ANNUAL REPORT

2015-2016

Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime
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MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

In the past year, the OFOVC fulfilled its mandate by focusing on three core activities:

- responding to questions and complaints from victims and their families;
- identifying and championing effective policy, program and legislative improvements; and
- reaching out to, and engaging with victims, stakeholders and the general public.

In 2015–2016, the OFOVC responded to hundreds of inquiries and complaints from Canadians, most of them from victims of crime or from their family members. We helped to resolve their concerns and to advise the responsible agencies about issues that needed attention. In short, we worked to shape policies and practices to prevent the underlying situations that led to the complaints.

A major milestone was the coming into force of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights (CVBR) on July 23, 2015. The OFOVC’s 2014–2015 Annual Report documented our contributions to the CVBR from the earliest stages of this initiative. For the first time, in 2015–2016, we had a chance to see the CVBR in operation. The coming into force of the CVBR provides significant benefits for victims, both directly and by virtue of the fact that, as a result of its implementation, important conversations regarding victims and their treatment have taken place across Canada amongst the key participants in the criminal justice system.

There is still much work to be done. Victims of crime must deal with multiple complaints mechanisms. The justice system needs data to evaluate the impact of the CVBR. And victims in the military justice system lack the protections now afforded to victims in the civilian justice system. The OFOVC is taking action on these issues. As the CVBR is implemented, the federal government will need to assess whether victims are able to access their new rights, how satisfied they are with the CVBR, and whether the CVBR is making a difference.

The OFOVC also pushed for enhanced rights for victims with ministers and members of Parliament. The OFOVC ensured that victims’ concerns and needs were considered in discussions on important issues of our day. For example, the OFOVC submitted comments to the online pre-design survey for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We emphasized that a national inquiry must focus on the victims, survivors, their families and their communities. The national inquiry must hear their voices, share their lived experiences, fully acknowledge their pain, and honour their memories. The national inquiry must also develop strategies to address the needs of Indigenous women and girls in Canada, and it must deal with the causes of their victimization.

Since the OFOVC began operating in April 2007, we have seen a steadily growing recognition that victims of crime have legitimate needs and rights. Meeting their needs and upholding their rights benefits all participants in the criminal justice system and society as a whole. That recognition has led to significant changes in legislation, policies and practices. These changes have been possible, first and foremost, because of the tireless work of committed individuals and organizations.

I am proud that the OFOVC has contributed to this notable shift in our society’s thinking and actions. In the coming years, we anticipate greater achievements in the ongoing efforts to ensure that victims of crime in Canada are informed, considered, protected and supported.

Sue O'Sullivan
Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime

1While almost all technical amendments came into force on July 23, 2015, some amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act came into force on June 1, 2016.
OUR MANDATE
The OFOVC was created in 2007 as an arm’s length federal government office that helps victims of crime and their families.

Our mandate relates exclusively to matters of federal jurisdiction and enables the Office:

- to promote access by victims to existing federal programs and services for victims;
- to address complaints of victims about compliance with the provisions of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* that apply to victims of crimes committed by offenders under federal jurisdiction;
- to promote awareness of the needs and concerns of victims and the applicable laws that benefit victims of crime, including to promote the principles set out in the *Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime* with respect to matters of federal jurisdiction, among criminal justice personnel and policy makers;
- to identify and review emerging and systemic issues, including those issues related to programs and services provided or administered by the Department of Justice or the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, that impact negatively on victims of crime; and
- to facilitate access by victims to existing federal programs and services by providing them with information and referrals.

*By sharing their experiences with the OFOVC, victims of crime and other Canadians help us to better understand the issues that victims in Canada face.*
WORKING DIRECTLY WITH VICTIMS
The OFOVC helps individuals every day by answering their questions and by addressing their complaints. Victims can contact a bilingual Complaint Review Officer by calling the toll-free telephone line or by TTY, or by sending an email, a fax or regular mail.

The OFOVC handles inquiries and complaints on a case-by-case basis. If a matter falls outside of the OFOVC’s mandate, the Complaint Review Officer will refer the victim to the agency or organization that is best suited to provide assistance. Otherwise, our staff will work closely with the victim to resolve their complaints.

The OFOVC also helps victims of crime collectively by reviewing important issues and making recommendations to the federal government on how to improve its laws, policies or programs to better support victims of crime. For more information on the Ombudsman’s recommendations for 2015–2016, please see the section on page 14 entitled Working For All Victims.

**CASE MANAGEMENT**

For each complaint it receives, the OFOVC follows an established process (see Chart 1).

The CVBR requires every federal department, agency or body that is involved in the criminal justice system to institute a complaints mechanism. This may change how we review complaints in the future. The OFOVC’s 2016–2017 Annual Report will reflect any changes to our case management process.

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*As required, the OFOVC will monitor and follow up on cases where a specific action is requested or a recommendation is made.*

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**Chart 1: OFOVC Case Management Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIAL CONTACT WITH CLIENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information and close file</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in mandate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide referral and close file</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within mandate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review case and recommend solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not resolved*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation and/or request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor action taken and follow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File closed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TALKING WITH VICTIMS

As part of the OFOVC’s mandate, we take complaints and inquiries from victims and other Canadians. We provide assistance and referrals, and we help to promote awareness of federal government programs and services for victims of crime.

The OFOVC opens a file when an individual contacts us with an inquiry or a complaint. Each subsequent contact with that same individual (i.e., follow-up conversations, additional letters or telephone calls) is recorded as an activity on the original file until the file is closed. A single file may reflect several interactions or “contacts” with an individual. The OFOVC opened 453 files in 2015–2016 compared to 546 files in 2014–2015. While the number of opened files has declined, the number of contacts per file has increased, perhaps indicating that the files opened during this past year were more complex.3

The OFOVC reopened 44 files in 2015–2016. These files are not captured in the total files opened, but they represent important work. A file is reopened when an individual contacts the OFOVC about the same issue during the same fiscal year.

Chart 2 explains the categories of files that the OFOVC opened in 2015–2016. A year-over-year analysis of the files opened between 2012–2013 and 2015–2016 shows a progressive increase in the number of complaints received, and a related decrease in the number of inquiries made.

The OFOVC hears from a wide variety of individuals. As in previous years, the majority of inquiries and complaints made to the OFOVC in 2015–2016 came from victims. Approximately 64 percent of the contacts came directly from victims of crime, or from family members of victims.

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2This activity is captured in the OFOVC’s "activity records" for each file.
3The number increased an average of 5.6 contacts per file to 5.7 contacts per file.
As in previous years, the OFOVC assisted individuals from across the country (see Chart 3). The proportion of files from each province/territory has remained fairly constant since the OFOVC began operating in 2007. These figures generally reflect the population sizes of the provinces/territories. As in previous years, approximately 12 percent of all files were initiated in French.

Chart 3: Total files opened, by location (April 1, 2015–March 31, 2016)
LEARNING FROM VICTIMS

Our conversations with victims of crime offer valuable insight into the issues and challenges that they face. This information guides our strategic planning and helps us to set priorities. It also ensures that we provide the best possible information and recommendations to the federal government. Chart 4 shows the five most common topics raised by individuals who contacted the OFOVC in 2015–2016.

Chart 4: Top five topics on which the OFOVC provided assistance to individuals (April 1, 2015–March 31, 2016)

Notes:
1. A single file may include multiple topics.
2. Beginning this fiscal year and going forward, the OFOVC excluded the category “OFOVC role and mandate” from the list, even though it still ranks amongst the most popular topics. Since the OFOVC was created nine years ago, individuals rarely call to exclusively inquire about the OFOVC without making a complaint or an inquiry on other topic. Removing this topic will help the OFOVC to highlight the more pertinent issues raised by victims.

Lack of victim services: Concerns relating to the lack of victim services available.

Safety concerns: Inquiries about measures that individuals can take to protect themselves, or concerns that victims of crime expressed about an offender’s proximity to their home or workplace.

Victim assistance options: Inquiries about services, programs, funding and other forms of victim assistance offered by municipal, provincial/territorial and federal governments, and by non-governmental organizations.

Victims’ rights: Inquiries or complaints about the legal entitlements of victims of crime in Canada.

Other levels of government: Concerns related to matters that fall under the jurisdiction of provinces/territories and/or municipalities.
In 2015–2016, the OFOVC began tracking inquiries and complaints related specifically to the CVBR. Our analysis shows that victims were most often interested in their right to information⁴ (see Chart 5).

**Chart 5:** Topics related to the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights* on which the OFOVC provided information or assistance (July 23, 2015–March 31, 2016)

- Right to Information: 35
- Right to Protection: 15
- Right to Participation: 14
- Right to Restitution: 2
- Remedies: 5

Note: A single file may include multiple topics.

⁴The OFOVC classifies these cases according to the rights listed in the CVBR. However, one case may involve several aspects of the CVBR. Although the OFOVC is committed to ensuring that its data are standardized and consistent, the interpretation and the classification of these cases are subjective.
The OFOVC informed Mr. M about the complaints mechanisms established in compliance with the new CVBR. With his permission, the OFOVC contacted Justice Canada to facilitate communication between the program and the victim. Justice Canada responded on the same day, providing timelines for Mr. M’s funding application and stating that staff at Justice Canada would contact the client that day. Justice Canada informed the OFOVC later that day that the funding was approved and an urgent payment was sent by courier. Mr. M received the payment the next day.

CASE HIGHLIGHT: ACCESS TO FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR VICTIMS TO ATTEND PAROLE HEARINGS

The Government of Canada makes financial assistance available to eligible victims who wish to attend parole hearings. Victims must apply for the funding, and they can use it to cover various expenses, including travel and accommodations.

In December 2015, Mr. M contacted the OFOVC to express his concern about a delay in receiving financial assistance so that he could attend an approaching parole hearing. According to Mr. M, the staff at Justice Canada who administers the Victims Fund told him that the paperwork was processed and that a courier would deliver his cheque. To ensure that he received the cheque, Mr. M arranged to be home on the specified delivery date. Mr. M explained to the OFOVC that he did not receive the cheque on the indicated date, causing him further anxiety and frustration. Mr. M also told the OFOVC that he had difficulty contacting staff at Justice Canada regarding his file.
Lastly, Mr. Y was upset that the hearing was delayed by two hours due to a booking error. As a result, Mr. Y and his support person needed to leave the hearing early in order to catch their flight. They subsequently missed the outcome of the hearing. Mr. Y felt that staff at Correctional Service Canada (CSC) and at the Parole Board of Canada (PBC) did not try to accommodate him and his support person while they waited. Furthermore, they were not given updates or additional information about when the hearing would begin during that time.

The OFOVC informed Mr. Y about the complaints processes established in compliance with the new CVBR. Given that his complaint required him to go through three separate complaints processes, the OFOVC facilitated the process by directing Mr. Y’s complaints to the appropriate agencies within CSC, the PBC and Justice Canada. Mr. Y told the OFOVC that he felt re-victimized by going through three different complaints mechanisms. The OFOVC identified the systemic nature of the issue and, in order to assist all future victims, recommended a single, amalgamated complaints mechanism to the attention of officials at Public Safety Canada.

The OFOVC occasionally receives complaints from victims of crime who have concerns with multiple agencies in the federal government. In one case, Mr. Y, a registered victim, contacted the OFOVC with a number of concerns related to a parole hearing he attended with his support person. His most pressing concern was that the Victims Fund had not yet reimbursed him for expenses incurred in attending the hearing.

Mr. Y was also concerned about an exchange that occurred prior to the hearing when Mr. Y and his support person arrived at the institution where the hearing was to be held. Not knowing that Mr. Y was the victim, a staff member who spoke to him made a comment about the offender that Mr. Y and his support person found offensive, insensitive and upsetting.

CASE HIGHLIGHT: ASSISTING VICTIMS TO NAVIGATE THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND FACILITATING COMMUNICATIONS WITH VARIOUS COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS
In addition to working with individual victims of crime, the OFOVC reviews important issues, and makes recommendations to the federal government about changes to laws, policies, programs or services to better support and assist all victims of crime. This type of broad national change ultimately helps all victims of crime in Canada.

The OFOVC is responsible for:

• undertaking special projects (e.g. data mapping);
• conducting systemic reviews;
• identifying issues and submitting recommendations to the federal government;
• making submissions to the federal government during consultative processes; and
• providing feedback and recommendations on legislative proposals.

The following section explains how the OFOVC performed this work in 2015–2016 in order to strengthen Canada’s criminal justice system.

**SPECIAL PROJECT**

**Data mapping study**

Victimization data in Canada is gathered infrequently and is limited in scope. The General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization provides much of the most useful data. The survey results illustrate victims’ experiences. They include both crime incidents that are reported to the police, and crime incidents that are not reported to police (i.e., unreported crime). Since many crimes are not reported to police services for various reasons, self-reported victimization data included in the GSS on Victimization are an essential complement to justice system statistics. A major challenge is that the GSS on Victimization is repeated once every five years, so statistics on victimization are not up-to-date. Police-reported data are very useful in some contexts, but they are limited to specific reported crimes and they do not necessarily speak to a victims’ whole experience.

In response to this gap in data, the OFOVC partnered with the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics at Statistics Canada in 2015–2016 to undertake a data mapping study. The study seeks to outline research needs and opportunities related to victims of crime. It also seeks to identify data opportunities that could be used to measure the impacts of the CVBR on the justice system. The project consists of two phases:

• Phase 1: Consult with stakeholders to define their overarching research and data needs and priorities related to victims of crime.
• Phase 2: Map existing data sets to determine what data are currently produced and to determine how to optimize this data to meet research needs.

The data mapping study will produce a roadmap for collecting, producing and disseminating information and data about victim issues and services within the criminal justice system across all jurisdictions in Canada.

The data mapping study was launched in September 2015. External consultations were held with a variety of victim-serving agencies and stakeholders between November 2015 and February 2016. We look forward to the release of the final report in 2017.

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5The target population is Canadians aged 15 and over. The GSS on Victimization is the only national survey of self-reported victimization which provides data for the provinces/territories. The survey also conducts interviews in Canada’s northern regions.

6The GSS on Victimization is conducted on six different themes: caregiving, families, time use, social identity, volunteering, and victimization. Each theme is surveyed in-depth every five years.
SYSTEMIC REVIEW

The OFOVC defines a systemic issue as:

An issue that currently impacts negatively on victims of crime, and if not identified and appropriately addressed, has the potential to continue to negatively impact victims.

While the OFOVC has always examined systemic issues, in 2015–2016, it formalized a step-by-step map of the process, including expected turnaround times and escalation levels. After developing the process map and supporting documents, the OFOVC met with its departmental partners and colleagues to share the process and to discuss what they can expect if their programs, services or policies are reviewed. The OFOVC operates according to ombudsman principles of neutrality and fairness, and believes that the development of a clear and transparent process is a valuable part of this.

In 2015–2016, the OFOVC concluded its first official systemic review using this reporting template. The report, entitled Financial Assistance for Victims to Attend Parole Board of Canada Parole Hearings, is available on our website. A synopsis of the review follows below.

Financial assistance for victims to attend Parole Board of Canada hearings

This review examined the poor or delayed communication between registered victims and program officers, as well as delays in interim or full financial assistance payments to victims.

The review evaluated the steps taken to resolve these problems. The Ombudsman made five recommendations following the review. They appear in Table 1, together with the responses from the Programs Branch at Justice Canada.
Table 1: Financial assistance for victims to attend Parole Board of Canada hearings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Recommendations by the OFOVC</th>
<th>Responses from Justice Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service standards</td>
<td>The Policy Centre for Victim Issues and the Programs Branch at Justice Canada should implement reasonable and measurable service standards for processing applications from victims seeking funding to attend parole hearings.</td>
<td>Agreed. A database to be adopted government-wide in 2017 will allow more service standard measures to be tracked, and this should improve standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better information</td>
<td>Justice Canada should improve its online and print information concerning the financial assistance program for victims to attend parole hearings. This should clearly describe the application process, and explain how and when to contact program officers.</td>
<td>Agreed. Correspondence with victims will clearly explain that they must submit receipts or invoices to be reimbursed for expenses. On the toll-free line for victims, the recording will invite callers to leave a message and will indicate when to expect a return call.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for staff and managers</td>
<td>Programs Branch staff and managers should receive ongoing training on changes introduced to improve client service delivery.</td>
<td>The Programs Branch has shared the OFOVC report with program officers. If required, the Branch will update the process map and give each officer a copy, listing the steps involved in processing and responding to individual files.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversight</td>
<td>Programs Branch managers should review all completed applications for financial assistance as soon as they are closed to ensure that they have been handled in a timely manner and that proper procedures were followed.</td>
<td>The Branch considers that management review of completed applications would prove burdensome to staff and could adversely affect service delivery. Instead, the Branch will continue reminding staff of the need to process applications in a timely and proper fashion, follow correct procedures, maintain departmental records, and ensure client satisfaction with the service provided. Managers and officers will be reminded that victims are entitled to use the Department’s complaints mechanism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>The Branch should report back to the OFOVC on the implementation of these recommendations and the overall quality of service delivery every six months.</td>
<td>The Branch reports to the Minister of Justice. However, it could inform the OFOVC of changes to improve service delivery, such as new template letters, updates to the website, etc. After obtaining senior management approval, the Branch could also share results regarding service standards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IDENTIFIED ISSUES AND SUBSEQUENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementing the complaints mechanism as required by the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights

The CVBR requires federal organizations that are involved in the criminal justice system to have a complaints mechanism in place. As a result, there are numerous complaints mechanisms, each with their own admissibility criteria, complaints forms and time frames. Victims with complaints are required to contact the responsible department or agency. If they have exhausted the process and are still dissatisfied, they can file a complaint with any authority that has jurisdiction to review complaints, such as the OFOVC.

In 2015–2016, the OFOVC began to hear from victims who were dissatisfied with the new complaints processes. Victims were unsure about where to lodge complaints. They also found the process challenging. In some situations, a victim's complaint may involve more than one government department. In those cases, victims reported to the OFOVC that telling their story multiple times in multiple formats, and dealing with numerous individuals was frustrating and confusing. The OFOVC helped victims to navigate the new complaints processes and facilitated complaints by individual victims. The OFOVC is aware that this emerging systemic issue negatively impacts victims of crime.

Recommendation
During an in-person meeting, the Ombudsman provided feedback on the complaints system to the staff of The Honourable Ralph Goodale, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. The Ombudsman also recommended the use of a single complaint form to help facilitate the complaints process for victims of crime.

Status
The OFOVC will follow up on this issue in 2017.

Victims' rights in the military justice system

While the CVBR was a significant step forward in enshrining rights for victims of crime in Canada, these statutory rights do not apply to victims of offences that are investigated and prosecuted under the National Defence Act. As a result, victims of crime within Canada’s military do not have the same rights or access to the same information as victims of crime in the civilian criminal justice system.

On December 3, 2015, the Ombudsman sent a letter to the Minister of National Defence to bring this disparity to his attention.

Recommendation
The Ombudsman recommended that the Minister of National Defence introduce legislation to amend the National Defence Act to give victims in the military justice system the same rights and entitlements that are set out in the CVBR.

Status
On March 22, 2016, the Minister of National Defence sent a letter to the Ombudsman, acknowledging the disparity in the rights afforded to victims of crime in the military justice system. The Minister of National Defence said that addressing the statutory gap was a priority for him, and that he expected to work with officials to resolve this issue in the coming months.

The OFOVC continues to monitor the issue.

Proposed victim response program for incidents of mass victimization or terrorism

In the current global environment, we unfortunately hear more frequently about incidents of mass victimization or terrorism. These incidents may involve active shooter situations, terrorist attacks or other emergencies.

As Canada grapples with this issue, the OFOVC recognizes the importance of ensuring that victims' needs and concerns are heard and addressed.

Recommendations
The Ombudsman proposed that the federal government create a specialized victim-centred response program involving Public Safety Canada (PSC), with cooperation from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and provincial/territorial victim services. The Ombudsman recommended embedding the program within the RCMP's incident command structure.
The Ombudsman also recommended that this program include the following features:

- **Research and policy development.** Identify best practices and lessons learned in victim response in Canada and internationally. Develop policy to reflect the research findings.

- **Specialized training to create a pool of accredited “victim specialists.”** Select existing victim services workers and train them to respond to mass casualty and victimization events. Draw workers from within the RCMP and from provincial/territorial and municipal police services.

- **Support and consultation.** Provide direct support to police services and to all levels of government in response to mass victimization and/or terrorist incidents. Ensure that policies and plans take victims’ needs into account. Consult with victims when developing plans.

The specialized victim-centred response program would enhance public preparedness for mass victimization incidents and increase Canadians’ resilience following incidents. It would also create a higher, more consistent standard of victim response across jurisdictions in Canada.

**Status**
The OFOVC continues to discuss this proposal with PSC, the CACP and the RCMP.

**SUBMISSIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT AS PART OF ITS CONSULTATIVE PROCESSES**

**Pre-inquiry design process for a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls**

On December 8, 2015, the Government of Canada launched a national inquiry into the issue of the vastly disproportionate number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Between December 2015 and mid-February 2016, the government met with the families of victims. The government also launched an online survey to obtain input from a wide range of stakeholders and from the general public about the design of the national inquiry. The Ombudsman made a submission to the online survey.
Recommendations
The Ombudsman, who has long supported the call for a national inquiry, submitted the following considerations and recommendations:

- The participation of the families of victims, survivors and communities is of utmost importance. The national inquiry should implement measures to ensure diverse representation and to address potential barriers to participation. For example, the national inquiry should provide individuals the option to participate anonymously. It should offer accommodations in order to protect individuals’ privacy and to minimize their public exposure.
- The national inquiry should incorporate the 10 principles outlined in the *Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime, 2003*. In addition, where applicable, the national inquiry should take into account the rights and protections of the CVBR.
- The national inquiry should address the specific root causes of missing and murdered Indigenous women, and the broader issues of violence and victimization of Indigenous women.
- The Ombudsman supports the national inquiry, but also recognizes the need for immediate and concrete action. As such, she called for the public reporting of measures to address the ongoing victimization of Indigenous women and girls, as well as relevant evaluations and results. These include measures falling under the government’s *Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes Against Aboriginal Women and Girls*.
- It would be useful to create a National Action Plan outlining all recommendations, responsibilities, funding sources and timelines.

Status
The federal government posted summaries of the in-person meetings with families of victims on the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada website. As of March 31, 2016, the federal government has not yet released a summary of the online consultation.
RECOMMENDATIONS ON LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

Senate of Canada study on delays in the criminal justice system
In January 2016, the Senate of Canada authorized the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs to study delays in the criminal justice system. The Ombudsman appeared before the committee on March 24, 2016 to report on how delays affect victims of crime. The Ombudsman recommended strengthening victims’ rights and services to reduce delays and to improve victims’ overall satisfaction with the criminal justice system.

Recommendations
The Ombudsman recommended action in two areas to reduce delays in the criminal justice system and to lighten the burden on victims:

- **Expand the use of technology to keep victims informed.** The Ombudsman noted that, in Canada, electronic or online notification for victims is available only in the corrections and parole systems. The Ombudsman suggested creating an integrated, online system so that multiple criminal justice practitioners could upload information about proceedings to disclose to victims. Victims who are informed at an early stage about their rights, about what to expect from the proceedings, and about what is expected of them are more likely to participate as witnesses in proceedings. Furthermore, Crown Attorneys would find it easier to present evidence, and there would be far fewer adjournments to allow victims to invoke their rights.

- **Comprehensive victim support services.** Based on the findings of a pilot project in the United Kingdom, the Ombudsman observed that better supporting victims can increase efficiency in the criminal justice system. The pilot project provided:
  - victims and witnesses with a single point of contact for their case;
  - a full assessment of their needs for the purpose of identifying specific support requirements, highlighting areas of concern;
  - witness care officers to steer individuals through the criminal justice system and to coordinate support services;
  - ongoing review of victims’ and witnesses’ needs throughout the case; and
  - greater communication and contact.

An independent evaluation of the pilot project in the United Kingdom found:
  - enhanced participation among witnesses in the criminal justice process;
  - fewer adjournments of proceedings because of witness difficulties; and
  - more trials where the defendant entered a late guilty plea.

The Ombudsman concluded that these practical reforms could resolve delays in Canada’s criminal justice system, and that they would benefit the accused, the victims, criminal justice practitioners and society as a whole.

Status
The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs continues to study these issues.
BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND RAISING AWARENESS
The OFOVC engages as much as possible with organizations that work with victims of crime in order to fulfill its mandate, to build relationships and to raise awareness.

ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Outreach activities in 2015–2016 included meetings with:
- hundreds of victims of crime;
- victim services agencies;
- advocates;
- criminal justice personnel; and
- police services.

OFOVC officials also attended conferences, symposia and commemorations across Canada, the United States and Europe in order to exchange information and to raise awareness of:
- the OFOVC and its work;
- the programs and services that the federal government offers to victims of crime;
- victims’ rights; and
- emerging practices in the field of victims’ rights.

Highlights of conferences that the Ombudsman attended in 2015–2016 include:
- The UN Conference on Human Rights of Victims of Terrorism, held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on February 11, 2016. The Ombudsman moderated one of the conference sessions and contributed to the discussions. The Ombudsman emphasized the need to support victims of terrorism and their families.
- The Victim Support Europe 2016 annual Conference held in the Muntgebouw in Utrecht, Netherlands on May 25, 2016. The conference theme was “Taking victim support to the next level: connect and commit.”
- A meeting of Crown Attorneys from across Ontario on the subject of sexual violence.
- Re-inventing Criminal Justice: The Eighth National Symposium, held in Montreal from January 22–23, 2016.

WEBSITE: www.victimsfirst.gc.ca

We continued to enhance and populate our website to provide more information to victims of crime and to all Canadians about the OFOVC’s work, victims’ rights, and the programs and services available to victims. The website received more than 29,000 visits in 2015–2016. Most visitors sought information on victims’ rights and services for victims.

Since its inception, OFOVC’s websites have generally steadily increased, however, in 2015–2016, website visits decreased approximately 20 percent from the previous year. This is likely due to our inability to carry out our Google keyword-search campaign during the federal election, during which all advertising is prohibited.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Twitter

The OFOVC created a Twitter account in 2014. In 2015–2016, we tweeted about:
- the mandate of the OFOVC;
- how the OFOVC helps victims;
- information and resources for victims;
- upcoming events (e.g., National Victims of Crime Awareness Week 2015); and
- organizations that help victims of crime.

In 2015–2016, we attracted 159 new followers, increasing the total number of followers to 409. Our twitter handle is: @OFOVC_BOVFAC.

MEDIA RELATIONS

The OFOVC engages with the news media to increase public awareness of victims’ issues, to increase sensitivity to their needs, and to stimulate support for action. The Ombudsman remained available to engage with the media throughout the year.
OPERATIONS

The OFOVC is an arm’s length program activity of Justice Canada. The OFOVC shares administrative services (e.g., procurement and human resources management) with Justice Canada to maintain cost and operational efficiencies.

Within Justice Canada’s Program Alignment Architecture (2015–2016), the OFOVC helps to support and achieve Strategic Outcome 1: A Fair, Relevant and Accessible Canadian Justice System.

Since the Ombudsman reports directly to the Minister of Justice, the OFOVC is not included in Justice Canada’s governance framework.

Some information about the OFOVC appears in Justice Canada’s Report on Plans and Priorities and in its Departmental Performance Report. For performance analysis, however, those documents direct readers to the OFOVC’s Annual Report.

The OFOVC employs a full-time staff of nine people who support three units:

- Case Management;
- Policy and Research;
- Communications.

FINANCE

Table 2: Summary of actual expenditures (April 1, 2015–March 31, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Actual ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries and wages</td>
<td>918,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/communications</td>
<td>70,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and professional dues</td>
<td>8,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and special services</td>
<td>60,871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Legal services</td>
<td>8,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Translation services</td>
<td>23,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other services</td>
<td>29,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentals</td>
<td>4,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities, materials and supplies</td>
<td>3,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition of machinery and equipment</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel and relocation</td>
<td>46,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total expended by the OFOVC</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,115,554</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Actual ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate costs (controlled centrally)</td>
<td>90,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total expended by Justice Canada</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,205,595</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Public Services and Procurement Canada covered the cost of occupying and maintaining the OFOVC’s premises.
LOOKING AHEAD
As 2015–2016 ends, we continue to work with our federal and non-governmental partners and colleagues to enhance victims’ experiences.

In 2017, the OFOVC will:

- continue raise awareness of the CVBR and victims’ new rights in Canada;
- monitor the implementation of the CVBR;
- continue to work with our federal partners and share feedback that we receive from victims about improving the processes and services that were created to uphold the CVBR and to meet victims’ needs;
- ensure that victims’ voices are heard as the Government of Canada works to fulfill its new mandate; and
- offer recommendations to public consultations, Parliamentary Committee hearings, round tables and other forums.

We look forward to working with all of those involved in the development and delivery of federal laws, policies, programs and services that impact victims. By taking a victim-centred approach we can ensure that victims of crime in Canada are better informed, considered, protected and supported.