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CONTRIBUTORS

OPINION

Gun control is a women's issue

By **Heather McGregor** Opinion

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The presence of a firearm in the household greatly increases the risk of death in cases of domestic violence. This is a well-researched fact that every Canadian should know. Indeed, this fact is the reason why YWCA Toronto has been part of the growing movement for gun control in Canada for some 20 years now. We know that gun control saves women's lives.

For this reason, the federal government's recent announcement of a [federal review on gun control](#) is welcome news. Bill Blair, the minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, will work with Ralph Goodale, minister of Public Safety, on "an examination of a full ban on handguns and assault weapons in Canada." This review is an encouraging and progressive start toward eliminating gun violence.

This federal move takes on a special significance in Toronto after a summer of tragic gun violence. In response, Toronto City Council proposed a ban on hand guns and ammunition sales. While this is certainly an important step forward, what has consistently been missing from local discussions on gun violence is recognition of the impact of guns on the lives of women and children.

How can it be that violence against women, which has claimed the lives of [106 women in Canada](#), thus far in 2018, is not met with the same public outcry and attention? The need for action is urgent.

As a women's organization that shelters and serves victims of violence, YWCA Toronto sees first-hand the harmful effects of guns in the lives of women and children.

Gun violence not only claims lives, it uproots women and children — every year more than [100,000 women and children in Canada](#) leave their homes to escape abuse. Gun violence will not be resolved by having one city proclaim a ban on hand-held firearms. Rather, now is the time for the federal government to use its rightful authority to ban all hand guns and assault weapons in Canada.

Our members of parliament and senators should know the facts. Women face disproportionate risks from guns that are too often used to threaten, control and kill. Indigenous women, racialized women, trans women, older women, newcomer women and women living with disabilities are at increased risk of experiencing violence because of systemic barriers.

Access to firearms by an intimate partner increases the likelihood of femicide by 500 per cent. It is also important to recognize that women in small towns or rural areas are at greater risk of violence and homicide involving firearms than their urban counterparts.

Our politicians must ensure that this upcoming gun control review leads to action — not just further study and talk. They must heed the long standing calls of the Coalition for Gun Control to enact progressive legislation in the face of well-organized and well-financed members of the gun lobby — a lobby that argues gun ownership should extend to assault rifles and unregulated handguns.

The public will be on the government's side as [polls demonstrate](#) that Canadians overwhelmingly support strong gun control legislation.

Under the previous federal government, we saw many regressive policy actions on the gun control file. For instance, it is not widely understood that Canada no longer tracks the sales of unrestricted rifles and shotguns — a minimum measure that is recognized even in the United States.

What should be clear is that this poses a risk for public safety and especially for women's safety; the two are inextricably linked. The same federal legislation that has failed to protect people on the streets has failed to protect women in their homes.

Ultimately, we cannot leave women out of the discussion on gun violence. The fight for women's safety is an integral part of the fight for our city's and country's safety.

Stronger gun control laws in Canada will help to protect women, children and communities from the devastating impact of gun violence. It is on us, as concerned citizens, to speak out loudly and urge the federal government to act with courage and determination for gun control.

Correction — Sept. 19, 2018: *This article was edited from a previous version that mistakenly said gender-based violence claimed the lives of 57 women in Ontario thus far in 2018. In fact, that number represented the number of women in all of Canada who died by violent means in the first four months of 2018, according to a May report by the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. As of September 2018, that number jumped to 106 Canadian women.*

Heather McGregor is the CEO of YWCA Toronto, the city's largest multi-service women's organization. YWCA Toronto is a founding member of the Coalition for Gun Control.

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