

Declare the Epidemic: Ending Intimate Partner Violence in Ontario

CFUW Ontario Council urges the Ontario government to formally declare intimate partner violence a public health epidemic and fund a coordinated, province-wide response.

1 Executive Summary

This brief sets out the position of the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) Ontario Council on Ontario's response to intimate partner violence (IPV). We welcome the Legislature's November 2025 recognition of IPV as a persistent, systemic issue, and the years of grassroots advocacy that produced it.

Our concern is that this recognition falls short of the **epidemic declaration** recommended by the 2022 Renfrew County (CKW) Inquest and already adopted by more than 115 Ontario municipalities. **Bill 173, the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, has still not passed.** CFUW Ontario Council urges the government to pass Bill 173, fund the response it has already acknowledged is needed, and act on the Inquest's recommendations without further delay.

115+

Ontario municipalities that have declared IPV an epidemic since 2022

1 in 3

Women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence, mostly from a partner

Every 4–5 Days

A woman is killed by an intimate partner in Canada

2 Policy Overview and Key Milestones

Provincial Recognition, Not Yet Declaration

- **2022 – The CKW Inquest.** The jury's 86 recommendations into the deaths of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk, and Nathalie Warmerdam opened with a call for Ontario to declare IPV an epidemic.
- **April 2024 – Bill 173.** The Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act passes second reading unanimously and is referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for study.

- **November 2025 – Endemic motion.** Following an 18-month committee study, the Legislature unanimously passes a motion recognizing IPV as “endemic” rather than adopting the Inquest’s recommended “epidemic” language. Bill 173 itself has not been brought back for third reading.

Key Milestones

Year	Milestone
1983	Bill C-127 removes spousal immunity for sexual assault, criminalizing marital rape.
1989	The Montreal Massacre leads to December 6 becoming the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.
1992–93	CEDAW General Recommendation 19 and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women recognize gender-based violence as a human rights violation.
1995	The Beijing Declaration sets a global agenda to eliminate violence against women and girls.
2000	Luke’s Place is founded, pioneering legal support for women and children navigating family court after abuse.
2022	The CKW Inquest issues 86 recommendations; Lanark County becomes the first Ontario municipality to declare IPV an epidemic.
2023	Nova Scotia’s Mass Casualty Commission recommends declaring IPV/GBV an epidemic at every level of government; Canada commits to criminalizing coercive control; Ottawa signs 10-year bilateral funding agreements on gender-based violence with the provinces.
2024	Bill 173 passes second reading in Ontario; Nova Scotia becomes the first province to declare IPV an epidemic in law.
2025	Ontario’s Legislature votes to recognize IPV as “endemic”; municipal epidemic declarations pass 115.

3 Scope and Impact

Indicator	Impact
Prevalence	Worldwide, about 1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, primarily from an intimate partner (WHO/UN Women).
Femicide rate	A woman is killed by an intimate partner in Canada roughly every 4 to 5 days; a woman or girl is killed by violence overall about every 48 hours (Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability).

Indicator	Impact
Economic cost	Spousal violence costs Canadian society an estimated \$7.4 billion annually (Department of Justice Canada). A separate sector analysis puts the cost of sexual violence alone at \$14.8 billion annually, or roughly \$21,211 per survivor (ESVA Canada / Ripple Strategy).
Municipal recognition	More than 115 of Ontario's 444 municipalities — representing roughly 70% of the province's population — have declared IPV an epidemic, far outpacing the provincial government's own response.

4 Stakeholder Perspectives

- **CFUW Ontario Council & local Clubs** — 48 clubs, ~4,700 members. Clubs including CFUW Orillia are actively petitioning municipal councils to declare IPV an epidemic, arguing the province should follow the lead its own communities have already set.
- **WomanACT** — Executive Director Harmy Mendoza has stated that IPV is an epidemic, but a preventable one, and continues to press the government to pass Bill 173 rather than rely on the non-binding endemic motion.
- **Luke's Place** — argues that declaring IPV an epidemic would cost nothing yet have significant impact, reframing the issue as a public policy priority rather than a private matter.
- **First Nations Women's Council** — has raised concern that the truncated Standing Committee process on Bill 173 limited participation from Indigenous, rural, and Francophone communities, even though Indigenous women are dramatically overrepresented among IPV homicide victims.
- **Frontline service providers** (e.g., YWCA) — have told the Legislature that shelter wait times for permanent housing have stretched from months to years, evidence that current funding does not match demonstrated need.

5 Our Requests to Government

1 Pass Bill 173 without further delay

Formally declare intimate partner violence an epidemic in Ontario, implementing Recommendation 1 of the CKW Inquest.

2 Fund a coordinated provincial response

Attach dedicated, sustained funding for shelters, transition housing, and prevention programs to any epidemic declaration, rather than recognition alone.

3 Embed IPV prevention in public systems

Require funded IPV priorities in municipal Community Safety and Well-Being Plans, and mandate healthy-relationships education in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools.

6 Why This Matters

Naming a crisis is the first step toward resourcing a response to it. More than 115 Ontario municipalities, the CKW Inquest jury, and dozens of frontline organizations have already reached the same conclusion: intimate partner violence in Ontario is an epidemic. The province's own Legislature has now agreed IPV is endemic — persistent and systemic — but has stopped short of the formal epidemic declaration that would unlock the urgency, funding, and accountability survivors and advocates have been asking for since 2022.

Recognition and funding are not substitutes for one another. CFUW Ontario Council asks the government to close the gap between what its own committee has concluded and what Bill 173 would actually do — and to match the leadership already shown by more than a quarter of Ontario's municipalities.

ABOUT CFUW ONTARIO COUNCIL

CFUW Ontario Council represents 48 clubs and approximately 4,700 members across the province. Through briefs, letters and direct submissions to the Ontario government, we work to ensure women's voices are heard on the issues that shape their lives.