.

The Ministry is developing an Asset Management Framework to better support decision-making regarding the use of the Ministry's limited capital funding. As the basis for the framework, the Ministry will be procuring services to complete Building Condition Assessments of all Ministry-funded sites, including VAW sites, over the next five fiscal years. The Ministry is determining which sites will be assessed at which times, but all VAW sites will be assessed over the life of the project.

MEETING DEMAND FOR SERVICES

The Ministry lacks the information that would allow it to identify the unmet demand for services and in turn to allocate the appropriate resources to close the service gap. The two crucial pieces of information the Ministry needs are:

- How many abused women who were eligible for services did agencies turn away because they did not have the space or resources to serve them?
- Of those women, how many were referred to other VAW agencies and received the necessary help?

The Ministry only tracks the number of women who, whether eligible or not, sought services and did not initially receive them. In the 2011/12 fiscal year, that number for emergency shelter services was almost 15,000, or 56% of women who sought these services, and the number for VAW counselling services was more than 3,000, or 6% of women who sought these services. But because the Ministry does not track which of those women who were eligible were then referred to other VAW agencies and served, it does not know for any given year how many eligible women who sought help were not served.

All of the emergency shelter directors we spoke to said that they try to refer abused women to other emergency shelters first, followed by municipally operated homeless shelters. However, none followed up with the shelter to which they referred each woman to determine whether she had arrived

and received help. To maintain confidentiality, emergency shelter staff told us that they call around to locate a shelter with room, give that shelter's address to the woman, and leave it up to the woman whether or not she goes there. We contacted the largest municipalities in three regions to determine how many abused women were placed in their homeless shelters. Only one of the three municipalities we contacted maintained information on VAW clients served in its homeless shelters. In this region, almost 900 VAW clients were accommodated in homeless shelters (which are less suitable because they do not provide the appropriate supports for abused women and their children).

The Ministry does not track information on wait-list length and wait times for VAW services. Only one of the shelters we visited kept a wait list for counselling services. In this case, the wait for family counselling was three months. We also reviewed documentation regarding service needs from agencies we did not visit and noted a five-month wait for long-term counselling at one agency and an 18-month wait for individual trauma therapy at another agency.

In 2011/12, cumulative data reported by all agencies indicated that only one-third of women who sought services from the Transitional and Housing Support Program found housing. Agencies told us that social housing is harder to find in metropolitan areas, as was evident from the fact that the length of stay at shelters in metropolitan areas was higher than in smaller communities.

RECOMMENDATION 5

To better ensure that the service needs of abused women and their children are met, the Ministry of Community and Social Services should:

- require agencies to maintain wait-list information for their services; and
- review the feasibility of implementing a system to determine whether women who are eligible for VAW services but must be referred elsewhere by an agency, because of capacity issues, actually receive the needed services.

MINISTRY RESPONSE

As part of the improvements made to the Ministry's reporting requirements in 2012/13, the Ministry implemented the requirement for agencies to track and report both the number of women who are referred elsewhere for services and the number of women waiting for service at any point in time during the reporting period. The Ministry acknowledges the importance of collecting agency wait lists and will assess the feasibility of requiring VAW agencies to collect this information.

The collection of data must consider the safety and well-being of abused women and children. The Ministry does not require agencies to track whether women have received services when they are referred to other agencies for shelters, counselling, and transitional and housing supports. In the 2008/09 fiscal year, the Ministry removed the requirement for service providers delivering the Transitional and Housing Support Program to track and report the number of women who had found and maintained housing for six months. Service providers informed the Ministry that results would be unreliable and attempting to contact these women could place them at an increased risk of violence.

In light of the Auditor's recommendation, the Ministry will assess the feasibility of requiring VAW agencies to develop protocols and procedures to determine whether women received services from other service providers.

FUNDING

Over the past five years, Ministry funding to transfer-payment agencies for VAW programs and services increased by 16%, from \$122 million in the 2007/08 fiscal year to \$142 million in 2011/12, as shown in Figure 5. This \$20 million increase was a direct result of the Domestic Violence Action Plan,

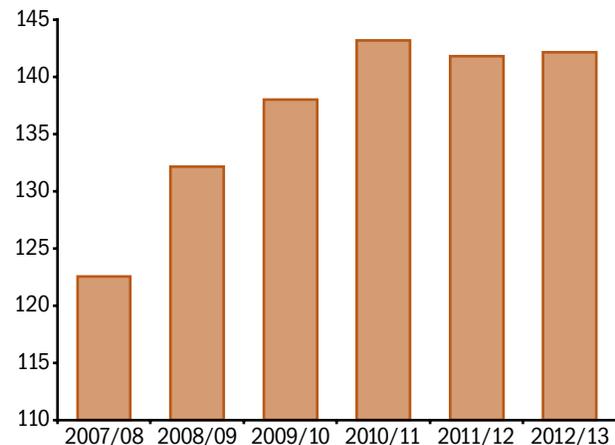
which included increases in base funding for all VAW programs and services, as well as additional funding for existing and new shelter beds and for the expansion of francophone services.

Although transfer-payment agencies are required to submit an annual budget to secure funding for the following year, we noted that agency funding is generally historically based, with little or no correlation to identified needs or past performance. In particular, we identified the following with respect to the Ministry's funding of transfer-payment agencies:

- The approved budget remained the same for three consecutive years, from 2009/10 through 2011/12, for 84% of agencies that operated emergency shelters and 93% of agencies that provided counselling services.
- There was little correlation between service-level targets and the amount of annual funding the Ministry approved. For example, 50% of emergency shelters that reduced their service target for the number of women to be served by at least 10% for 2011/12 were approved either for the same amount of funding or more than in the previous year. Conversely, 56% of emergency shelters that increased their service level targets for the number of women to be served by at least 10% for 2011/12 were approved for the same amount of funding or less than in the previous year. Fixed costs incurred by shelters prevent immediate changes in funding level. However, we noted that agencies with similar targets for the same service received different levels of funding. For example, in 2011/12, funding for 10-bed shelters ranged from \$334,000 to \$624,000, even though the agencies at the high and low ends of the range were located in the same region. Funding for a target of 1,200 direct hours of transitional and housing support services ranged from \$67,000 to \$141,000 per agency. The Ministry has not looked at the variances to determine whether they are reasonable.

Figure 5: VAW Transfer Payments, 2007/08–2012/13 (\$ million)

Source of data: Ministry of Community and Social Services



- An agency's performance had little impact on the funding it received the following year. For example, 60% of emergency shelters missed their service targets for the number of women to be served by at least 10% in 2010/11, but received the same amount of funding or more the following year.
- For an individual agency, a permanent change in its annual funding level occurs mainly when there is a change in the programs or services it provides. During the last decade, most other changes to an agency's annual funding level have occurred when there were across-the-board funding increases. To illustrate, there were annual funding increases to the base budgets of all VAW programs and services from 2004/05 through 2009/10, and annual increases to all agencies' salaries and wages from 2006/07 through 2008/09. As well, in 2008/09, annual funding was increased to ensure that each shelter received at least \$30,000 per bed.

Reasonableness of Funding Allocation

At the time of our audit, the Ministry had not done an analysis to determine whether resources were properly allocated across the province to meet

demand. Ideally, this analysis should be based on the number of women who could not be served by any VAW agency during the year, by region, but as previously indicated, the Ministry's figures are overstated in this area. Therefore, in order to assess whether resources are being distributed equitably, we compared the distribution of total VAW funding and shelter beds across the province with the distribution of females. Our analysis indicated that the Central West region (which includes Peel, Dufferin, Wellington, Waterloo and Halton) had about an 8% discrepancy between its share of total VAW funding and the percentage of Ontario's female population living there (adjusted to reflect the ages of women in shelters). The Ministry recognizes that the province has growth regions and that it needs to find a way to shift capacity to meet the demand.

We also analyzed various unit costs for the three most significant VAW programs and services in the 2011/12 fiscal year, and noted a wide variation in unit costs among agencies for similar services, as illustrated in Figure 6. We did not note a large variance between rural and urban areas, but we did note that the Eastern region had some of the higher average unit costs, followed by the Northern region. At the time of our audit, the Ministry had not followed up on these variances.

Figure 6: Key Service Costs in VAW Programming, 2011/12

Source of data: Ministry of Community and Social Services

	Provincial Median (\$)	Variation Among Agencies (\$)
Shelter Costs		
Costs per person	4,400	1,500-17,500
Annual cost per available bed	39,500	26,400-63,200
Cost per person per day of residential care	140	90-575
Counselling Services		
Cost per person	630	20-3,500
Cost of hour of service	84	20-520
Transitional Housing Support Program		
Cost per person	730	90-6,800

RECOMMENDATION 6

To ensure that funding provided to transfer-payment agencies is commensurate with the value of services provided to abused women and their children and is properly allocated to meet the demand for these services across the province, the Ministry of Community and Social Services should periodically compare and analyze agency costs for similar services across the province, investigate significant variances that seem unjustified, and ensure that funding is based on the trend in actual service levels provided.

MINISTRY RESPONSE

In the 2012/13 fiscal year, the Ministry made changes to the type of data transfer-payment agencies are required to submit for monitoring purposes. These changes are expected to improve the Ministry's ability to compare costs between agencies providing similar programs. Further changes were made to the financial data reporting requirements for the 2013/14 fiscal year. These changes will allow more accurate information on program cost factors and variances.

The Ministry will develop tools and procedures for Ministry staff to use in conducting analyses of agency costs and variances to ensure that funding is based on trends.

CO-ORDINATION

The Ministry is responsible for co-ordinating regional service delivery through its nine regional offices. The Ministry requires each regional office to conduct strategic service planning. Regional strategic service planning involves bringing together Ministry-funded VAW agencies to discuss service issues, best practices, emerging issues and regional priorities. For the three regions we visited, we found

that the degree of regional service planning varied. For example, one of the regional offices involved all agencies in its service-planning activities. Another regional office involved only agencies providing shelter services, and the third regional office involved only agencies from a certain part of the region. As a result of these planning activities, one region developed a strategic plan but told us that due to a lack of funding, it had not taken action to address the needs identified. Another region shifted some annual funding from one agency to another to better meet demand for counselling services.

Additional co-ordination activities are also conducted through the Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees, collaboration agreements between VAW service providers and Children's Aid Societies, and referral agreements between the Transitional and Housing Support Program service providers and social housing service providers.

Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees

The Ministry provides an average of \$30,000 in annual funding to each of the 48 Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees in order to strengthen linkages and networks among community agencies for the purposes of improving community response to abused women, increase awareness and prevention, and identify and address gaps in VAW services. The committees are typically led by a volunteer chair and include representatives from various sectors (such as justice and health), as well as from agencies providing VAW services.

Although the Ministry requires these committees to report annually on their activities and on what they accomplished for the funding they received, such reporting was inconsistent. To illustrate, in one of the three regions we visited, none of the committees provided the Ministry with a year-end report that outlined their objectives, deliverables for the year and achievements, as required under their funding contracts. In the other

two regions, where committees had provided such a report, the descriptions of what they did were often too general and did not contain quantifiable targets or outcomes. There was no evidence that the Ministry had followed up with these committees.

We met with some committee chairs in the regions we visited and inquired about their activities. Although most said that they meet monthly to identify gaps in service, only one reported that it conducted this activity in its annual report to the Ministry. The most common activity among the committees was promoting public awareness. We were also informed that some committees were securing funding from other organizations to conduct research. For example, one committee examined policies that inadvertently put women who experience violence at increased risk. The resulting report proposed a framework for assessing the determinants of women's safety and provided a map of potential areas of focus for service delivery and policy design. However, the Ministry does not collect or review the research materials generated by the Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees, even though doing so could inform decision-making about services and ways to address service gaps and inequities.

The Ministry informed us that the first two-day provincial conference for these committees was held in November 2011 to facilitate information-sharing. Forty-two of the 48 committees attended. Since the conference, representatives from various committees have gotten together as a group and begun attempting to secure funding for the creation of a provincial network to support the VAW sector. A website has also been developed where committees can post information, share best practices and stay connected.

Collaboration with Children's Aid Societies

Shelters for abused women with children may need to involve a Children's Aid Society (CAS) in certain cases, and vice versa. In 2004, the Ministry facilitated the development of local protocols between

CAS and VAW agencies (both shelters and counselling agencies) to identify the situations when the two sectors must involve each other and what actions should be taken by each. At the time of our audit, although there were 46 Children's Aid Societies in Ontario, only 37 collaboration agreements between CAS and VAW agencies were in place in various communities.

Over the years, the Ministry was made aware of problems with the collaboration process by such sources as the 2007 Domestic Violence Death Review Committee report issued by the Office of the Chief Coroner, the 2009 report from the Domestic Violence Advisory Council, and annual reports submitted by each CAS/VAW collaboration agreement committee. As a result, in November 2010 the Ministry held consultations with representatives from both the CAS and the VAW sectors to discuss concerns and develop strategies to improve matters. Some of the concerns identified included the following: other sectors were required to play a role because the needs of women were becoming increasingly complex (for example, mental-health and addiction issues, as well as custody and access issues); links were needed to other children's services, such as those for mental health; expectations and requirements for collaboration were not the same for VAW and CAS organizations; current resources were not adequate to support and nurture effective working relationships between the two sectors; and more training was required to promote a shared understanding of abuse against women. Suggested actions for improvement included replacing the current collaboration agreements with a multi-sectoral protocol or collaborative agreements with representatives from police, Crown attorneys, probation and parole services and the health sector; developing a common risk assessment process and a standardized risk assessment tool to be used by both the CAS and the VAW sectors; providing resources for ongoing cross- or multi-sectoral training on the application or implementation of any collaboration agreements; and promoting inter-ministerial collaboration and providing inter-ministerial leadership.

In response, the Ministry updated the year-end reporting template to be completed by the co-chairs of the CAS/VAW collaboration agreement committees as part of their annual reporting process to the Ministry and, in conjunction with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, provided one-time total funding of \$200,000 in 2012/13 to support cross-sectoral initiatives that respond to the needs of local communities. With respect to the additional funding, we noted that the Ministry required committees to submit proposals that aim to "improve collaboration between their sectors, as well as service delivery for women who experience violence and their children." In 2012/13, the Ministry also prepared a summary of the achievements and challenges reported by the collaboration agreement committees in their 2010/11 and 2011/12 annual reports. However, according to the summary, many of the concerns identified during the 2010 consultations remain, such as a lack of understanding of each party's roles and responsibilities, and in turn the need for training to promote a shared understanding of abused women and the agreement.

Transitional and Housing Support Program Referral Agreements

Finding safe and secure housing is important for women who have left situations involving domestic violence because it allows them to lead independent lives. All 127 Transitional and Housing Support Program (THSP) providers are expected to have agreements with the 47 local Social Housing Coordinated Access Centres to help abused women find social housing. These centres, which are operated by local regional or municipal governments and funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, provide a single point of entry into the local social housing market. At the time of our audit, 34 THSP referral agreements were in place. Therefore, not all communities were covered by these arrangements.

Victims of domestic violence, whether they are still living with the abuser or in temporary lodging

such as a VAW shelter, are given priority access to social housing provided they meet specified criteria and submit a written declaration from a community professional (for example, a shelter worker, social worker or health-care worker) who confirms their eligibility for priority status. Eligible applicants are placed at the top of the social housing waiting list.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services does not track the number of women who are referred to rent-g geared-to-income housing units designated for victims of domestic violence. Therefore, it is not aware of how long women in the THSP typically wait to receive social housing. Based on an annual survey administered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, in 2011, of the 230,000 people who were waiting for rent-g geared-to-income housing in Ontario, 10,000 (or 4%) had priority status. During that year, 46% of those with priority status were housed, compared to 8% of those without priority status. According to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the average waiting time for social housing for people with priority status was six months. The Ministry did not have information on waiting times for other groups, but a survey conducted by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association that same year found that those housed in 2011—excluding those in Toronto, which did not report—waited an average of two to four years, depending on the community. Overall, although the priority applicants made up 4% of the waiting list, they accounted for almost 24% of the people who obtained housing. Therefore, the priority policy was working in getting many abused women and their children into housing more quickly.

As is done with CAS/VAW collaboration agreements, a committee is set up to manage each THSP referral agreement, and each committee is required to report annually to the Ministry on its referral activities, describing what worked well and what did not, and providing resolution strategies. We saw no evidence that the Ministry had analyzed the information submitted to identify best practices or issues to be dealt with systemically.

RECOMMENDATION 7

To help improve the co-ordination of service delivery for abused women and their children, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (Ministry) should:

- ensure that regional offices undertake effective strategic service planning with agencies and that the results support the Ministry's overall goals and priorities; and
- use the annual reports of the Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees, and the committees set up to manage the collaboration agreements between Children's Aid Societies and VAW agencies, as well as the Transitional and Housing Support Program referral agreements to:
 - summarize the useful information;
 - share the opportunities for service improvements and useful research identified; and
 - take corrective action on common issues identified.

MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry agrees that it needs to ensure that planning activities between regional offices and VAW agencies are effective, in order to maintain the stability and sustainability of the existing system of VAW services and establish priorities for future system development. The Ministry will develop a strategic plan that will identify priorities for improving regional planning activities and will enhance service system co-ordination across the VAW sector.

In addition, the Ministry will summarize information from the annual reports submitted by the Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees and the Children's Aid Societies/VAW Committees, share useful information accordingly and take corrective action where necessary. The Ministry will assess the need for continuing the Transitional and Housing Support Program referral agreement reporting.

PERFORMANCE REPORTING AND OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

The Ministry has set performance measures for all but one of its objectives for the VAW programs and services. However, the Ministry has not established targets or benchmarks for many of these measures, and does not routinely report results related to them. Instead, the Ministry reports activity, such as the number of women and children served, the number of shelters and the number of calls to the crisis lines. Figure 7 summarizes the objectives, performance measures and targets for VAW programs and services, along with the results achieved in the 2011/12 fiscal year (the latest year for which information was available at the time of our audit).

The program's effectiveness cannot be assessed by these measures alone, since three of the five performance measures rely on results from the client satisfaction survey. As we noted earlier, these results may not be representative of the perceptions of those who access VAW services or the agencies providing VAW services because of the low response rate and the fact that few or no surveys were completed for 60% of agencies.

The Ministry may find other information useful to help determine how its services are being used and whether they are being effective over time and in comparison to other jurisdictions. For approximately 20 years, under the federal government's Family Violence Initiative, in consultation with provincial and territorial governments, Statistics Canada has been surveying all residential facilities that provide services to abused women and their children across Canada and collecting information both on the services provided and on the clientele. This survey, currently called the Transition Home Survey, is conducted every other year. A number of the questions, as well as the answers from the Ontario survey respondents, would provide useful information to the Ministry. For example:

- The reasons for seeking shelter that women reported to the agencies could help the Ministry determine whether emergency shelters are being used for abused women and their

children. The survey indicated that more than 20% of women who sought shelter on April 15, 2010, did so for reasons other than abuse.

- Services that were felt to be needed but not currently offered, or not offered at the level required to meet the needs of residents, as well as any issues or challenges facing the shelter or residents, could help the Ministry identify service gaps. The survey highlighted the following service needs: addiction and mental health counselling, transitional support for housing and employment, and programming for children. The challenges facing women most frequently reported by the facilities included access to affordable long-term housing, lack of services for mental health and addiction issues, poverty, and access to legal services. Besides the need for more funding, one of the most frequently mentioned challenges facing shelters was the need for more staff training to deal with the increasingly complex needs of residents.
- The number of women turned away from the shelter and the reasons for turning them away could help the Ministry assess its ability to meet needs. The survey indicated that two-thirds of the women seeking shelter on April 15, 2010, were turned away because the shelter was full.
- The number of repeat users could help the Ministry assess the program's ability to empower women to live free of violence. The survey indicated that about 20% of women residing in shelters on April 15, 2010, had been at the same shelter before.

The Ministry has access to the public reports produced by Statistics Canada; but little can be concluded from those reports, because only selected information is presented and because that information may or may not have been included in previous reports. The Ministry would be well served to request the results of all questions by type of facility and by province to best identify where improvements are needed in Ontario and how it compares to other jurisdictions.

Figure 7: Objectives, Performance Measures, Targets and 2011/12 Results for VAW Programs and Services

Source of data: Ministry of Community and Social Services and Office of the Auditor General of Ontario

Objectives	Performance Measures	Targets	2011/12
			Results
Increase the safety of women who are experiencing violence and their children by providing safe shelter, safety plan development and crisis counselling	• % of women who feel safer	96	87 ^a
	• % of women with a safety plan	100	83 ^b
	• % of women who sought help and received service	None	81 ^b
Assist women experiencing violence and their children by enhancing self-esteem and supporting them to access resources to live independent of domestic violence	• % of women who feel more confident	None	87 ^a
	• % of women who gained hope that they could have a better life	None	90 ^a
Enhance the co-ordination of VAW services at the community level	None	None	N/A

a. Source: accumulated results from the 2011 client satisfaction survey.

b. Source: calculated by the Office of the Auditor General using 2011/12 service-level data reporting by agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 8

To assess how effective the Ministry of Community and Social Services (Ministry) has been in achieving its objectives for Violence Against Women programs and services (see Figure 7), the Ministry should:

- establish performance measures for its objective of enhancing the co-ordination of services, as well as targets for all established performance measures, and regularly report results related to those measures; and
- liaise with Statistics Canada to obtain responses to the biennial Transition Home Survey, by province, and compare pertinent results for Ontario to past performance and to results in other jurisdictions.

MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry is refining the type of data that transfer-payment agencies are required to report to the Ministry on a quarterly basis so that it is more consistent, meaningful and reliable. It will therefore enable the Ministry to measure the performance of programs and services, and will support the program planning needs of the Ministry and VAW-funded agencies. The Ministry will reassess the performance measures established for the VAW program and the appropriateness of reporting results.

The Ministry plans to obtain more detailed data from the Transition Home Survey and other relevant sources to enhance its understanding of violence against women and its assessment of its programs and services, so that it will know how better to meet the diverse needs of women.