



ACT NOW:

*Canada's National Survivor
Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking*

Stratégie Nationale du Canada pour Lutter Contre la Traite des Êtres Humains

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & STATEMENTS OF SOLIDARITY

WomenatthecentrE acknowledges that the land on which we operate is the territory of the Huron- Wendat, the Anishinaabe Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Métis, Inuit, and the Mississauga's of the Credit, and was taken without consent.

Today, this land is still home to many First Nations and Indigenous Peoples from across Turtle Island. We recognize the inherent connections between ongoing colonialism and all forms of violence, including racism, sexism, and over-policing that disproportionately impact Indigenous communities, particularly Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people.

WomenatthecentrE actively works to break this pattern of ongoing violence because it is crucial to our work of dismantling the embedded impacts of colonialism. Too often, land acknowledgements are presented as something to cross off a checklist or are done performatively to be 'politically correct' so, it is important to take time to honour and recognize each of our individual relationships with the land, otherwise the words we speak in a land acknowledgement hold no meaning. It is important to remember that while anyone can do a land acknowledgement, only certain people have the right to welcome you to this land. WomenatthecentrE asks everyone, settler and migrant, to take a moment to think about their relationship with this land, and our responsibilities to honor the land and Indigenous Peoples. We invite you to share the land in which you are occupying. If you are unsure of who's land you are on, please visit native-land.ca



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STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY FOR BLACK COMMUNITIES

WomenatthecentrE stands in solidarity with Black communities across Canada and recognize the profound and enduring impacts of the transatlantic slave trade. The legacy of slavery has left deep scars and systemic inequalities that continue to affect Black Canadians today. We acknowledge the historical and ongoing injustices faced by Black individuals and communities, including the exploitation, discrimination, marginalization and displacement that have been perpetuated through centuries of systemic racism.

We actively ground our work in this knowledge and commit to not perpetuating the same violence against Black communities. We acknowledge the history of human trafficking that stole Black people from their homes and displaced them here in Canada. We work to actively dismantle these systems and elevate the voices of Black women, girls, gender diverse and trans people.

STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY WITH SEX WORKERS AND SEX WORKING COMMUNITIES

We stand in solidarity with sex workers by recognizing their rights and autonomy, we are committed to not conflating consensual sex work with sex trafficking, advocating for protective policies and a unified effort to respect all individuals in the sex industry while doing anti-trafficking work.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I: Introduction	5
Introducing WomenattheCentrE	7
Message From The Team	8
Overview of Canada’s Existing Anti-Trafficking Framework	10
Survivor Identified Gaps and Challenges with Canada’s Framwork	11
Part II: Methodology	18
Moving Beyond Consultation	19
Review of Canada’s National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking	20
National Collective	24
Community Based Ethics Approved Research	24
Part III: Pillars and Recommendations	27
Pillar 1: Empowerment and Personal Agency	28
Pillar 2: Real Prevention	30
Pillar 3: Protection and Collaboration With Survivors	33
Pillar 4: Prosecution Enhancing the Criminal Legal System Response	36
Pillar 5: Partnerships and Accountability	38
Part IV: Immediate Calls to Action	41
Calls to Action for Canada	42
Emerging Trends	44
Part V: Conclusion	46
Part VI: Appendices	49
Appendix A: Literature Review	50
Appendix B: Jamboard	50
Appendic C: Research Report	50
References	51



PART I: **INTRODUCTION**



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WomenatthecentrE is a survivor led organization that aims to eradicate gender-based violence. In 2020, we received funding from WAGE Canada to develop survivor-led services and supports to survivors of trafficking after 10% of members identified they needed different types of supports and programs. We embarked on a journey to connect and create pathways with survivors to connect through membership, Collectives, and our ethics approved research process, which informs this National Survivor Strategy.

The National Survivor Strategy to End Human Trafficking is a collaborative document developed by survivors and community partners to address human trafficking in Canada. This strategy, titled ‘ACT NOW’, is a collection of recommendations from survivors across the country aimed at informing the Canadian government about their needs.

‘ACT NOW’ calls on the federal government to incorporate survivors’ voices into policies, procedures, and programs that impact and claim to support survivors of trafficking in Canada. Additionally, this strategy urges the federal government to take decisive action to combat trafficking and support survivors and their families. It emphasizes moving beyond consultation to co-creating solutions with survivors, thereby using best practices for meaningful and sustainable engagement at all levels of decision-making.

Human trafficking is a complex human rights violation impacting millions of people worldwide¹ and is defined as:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit”².



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Due to its complexity, there are no simple solutions. Human trafficking is a legacy of colonization, systemic violence, racism, capitalism, and globalization³. The deep history and ongoing systemic violence against many communities, coupled with restrictive laws that create conditions for trafficking and exploitation, cannot be overlooked in furthering harm against survivors and survivor communities. Through survivor engagement, we continue to assess the effectiveness of the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking. This strategy advocates for people with lived experience by highlighting how they enhance the effectiveness of the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking. Their insights help us better understand and address root causes and optimize funding allocations to meet the needs of survivors and the broader community.

WOMENATTHECENTRE

WomenatthecentrE is the first and only pan-Canadian non-profit organization created by and for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). Our mandate is to ensure that the voices of survivors with lived experience are integral to the development and implementation of public policy. Since its inception in 2008, WomenatthecentrE's free membership program has grown to include over 7,000 members across the world. WomenatthecentrE provides a free peer-support network of survivors of all forms of GBV, which facilitates connection with other survivors thereby assuring a sense of community and engagement in collective healing, advocacy, and training opportunities. WomenatthecentrE also provides survivor-led and trauma-informed counselling services to survivors through the C6 Peer Counselling Program.

The organization is a leader in community-based participatory research and advocacy,



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collaborating with leading community organizations to conduct and disseminate research in the areas of gender-based violence and strangulation leading to traumatic brain injury (TBI), domestic violence courts, and sexual violence. WomenatthecentrE is also conducting unprecedented research and community engagement to advance gender equity for Black women, girls, gender-diverse and trans peoples (B-WGGDT) in Canada in the Truth and Transformation project funded by the Department for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada.

WomenatthecentrE is committed to survivor-centered work, which fundamentally upholds the value of prioritizing and promoting survivor’s dignity, respect, diversity, strengths and resilience. In this project, and across all other unique initiatives led by WomenatthecentrE, the organization is further committed to using an inclusive, culturally responsive, intersectional feminist, and trauma-informed lens.

MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM

To the National Collective Members: This Collective met 10 times to discuss and inform this document. It is the membership and the hard work and dedication of this Collective and their expertise that drove the recommendations and the responses to the pillars in the following pages. We want to acknowledge their hard work publicly, vulnerability, and dedication to the work of this project and report. We want to specifically thank those who allowed us to acknowledge them by name here: Dawn, Assiinaabaago, Chitwaa kwe miishkikeh doodem Jeanette Niganobe, Brenna D. Wallace, Nicole Rego.



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We also would like to acknowledge and thank all those who supported the ethics approved research to help us understand a more fulsome picture of experiences, services and supports related to human trafficking in Canada. Community Research Ethics Office (CREO) who approved this research and worked alongside us to ensure our questions, consents and processes of conducting research were ethical and embodied community based research.

To the staff of WomenatthecentrE, from Nneka Macgregor, Shirley Broekstra, Mandira Arnab Aich, Nicole Fontyn-Taylor, Dr. Gifty Asare to the rest of the team, thank you for your many hours supporting us (the Embedding Resilience Grounding Resistance Survivor Team), assisting with process learnings, and receiving our feedback. Your collaborative support in writing these documents and assisting us in organizing our information was invaluable and supported our long-term skill development in this field.

To the community partners who met with us, shared their experiences about working in the field asked questions about survivor engagement, and assisted us in collecting recommendations for this strategy. Agencies such as the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, The Global Alliance Against the Trafficking of Women, Atikokan Native Friendship Centre, Women and Gender Equity (WAGE) and its Program Officer, Mia Sam Yang, Butterfly, YWCA Halifax and so many others. Whether we met on an ongoing basis or one or two times during this initiative, each meeting had an impact on this document and beyond.

Finally, to the almost 100 survivors who provided insight, shared their declarations, experiences, and recommendations throughout the various stages of our research; your time, energy, and tenacity are deeply appreciated. Without your engagement, declarations, and trust,



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this strategy would not be possible. Human trafficking is a community issue and can only truly be eradicated by the involvement of the full community.

Thank you.

CANADA'S EXISTING FRAMEWORK

Canada's existing framework to combat human trafficking was explored in depth in our Literature review (**Appendix A**). Overall, Canada's responses are informed by a variety of federal, provincial, and international laws, such as:

- 1. The Criminal Code of Canada:** Specific laws related to Human Trafficking such as Sections 279.01 to 279.04, as well as The Protection of Communities and Exploited persons act. These provisions legislate offenses related to sex work and is often known as the "Nordic model".
- 2. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA):** IRPA houses the regulations surrounding foreign Nationals and work in Canada. This includes restrictions on foreign workers not to work in the sex industry such as strip clubs, massage parlours and escort services.
- 3. The Canadian Victims Bill of Rights:** The Canadian Victims Bill of Rights is part of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It provides four protected principle rights that include information, protection, participation, and restitution.
- 4. International agreements:** The Palermo Protocol, Provincial Legislation such as the Ontario's



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Combating Human Trafficking Act and the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking (NSTCHT) are acts that are not necessarily legislation in their entirety but they outline the direction and resources which support combating trafficking. These acts are predominantly used for enforcement and investigations and although make mention to support prevention and survivor engagement they do not center the voices of survivors of trafficking and are often designed with political influence. In the next section, we will explore survivor identified gaps and challenges within the existing Anti-Trafficking frameworks.

SURVIVOR IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES AND GAPS

Despite advances in legislation, responses, and awareness-raising initiatives, significant challenges with access, coordination, support, and prevention of trafficking persist. As noted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur as well as from survivors of trafficking who have migrated to Canada, there are glaring gaps to the labour rights of migrant workers, sex workers and those in Canada with a work visa have no clear pathway to residency in Canada after exploitation and trafficking⁴. We have heard declarations regarding the over policing of massage parlours in the name of anti-trafficking whereby migrant sex workers and their families are arrested and detained. We have observed incidents where labor trafficking related charges are administered when overcrowding or housing compliance issues arise rather than specific human trafficking. The comprehensive training of law enforcement, by-law, and other related agencies is necessary to address the over policing and legislative gaps related to IRPA and other legislation.



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Law enforcement agencies play a crucial role in anti-Trafficking work; however, we noted gaps around collaboration across jurisdiction, maintaining confidentiality of survivors' experiences, better training for labour rights and more funding to support legal aid for survivors involved in various legal systems. Laws related to human trafficking seem to be inconsistently applied and interpreted as it relates to investigations.

Survivors noted experiencing stigma and discrimination when reporting to police, healthcare, or other service providers. Stigma, such as the assumption around the active participation of survivors in the trafficking they experienced and their trauma-related symptoms caused by the violence they endured, remain a crucial issue. This violence needs to be addressed for survivors to have their human rights complied with and their dignity and autonomy restored after a trafficking situation. Misconceptions about trafficking, blaming survivors, and the portrayal of human trafficking in the media continue to be barriers to trafficking disclosure and accessing support.

Social Services, although vastly underfunded and not always accessible, receive the majority of funding related to the long-term support needs of survivors of trafficking. Peer based initiatives such as peer support networks, peer counseling, alternative healing modalities, leadership initiatives, job training, education opportunities and holistic support options that are culturally relevant, linguistically accessible, and offered in a variety of communities are not often found and are not receiving core or enough funding.

The prevalence of trafficking in Canada is truly unknown due to current data being primarily collected through police reports. The most recent data from Statistics Canada (2022) shows there were 2,977 reported incidents of human trafficking between 2011 and 2021⁵. It's very likely that



these numbers are much higher as there are multiple reasons why a survivor may not report to police and/or police may not capture the report accurately. The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking released their report from calls received between 2019 and 2020, revealing that only 7% of the calls regarding human trafficking were reported to police⁶.

Our members expressed a continuous lack of addressing the causes of human trafficking in Canada's initiatives. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls To Action⁷ has not yet been implemented despite the disproportionate number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2-Spirit individuals that are directly linked to human trafficking. As noted in the Native Women's Associations Annual Federal Score Card , "It becomes clear, when assessing the government's National Action Plan goals and the actions deemed necessary to achieve them, that little headway has been made over the past 12 months toward ending the violence"⁸. The ongoing housing and homelessness issue created by capitalism and commodifying human rights has further created conditions for trafficking to exist and persist. Other ineffective strategies, such as the war on drugs and the lack of intersectional approaches to many of the larger societal issues, continue to exasperate human trafficking in communities across Canada. Without survivors at all tables, additional strategies will continue to recreate the dynamics of silencing survivors, the narratives of "we know what's best for you" and the discrimination that traffickers have subjected survivors to.

COMMUNITIES MOST COMMONLY TARGETED BY TRAFFICKERS

Although anyone and everyone is at risk for Human trafficking, there are communities that are targeted by traffickers at a higher rate⁹. Human Traffickers look to lower risk while maximizing their profit, and due to systemic violence such as discrimination, colonization, racism, white supremacy,



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capitalism and globalization, the following communities have a greater likelihood of being recruited and trafficked and a lower likelihood of receiving the supports they need.

- People living with disabilities
- Indigenous people
- Youth involved in the Child Welfare System
- Black women, girls, gender diverse and trans individuals
- Women and girls
- People who have previously had violence perpetrated against them
- Newcomers to Canada
- Migrants
- International Students
- People who are unhoused
- People living in poverty
- People whose first Language is not English
- 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals
- People of Colour

The Government of Canada must enhance supports to address the over representation of the above communities and address the ongoing systemic violence that creates the conditions for trafficking. The Canadian government has continuously trafficked and exploited these communities, creating a legacy of harm, intergenerational trafficking, and complex trauma within communities. Some examples of how the Canadian government has exploited and trafficked communities, include the Indian Residential Schools, Ontario Training Schools, British Home children, Child Welfare System, and the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. Although this is not an exhaustive list, each of these



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examples meets the definition of human trafficking. The Government of Canada must ‘ACT NOW’ to address the root causes, minimize the risk to targeted communities, and at minimum, provide monetary investment into healing and support to match the generation of profits gained by the government from the exploitation of humans.

INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking has significant repercussions on survivors’ sense of self and their mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Traditional methods of treatment often fall short of fully supporting the needs of survivors. Additionally, secondary and tertiary survivors of trafficking, such as caregivers, family members, friends and those who know the survivor, are also impacted yet have very little specialized supports made available to them. Not only are survivors and their support systems impacted by trafficking, but there are impacts on the broader community as well.

As noted above, as a result of the trauma that survivors experience before, during, and after human trafficking, holistic supports to address the complex trauma and stress in their minds, bodies, spirits, and emotions are required. The ways this trauma shows up can be difficult to navigate and often lack fully accessible supports.

Survivors experience significant challenges with extreme mental health symptoms. It is common for survivors to be misdiagnosed more than once due to a lack of training, awareness, and experts in supporting survivors of extreme trauma, such as that of human trafficking. Impacts such as Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, extreme dissociation, cognitive impairment, difficulty with memory, and disordered eating, to name a few, are often present and increase during times of



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extreme stress.

Spiritual impacts can often be exasperated if some or all of the trafficking were done by people in positions of power, trust or authority in a survivor’s spiritual community or religious haven. Survivors report a loss of faith and a sense of hopelessness, being isolated from their spiritual or religious communities, feeling a deep sense of despair, rejection, disconnection or a loss of knowledge and ceremonies, offering a variety of safer ways to return to connecting with spiritual supports have to be available to survivors from a variety of spiritual, cultural and/or religious perspectives.

Survivors often struggle with identifying and navigating complex emotions. Due to the trauma, many survivors live in an elevated state of fear and anxiety, making it difficult to feel “clear-headed” and grounded. Many survivors do not know what a sense of feeling safe is as safety has never been available to them. Addressing these emotional needs in a holistic way acknowledges that offering 20-30 sessions of therapy or peer support programs to meet our needs are ineffective as it can take many years of intensive emotional support to see lasting changes in these symptoms.

In addition, many survivors live with complex physical health issues, sometimes resulting in untreated or poorly managed chronic pain. Survivors are often forced to work long hours in poor conditions and may suffer from physical injuries related to extended time working. Long-term impacts related to malnutrition and sometimes substance use are often overlooked or medications to manage symptoms without options for maintenance or long-term treatment options such as massage, physiotherapy, chiropractic, naturopathy, or healthy foods are inaccessible despite being more effective and preventative in the long run.



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Survivors' sense of self and who they are in the world often develop and are shaped by their experiences of abuse and physical and interpersonal trauma. Noted impacts, such as a fundamental low self-worth and self-esteem, influence how survivors re-engage in the world and build relationships. Sometimes, a sense of uncertainty about identity in terms of who we are, what we like, what we dislike, and our place in the world can be challenging to connect with and relate to when shaped by exploitation. Body image issues arise as symptoms of the trauma experienced and can be all-encompassing. Generally, a lack of autonomy presents and can cause many challenges in our day-to-day life.

Despite these challenging impacts, survivors find ways to resist and remain resilient throughout trafficking and long after. Survivors move through their symptoms and resist violence and oppression in a variety of ways. That being said, while developing this Survivor Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, it was imperative to draw attention to some of the complexities, causes, and impacts of human trafficking in Canada. In order to meet the needs of survivors and to prevent human trafficking, holistic considerations of people and their communities need to be prioritized

This document offers practical suggestions, considerations, and ideas from survivors across Canada. We conducted a review of the National Strategy, completed a literature review on human trafficking in Canada, and analyzed surveys from survivors. We also conducted focus groups and one-on-one interviews to gather insights and information to drive this survivor strategy. This work was led by WomenatthecentrE's National Collective of survivors of human trafficking, who worked tirelessly to highlight what is working well in anti-trafficking initiatives, identify existing gaps, and provide concrete Calls to Action to better support the Pillar approach created by Public Safety Canada to inform the country's response to human trafficking.



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PART II: **METHODOLOGY**



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MOVING BEYOND CONSULTATION

In the global anti-trafficking sector, there is increasing acknowledgment that we need to move beyond consulting and checking boxes as a way of engaging survivors of trafficking in research and the development of initiatives. For too long, solutions to human trafficking have been driven by and centered on police investigations and prosecution. It is important to recognize that survivors, like any other community, are not a monolith. This means that we have a diverse set of knowledge, identities, and experiences that inform and highlight what we need or needed to prevent, exit, and heal from human trafficking experiences.

Survivors of trafficking are capable, willing, and ready to work in the anti-trafficking field to support initiatives related to this experience. However, it is still common practice to merely consult with some survivors on what strategies and programs should look like. At WomenatthecentrE, we acknowledge and ensure that this work, including this document, is not only developed through consultation with survivors, but that every part of the process was co- designed with survivors of trafficking. This included having survivors lead the National Collective Meetings, conducting the research, identifying the themes, and writing this document.

Through this practice of co-design, we ensure that we are centering the voices of survivors, enhancing our growth, learning, and skill development in this work, and ensuring that the diverse and unique voices of survivors across Canada are honored, elevated, and centered throughout this report. We do acknowledge that although we wish we could engage with every survivor in Canada, we were unable to do so. Multiple forms of outreach to connect with those with lived experiences of trafficking were used to develop and implement this research. There were real barriers to reaching



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people with limited or no internet access, as well as people who may not be connected to our organization or partnering ones. Additionally, funding restrictions limited the number of survivors we could engage while offering fair and equitable pay for participation..

We embarked on this journey together, beginning with a team of survivors hired to mobilize this project. The team conducted a literature review to understand the current landscape of human trafficking in Canada. Part of this process was also reviewing the existing National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking. As we read through the existing strategy, we began to conduct a review of the reports and understand which part of the National Strategy had been operationalized and what still needed to be implemented. Below you will find the review of the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking that was conducted in 2023.

REVIEW OF THE 2023 NATIONAL STRATEGY TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING (NSTCHT)

The National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, as outlined by Public Safety Canada, presents numerous promising ideas and initiatives aimed at addressing human trafficking. However, a review of the annual reports for 2019-2020¹⁰, 2020-2021¹¹, and 2021-2023¹², reveals significant gaps between these promises and actual achievements. It appears that much of the progress has been concentrated in law enforcement and crime-fighting efforts, with limited advancements in other critical areas such as survivor leadership, coordination, and collaboration.

We acknowledge the limitations to reporting on these reviews. This information is drawn



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directly from the reports located on Public Safety Canada’s Website and through the experiences and declarations of survivors and agencies involved in this project.

1. REVIEW OF THE 2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT STRATEGY

The 2019-2020 report spoke to the launch and ongoing funding of the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking. 201 Temporary Resident Permits (TRP) for foreign national victims of trafficking and their dependents were provided. \$1.06M of funding was provided through the Victims Fund. Some gaps remain including the acknowledgement that the TRP permits are not a permanent pathway to residency and are often ineffective at providing survivors with the status they need to access long-term healing, wellness programs, and overall stability.

2. REVIEW OF THE 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT STRATEGY

In the 2020-2021 report, 14 human trafficking related initiatives were funded through Public Safety Canada’s Contribution Program to Combat Serious and Organized Crime. A National Human Trafficking Public Awareness Campaign was organized to raise awareness among youth and parents, 11 projects were funded through the Victims fund, totaling \$930,198 to support survivors and 90 Temporary Resident Permits were issued to Survivors and their dependents.

3. REVIEW OF THE 2021-2023 ANNUAL REPORT STRATEGY

In our review of the 2021-2023 National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, we noted significant achievements in terms of outcomes and initiatives. Some questions remained regarding



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financial contributions, opportunities for enhancement, and leveraging best practices. The report states “an investment of over \$60 million (2019-2024) and \$10 million ongoing to advance specific measures to address human trafficking”¹³. However, the NSTCHT states “\$75 million over six years that includes a 2018 investment of \$14.51 million for the new Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline”¹⁰. Financial transparency surrounding the investment to address trafficking is needed to fully understand the government’s commitment to end trafficking.

As mentioned in the report, 2021-2023 were challenging years because of global issues such as the pandemic. Some programs and initiatives continued to operate and mobilize however, due to the slowing down of vital services, human trafficking was exacerbated, and will require significant efforts to “catch up” and address the pre- and post- pandemic trafficking related issues. The Protection Pillar highlights a variety of initiatives to combat trafficking, such as education provided to Canada Border Services Agency, a rural outreach program with Envision Counseling, and other important initiatives. The report highlights collaboration with agencies across provinces and territories in Canada, and internationally. Other than the RCMP police training, none of these collaborations and working groups explicitly discuss these works being survivor led or being co-developed with survivors of trafficking.

Overall, in reviewing the National Strategy and the reports outlining initiatives and activities, we noted areas for improvement and notable gaps, which include:

1. No national survivor advisory board has been created.
2. Canada is falling behind many other countries, including the USA and Jamaica, regarding implementing an advisory board of those with lived experience in human trafficking to advise on activities such as policies, procedures, and initiatives that impact survivors.



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3. The majority of the funding has gone to enforcement and investigative initiatives despite a previous acknowledgment at the 2018 Stakeholders meeting to focus more on service delivery and support.

There was a heavy focus on supporting survivors of sex trafficking and some labor trafficking initiatives; however, the realities of other forms of trafficking in Canada and related awareness or response initiatives were not included. Although programs are consistently reminded that there is no core funding to be offered, the CCTEHT seems to have an ongoing long-term significant financial investment and commitment. With new Laws related to procurement and supply chains, there has been a lack of direction on when it applies and where, leaving many effected industries uncertain of how to proceed with compliance.

Survivor-led initiatives are required and should not be separate from the work noted in the strategy but should rather be a requirement in all anti-trafficking work that is led, funded and directed by Public Safety Canada and all branches of federal, provincial territorial and municipal governments. In 2023, the United Nations Special Rapporteur released their finding on the state of human trafficking in Canada¹⁴. They cited major concerns with the migrant worker program, and highlighted “the extent to which Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people go missing or are murdered, often as a result of being trafficked for forced labour or sexual exploitation”¹⁵.

Hopefully, ‘ACT NOW: National Survivor Strategy’ will create a road map for the Government of Canada to prioritize the voices of those with lived experiences more effectively and commit to meaningful attention to the prevention of trafficking and the needed ongoing support for survivors and their families.



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NATIONAL COLLECTIVE

In addition to the review of the NSTCHT, WomenatthecetrE developed a National Collective comprised of 8-12 survivors of human trafficking from across Canada. The members identified as survivors of various forms of trafficking including labour, sex, and familial trafficking. The members were of intersecting identities and experiences. There were women of colour, members from the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, members living with disabilities, Indigenous women, and individuals working in the sex trade. Some members were formally engaged in anti-trafficking work and others were not. This Collective met 10 times to discuss and inform this strategy.

During our virtual meetings we discussed the four pillars of the NSTCHT. Members engaged in conversation that was captured using a Jamboard to list themes, ideas and recommendations. The information from the Jamboard (**Appendix B**) has been correlated and integrated into this strategy.

ETHICS APPROVED RESEARCH

After receiving ethics approval, a survey was shared with survivors of human trafficking across Canada. The survey was open to women and gender diverse survivors who were over the age of 16, were currently living in Canada or were trafficked in Canada, and were not presently involved in the criminal legal system related to being trafficked. The respondents were from every province and territory in Canada except for PEI and Nunuvut.



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SURVEYS

The survey was administered online and was shared by many community partners across the country. Survey questions were focused on experiences survivors had while accessing or accessing supports before, during, and after trafficking. A specific section was focused on understanding the types of violence women experienced that could have restricted blood and oxygen, potentially leaving survivors with a traumatic brain injury. The full research report can be found in **Appendix C**.

ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

In order to further capture survivors' needs to incorporate into the 'ACT NOW' strategy, one-to-one interviews were conducted with survivors across Canada. The outreach for participants was done via social media platforms. The eligibility requirements remained the same as the surveys. Interviews were conducted with two peer researchers and a psychotherapist on standby to support participants and researchers as needed. There were many impactful statements that highlighted what worked well when survivors accessed services as well as many areas for improvements. When speaking about her experience with the criminal court system, one survivor stated:

“They’ll send you the papers, the bail papers, and, you know, all these things saying ‘this person’s not to be in contact with you’... and... Okay, like, did that ever stop them before? Like, you know, like this piece of paper is supposed to protect me, and it never does. Um, quite literally, the same day my trafficker was released, he got in contact with me with threats.” - CB



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Focus groups were facilitated similarly to one-to-one interviews. They were 2 hour sessions hosted online with no more than 5 survivor participants per group. Through the focus groups researchers found that even more ideas of prevention, persecution, protection, and empowerment were shared as participants were able to draw from other survivors' experiences and add theirs to inform the overall initiative. In addition, there was a sense of camaraderie and support that naturally occurred in the focus group space highlighting the need for more survivor spaces to connect.

Throughout the research phase and the National Collective meetings, survivors contributed several valuable insights to address gaps in support and further advocate for the need to be included in all phases of decision-making about programs, policies, and services that impact their lives. The findings were grouped under the four pillars of the NSTCHT. Below are a collection of recommendations for the Federal Government to 'ACT NOW' to truly change the landscape to a more effective anti-trafficking support model that is holistic and led by survivors.



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PART III:
PILLARS & RECOMMENDATIONS

“Survivor led training for EVERYONE who needs to be educated”



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PILLAR 1: EMPOWERMENT AND PERSONAL AGENCY

In this first pillar, agency has been added. In order to empower survivors of human trafficking, agency MUST be returned to those who are impacted and/or at risk. In order to achieve agency, survivors need to be involved in all pathways and compensated appropriately. Below are a collection of recommendations for Empowerment and Agency.

TRAUMA INFORMED AND TRAINING NEEDS

1. Mandate ALL officers to be trained by survivors on trauma informed survivor led investigations and engagement.
2. Ensure that laws, policies, and federally funded initiatives are truly trauma informed. This goes beyond a single day training and is reflected in their governance, policies, procedures, and culture in the agency.
3. Mandatory training to all health care industries centering on human trafficking as a public health issue.
4. Mandate training in education systems, including post secondary institutions.
5. Incorporate all forms of trafficking into anti-trafficking discourse and service delivery.
6. Enhance peer-based support and stabilize funding for survivor-led agencies.

EDUCATION, FINANCIAL STABILITY, AND OPPORTUNITY NEEDS

1. Provide scholarships to survivors to access post secondary education.



2. Develop a survivor table at the federal level to inform all anti-trafficking related activities and to ensure a diverse representation of experiences and identities.
3. Provide leadership opportunities and training for survivors to take an active paid role in this work.
4. Provide trauma informed employment training for survivors who wish to work but not in this field or in a supportive role outside of speaking, etc.
5. Provide adequate pay to survivor advisors given they are experts.
6. Offer advisory opportunities outside of the traditional 9-5 Monday to Friday to ensure accessibility.
7. Develop a youth-specific advisory board to work alongside governments and the National Survivor table and offer adequate pay to the youth as experts.
8. Enhance the laws around forced debt to also cover Federal amounts owing such as Employment Insurance, CERB benefits, Civil court debts, etc.
9. Ensure permanent pathways to status for survivors and their family members.

CRIMINAL RECORDS AND LEGISLATION NEEDS

1. Comply with the United Nations Non Punishment Principle to end the criminalization of survivors who commit crimes while under the direction of their trafficker.
2. Enhance supports and opportunities for survivors to have their criminal records pardoned by legislating a criminal records relief program.
3. Add legislation for protection in civil and family court preceding and train staff to eliminate the ongoing further violence, exploitation, and human rights violations to survivors during these proceedings.



4. Provide better direction and support related to new and emerging laws regarding procurement and supply chains.
5. Provide better direction, support, and change management for legislative changes to the organizations, institutions, and individuals who are impacted.
6. Legislate for prison systems and staff to identify, respond to, and connect with survivors of trafficking or those targeted in the prison system.

Ultimately, this Empowerment and Personal Agency Pillar highlights the need to achieve empowerment by providing pathways and opportunities to restore personal agency and self-determination to survivors through a variety of initiatives. Ensuring financial stability, pathways to education and employment, enhancing training and awareness activities, and aligning the criminal legal system with international and human rights principles will create systemic change and safer structures for survivors to engage and feel empowered.

PILLAR 2: REAL PREVENTION

For the prevention pillar, survivors acknowledged that education and awareness initiatives are important. There was discussion around what real prevention would look like, and there was acknowledgement that initiatives would be addressing root causes mentioned above. Human trafficking can be seen as a symptom of inequality, and in that, it is important to highlight that many of the structural and societal issues previously mentioned need to be addressed to prevent human trafficking and not create more survivors. The information below offers tangible activities that can



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& Grounding Resistance
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be operationalized in the next five years and are grouped into address root causes, awareness, and research.

ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES

1. Increased coordination with survivors internationally to understand and implement prevention strategies related to migration, climate change, and political instability.
2. Meaningfully address larger social issues such as poverty, homelessness, and fractured families.
3. Completely revamp Child Welfare systems that focus on stabilizing and supporting families.
4. End ongoing apprehension of Indigenous children and children from targeted communities.
5. Provide families and communities with resources to respond better and support survivors of trafficking.
6. Make specialized forms of holistic support accessible, such as cultural healing, trauma treatment rather than trauma informed therapy, body and somatic based interventions, etc.
7. Provide programs to divert youth from gang involvement.
8. Focus on a prevention of traffickers.

AWARENESS: “Posters are not enough”

1. Awareness of standards of care in various court structures to the judges, staff and lawyers. Specifically, family and civil court procedures.
2. Create standards for anti-trafficking awareness content and imagery to combat sensationalizing trafficking and creating a “perfect victim” narrative.



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3. Meet communities where they are at with their knowledge building to support a more effective way of retaining the information.
4. Create more ways to get information about resources other than emergency resources.
5. Stop the conflation of sex work and sex trafficking in trainings, resources, and media campaign.
6. Stop the funding of agencies who conflate sex work with sex trafficking.
7. Provide resources and updates for language changes related to anti trafficking that are stigmatizing (ie: prostitution).
8. Training materials need to be accessible and developed by a wide variety of communities that are culturally relevant, linguistically accessible, and offered in a variety of mediums.

RESEARCH

1. Conduct more peer-driven community-based research to evaluate the effectiveness of programs further, emerging trends, survivor needs, and methods of resistance and resilience.
2. Adhere to the international 12 guiding principles for anti-trafficking work and monitor the implications through research with survivors.
3. Conduct research for holistic treatment programs to inform safer, accessible, and effective treatment specific to the needs of those who have experienced trafficking.
4. Research about organ trafficking and how it intersects with other forms of trafficking.
5. Conduct peer-based research informing supports on familiar trafficking, the signs and best practices in healing modalities.

Real Prevention goes beyond awareness raising activities. Although training and awareness



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plays a role in preventing human trafficking, research efforts addressing causes and bolstering activities to meet the needs of targeted communities will see the greatest impacts. Pivoting from enforcement and social service specific models and prioritizing community-based solutions that address the needs of all those who are impacted by trafficking is the best path forward for survivors and their families.

PILLAR 3: PROTECTION AND COLLABORATION WITH SURVIVORS

“If we truly want to protect anyone from trafficking, we need to address issues of equity, patriarchy, colonialism, ...”

A survivor-centered protection pillar rooted in the needs of those with lived experience acknowledges that training and awareness initiatives are imperative. Although we covered many aspects of training and awareness, we will reiterate some main points below. Additionally, this pillar covers some legislative recommendations, assessments, and enhancing best practices.

TRAINING

1. Incorporate training on other forms of trafficking, such as organ trafficking, domestic servitude, and forced marriage into the National Strategy and its activities.



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2. Conduct an accessible comprehensive awareness campaign co-created with survivors of trafficking to ensure accuracy and minimize sensationalized narratives.
3. Training created by us for us.
4. Incorporate learning around biases and stigma still associated with trafficking and survivors.
5. A focus on developing trainings and making them accessible to communities who are most often targeted for trafficking and exploitation.
6. Address patriarchy, toxic masculinity and racism in awareness raising initiated to reduce the hyper-sexualization of women and girls who are targeted for sex trafficking.

ASSESSMENTS

1. Rather than or in addition to the national standards, create individualized case management standards.
2. Better assessments and trauma informed ethical standards for all police, not just human trafficking investigative teams, to ensure consistent responses across services.
3. Implement a National Referral Mechanism similar to that of the UK which ensures support, services, and status for all who identify as survivors of trafficking.
4. Utilize assessments to identify and prevent those who are experiencing exploitation on any part of the spectrum rather than trafficking only.
5. Support families in order to support and prevent trafficking.
6. Comprehensive revamp of Child Protection Services with better assessments and enhanced skills related to supporting children who are trafficked.



ENHANCING BEST PRACTICES AND LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Incorporate anti-exploitation laws into all legal and court programs such as family and civil court.
2. Do not solely rely on a survivor's testimony for evidence and persecution in the criminal legal system. Adjust laws to provide alternate forms of evidence without the need for survivors' presence.
3. If a survivor chooses to move forward with the criminal legal system, the case should be worked in coordination with the survivor rather than removing autonomy; collaborate with survivors.
4. Collaborate with those agencies doing anti-trafficking work to support the development of a network that acts as an expert body to advise on cases.
5. Provide agencies with training regarding working with survivors of trafficking who are employed and/or provided peer support .
6. Create guidelines and laws for agencies surrounding the engagement of those with lived experience so their journey is not re-traumatizing and further exploitative.
7. Establish stronger pathways to hold those in power, such as police, lawyers, doctors etc, accountable for participating in trafficking, ensuring they are held to the same standards as everyone else charged with trafficking.
8. More comprehensive victim/ survivor witness programs available to those who have chosen not to involve police.
9. Far more resources, research, support, and best practices need to be prioritized for rural and remote areas in Canada.



10. Incorporate better protection in information sharing systems such as HIFIS and Clinical Connect to ensure the safety and confidentiality of survivors is paramount.

These recommendations highlight gaps in the existing strategy and methods of protection reaching far beyond enforcement and woven into various areas of the services and supports. Although there has been a significant amount of work done to protect survivors of human trafficking, we continue to fall short as a nation as it pertains to truly implementing changes that survivors have prioritized.

PILLAR 4: PROSECUTION ENHANCING THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM RESPONSE

*“Minimum Mandatory sentences should be just that.
MANDATORY.”*

In 2023, Statistics Canada highlighted that only 11% of human trafficking charges laid across Canada result in a guilty verdict. It is clear there is much more work to be done in these systems. With the acknowledgements that the Criminal legal system may not be a pathway for everyone, significant changes must be implemented to accommodate those who choose to engage with this system or are made to engage with it due to age or issues of public safety. Survivors’ recommendations concerning the criminal legal system are as follows.



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1. Increase awareness of the holistic impacts of violence on survivors including the severity of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual trauma and its associated symptoms.
2. Ensure these are considered in sentencing and support options.
3. Better training and understanding that the very things that make court participants “not credible” are the symptoms that are associated with the trauma survivors have experienced.
4. Provide accessible reparation programs across Canada.
5. Ensure consistent support programs that are tailored to community needs in all provinces and territories in Canada.
6. Consider survivors as expert witnesses as needed in court.
7. Shift responsibility away from survivors in order to prosecute trafficking cases.
8. Build cases that can be successful at trial without survivors testimony.
9. Incorporate those with lived experience as Jury members.
10. Engaging in the court process should not require months and months of therapy after, a comprehensive review of the criminal legal system should be conducted and trauma informed survivor-centered recommendations should be implemented to reduce re- traumatization rather than simply manage it.
11. Address backlog issues and judge shortages to stop cases from being thrown out due to speedy trial rights being breached.
12. Create policies and pathways for holding accountable court staff (i.e.:judges, lawyers, prosecutors, and more) who infringe on survivors’ rights including the right to dignity, respect, and safety.

Significant changes need to be made in the criminal legal system in order to support the persecution of traffickers. The low rate of convictions is caused by many factors, however, without



adjusting the issues, to continue to conduct investigations and arrests, and have survivors go through this system, it often delays healing, causes further trauma, and reduces further trust in these systems.

PILLAR 5: PARTNERSHIPS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Through the consultations with survivors, we identified the need for an additional pillar to be incorporated into this strategy. Many of the suggestions survivors brought forward were centered around enhancing partnerships and also calling for fiscal transparency and accountability to the public, survivors, and their families from the federal government.

OVERSIGHT

1. Implement survivor advisory boards for oversight and recommendations on all anti- trafficking initiatives, policies and procedures.
2. Prioritize survivors' confidentiality in responses, prevention, and engagement activities.
3. Ensure ongoing clear informed consent when working with survivors.
4. Create a federal review board of human trafficking investigations to ensure procedures, best practices, and identify systemic gaps in responses.
5. Incorporate a Human trafficking lens into existing review boards such as sexual assault, drug related crimes, domestic violence and labour rights investigations.



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Initiative

6. Include survivors on grant review boards to ensure the effectiveness of proposals to the population served.

ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Enhance fiscal transparency to anti-trafficking initiatives such as the NSTCT, grant recipients, law enforcement, etc.
2. Develop guidelines for grants prioritizing meaningful survivor engagement and co-design at all levels of the application and project deliverables.
3. Provide training for agencies receiving grant money on best practices for working with survivors of trafficking that goes beyond GBA+.
4. Include the private sector in accountability strategies such a social media platforms, clothing industries, and sectors where labour trafficking is most likely to occur.

PARTNERSHIPS

1. Centre relationship building with partners across the country for knowledge exchange, sharing trends, expanding the conversation beyond sex trafficking
2. While conducting consultations to inform the NSTCHT, actively seek out individuals and agencies not funded by Public Safety Canada to ensure a more fulsome consultation to inform strategies
3. Further develop relationships with international agencies and survivors to collaborate and create a specific strategy to address trafficking in newcomer and migrant communities.
4. Develop training to support agencies in working with survivors and training to support



survivors working with agencies

5. Offer a survivor summit to enhance movement building and strengthen community connection with survivors and community partners
6. Prioritize multi-agency collaboration and various stakeholders including healthcare and advocacy group such as sex worker and migrant worker rights groups

Incorporating a ‘partnerships and transparency’ pillar into the national work addressing human trafficking will hold all stakeholders accountable to each other and the public to ensure the work is collaborative, meaningful, and impactful.



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PART IV:
IMMEDIATE CALLS TO ACTION



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CALLS TO ACTION FOR CANADA

Although there are several recommendations that have been presented through this survivor strategy, some may take longer to implement or are more complex than others. Below are some overarching recommendations which have been prioritized to ‘ACT NOW’ and implement immediately.

The federal government creates a survivor advisory board. The board should be comprised of diverse identities and experiences of trafficking. The board will pay survivors as experts and cover costs associated with attending. The board will reduce barriers to participation by addressing child care needs, access to the Internet, access devices that may be needed for accommodations, disability supports, and language accessibility.

- 1. Establish a youth advisory board. Include all the above-mentioned supports and considerations. This board should not offer community service hours but rather pay the board members for their time and expertise.**
- 2. Develop legislative protections and enforcement mechanisms for all court proceedings, including Family and Civil court to stop the ongoing intimidation, human rights violations, and violence survivors experience when needing accommodation and engaging with these structures.**
- 3. Bolster awareness activities co-designed with survivors that reflect the intersecting identities of those who experience trafficking. Further awareness campaigns need to be aligned with best practices on imagery and content and reflect various forms of**



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trafficking including; labour trafficking, domestic servitude, forced marriage and organ trafficking.

- 4. Increase national access to specialized holistic support. Including physical health and somatic treatment, trauma treatment rather than trauma informed, cultural and spiritual connection and healing, with a priority in supporting rural, remote, and fly-in communities.**
- 5. Prioritize peer-led initiatives and create pathways for collaboration between survivor-led services to enhance movement building opportunities for all survivors of human trafficking.**
- 6. Create national core funding streams for survivor-led agencies to empower those with lived experience further and foster a national community.**
- 7. Implement permanent pathways to residency for those who are trafficked. Include a National Referral Mechanism that reduces barriers to accessing supports and is not restricted by common barriers to accessing services such as status, time since trafficking, type of trafficking, geographical, and language barriers.**
- 8. Implement ALL 231 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission regarding ongoing and historical Missing and Murdered Women Girls and 2 Spirit individuals.**

In conclusion, these nine Key Recommendations provided by survivors from across Canada, are crucial to enhance anti-trafficking efforts. By taking steps to meaningfully engage survivors in all aspects of responses that affect their lives, the federal government would see greater strides



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in empowering, protecting, persecuting, and preventing human trafficking. It is imperative that the federal government 'ACT NOW' to implement these recommendations into the next federal strategy.

EMERGING TRENDS

The global pandemic highlighted several lessons and opportunities which are relevant to anti-trafficking work. Rapid technological changes, worsening climate change, and our undeniable global interconnectedness.

Although this strategy did not speak specifically to these emerging trends, it is important that we create space to highlight them and incorporate them into this work as we move forward. Fostering more learning opportunities regarding social media, AI, and human trafficking is needed to protect communities better. Engaging in discussions about the risks and benefits of emerging technology will keep the movement informed and up-to-date.

There is a direct connection between climate change and forced migration and human trafficking. It is crucial to consistently prioritize opportunities to combat climate change and engage in focused discussions about these connections and potential solutions. Incorporating climate change initiatives as programs to prevent trafficking would have a significant impact on combating trafficking in Canada and Globally.

The COVID-19 Pandemic shutdown many services, left many unemployed, and exasperated social issues such as violence against women, the opioid poisoning crisis and housing. We



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still do not truly understand the breath of the impacts. Providing opportunities to get a deeper understanding of the impacts of the pandemic, its effects on trafficking, and matching our responses to these additional needs can not be forgotten about. The youth and children affected by the pandemic have developed unique perspectives on its impacts and on their own experiences, and these should not be overlooked as we work to understand and respond to these additional needs.

In summary, being aware of these emerging and existing trends will support all the pillars noted in this strategy. Thinking beyond explicit anti-trafficking agencies and into more well rounded programs and projects with an anti-trafficking lens will enhance our knowledge and provide further reach to the movement.



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SECTION V: **CONCLUSION**



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This strategy will be released at the time Public Safety Canada will be working on their next strategy to combat human trafficking. As we take in the lessons learned on where we can enhance our collective efforts in Canada and abroad, the hope is that the next strategy truly centers on co-design alongside survivors. Implementing the updated Pillars highlights a commitment to survivor voice and meaningful inclusion.

Fully acknowledging the role that the Federal Government of Canada has played and continues to play in the exploitation of people in Canada while matching resources to acknowledge these harms is a crucial step towards accountability and change. By listening to and elevating the voices and experiences of survivors, the Federal Government and community partners can better understand the systemic issues that perpetuate human trafficking and exploitation. Committing to the recommendations outlined in this strategy, the Federal Government can demonstrate its dedication to creating a safer, more equitable society. It is through this acknowledgment and action that collectively, we can move to end the cycle of exploitation and provide pathways for survivors to reclaim their lives with autonomy, compassion, and understanding.

The four Pillars were intentionally renamed to provide a more fulsome and inclusive strategy with the addition of Pillar five: Partnerships and Accountability. Human trafficking is a community issue and therefore requires a community response, by broadening our reach and engagement in the anti-trafficking movement, building deeper connections to each other we provide more fulsome layers of protection to lean into growth and change as this “sector” continues to develop. These recommendations are for implementation. We hope to meet with Public Safety Canada to devise an implementation strategy for all Calls to Action in the short term and work on the long-term implementation of the recommendations from survivors across Canada.



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Canada has engaged in anti-trafficking initiatives for some time, however much is still left to do. We, survivors, continue to battle with lasting impacts of the violence we experienced at the hands of our traffickers. We have been subject to and resist acts of violence from systems advertising help and support, and we continue to lose friends, family, and community members to human trafficking and exploitation. The impacts of trafficking on our lives, our wellbeing, our children, and our families can not be understated. Still, despite the ongoing oppression and violence we experience, we gather to provide each other with life-saving support, and hold each other while we grieve, laugh, and heal from things that are not our fault. We must ‘ACT NOW’ to reduce the suffering and elevate the resilience of survivors across Canada.



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SECTION VI: **APPENDICES**



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APPENDIX A:

Literature Review (See attached)

APPENDIX B:

Jamboard (See attached)

APPENDIX C:

Research Report (See attached)



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