

Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons

What do we know about missing persons in Saskatchewan?

- According to the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police website, there were 118 long-term missing person cases in the province as of April 2014. Long-term cases generally refer to situations where a person has been missing for six months or more. There are many reasons why people go missing. Disappearances may be deliberate, such as a person leaving to start a new life as a way of escaping financial or relationship difficulties or they may be unintentional, such as when becomes lost while seeking help for a broken down vehicle. Sometimes a person goes missing under unknown circumstances with no clear explanation but there are also instances where circumstances of a disappearance may be suspicious, suggesting foul play.
- In regards to long-term missing persons in Saskatchewan, the statistics indicate:¹
 - The majority of missing persons are male [87 persons];
 - Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented compared to their percentage in the population: missing males [36 Aboriginal, 50 being Caucasian and 2 visible minority persons] and missing females [17 Aboriginal and 14 Caucasian persons];
 - These cases include individuals who went missing and have not been located from 1935 to 2014; and
 - Long-term missing persons are most often adults.
- People go missing for different reasons:
 - **Children/youth run away:** The majority [62% in 2012] of missing person reports in Saskatchewan involved mostly runaways.² This high level of runaways is also found in national data. Children and youth who runaway are at serious risk of physical or sexual abuse or involvement in crime while on the run.
 - **Children may be abducted:** Abductions involve less than 1% of all missing children cases and most are parental child abductions cases.
 - **Health concerns:** More than 60 percent of those with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia will wander, and if a person is not found within 24 hours, up to half of individuals who wander will suffer serious injury or death. Families and caregivers should have a plan in place to help reduce risk and know how to respond if a person with dementia does go missing. As a bystander, it's also important to recognize the signs of wandering and how to help ensure a safe return home.
 - **Foul play:** People may go missing as a result of foul play or criminal conduct.

¹ www.sacp.ca

² Supra footnote 1.

- **Violence experienced by Aboriginal women and girls:** Aboriginal women and girls are at-risk of going missing as a result of violence.³ Data on long-term missing person cases indicates that Aboriginal women in Saskatchewan are over-represented in comparison to their proportion of the Saskatchewan population amongst missing women and as possible victims of foul play.
- **Drowning Incidents:** Boating, hunting or other accidents can lead to a person going missing.

Phases of Missing Persons Cases

Prevention	Situation of Concern	Report	Investigated/Response	Outcome
Public education, awareness and prevention (involves agencies, families, and communities)	Families or friends become concerned or start to suspect a person is missing. Education/awareness is important to provide families and communities with guidance and support.	Family, friends or an agency reports a person missing.	The role of agencies, police, family, and the community needs to be coordinated.	Evaluate the outcome of closed cases and determine if follow-up action is required.

MEDIA ROLE THROUGHOUT



Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons

Public concern about missing persons, including cases of missing Aboriginal women, led to the creation of the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons in 2006. This committee consists of organizations with interest and province-wide experience in dealing with missing person cases to encourage a collaborative approach to better support families and communities of missing persons. The Committee’s goals are to:

- To raise awareness and support public education around the reasons why people go missing;
- To promote prevention strategies;
- To encourage cooperation and partnerships amongst agencies to better support families and communities where someone goes missing; and
- To enhance capacity to respond to cases of missing persons at the family, community and provincial level.

The Committee is a unique Saskatchewan approach that brings together a broad range of perspectives to build partnerships across sectors and amongst differing perspectives to strengthen the provincial response to cases involving missing persons.

³ The Amnesty International Report “Stolen Sisters, A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada” October 2004, and the Native Women’s Association of Canada “What Their Stories Tell Us – Research findings from the Sisters in Spirit initiative” 2010.

The Committee started its work in 2006 with 14 organizations representing government, police, First Nations, Métis and community-based organizations involved with missing persons. Since then, it has grown to include representatives from 20 sectors, including the coroner's office.

In 2007, the Committee met with families of missing persons and issued a report that fall, with over 20 recommendations dealing with prevention, supporting families, and improving police and other responses. The Committee met with families to report on progress and to seek input on action taken and future areas of action in 2009. A further report was issued with nine recommended areas for action including a suggestion that the Committee engage other agencies and jurisdictions outside Saskatchewan.

With funding support from Justice Canada, the Committee organized a Western Regional Forum in March 2011 that provided an opportunity for organizations from across western Canada to discuss a more coordinated approach to serving families of missing persons. Following the forum, a report was released in 2011 and contained 16 recommendations including the development of a strategic business case.

In response, the Committee, with funding support from Justice Canada, developed a strategic business case on supporting families of missing persons, which was released in the fall of 2012. One of the key actions proposed in the business case was to promote public awareness through events such as the proclamation of the first annual Missing Persons Week in Saskatchewan in May 2013.

In 2011, the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons was honoured with the Premier's award for innovation. The Committee continues to work at implementing or supporting the implementation of the recommendations.

What action has occurred on the recommendations so far?

- **Saskatchewan proclaimed *The Missing Persons and Presumption of Death Act* to assist families to administer assets of missing persons.**
- **To support families, a checklist and media kit were developed along with an inventory of agencies involved in missing person cases and posted to the Ministry of Justice website (<http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca/missing-persons-report>).**
- **To support understanding of issues related to runaways, research was completed and posted to the Ministry of Justice website.**
- **The Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police (SACP) and Justice Victims Services agreed upon a new policy to ensure all families of missing persons who need support are referred to police-based victim services for assistance. In addition, in Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert, three victim services workers are now available to support families of missing persons and to assist victim services across the province. Information on victim services for families of missing persons can be found at: <http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca/victimsservices>**
- **The Saskatchewan Police Commission has approved a policy that will apply to all police services in the province for recording and investigating missing person cases. This policy has the support of SACP.**

- **The first annual Saskatchewan Missing Persons Week was proclaimed May 5-11, 2013. Activities during the week clarified five of the most popular myths about missing person situations:**
 - *You should not wait 24 hours to report someone missing - report them missing immediately;*
 - *Anyone can report someone missing – a relative, a co-worker, a friend, a neighbor;*
 - *You can report that someone went missing at your nearest police station – even if the person went missing elsewhere;*
 - *Report someone missing no matter what has occurred in the past - not every event surrounding a missing person is the same;*
 - *Cold cases are NOT closed cases - ALL unsolved missing person investigations remain active until there is some sort of outcome.*
- **During the second annual Saskatchewan Missing Persons Week (May 4 - 10, 2014) activities will promote public awareness and understanding of how and why people go missing. Member organizations of the Committee will offer safety tips on how to minimize the risk of going missing due to:**
 - Foul play
 - Drowning incidents
 - Mental health issues, in particular dementias such as Alzheimer's
 - Youth runaways; and
 - Parental child abduction
 - *It is important to note, however, that not all missing persons cases fall under these five classifications and indeed, several of Saskatchewan's long term missing persons went missing under unknown circumstances.*
- **The recommendation for a national police missing persons database was acted upon by the federal government with the creation of the National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains database including public access to www.canadamissing.ca.**
- **Partners in the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons have undertaken initiatives in public education, awareness, and support for families.**
- **The Committee published an Agency Response Guide (2014) which provides information to support agencies in assisting and supporting the families and friends in missing person cases. (<http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca/MissingPersons>)**
- **The SACP commenced operations of a Saskatchewan database in April 2006. The site provides the public with an opportunity to learn about known cases and to provide information to the authorities. This is the only police database in Canada to publish data related to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal missing persons.**