



# **Promoting Unbiased Policing in B.C. Public Engagement Process**

What we heard

**MARCH/APRIL 2018**



Ministry of  
Public Safety and  
Solicitor General



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# Public Engagement Process

Between March 12 and April 16, 2018, the Policing and Security Branch (PSB) and Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE) conducted a public and stakeholder engagement initiative on behalf of the Province of British Columbia. The purpose of the engagement was to hear the views of British Columbians on a range of issues related to the promotion of unbiased policing in B.C.

Leading up to this public engagement process, the Province identified concepts and themes for guiding principles and standards to promote unbiased policing in B.C. This information is available here: <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/unbiasedpolicing/work-to-date/>.

The online questionnaire asked respondents about their level of agreement with concepts for what may be Principles to promote unbiased policing and for key themes that may be included in the *Provincial Policing Standards*. Respondents could also offer comments and suggestions about the information presented and what they would like to see added.

## Participation in the Process

This report summarizes the results of engagement activities undertaken during the noted timeframe. Several methods were used to solicit public input, including an online questionnaire; an email address for comments, concerns or suggestions; and organizations could make written submissions.

Out of the 231 completed online questionnaires, 179 respondents wrote additional, detailed comments on at least one question. The complete questionnaire can be found here: [https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/352/2018/06/Questionnaire-Promoting-Unbiased-Policing-in-B.C\\_FINAL.pdf](https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/352/2018/06/Questionnaire-Promoting-Unbiased-Policing-in-B.C_FINAL.pdf). Organizational submissions meeting the published guidelines were posted online on the engagement website: <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/unbiasedpolicing/submissions/>.

# Online Questionnaire

## – Demographics

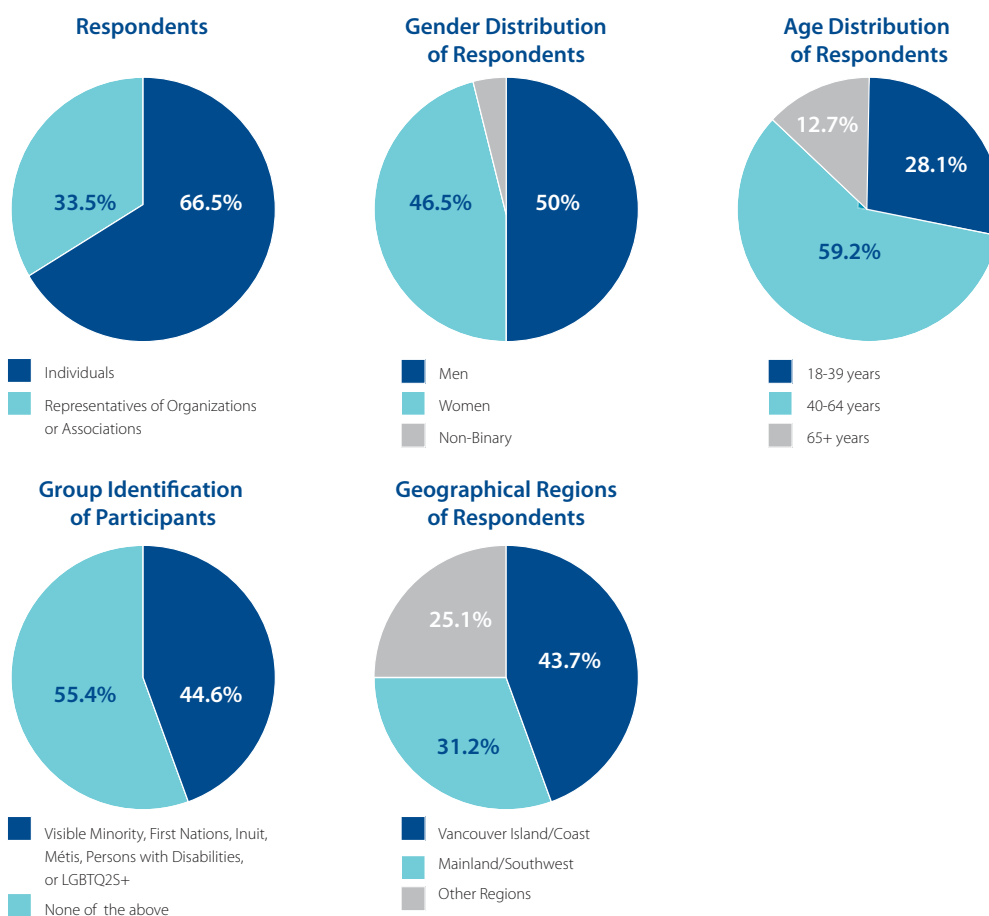
Most respondents identified themselves as individuals (66.5%). The remainder (33.5%) were representatives of various organizations or associations.

Respondents identified as men (50.0%), women (46.5%), and non-binary individuals (3.5%).

Most respondents were 40-64 years old (59.2%). The remaining participants were 18-39 years old (28.1%) or 65 years old and older (12.7%).

Almost half of the respondents (44.6%) identified with at least one of these groups: Visible Minority; First Nations, Inuit, Métis peoples; Persons living with a Disability; or LGBTQ2S+.

Geographically, most respondents were from the Vancouver Island / Coast (43.7%) or the Mainland / Southwest (31.2%) regions of B.C. The remainder (25.1%) were from the Thompson / Okanagan, the North Coast, the Kootenay, the Cariboo, the Northeast, and the Nechako regions of B.C., except for one respondent from the Yukon Territory.



# Online Questionnaire

## – Summary of Major Themes

Overall, most respondents supported the proposed concepts and themes that may be part of Principles for *Provincial Policing Standards* on the promotion of unbiased policing. Comments included constructive feedback, concerns, and recommendations for the development and implementation of *Provincial Policing Standards* to promote unbiased policing.

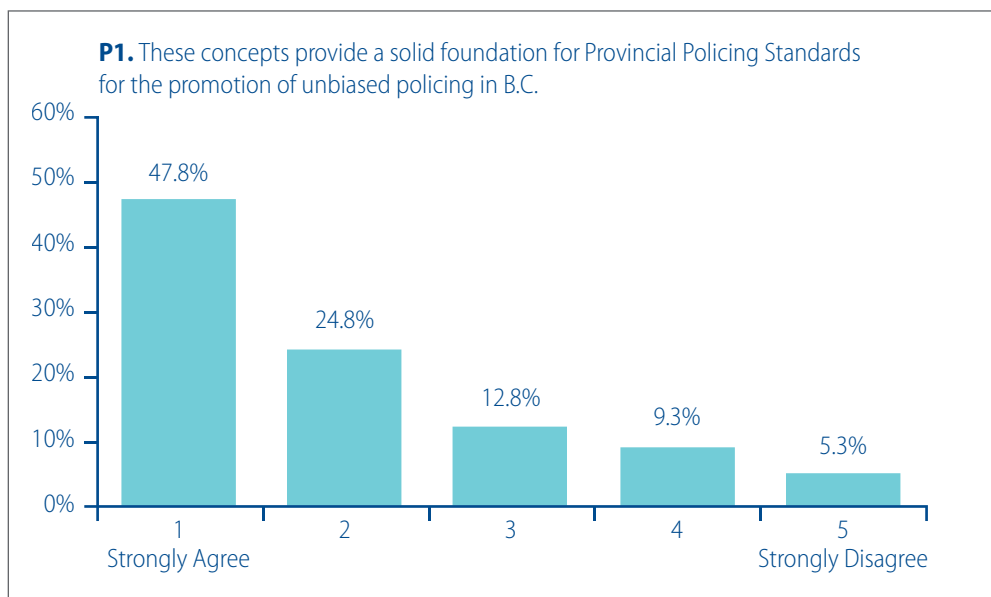
For example, we heard from a number of participants that principles and standards:

- Should be clear and specific, use plain language, and define terms used.
- Should embed theoretical aspects and include practical mechanisms.
- Support policing, improve police-community relationship, support human rights, fairness, equity.
- Should identify specific groups that may be more likely to experience violence or be the subject of stereotypes. These groups may include women, LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous peoples, persons selling sexual services, the differently abled, those living with chronic or mental health issues, immigrants or refugees, persons without homes, or persons experiencing economic hardships.

# Detailed Questionnaire Responses

**RESPONDENTS WERE asked for their level of agreement as to whether the concepts listed below were a solid foundation for Principles and *Provincial Policing Standards* for the promotion of unbiased policing in B.C.:**

- Everyone has conscious and unconscious biases. Policing occurs in this context.
  - Acknowledging bias is an important step in addressing its negative effects.
  - The public must have trust in police for policing to be effective, just, and safe.
  - People's trust in police is enhanced when people are confident that policing is fair and impartial.
  - Policing based on stereotypes or discriminatory policing practices is ineffective, unjust, and unsafe.
- Policies and practices should be informed by an understanding of the history and current state of police-community relations, and the root causes of marginalization.
  - Some groups are both at an increased risk of being affected by violence and less likely to report it.
  - Police have a duty to ensure equality in the delivery of services and access to justice.
  - Ensuring equality includes taking steps to guard against bias and adapting processes, as needed, to offset barriers.



Almost three-quarters of participants (73%) strongly agreed or agreed with these concepts as a solid foundation for *Provincial Policing Standards* for the promotion of unbiased policing in B.C.. Respondents wrote an additional 156 comments across two opened-ended questions on the Principles asking whether there are other key concepts that should be included, and also inviting any other comments on the proposed guiding principles.

Comments indicated support for this project as a whole and also included suggestions for Principles for the promotion of unbiased policing.

There were numerous comments on specific concepts that were also addressed in themes presented later in the questionnaire. For example, there were suggestions about policies, practices, accountability and transparency; engagement and consultation with community stakeholders; and training and education. Comments mentioned the importance of building trust between police and the diverse communities they serve. Specific examples included Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S+ peoples, and women who experienced violence. Many comments stated that community stakeholders should have a greater voice in informing police practices and in the justice system more broadly.

Frequently, comments suggested that the Principles should explicitly acknowledge how specific groups have historically experienced policing. For example, the Principles should specifically refer to the history and legacy of colonization and the ongoing effects on Indigenous peoples, particularly the role police played in enforcing discriminatory government policies. Other examples include police historical relations with LGBTQ2S+ peoples, racialized communities, or persons selling sexual services.

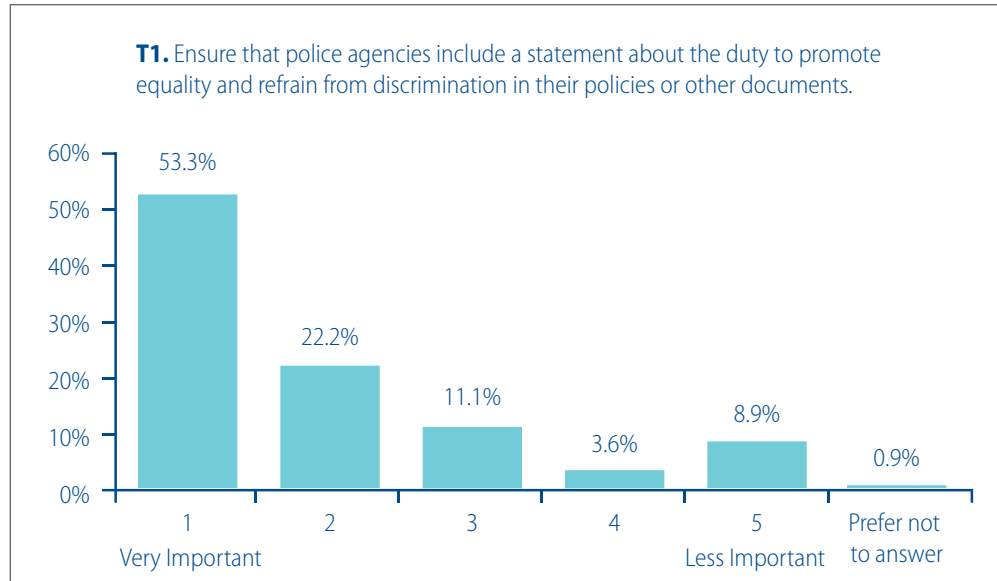
While there is broad agreement on concepts presented as a foundation for the Principles, the issues are complex. For example, one respondent suggested that clarification is needed about the meaning of 'biases' versus 'reasonable suspicions'. Several comments stated that cognitive shortcuts, such as biases, informed by experience may be useful in policing, as officers must rapidly filter through large amount of information during an incident. Others felt that police should focus on the facts of a case and on enforcing the law.



**RESPONDENTS WERE asked to express their views on each of the proposed themes for the B.C. *Provincial Policing Standards* to promote unbiased policing.**

- Ensure that police agencies include a statement about the duty to promote equality and refrain from discrimination in their policies or other documents.
- Provide guidance on measures to be taken during police investigations to accommodate the needs of vulnerable victims, witnesses or suspects (e.g., investigation procedures relating to LGBTQ2S+, or the handling of items of cultural or religious significance).
- Engage with the community regarding the priorities for policing, including Indigenous persons, marginalized or vulnerable community members, and minority groups.
- Support officers, through training, to better understand and respond to the diverse needs of their communities. In particular, the MWCI emphasized training related to Indigenous peoples and others who may be marginalized or vulnerable to violence.
- Require police agencies to monitor their effectiveness in ensuring equality in service delivery (e.g., through performance evaluations and/or audits).
- Ensure that police agencies strive to be responsive to, and reflect the diversity in their community (e.g., ability to access services in other languages, targeted recruitment activities).

**THEME 1:** *Ensure that police agencies include a statement about the duty to promote equality and refrain from discrimination in their policies or other documents.*



Over three-quarters of participants (76%) strongly agreed or agreed that this theme is important for the B.C. *Provincial Policing Standards* to promote unbiased policing. Respondents also wrote 98 additional comments for one opened-ended question on this theme.

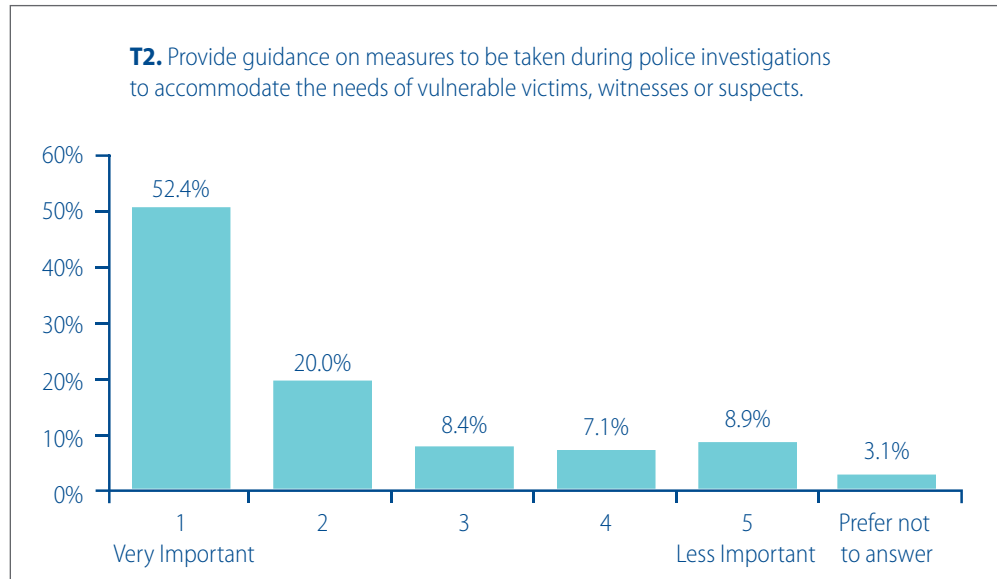
## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THEME 1:

Many respondents for Theme 1 expressed support for this concept to be further developed in *Provincial Policing Standards*. Comments suggested that the *Standards* should clearly define terms used and be specific as to what would be expected of police agencies or police officers. For example, there were several comments about the importance of clarifying the meaning of equality, and whether it means equity, equality of outcomes, or ‘treating everyone the same’. Several comments also suggested the *Standards* could provide a source of information for police agencies’ policies, training, and mentoring purposes that would be useful to officers and new officers especially. There were also suggestions that the *Standards* also apply to police oversight agencies.

Several comments addressed implementation in police agencies. While many felt that such a policy statement would be useful for educational and accountability purposes, others stated that changes in policies may not necessarily result in change in practices and that monitoring police agencies’ implementation would be key.

Some also expressed concerns with this theme, stating that police already have statements on core values that emphasize honesty, integrity, professionalism, compassion, accountability, and respect. As well, others stated that police policies are in place that require officers to treat people equally. A few respondents commented that because police are already bound to enforce all laws equally on all persons, additional statements on equality may not be necessary.

**THEME 2:** *Provide guidance on measures to be taken during police investigations to accommodate the needs of vulnerable victims, witnesses or suspects (e.g., investigation procedures relating to LGBTQ2S+, or the handling of items of cultural or religious significance).*



Almost three-quarters of participants (72%) strongly agreed or agreed that this theme is important for the B.C. *Provincial Policing Standards* to promote unbiased policing. Respondents also wrote 271 additional comments across the three opened-ended questions on Theme 2 for developing standards.

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THEME 2:

Many respondents for Theme 2 expressed support for developing standards for police practices that minimize barriers to participation in the Criminal Justice System for victims or witnesses who may require further supports.

Frequent comments included suggestions to improve police knowledge of their community and ensure a victim-centred approach, particularly in cases involving victims or witnesses who may be less likely to participate in the process. Several comments suggested that police: ask victims and witnesses what they may need to be supported in the process, understand trauma, and consider cultural factors. Also, it was felt that police should learn from the experience and expertise of local community groups or service providers and know what resources exist in their communities. There were suggestions that the *Standards* should require referrals to support services (e.g. victim services or translators) or advocates for individuals who may be wary of, or suspicious of police to improve investigative outcomes.

Several comments emphasized the importance of effective police-community relations and mentioned that public safety is enhanced when police actively engage with and listen to community members and representatives from different

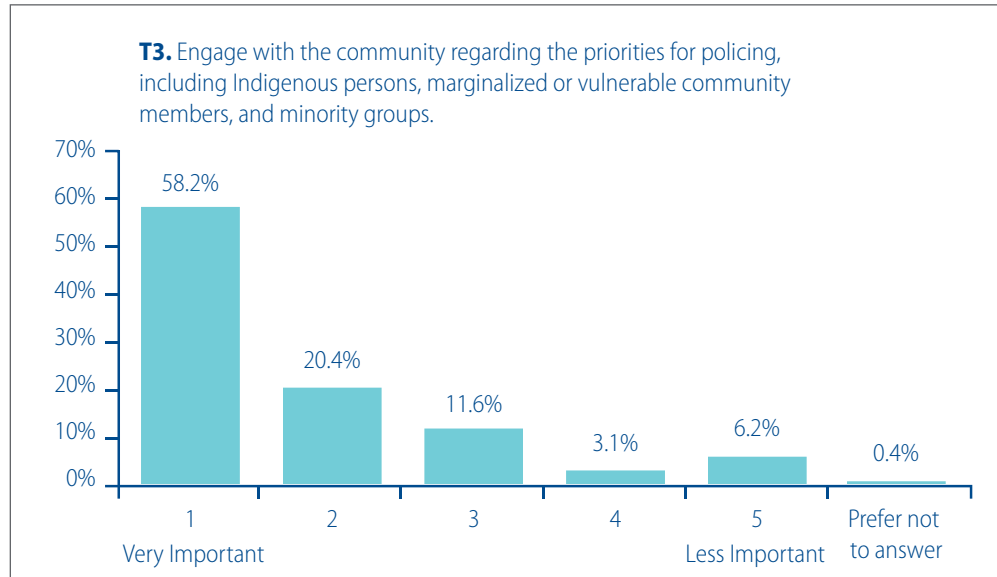
ethno-cultural groups, LGBTQ2S+, First Nations, and the overall socio-economic diversity within their respective communities. Comments emphasized that standards should support police knowledge of the history of police-community relationships.

There were diverging comments on the degree to which this is already part of police practices or policies.

While aspects of this theme are already addressed in case law, most comments supported its inclusion in *Provincial Policing Standards* for the promotion of unbiased policing, emphasizing that it is necessary to support further awareness and understanding of obligations of police agencies and police officers. However, there were also comments to the effect that local approaches should be specific to the diversity within a particular community. Respondents also felt that training is required on human rights legislation and on key related concepts.

There were statements to the effect that there was no need for special measures, that police were already required to conduct themselves in an unbiased, professional, compassionate, and respectful manner. Others felt that it was unrealistic for police officers to know who would require special measures, that police should 'treat everyone the same', or that special considerations would not be fair.

**THEME 3:** *Engage with the community regarding the priorities for policing, including Indigenous persons, marginalized or vulnerable community members, and minority groups.*



Over three-quarters of participants (79%) strongly agreed or agreed that this theme is important for the B.C. *Provincial Policing Standards* to promote unbiased policing. Respondents also wrote 280 additional comments across the three opened-ended questions on Theme 3 for developing standards.

**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THEME 3:**

The majority of comments expressed support for this theme to be included in the *Standards*, and comments addressed police-community engagement both at the organization level and at the officer level. For example, there were suggestions about processes and strategies for seeking input into the development of policing priorities in a manner that ensure a range of viewpoints, reflective of the diversity in the community. There were comments about the importance of repairing relationships, reconciliation, better understanding of community context, and the importance of mutual respect for respective expertise – that community groups have expert knowledge of the community they also serve.

There were 126 comments suggesting approaches for police-community engagement. And there were also 115 comments about what strategies would ensure police hear from a range of viewpoints and reflect the diversity in their respective communities.

For example, many made suggestions as to how police can engage with their communities to improve relations and build trust. Specifically, several comments included that police organizations should formalize their engagement processes and use a variety of means to reach community members, including surveys or feedback forms, online forums, in-person forums, town hall meeting, and 'open microphone' sessions. In addition, comments suggested that there should be clear goals to the engagement process (e.g., informing the community about police priorities, strategic plans, decisions, or funding allocations). A frequent comment was that police organizations should report back on what was heard from community engagements.

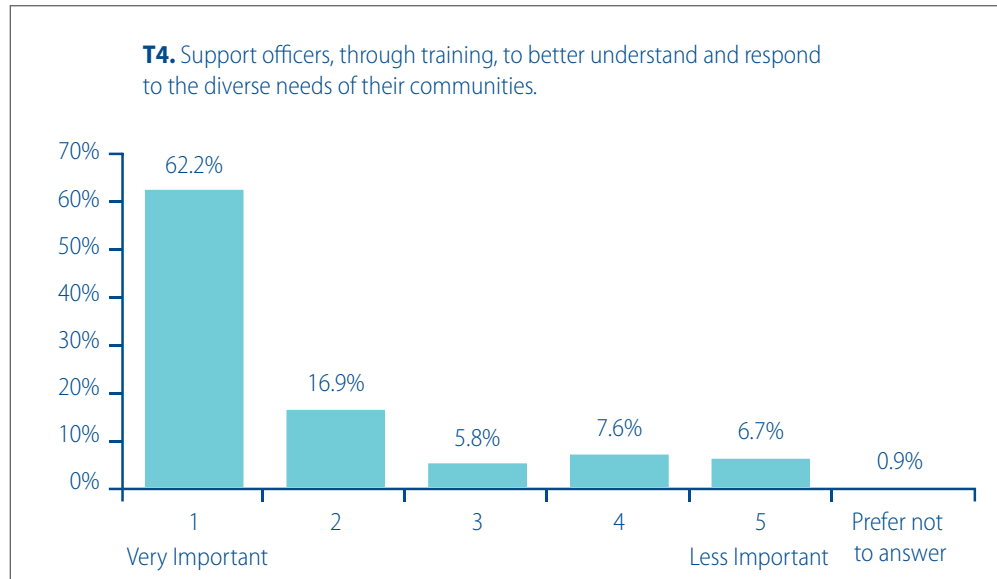
There were also suggestions for ongoing processes, citing that building relationships is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. Examples include establishing advisory committees, 'community engagement teams' dedicated to a police organization, or community liaison positions. Comments also suggested that more informal processes would be

useful in creating opportunities for positive interactions, such as 'coffee with the police chief' and attending various community groups' events. Several participants stated that it was important for police officers to be visible to their community, for example, through foot patrol in urban areas, liaison activities, or school visits.

Some comments emphasized strategies for police to seek input in a manner that increases outreach to all community members. Some mentioned that using third parties may be helpful for groups who may not be comfortable engaging with police, that input could be received in different languages, and that targeted outreach can assist in reaching the full diversity within communities. In addition, several comments suggested that community participation can be increased if police use social media to promote community engagement events.

Several respondents highlighted that some police organizations in B.C. are doing great work in this area and that good practices should be shared with others. Some commented that there should be adequate resources allocated for police initiatives responsive for this theme and also for police to support implementation of initiatives that may be recommended as a result of their community engagement.

**THEME 4:** *Support officers, through training, to better understand and respond to the diverse needs of their communities. In particular, the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) emphasized training related to Indigenous peoples and others who may be marginalized or vulnerable to violence.*



Over three-quarters of participants (79%) strongly agreed or agreed that this theme is important for the B.C. *Provincial Policing Standards* to promote unbiased policing. Respondents also wrote 132 additional comments across the one open-ended question on Theme 4.

#### SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THEME 4:

Comments or suggestions for this theme offered different perspectives on what training should include, how it should be delivered, and to whom it should be addressed. Several respondents made general comments about police training and about these areas of policing. Others stated that police training is a complex issue, noting that funding for and capacity to deliver additional training, lack of trainee buy-in, or training format itself may pose barriers and lower the efficacy of training. Others thought that in some jurisdictions training on similar topics already exist. Some expressed that different hiring standards and required competencies, or ongoing mentoring, would be more effective than training in effecting change.



However, a large number of comments noted that new or improved training would provide knowledge and skills essential to deliver police services in a manner that is more responsive to community needs. There were many suggestions about who should take training, noting that training should be available for and adapted to recruits or cadet training, in-service police officers at different levels, and also other positions in a police departments including call takers and dispatchers.

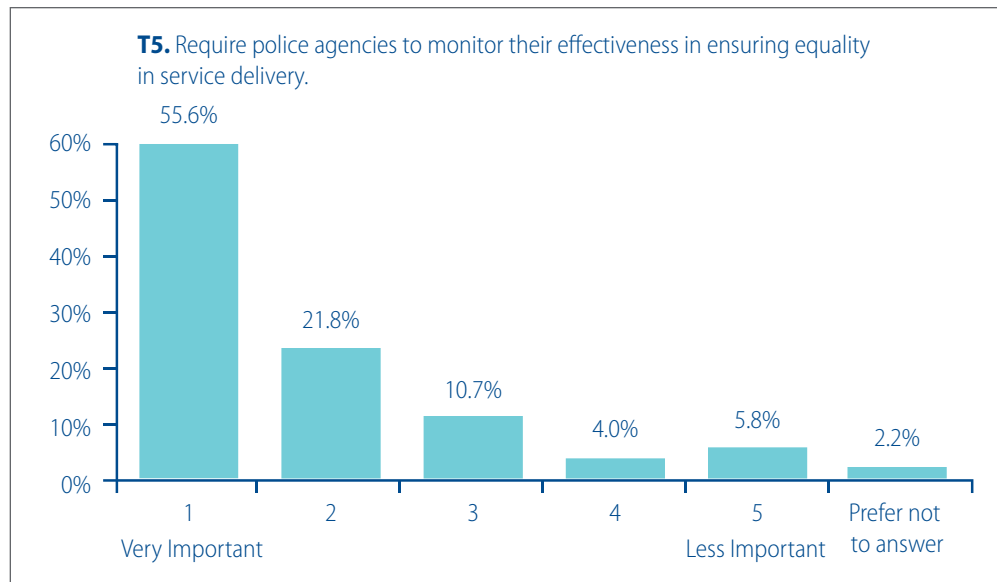
Many comments provided information as to what should be included in the training, for example, that training should include legislated or common law requirements with regard to human rights, key aspects of crimes involving power-based dynamics (including violence against women), governments' historical and contemporary relations with Indigenous peoples, the effects of trauma, and locally-relevant knowledge of the experiences of British Columbians who may be marginalized or more vulnerable to violence. Comments highlighted the importance of training on broad topics relevant to policing in B.C. and also the importance of locally-relevant knowledge and skills specific to police work in the community. For example, there were suggestions that training should impart knowledge of key concepts and offer practical skills. There were numerous comments to the effect that community groups should be involved

in developing or delivering the training. Suggestions also included training for police to increase self-awareness, understanding of how police may be perceived in different communities and on skills to become more 'relatable'.

Respondents made several suggestions as to how training should be delivered. For example, comments emphasized that such material should be reinforced over time, ongoing, and regularly scheduled as an officer progresses through different roles within a police organization. In addition, suggestions included that training should require active involvement from trainees, encourage humility and reflection, challenge assumptions, and offer opportunities to practice soft skills. Some comments emphasized the need for community-based advice to inform practical examples for discussions during training, and the added value of community-based trainers.

There were several comments to the effect that training alone cannot necessarily resolve long-standing or systemic issues, that many biases cannot be 'trained away', and that bias training may not be effective for some officers. It was suggested that police organizations and police leaders should make expectations clear, support change to police culture, offer opportunities to improve, reward improvements and performance in these areas, and ensure accountability processes are in place.

**THEME 5: Require police agencies to monitor their effectiveness in ensuring equality in service delivery (e.g., through performance evaluations and/or audits).**



Over three-quarters of participants (77%) strongly agreed or agreed that this theme is important for the B.C. *Provincial Policing Standards* to promote unbiased policing. Respondents also wrote 179 additional comments across the two opened-ended questions on Theme 5 for developing standards.

**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THEME 5:**

Many comments for Theme 5 expressed support for this concept and suggested that the *Standards* should clearly detail the expectations for police organizations in terms of monitoring, and clarify ‘what’ should be assessed and against what criteria and also ‘who’ should conduct monitoring activities. There were several comments offering suggestion for processes for monitoring.

A great number of comments discussed the pros and cons of monitoring being conducted by police (e.g., internal reviews) or by independent third parties (e.g., existing oversight organizations, independent evaluator, community based-partnerships), noting that transparency, objectivity, and buy-in for the process were key aspects of either approaches. In addition, many comments highlighted that monitoring could occur at different levels within an organization and for different purposes.

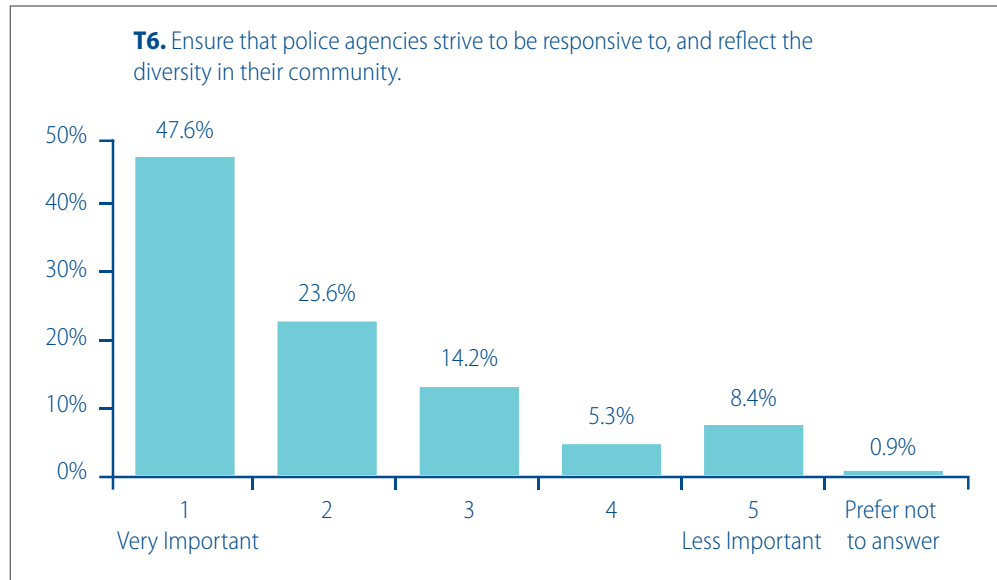
Participants recommended different methodologies and commented on ways to achieve accountability and transparency. Several respondents pointed to existing internal review mechanisms either at the officer level (e.g., supervisor file review, case reviews, or annual unit-level quality assurance), or at the organizational level (e.g., internal audit mechanisms, performance evaluations and reporting, or formalized public feedback such as surveys). While some commented that baseline measurements should be developed to ensure the ability to compare effectiveness over time or across different police agencies, others cautioned that such comparisons can be complex or misleading. Many commented that for transparency and accountability purposes, the results of monitoring mechanisms should be available publicly.

Several comments expressed concerns about police organizations monitoring

their own effectiveness in ensuring equality, and suggested that oversight from external or independent bodies should be involved to ensure objectivity and accuracy. Others cautioned that existing oversight bodies may not have the capacity or the expertise to carry such audits. In addition, several comments suggested that complaints about the police should not be taken by the police but by an independent external body.

Several comments suggested that a key purpose for monitoring mechanisms should be transparency and accountability to the community. Others suggested that monitoring should support opportunity for officer learning, improvement, and growth, rather than focus on punitive measures. Some commented that monitoring can be used by police organizations to identify and address issues or concerns in relation to equality in the delivery of service, as well as develop effective strategies to promote equality.

**THEME 6:** *Ensure that police agencies strive to be responsive to, and reflect the diversity in their community (e.g., ability to access services in other languages, targeted recruitment activities).*



Most participants (71%) strongly agreed or agreed that this theme is important for the B.C. *Provincial Policing Standards* to promote unbiased policing. Respondents also wrote 139 additional comments across the two opened-ended questions on Theme 6 for developing standards.

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THEME 6:

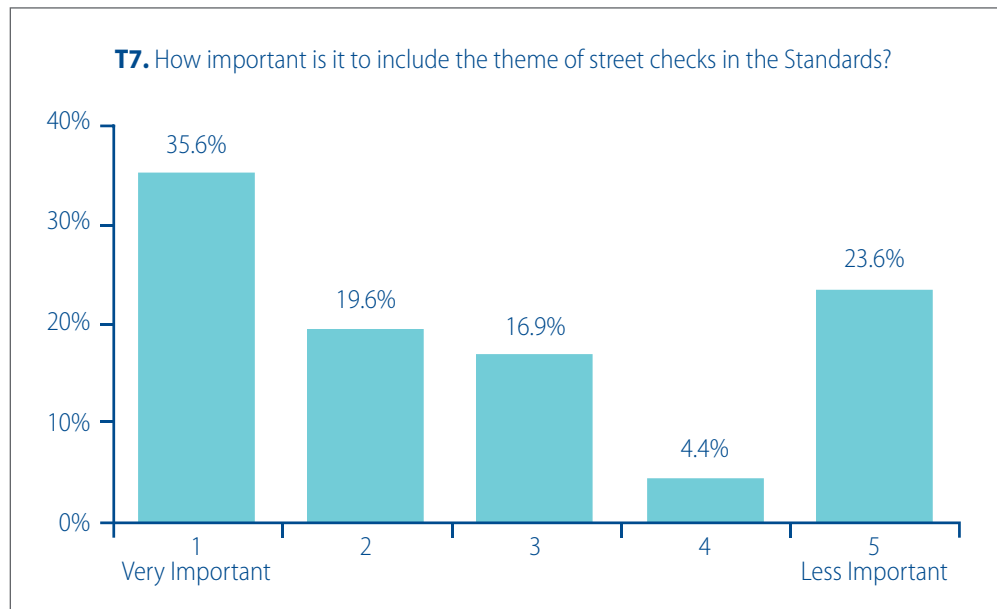
Many comments for Theme 6 expressed support for this concept to be further developed in *Provincial Policing Standards*. Several comments suggested that to reflect the diversity in their community, police should actively recruit and hire employees who are representative of the community that they police. For example, some comments mentioned that community recruitment events could target people from various cultural backgrounds and people who can speak multiple languages. In addition, comments mentioned that community representation in the police force may help improve police-community relations, for example, through Indigenous policing. To add, one comment expressed concerns with assigning officers to short term placements in communities.

To further be responsive to the diversity in the community, comments made similar suggestions as those in Theme 3, noting that police should engage with their community through a variety of means, including positive community engagement events.

Numerous comments emphasized that recruiting and hiring practices should target the best candidate for the job, without consideration of group membership.

Several comments supported increased diversity in recruitment, as long as hiring standards are not lowered. Other comments expressed concern that recruitment activities that target particular groups may be discriminatory.

**THEME 7:** *Although the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) did not comment on the matter, some stakeholders have expressed an interest in standards for ‘street checks’. In its simplest form, a street check is when a police officer asks someone for identifying information when there is suspicion of unlawful activity. Some police agencies in Canada and B.C. have developed or are considering policies, procedures, or guidelines pertaining to the practice of street checks. Although police practices are guided by case law, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and human rights legislation, governments in other jurisdictions have standardized, or are looking at standardizing, processes surrounding street checks.*



Over half of the participants (55%) strongly agreed or agreed that this theme is important for the B.C. *Provincial Policing Standards* to promote unbiased policing, but over a quarter of the participants (28%) strongly disagreed or disagreed. Respondents also wrote 188 additional comments across the two opened-ended questions on Theme 7 for developing standards.

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THEME 7:

Many supported police use of street checks, emphasizing their utility in ensuring the safety of the community, preventing and solving crime, as a tool for finding or monitoring individuals or that street checks are a key part of proactive policing. In addition, there were concerns that standardizing street checks would limit the capabilities of police officers, for example, that victims of crimes expect that police will conduct street checks to prevent crimes and/or identify suspect(s).

Others supported police use of street checks but with restrictions, including that street checks should not be random or based on ethnicity alone and that street checks can result from biased decisions. Comments included that there should be *probable cause* before police engage in street checks and that police should be mindful of not infringing a person's rights. Some stated that, unless a person is committing an offence or there are reasonable grounds to believe they did, street checks should not be conducted.

There were many suggestions that comprehensive training and education would be necessary to prevent street checks from unfairly targeting specific groups of individuals. To support police officers and protect British Columbians, many suggested that there should be clear, fair, and consistent guidelines in place, there should be oversight to ensure compliance with these guidelines, and that these guidelines should be made public.

Some were against police use of street checks, stating that there is too much potential for abuse of power, that there is little evidence to support their utility, or that they may be damaging to police-community relations. Of those concerned with street checks, some stated they may be unlawful and infringe upon people's rights – such as the right to be free from arbitrary detention. Specifically, some argued that street checks are disproportionately used or have discriminatory effects towards specific groups.

## FINAL QUESTION: Suggestions for additional considerations.

Respondents made the following suggestions:

- Including a constructive statement about a common goal for police and the community to work toward safety,
- Standardizing investigative practices with regards to violence against women, violence in relationships,
- First Nations communities forming their own police forces,
- Accountability mechanisms within these standards, or
- Addressing issues within police organizations, stating that biases internal to a police agency may be related to biased policing toward the public.

There were also more general comments regarding:

- The role for government to set police policy, and monitor compliance,
- Management practices and leadership within police organizations,
- Police funding for or capacity to take on new initiatives and more general comments about police resources, or
- Level of government resources toward community support and social or health services overall to support British Columbians.



# What Happens Next

What was heard will help the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General ensure that the guiding principles and standards reflect the needs and interests of all British Columbians.

This public engagement process concluded April 16, 2018. Further discussion with key stakeholders including police and community-based service providers will continue beyond this date as needed to support the completion of the standards.



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