

# Interconnectedness Initiative

Strengthening the Collective Support of Torture Survivors and  
Their Families in British Columbia

June 2023



<b>Report:</b>	Interconnectedness Initiative
<b>Purpose:</b>	Strengthen the collective support for torture survivors
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<b>Prepared for:</b>	Participating Agencies of the Initiative
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Victoria Coalition for Survivors of Torture (VCST)
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## Primary Contacts

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## Stakeholders

The initiative brought together a collaborative effort from eight mental health and settlement agencies in Metro Vancouver and Vancouver Island, all united by a shared objective of supporting survivors of torture. These agencies included:

- The Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST) | [More](#)
- Vancouver Island Counseling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees (VICCIR) | [More](#)
- DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society (DCRS) | [More](#)
- Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC) | [More](#)
- Inter-Cultural Association (ICA) | [More](#)
- Rainbow Refugee | [More](#)
- Anglican Diocese of Islands and Inlets - Refugee Program | [More](#)
- Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre (VIRCS) | [More](#)

This project was funded by the [Victoria Foundation](#).





## Methodology

Fourteen settlement and integration organizations in the Capital Regional District (CRD) and Metro Vancouver were invited to participate in the project, with a total of eight organizations responding—four from the CRD area and four from the BC Mainland.

In the fall of 2022-23, a comprehensive series of interviews was carried out with the eight participating agencies. The primary objective was to establish a baseline assessment of their perceived ability to effectively support, refer, and empower survivors of torture. These interviews played a vital role in gauging the agencies. These interviews also helped us measure their knowledge and understanding of the challenges confronted by survivors, their families, and their communities.

Two online round-table discussions were organized to collect input from participating agencies, and to identify predominant gaps and actions needed. The services of a consulting firm - [Turning Point Resolutions](#), were engaged, to help the VCST maintain its neutral role as the project facilitator and be able to fully engage in the discussions. The first-round table was completed in March 2023, and the second one in May 2023. This report summarizes the key findings, recommendations and actions emanating from this process.

It is truly inspiring to witness the collaboration of eight organizations dedicated to serving immigrants and refugees in the Capital Regional District (CRD) and Metro Vancouver. Their collective efforts aim to enhance the support provided to survivors of torture, their families, and their communities, ultimately contributing to fostering harmony in our world.

## Key Findings

During the two round-table discussions held online with our stakeholders, it was evident that there are several significant gaps in the collective support system for survivors of torture in our community. These gaps were consistently highlighted by the participating agencies.

Based on the feedback received during this project, the following points emerged as the most frequently mentioned areas requiring attention and improvement.

### Referral

Survivors of torture find themselves entangled in a web of multiple and competent service providers, which can be overwhelming. The importance of establishing and adhering to best practices for the referral and support process was emphasized by stakeholders. This includes elements such as inter-agency coordination, building trust and ensuring honest and appropriate follow-up. Moreover, stakeholders' focus extended beyond basic networking and regular meetings, highlighting the need to gain a clear understanding of the services available to effectively meet the needs of torture survivors, their families, and their communities.



## **Training**

Training plays a crucial role in addressing key questions related to torture, its impact on survivors, as well as their families and communities. By equipping service providers with appropriate training, we can effectively respond to these questions. Presently, survivors often experience a distressing cycle of endless referrals or go unnoticed within the gaps of service delivery. There is a pressing need for training that enables agencies to create safe and supportive spaces, effectively utilize available resources, services, and referrals. Moreover, comprehensive training resources should cover essential topics such as re-traumatization, public stigma, vicarious trauma, and burnout prevention for frontline workers and their colleagues.

## **Case Conferencing and Community Capacity Building**

To enhance the capacity of staff members supporting survivors of torture, case conferencing is perceived as a valuable approach to gaining insight into the specific needs and strengths of survivors, while fostering cooperation and collaboration among relevant stakeholders. Developing a case conference protocol to ensure consistency and effectiveness in the process is important. Additionally, establishing case-sharing sessions for sharing best practices is needed.

## **Research and Advocacy**

It is essential to leverage the power of research to inform and support advocacy initiatives. Active participation in research, advocacy, and policy program development is encouraged to contribute to the advancement of advocacy and policy programs. Advocacy for expanded definitions of torture to encompass the experiences of family members, children, and their support community is recommended.

## **Advocacy**

Overall, the analysis emphasizes the significance of advocacy in amplifying the voices of survivors and effecting positive change. Lastly, organizing advocacy efforts collectively and prioritizing knowledge development and public education was recognized.



## Next Steps

After looking at the findings from this process, the following steps have been formulated by the VCST board of directors, based on the identified gaps and priorities, as communicated by the participating agencies.

### Resources

Developing a comprehensive resource list of services for survivors of torture would be a first step as per the professionals' demand. A resource guide for survivors of torture would point out safe and supportive services they can access. This may be a way of identifying and reducing barriers to accessing adequate resources, and it will also help professionals make the necessary referrals and connections.

**Action:**

The VCST will initiate an inventory of services and resources available. Current inventories of services for refugee and settlement agencies will be framed to facilitate the identification of specific services for survivors of torture. This guide will be incorporated into our VCST Website and other platforms (e.g., social media, BC211), making it available to stakeholders by June 2024.

### Program Promotion

Supporting and promoting programs provided by agencies that empower and assist survivors of torture is a key role for the VCST. These would include non-profit and governmental organizations that provide social and community services relevant for survivors. By raising awareness and highlighting these programs, we can ensure that survivors, their families and their communities, have access to the resources they need.

**Action:** By the end of June 2024, the VCST will have contacted service providers in the region, to develop a promotional package that will meet this need.

### Training

The VCST will initiate the development of a curriculum that directly addresses the expressed needs of stakeholders. that specifically caters to the identified needs of stakeholders in comprehending the nature of torture and its lasting effects on survivors, their families, and their communities. Through training sessions, participating agencies and our community as a whole will be equipped to foster a safe and nurturing environment, where survivors of torture feel comfortable and empowered to address their unique needs.

**Action:** Within the year, the VCST will bring stakeholders and board members together, to initiate the drafting of a training curriculum for stakeholders' staff members. Training will cover methods for assessing and supporting a client without the necessity of explicit



disclosure, emphasize the importance of providing culturally sensitive, client-centered, psychoeducational, and trauma-informed emotional and practical support to effectively assist survivors, their families and their communities.

**Action:** The VCST will initiate the development of a public educational campaign to address the stigma of torture, and produce a template for torture awareness for the different social sectors that serve survivors: mental and physical health, education, community services, legal services, employment, recreation, etc.

### **Case Conferencing**

Case conferencing was identified as an important tool to address sensitive cases among survivors in the region, and to bring forward the experiences of stakeholders in addressing those cases.

**Action:** As a crucial first step, by December 2023, the VCST will initiate the collective development of best practices and protocols for case conferencing, incorporating valuable feedback from both survivors and agencies.

### **Engage in Research**

There are many layers of torture that we do not understand, both locally and globally. By engaging academic research institutions in this process, such as UVic, we can incorporate community research tools to help us better understand these layers, and to develop resources to inform the community and the public about the hidden sequels of torture.

**Action:** Identify academic and community research organizations in the region that can help us develop a research protocol to complement the community development activities in this project.

### **Advocacy and Public Education**

Educational and research endeavors mentioned previously, will serve as a seed for advocacy, nurturing a broader understanding and support for survivors of torture from our institutions and governments, and for our community.

**Action:** VCST will continue to participate in existing networks to advocate for, and represent the needs of survivors of torture, their families, and their communities (e.g., multi-Agency partnerships).

**Action:** By January 2024, an advocacy strategy to engage local, provincial, and federal politicians will be proposed by the VCST board and shared with stakeholders for further development.



## Website Enhancement

VCST will focus on transforming its website into an interactive and resourceful platform that provides valuable support to survivors, agencies, and community members. This includes developing a user-friendly portal and incorporating relevant resources to meet the needs of stakeholders effectively.

**Action:** By August 2023, the VCST will identify and engage the services of a non-profit website development company, to update and maintain the VCST website. Website will include upcoming events, access to referral and coordination services, research and development resources, social media and public education resources, and networking opportunities within the CRD region.

## Sustainability

The VCST is committed to proactively seek sustainable resources and funding solutions as a top priority. By securing reliable financial resources, VCST ensures the successful fulfillment of identified agency gaps and priorities.

**Action:** The VCST will continue to advocate government and private foundations, to promote the need for long-term program funding within our sector, as opposed to short-term project funding.

## Conclusion

A total of ten specific actions have been identified through this process to help address the needs of survivors of torture, their families, and their communities in the region.

The VCST is committed to fulfill these ten actions, with the support of their board, staff, stakeholders, supporters, and funders, to the best of our capacity.

We look forward to the next stage in this endeavor.