

Review of the Roots of Youth Violence

NEWS

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Ontario can reduce violence involving youth by adopting a more coordinated, more comprehensive and more community-focused approach, according to a report presented today to Premier Dalton McGuinty.

The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence, co-chaired by former Chief Justice Roy McMurtry and former Speaker of the Legislature Alvin Curling, recommends that government focus its resources on the province's most disadvantaged communities. It describes how poverty, racism, the lack of decent housing, culturally insensitive education systems and limited job prospects combine to create hopelessness, alienation and low self-esteem among youth that all too often explodes into violence.

Ontario is at a crossroads, say the Co-Chairs, because of several disturbing trends: increasing concentrations of disadvantage, the escalation of serious violence among youth and the fact that such violence is more frequently occurring in public places.

To address these issues, the report recommends measures to improve social conditions, address poverty and racism, generate employment opportunities, establish a comprehensive youth policy framework, and better coordinate the efforts of different government ministries and agencies.

It also recommends building strong communities through a "place-based" approach similar to the United Kingdom's, and the use of an Index of Relative Disadvantage to determine objectively which communities are most in need of extra assistance. Within those communities, whose boundaries would be confirmed in consultation with municipalities, the province would work with other partners to establish community hubs, create neighbourhood partnerships and increase the community's ability to work at solving its problems.

To ensure an effective, coordinated and efficient approach to the many issues affecting violence involving youth, the Co-Chairs recommend a series of structural changes that would, if adopted, create a new Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and Anti-Racism (or an equivalent central body), set up a Cabinet Office secretariat and establish a Premier's advisory council. Without an effective governance structure and mechanisms to cut across the many silos that exist in the provincial government, the Co-Chairs say their experience tells them that no meaningful progress can be made.

"We strongly believe Ontario is at a crossroads in dealing with the roots of violence involving youth," said review Co-Chair Roy McMurtry. "Our report presents the government with a comprehensive framework to address the serious trends we have identified, and that will have serious consequences if allowed to continue unchecked."

Review Co-Chair Dr. Alvin Curling said: “We thank the communities that participated in our review, and we commend the many individuals and organizations that are already working hard to improve their neighbourhoods. We listened to what they told us about the scope and impact of violence on their daily lives. We believe our recommendations, reflecting what we heard, provide a real opportunity for sustainable change.”

"This report underlines the critical importance of governments building meaningful partnerships with business, labour and educational institutions to address the needs of thousands of youth from our most vulnerable communities," said Toronto Mayor David Miller. "By providing them the right environment with access to recreation, education, and proper training, these young people will have a real chance to live productive lives free from violence."

“This report represents a significant moment in our history — an opportunity to re-focus our attention on addressing the causes of violence among young people,” said Frances Lankin, President and CEO of United Way Toronto. “The government took a bold first step in bringing together this review and engaging in a broad, deep consultation that touched many corners of our province. I know that communities everywhere are eager to get to work, to build a better future for young people in Ontario.”

Quick Facts:

The Review, established in June 2007, commissioned academic research, consulted with provincial and national organizations, and visited disadvantaged communities across Ontario to hear first-hand of the effects of violence and to understand why it occurs.

The Review met with or received submissions from an estimated 750 individuals and organizations, including community representatives in eight disadvantaged communities, during its consultation phase.

More than 5,000 people responded to a survey on the review’s web site.

The Co-Chairs prepared a special “Community Perspectives” report to reflect public – and especially youth – input into the report. It includes a report on youth-led consultations.

The Review also sponsored consultations with universities and colleges, legal aid organizations, and urban Aboriginal youth.

For more information and the complete report, go to <http://www.rootsofyouthviolence.on.ca/english/reports.asp>.