

Attention News Editors/See CNW Photo Network and Archive:

Review of the Roots of Youth Violence

TORONTO, Nov. 14 /CNW/ -

NEWS

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 www.rootsofyouthviolence.on.ca/report.

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BACKGROUND

Review of the Roots of Youth Violence

BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW OF THE ROOTS OF YOUTH VIOLENCE

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On June 11, 2007, Premier Dalton McGuinty appointed former Chief Justice and Attorney General Roy McMurtry and former Speaker of the Legislature Alvin Curling as Co-Chairs to conduct a Review of the Roots of Youth Violence. The five-volume report of the Review was made public on November 14, 2008.

The Review's Terms of Reference directed the Co-Chairs to:

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- Build on existing investments in Ontario's public education system, in creating opportunities for young people, in making schools and communities safer and on the important work of previous reviews and key partners including the City of Toronto and the United Way,
- Consider existing provincial investments and programs related to child development, youth violence and youth at risk that are intended to create educational and employment opportunities for young people,
- Assess approaches used in other jurisdictions to evaluate potential for successful application in Ontario's context,
- Identify further opportunities for prevention of violence and the rehabilitation of youth.

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In fulfilling this mandate, the review visited eight neighbourhoods in five cities across Ontario, consulted with provincial organizations and commissioned research papers. The review met with or received submissions from more than 750 individuals during its consultations - an estimated 400 residents participated in the neighbourhood insight sessions process, and more

than 350 met with or provided written submissions to the Co-Chairs. The review also received more than 5,000 responses to its online survey.

Neighbourhood Insights

To learn more about the impact of violence involving youth at the community level, the review visited four Toronto neighbourhoods (Jane /Finch, Jamestown, Kingston/Galloway and L'Amoureux), and one each in Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo.

In each neighbourhood, external consultants retained by the review selected and trained local representatives to work with community groups and individuals to collect information and impressions on the impacts and challenges of violence involving youth, and their perceptions of what is or is not working in their neighbourhoods to address its root causes. Once this work was complete, the neighbourhoods themselves selected representatives to meet with the Co-Chairs and present the neighbourhood's findings. The Neighbourhood Insight Sessions summary report is included in Volume 3.

Mr. Curling and staff also visited South Etobicoke in January, Windsor in February and Peel Region in April to meet with youth and youth-serving organizations in each area.

Consultations

The Co-Chairs and staff met formally and informally with organizations and individuals, including officials from the City of Toronto and United Way Toronto (both are referred to as key partners in the Terms of Reference); representatives of provincial organizations such as the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; a coalition of Black organizations; an interfaith council; and the youth-led organization Grassroots Youth Collaborative, which also conducted a specific consultation with complex-needs youth in Toronto, included in Volume 3.

The Co-Chairs also met on three occasions with Deputy Ministers from 11 ministries involved with youth or related issues.

A list of groups and individuals is included in Volume 1.

Other Consultations

The Co-Chairs visited the United Kingdom in April 2008 and met with government representatives and others involved in a 10-year community development/social inclusion initiative.

From January to May 2008, the review sponsored forums organized by Ryerson University, to explore ways that colleges and universities can reach out to surrounding communities; Legal Aid Ontario, for legal clinics serving disadvantaged groups; and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, to hear from urban Aboriginal youth. In January, the Co-Chairs visited an institution housing young offenders.

Research

The review retained Prof. Scot Wortley of the University of Toronto as research consultant. He advised the Co-Chairs on research issues, completed two literature reviews (published in Volume 5), and contributed an in-depth research paper.

The Co-Chairs commissioned, from experts in their fields, five additional research papers (Volume 4) ranging from a comparison of youth criminal justice systems in other provinces to a study of governance issues.

Various ministries provided 10 research papers based on their areas of expertise and assisted in completing an inventory of provincial programs relevant to addressing the roots of violence involving youth. These papers greatly assisted the Co-Chairs in preparing their report and recommendations.

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INDEX OF RELATIVE DISADVANTAGE

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A place-based approach (see Backgrounder No.2) requires a means of identifying those places that are most in need of extra attention. For that, the Co-Chairs are recommending that the Province adopt an Index of Relative Disadvantage.

The idea behind such an index is that while social scientists may recognize and separately measure different aspects of deprivation in a community, individuals living in that community experience the combined impact of all deprivations. For example, poor health is a deprivation in its own right, but it may be related to inadequate housing or other factors linked to low income. An index can be used to measure that total impact and then rank communities as relatively better or worse off.

The United Kingdom began developing ways to determine disadvantaged communities in the 1970s and has continued to refine its methods ever since. By 2007, its Index of Multiple Deprivation consisted of 33 indicators divided into seven main groupings: income deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation and disability, education skills and training deprivation, barriers to housing and services, living environment deprivation and crime. After more than three decades, the index is a routine part of government decision-making.

The City of Toronto provides an Ontario example with its experience in identifying its 13 priority neighbourhoods. It started by analyzing 11 key services, linking their availability to the residents most likely to need them, to create indicators of service levels. Then, within underserved areas, it considered five additional factors (economic status, educational attainment, urban fabric (state of the private housing stock), health and demographics. Finally, it used this information combined with the service-level indicators and some other community safety data to determine its priority neighbourhoods.

To help determine if such an index could be developed for the entire province, the Co-Chairs commissioned a research paper by Prof. Desmond Ellis of York University. His paper is published in Volume 4 of the report. It includes not only a review of previous approaches to this question, but also recommends a specific Index of Relative Disadvantage.

As described in the Review's report, the proposed index would provide the Province and its municipal partners with an objective way of identifying priority areas for a place-based approach. It would start with census data collected by Statistics Canada from what it calls "dissemination areas," each having a population of 400 to 700 people. Prof. Ellis proposes using this readily available, highly reliable data to create an index based on five aspects of disadvantage: income, housing, education, family and employment. In theory, the index could apply to every one of the more than 19,000 dissemination areas in Ontario, although in practice, areas would probably be combined to more accurately reflect local neighbourhoods or overcome privacy issues. Rankings could show each area's relative level of disadvantage, or could rank all areas according to the degree to which they fall above and below benchmarks for large urban, small urban and rural communities.

In their report, the Co-Chairs say that while more work may be needed at the provincial level before the Province determines what best meets its long-term needs, they recommend Prof. Ellis's work as a good starting point, saying an Index of Relative Disadvantage similar to his proposal could be

generated quite quickly.

Once the index is generated, they suggest, the province should work with affected municipalities to ensure that the identified areas are indeed the most disadvantaged ones locally. Municipalities should also have the lead in determining the boundaries of such areas.

The Co-Chairs' views concerning use of the index are reflected in Recommendation 8, which states:

To identify the neighbourhoods for the place-based approach, the Province should employ the Index of Relative Disadvantage we have proposed to determine on a provincewide basis the areas where disadvantage is most concentrated. Once the index results are available, the Province, through a lead ministry for community building, should immediately open discussions with the affected municipalities to identify local factors, such as the availability of services, for inclusion in the determination of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and to define the boundaries of such neighbourhoods.

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PLACE-BASED APPROACH

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A place-based approach focuses resources and attention on geographic areas where there are concentrations of issues to be addressed and may be used to complement the universal government programs that are the more usual way of addressing public needs.

For example, the Co-Chairs found that disadvantaged neighbourhoods play a central role in generating the roots of violence involving youth. A place-based response to this finding would work in each neighbourhood to understand its particular conditions, assess what is already being done to meet its needs, and then develop the community's ability to plan and implement programs that would lead to further improvement.

An example of a place-based approach, cited in the Co-Chairs' report (Volume 1: 142), would be to support an increase in the minimum wage (a universal program) with a job readiness program for a disadvantaged neighbourhood that is tailored to the educational and language needs of that community, along with initiatives to increase local employment opportunities. Different place-based solutions could be developed for other communities, depending on their needs.

There are four principles underlying the place-based approach:

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- It is asset-based, because it emphasizes finding and supporting local strengths.
- It is tailored, with solutions that work best for each individual community.
- It encourages community-building, as local residents come together decide on common goals and then to work towards them.
- It is collaborative, with governments working with each other and with the community to achieve their common goals.

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In 2001, England adopted the place-based approach as part of a program to concentrate the work of national government departments seeking to revitalize local authorities with high concentrations of disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

An important feature of the United Kingdom's approach is that it measures progress using outcomes that feature floor targets and race-based data collection, and the results are posted to a public web site. (see Backgrounder No.4: Measuring Outcomes).

The combination of the place-based approach and the outcome measures allows government to adjust its programs based on the needs of each neighbourhood. Recently, for example, after seeing improvements in community safety measures, it shifted its focus to the need for employment opportunities in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Place-based policies are also being used in the City of Toronto to address the needs of its 13 priority neighbourhoods. The work of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, established in 2004, led to a strategy that allows disadvantaged neighbourhoods to find ways of improving the use of existing resources and local knowledge helps identify program and policy barriers.

To implement the strategy, the city first established action teams of staff from city divisions and boards to coordinate the city's response to neighbourhood issues.

These teams worked to address local needs, coordinate services and build community capacity in under-served communities. Each team was assisted by a community development officer and championed by a senior member of the city's staff.

More recently, the teams have expanded to become neighbourhood action partnerships, adding residents, governments, community agencies and businesses to the core city staff. The partnerships seek to improve communities by guiding neighbourhood investment, and ensuring that residents identify local needs and priorities and participate with other partners in deciding how best to meet those needs.

In their report, the Co-Chairs write:

"The potential for the galvanizing effects we referred to earlier is demonstrated by the Province's targeting of some Community Health Centre expansion to (Toronto's) priority neighbourhoods, funding new youth outreach workers in the priority neighbourhoods, and launching the Youth Challenge Fund to improve opportunities for youth living in these poorly served neighbourhoods. The federal government has also supported this place-based approach by targeting some of its initiatives, such as the Local Labour Market Partnerships and youth employment programs in these neighbourhoods.

"That said, it has been difficult to integrate place-based strategies to assist Toronto's priority neighbourhoods to the same degree as has been possible in England. One key reason for this is that, unlike the national government there, the City of Toronto does not control most of the key drivers for investment in these areas and there is still little collaboration among the three levels of government on this place-based initiative." (Volume 1: 151)

Because of their investigations and research into the place-based approach, the Co-Chairs recommended that:

"The Province should adopt the place-based approach we have outlined, in which a pivotal although not exclusive focus is placed on addressing the roots of violence involving youth by working within and with the neighbourhoods where those roots are concentrated and where they are producing a downward cycle of disadvantage and violence." (Volume 1, Recommendation 7: 374).

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REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

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As underpinning for its recommendations, the report of the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence sets out four pillars that describe the outcomes required to respond effectively to the roots of youth violence. They are:

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- A Repaired Social Context: Social Opportunity and Anti-Racism
- A Youth Policy Framework
- A Neighbourhood Capacity and Empowerment Focus
- Integrated Governance

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Recommendations

The report offers 30 major recommendations, along with many associated recommendations and advice to the government. Of the 30, 12 address governance, 11 deal with identified roots, four relate to associated issues and three recommend urgent action. Further, the Co-Chairs believe that the starting point for the government must be the adoption of Pillar 4, Integrated Governance, if there is to be any meaningful progress.

Integrated Governance (Pillar 4)

The Co-Chairs recommend that the government:

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- Establish a means of coordinating the efforts of its ministries, other orders of government and communities
- Create a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and Anti-Racism (or equivalent body), supported by a Cabinet Office secretariat and Premier's advisory council, to lead the government's action
- Publish, by summer 2009, an integrated plan describing how ministries will collectively respond to this report.

Dealing With The Roots (Pillar 1)

- To repair the social context and address social opportunity and racism (Pillar 1), the government should:
- Reduce both the levels and concentrations of poverty by increasing the supply of affordable housing, enhancing the quality of government services and otherwise improving living standards in disadvantaged neighbourhoods
- Articulate more effectively its commitment to address racism, and require all public bodies to develop anti-racism plans
- Develop a methodology to collect race-based statistics in all key areas, including education and the youth criminal justice system
- Fund race-relations training for front-line officers working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, as well as youth-police liaison committees in those same communities
- Develop an education curriculum that is racially and culturally inclusive; recruit teaching and school administration staff that are more representative of local communities; and address remaining concerns about the Safe Schools Act
- Retain outside experts to develop universal, community-based child mental health services
- Fund the delivery of after school programs in the critical 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. period, when youth are most at risk, and invest more generally in space for youth programming
- Provide training, standards and supports for mentors across the province, so that every young person has access to a caring adult
- Ensure accessible sports and arts programs are available in all

- disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- Work with the private sector to develop a broad strategy that would prepare disadvantaged youth for work, including the creation of sustained, meaningful employment opportunities.
- Find ways to reduce the over-criminalization of Ontario youth, compared with other large jurisdictions
- Invest more in community-based strategies to reintegrate offenders
- Appoint a Youth Justice Advisory Board to better coordinate the work of the three ministries responsible for the youth justice system (Attorney General, Children and Youth Services, Community Safety and Correctional Services).

A Youth Policy Framework (Pillar 2)

The province should:

- Establish, within a year, a youth policy framework that is developed in consultation with stakeholders and includes a guiding vision, a set of principles and specific outcomes.

Community Capacity (Pillar 3)

The province should:

- Adopt a place-based approach for government investments that address the roots of violence involving youth by concentrating on the most disadvantaged communities
- Use the Index of Relative Disadvantage described in the report to identify the most disadvantaged communities for priority action
- Designate a lead ministry for community building, and have that ministry engage municipalities to help define the boundaries of priority areas.
- Work with the community sector to develop a way of providing streamlined and stable funding to those agencies that meet community needs
- Fund the establishment of community hubs in under-served neighbourhoods, with such hubs to be located in or close to schools and operated by organizations with experience in community programming
- Encourage the creation of Neighbourhood Strategic Partnerships that would allow the province, other governments, community residents and service providers to develop and implement local solutions to violence involving youth
- Commit to provide additional funding that supports families, including enhanced prenatal care and early years programming
- Fund at least one youth-led organization in each of the province's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods
- Recognize the critical role played by youth workers by promoting stable employment and salaries to attract and retain skilled staff.

Other Major Issues

The province should:

- Meet with First Nations leaders to consider how the review's advice relates to their communities, and to consider whether a further targeted inquiry should be undertaken to address their needs
- Ensure programs, services and safeguards exist for Aboriginal children and their families who must move away from home to attend high school.
- Continue to press the federal government to enact a handgun ban in Ontario, and explore avenues the province could take to minimize the

risks posed by handguns.

Priority Implementation

Among the recommendations were three that the Co-Chairs believe should receive special attention. These three, Recommendations 28, 29 and 30, would, if adopted, see the province:

- Start work on developing a universal, community-based children's mental health system for the earliest possible implementation
- Take steps to implement the anti-racism measures described in the recommendations
- Begin the process of developing community hubs by initiating consultations with municipalities most likely to be identified by the Index of Relative Disadvantage. Where necessary, make interim arrangements until permanent space is ready.

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BACKGROUND

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MEASURING OUTCOMES

Floor Targets and Race-Based Statistics

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Governments often measure progress in social programs by focusing on averages: lowering the percentage of children on welfare, reducing the percentage of patients waiting for a specific surgery or increasing the percentage of secondary school students graduating. There is, however, a trap in this process, because it may mask the fact that while those who are already doing well improve, those who are not doing well lag even further behind.

To get around this problem, the Co-Chairs, in their report, endorse the use of "floor targets," which set minimum acceptable standards that must be met, regardless of the average. They saw the importance of floor targets during their fact-finding visit to the United Kingdom, where floor targets were introduced in the 1970s, and where they became a core part of the national government's efforts to revitalize neighbourhoods in 2000.

On a now-archived web page, the United Kingdom explained the benefits of this approach:

"Floor targets" are an advance in how Government tackles disadvantage. Normal targets often hide patches where things are really bad. If the average is OK, then things seem fine. Setting floor targets means that we will ensure a certain level of standards for all, because for the first time Government departments, local authorities and other service providers are being judged on their performance in the areas where they are doing worst, rather than on the national average. No longer will the poorest areas and groups go unnoticed."

In their report, the Co-Chairs cite examples of floor targets and go on to explain their benefits:

"An example of a floor target would be that no neighbourhood should have an obesity or diabetes rate more than a defined per cent above the provincial average, or that no school should have a graduation or literacy rate below a certain figure. Using floor targets avoids the reality that if an average is used, the target can be met by having the best-off improve their performance even if the worst-off make no progress at all or even fall further behind. Averages hide a myriad of policy and program sins, and they fundamentally fail to identify the neighbourhoods or institutions needing the most help. More significantly, when addressing the risks for violence, it is those who are

doing the least well and losing hope as a result whom we must identify and on whom we must concentrate. We cannot do this if we are distracted by averages." (Volume 1: 368)

Another important feature of floor targets is that they can be applied locally, and when they are made available to the public, the Co-Chairs believe they can lead to residents becoming more involved in activities to improve their neighbourhoods. The United Kingdom has a website, "Floor Targets Interactive" (<http://www.fti.communities.gov.uk/fti/>), where residents can see how their neighbourhood is doing when compared to the national targets or to other neighbourhoods, and whether they are making progress from quarter to quarter and year to year.

Floor targets are also useful in determining whether differences between disadvantaged communities and those not considered to be disadvantaged are narrowing or widening. The principle of gap-narrowing between the most and least successful communities is a basic part of the United Kingdom's approach to neighbourhood revitalization.

The Co-Chairs also say that racial and other relevant differences must be tracked as the province measures progress towards outcome goals. This, they say, allows systemic barriers to be identified and addressed, thereby ensuring that all members of society have a fair opportunity to fulfill their potential.

Their report says:

"For example, depending on the makeup of its student population, a school might meet its outcome target of, say, a 90-per-cent graduation rate even though only 70 per cent of its Aboriginal or Black students were graduating. Floor targets that measure attainment by relevant groups allow this kind of issue to be identified. This permits remedial measures to be targeted where they are most needed and allows the response to focus on the circumstances of those who need the most help, or particular kinds of help." (Volume 1: 369)

As a result of this analysis, the Co-Chairs recommend that:

"The Province should commit to measuring and publishing progress towards defined outcome goals as a central part of its approach to the roots agenda. To the greatest extent possible, the outcome goals should include minimum standards of achievement, a level below which no institution or community should fall (known elsewhere as "floor targets"). Progress towards those targets should be tracked by racial and other relevant differences." (Volume 1, Recommendation 12: 375)

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For further information: Jim Cowan, Review of the Roots of Youth Violence Secretariat, (416) 212-5611




United Way Toronto President and CEO Frances Lankin, former Chief Justice and Review Co-Chair Roy McMurtry, former Speaker of the Legislature and Review Co-Chair Alvin Curling and Toronto Mayor David Miller. (CNW Group/Review of the Roots of Youth Violence Secretariat)



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