

Ontario pledges \$100 million to help end violence against indigenous women

By Keith Leslie
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TORONTO—Ontario will spend \$100 million over the next three years on a long-term strategy to end violence against indigenous women, most of it on support for families.

Indigenous women are three times more likely to experience violence and to be murdered than other women in Ontario, Premier Kathleen Wynne said Tuesday.

“This is devastating families and entire communities, and it’s a problem our entire province needs to face,” Wynne said.

Indigenous people make up 2.4 per cent of Ontario’s population, but they account for 26 per cent of the children in care. Indigenous women make up six per cent of the province’s homicide victims.

“Behind these grim statistics lies violence,” said Wynne.

“Behind these grim statistics lie the heartbreaking stories of mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts and grandmothers that we’ve lost.”

For decades, governments across Canada “shamefully” neglected the deep wounds inflicted upon indigenous communities, added Wynne.

“An entire society looked the other way, or worse, shrugged our shoulders as too many First Nations, Métis and Inuit women continued to experience violence, go missing or be murdered,” she said.

The provincial strategy, called Walking Together, is part of the Liberal government’s broader action plan to end sexual violence and harassment.

It will include \$80 million for a family well-being pro-



Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne

gram to support indigenous families in crisis and help communities deal with the effects of inter-generational violence and trauma.

Sylvia Maracle of the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres said the provincial strategy has all the parties rowing in the same direction.

“We’re going to leave a different legacy for our children and our grandchildren,” she said. “There will be space to talk, to heal, to remember and to develop their indigenous identity, and for that we are grateful.”

There will also be \$15.75 million to ensure indigenous women and communities have effective support when dealing with the justice system and to help develop a survivor-oriented plan to prevent human trafficking.

Another \$2.32 million will be used to help police investigate missing person cases, improve training for police and Crown attorneys and provide new tools for First Nations police forces.

The provincial strategy also incorporates a number of the Calls to Action from the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

It’s going to take some time to organize a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, so Ontario will move forward in the interim, said Wynne, who

will attend a roundtable on the issue in Winnipeg this week.

“The work that’s been

done in Ontario has informed the discussion in terms of where we might go at that national level,”

she said. “What happens next after the work that we’ve just laid out as this strategy, I hope, will be

dovetailed at the national level, but it’s not going to stop us doing what needs to be done in Ontario.”