



NATIONAL
POLICE
FEDERATION

FÉDÉRATION
DE LA POLICE
NATIONALE

STUDY ON GUN CONTROL, ILLEGAL ARMS TRAFFICKING, AND GUN CRIMES

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on Public Safety and National Security

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Introduction

About NPF

The National Police Federation (NPF) is the sole certified bargaining agent representing approximately 20,000 Members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) across Canada and internationally. The NPF is the largest police labour relations organization in Canada; the second largest in North America and is the first independent national association to represent RCMP Members.

The NPF is focused on improving public safety in Canada by focusing on increasing resources, equipment, training, and other supports for our Members who have been under-funded for far too long. Better resourcing and supports for the RCMP will enhance community safety and livability in the communities we serve, large and small, across Canada.

Current Situation

While Canada has long prided itself as a non-violent, safe, and inclusive country, firearms offenses are increasing generally. In 2020, Statistics Canada reported 3,544 firearms offenses overall, a 15 percent increase compared to 2019, and an 84 percent increase compared to 2010.¹

From 2018 to 2020 the number of firearm related homicide victims also increased from 251 to 277.² This continues the long-term trend from 2013 to 2020, which saw a 91 percent increase in the rate of firearm-related homicides.³ Approximately 60 percent of homicides in 2018 were committed using a handgun, which are already prohibited or restricted.⁴ In 2020, there were 8,344 victims of crime where a firearm was present during the commission of the offence, representing a 15 percent increase from the previous year.⁵ Firearm-related crimes have, unfortunately, increased for 8 out of 9 years since 2013.⁶

While nation-wide data remains to be collected, it is the experience of many law enforcement agencies that most of these guns are illegally obtained. As an example, during the April 2020 mass shootings in Nova Scotia that killed 22 people, including RCMP Constable Heidi Stevenson, the firearms used were illegally acquired, including three obtained from the United States.⁷

Gang-related violence is also increasing in Canada. In 2020, 20 percent of the 743 homicides in the country were linked to organized crime and gangs.⁸ Gangs and organized crime are a major contributor to smuggling weapons and the illegal sale of firearms. Group or individual criminal enterprises are often multi-dimensional, cross jurisdictional, and involve more than one type of illegal commodity or criminal behavior. Law enforcement tactics have evolved from focusing on commodity-based investigation and enforcement to focusing on the underlying issues driving criminality and activity-based investigations.

This multi-dimensional approach has shown to yield the greatest benefit to public safety and should be an important factor in tackling these issues. However, activity-based investigations demand

significant resources and dedicated units, while RCMP officers remain under-resourced and are required to cover a wide range of responsibilities already.

RCMP Policing in Canada

For over 100 years, the RCMP has been Canada’s national police service. Our Members have federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal mandates. We have Members in over 700 detachments in 150 communities, as well as in more than 600 Indigenous communities across Canada.

The RCMP plays an integral role in preventing gun violence, working alongside other agencies such as the Canada Border Services Agency and municipal and provincial police forces to ensure the safety of all Canadians. Officers also build connections to local social and mental health services in the communities where they work.

Over the past few years, the RCMP has experienced new and unforeseen challenges. Significant cutbacks have impacted staffing levels, recruitment, and the well-being of Members. At the same time, all facets of policing have experienced a significant increase in demand that goes beyond crime prevention and law enforcement, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has significantly impacted the RCMP’s ability to train new recruits, and the backlog it has created will be felt for years if immediate actions are not taken to remedy the situation. Depot, where all RCMP Members are trained, has experienced a backlog in graduations due to limited resources, closures, and reduced class sizes related to the global health pandemic.

In March 2020, Depot suspended all cadet and in-service training in the interest of protecting health and safety. Depot had planned to graduate 40 troops during the 2020/2021 fiscal year, but only 16 troops completed their full training. This means that, instead of 1,050 new Members, only about 380 graduated.

Anticipated Troop Capacity 2021-2023

Fiscal Year	# of Troops	Cadets/ Troop	Attrition Rate*	Total Graduates	Annual officer attrition	Hard vacancy rate of 2.1%**	Net +/-
2019/2020	40	32	18%	1,050	850	414	-214
2020/2021	16	32	25%	380	850	414	-885
2021/2022	34	32	18%	892	850	414	-372
2022/2023	40	32	18%	1,050	850	414	-214

*The 2020/2021 attrition rate is higher due to COVID-19.

**The RCMP categorize vacancies as soft or hard vacancies. A hard vacancy is permanent and can be backfilled (e.g., a member being transferred out, retiring, or resigning) .

***Numbers outlined in the chart are based on anticipated troop capacity numbers and can vary.

The situation has resulted in further strains on serving Members who continue to do more with less. In many areas, such as remote and rural communities, RCMP Members are the first and sometimes

the only first responder to a multitude of social issues. Despite going above and beyond in their duties; there are not enough officers available to respond to growing demands, such as gun crimes.

Illegal firearms, gun crimes, and violence are top priorities for police officers, but to effectively address these issues, available resources for policing need to be increased and social issues need to be addressed. Police act proactively to liaise with their communities, prevent crime, and address issues before they escalate, however their ability to work proactively is limited when they face personnel shortages and are overworked.

Ensuring that there is sufficient funding for social programs, especially in remote communities, is an important step to preventing violent crime. Officers can only act as effective first responders if there are programs to which they can refer the cases they encounter.

With the newly negotiated collective agreement, an increase in applicants should be expected. However, further investment into expansion of recruitment and training, as well as a rigorous recruitment strategy needs to be put in place to address the current and future backlog at Depot. These new recruits will assist detachments and communities across the country by filling vacancies and elevating resource levels. The federal government must allocate sufficient funding to increase the RCMP's ability to train recruits to make sure that they have the human resources to combat gun violence and crimes in Canada.

We Recommend

1. The federal government provide an additional \$190 million to expand recruiting and training at Depot, as well as increase funding in subsequent years. The government should implement a phased 3 to 4-year plan to increase the number of troops to at minimum 55 per year, which would correspond to 1,760 new cadets per year, to address the backlog.
2. The federal government expand funding to social program initiatives so that RCMP Members can concentrate their efforts towards law enforcement and crime prevention.

Illegal Arms Trafficking and 'Ghost Guns'

In 2020, the NPF published a position statement outlining concerns with the state of gun violence, illegal arms trafficking, and the illegal firearms market in Canada, and recommendations to address those issues.⁹ Those recommendations have yet to be implemented.

The NPF called for increased funding to the RCMP Border Integrity Program and the creation of an investigative firearm smuggling unit. As highlighted in the 2020 position statement, part of the issue regarding gun violence is the lack of data collection and tracing of the origins of these firearms.

The NPF is encouraged by initiatives such as the *Regulations Amending Certain Regulations Made Under the Firearms Act*, that aim to improve the tracing capabilities of non-restricted firearms.¹⁰ However, while efforts to improve tracing are welcome, this issue is much more complex, as, in most cases of crimes involving firearms, the guns are already prohibited and/or illegally obtained. This issue requires a broader approach to effectively tackle firearms offenses.

Evidence-based firearm controls are a vital step to ensure that the ownership and use of firearms is as safe as possible. Resources should prioritize the criminal use of firearms, with a coordinated strategy that effectively combines prevention, law enforcement, and social programs.

Mental health issues and extremist ideologies have led multiple perpetrators to gun violence. The NPF is encouraged by efforts to address these issues through funding of preventative programs and supports for social programs, including mental health initiatives. Despite encouraging measures being taken in some areas, the ongoing increase in gun violence shows that more is needed.

Organized crime is another major contributor to firearms violence in Canada. Proximity to the United States and the wide availability of weapons in that country present a unique challenge for Canada. Smuggling requires a distinct cross border solution that brings together law enforcement, customs, and international collaboration under one roof.

High-volume smuggling of weapons can present major long-term risks to public safety. A single shipment of illegal firearms can include hundreds of weapons and be responsible for hundreds of shootings for years afterwards.

Border integrity teams work to intercept these illegal firearms and will continue to do so. The RCMP, in coordination with provincial, municipal, and indigenous police services, CBSA and support teams such as the National Weapons Enforcement Support Team, have seized hundreds of illegal firearms through such programs.¹ These programs work, and need to be enhanced and expanded to tackle the flow of illegal guns across the border.

The Canadian Firearms Program is responsible for the administration of the Firearms Act. However, limited resources leave it unable to provide effective gun crime tracing since it does not collect tracing data. The Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre processes tracing requests for national and international law enforcement agencies, but the center does not collect statistics on illegal guns as it falls outside its mandate.¹¹ Rather, it determines the history of a gun connected to a criminal investigation and uses that information as potential evidence in court. The information is not retained, rather it is sent back to the police of jurisdiction.

There is no legal requirement for police agencies to submit firearms for tracing.¹² This creates a gap with municipal, provincial, and the RCMP fail to enter required information into police databases related to seized or found firearms.¹³ Significant effort, resources, training, and equipment will be required to close this gap.

Police support units, such as the National Weapons Enforcement Support Team, Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre, Criminal Firearms Strategic and Operational Support Services, and the Specialized Firearms Support Services offer *reactive* services. They do not contribute to *proactive* enforcement investigation efforts to maintain and enhance public safety.

¹ As an example see [59 illegal firearms seized at Canadian border by Cornwall RCMP | Royal Canadian Mounted Police \(rcmp-grc.gc.ca\)](#) or [Nearly 250 prohibited handguns seized in Dundee: Sherbrooke man charged | Royal Canadian Mounted Police \(rcmp-grc.gc.ca\)](#)

The 2018 Federal Budget saw an investment of \$327.6 million over five years to establish *The Initiative to Take Action against Gun and Gang Violence*, which will be led by Public Safety, the Canada Border Services Agency, and the RCMP.¹⁴ Of that, \$34.5 million over five years is provided to the RCMP with \$5.4 million to support the new Integrated Criminal Firearms Initiative (ICFI). While funding for support programs is welcome, in order for these initiatives to be successful, the government must provide funding to investigative units specific to gun smuggling.

Ghost Guns

Emerging technology is creating new challenges in controlling restricted and illegal weapons.

Smuggling partially assembled polymer firearm parts that are more easily smuggled across borders, and new technology, such as 3D-printed and computer machined gun parts, have emerged as new ways criminals have been acquiring/building firearms.

Partially-finished frames like the “Polymer 80” pistol can be finished at home and assembled even by untrained users. All these feed into smuggling concerns, when they reduce the number of parts that are needed to move across the border and make them more difficult to detect and enforce.

These pistols are non-traceable, concealable, easy to assemble, and do not have serial numbers. Smugglers can obtain restricted or prohibited weapon parts in the United States, traffic them across the border, and sell parts to be assembled by the buyer. Other parts are readily available in Canada without restriction.

Possession and manufacture of these weapons contravenes the Criminal Code of Canada under possession of a prohibited weapon without license, or manufacturing of firearms, both of which can result in significant time in jail.¹⁵ Despite being illegal, the difficulty in detecting these sales and manufacturing operations means organized crime is turning to this relatively easy way of acquiring illegal firearms. Because there are no commercial manufacturing markings, no serial numbers and the firearm has never been registered in any country, tracing these illegal firearms is a major challenge for law enforcement.

These types of unmarked “ghost guns” present a new problem that requires a coordinated multi-agency task force to address. A dedicated multi-jurisdictional approach to enforcement and intelligence activity is currently absent but is required to effectively support public safety and to curb the influx of illegal firearms.

We Recommend

3. To further allocate funds to the RCMP Border Integrity Program, to enable dedicated proactive RCMP investigative weapons enforcement activity and the dismantling of gang and organized crime firearms smuggling.
4. Closing gaps within current national tracing effort through investments in such efforts already occurring.
5. Develop a National Operational Investigative Program.

- a. A unified program led by the RCMP, to provide adequate support for firearms control in Canada. Support, control, and investigative tools would be concentrated in one place.
 - b. Implementing a strategy to curb the proliferation of illegal firearms manufacturing through the establishment of a dedicated multi jurisdictional task force on Component Assembly Guns within the Program
6. In order to create this National center, the government should:
- c. Add this item to the RCMP's mandate
 - d. Provide sufficient funding for the personnel and resources needed to create, administer, and manage this center.
7. Explore language expansion of criminal code offences in reference to manufacturing and assembly to contribute to tackling the issue of Ghost Guns.

Gang Violence and Criminality

Large city centers remain the primary focus of gun and gang initiatives, however, the presence of gang violence and firearm related crimes in other areas of the country must be acknowledged and considered.

Members of the RCMP work tirelessly to counteract gang recruitment, having developed several initiatives such as the Surrey RCMP's "Shattering the Image" anti-gang program¹⁶, based on the success of the "Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit's 'End Gang Life'" program. Increased funding and resources will help expand existing programs and launch successful models in other regions that require them.

The \$214 million over 5 years allocated in Budget 2018 to provinces to combat the issue of gun and gang violence is an important and necessary step. This money will be allocated to partners within each jurisdiction to, amongst other things, develop gun and gang violence prevention programs and interventions.¹⁷

The NPF encourages the Public Safety committee members to review the results of these initiatives and adjust strategies and funding accordingly. Community programs, in cooperation with law enforcement, should be evidence-based and result oriented with quantifiable metrics.

The NPF agrees with the Summit on Gun and Gang Violence, held in 2018, that a holistic approach is needed. Of note, the summit outlined that a strategy should include supporting prevention, intervention and rehabilitation initiatives, partnerships, collaboration, and funding.¹⁸ All these issues are vital to a comprehensive strategy, but the NPF urges a fulsome review of the status of these initiatives to ensure that resources are being used effectively.

Additionally, regional considerations need to be emphasized as community programs are sparse or non-existent in rural Canada. In many cases, RCMP Members are the only resource for prevention, but rural and remote postings often face overwork and understaffing challenges. The Government

must address the lack of RCMP baseline resources in order to meet the expansion of law enforcement efforts in gang diversion programs and investigations.

While federal data is sparse, it is estimated that approximately a fourth of convicted offenders re-offended within two years of release.¹⁹ Rehabilitation and parole programs are necessary to support reintegration into society but sentencing guidelines for serious crimes such as gun and drug trafficking, violent crimes using a firearm, and gang activity must also remain an important deterrent.

Steps must also be taken to expand police capacity to investigate and apprehend those who commit firearms offenses. Consistency in sentencing and charges, as well as prosecutorial barriers also need to be addressed to support the ability to investigate and produce convictions. In many provinces, the “revolving door” of the Justice systems not only enables repeat offenders to walk free repeatedly after being arrested and awaiting trial, but it also creates public safety concerns for communities and increases the workload of police officers and Crown prosecutors. Although RCMP officers do an excellent job apprehending firearms offenders, inefficiencies within the justice system create opportunities for criminals to reoffend quickly and consistently, causing Canadians to question the effectiveness of the current system.

Addressing gang violence needs a committed, well funded, multi-pronged approach including preventative measures through community programs. At the same time, vulnerable communities require protection from those who commit violent crimes, and investigations and sentencing must be a credible deterrent. Without thorough anti-gang initiatives to address the underlying problems at the outset, recidivism rates may continue being a factor.

We Recommend

8. Assessing the progress on the goals stated in the Summit on Gun and Gang Violence.
9. Expanding funding to evidence-based programs geared towards diversion, prevention, and rehabilitation with a close partnership with law enforcement, such as the Youth Intervention and Diversion Program and the Community Constable Program.
10. Supporting anti-gang recruitment initiatives through target specific program funding.
11. Funding resources to dedicated units of law enforcement, crime prevention, and organized crime.

Summary of Recommendations

1. The federal government provide an additional \$190 million to expand recruiting and training at Depot, as well as increase funding in subsequent years. The government should implement a phased 3 to 4-year plan to increase the number of troops to at minimum 55 per year, which would correspond to 1,760 new cadets per year, to address the backlog.
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10. Supporting anti-gang recruitment initiatives through target specific program funding.
11. Funding resources to dedicated units of law enforcement, crime prevention, and organized crime.

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