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Commentary from the Provincial/ Territorial Perspective

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Canada's Provinces and Territories are committed to addressing their local crime and victimization issues. More and more provincial/territorial inter-departmental committees are developing strategic responses to crime and victimization problems related to areas such as youth, poverty and exclusion, gangs and drug prevention, violence against women, auto theft, early childhood development, Aboriginal justice, and many others. Local programs and policies are then designed, funded and implemented. This work is resulting in the development and implementation of crime prevention strategies and initiatives across the country.

At times there is alignment and support from a national strategy, and the work is done in collaboration with the National Crime Prevention Centre or other Federal agencies. At other times, the Provinces or Territories operate independently from a national framework. These local initiatives do not always form the basis of a newsworthy announcement nor are they necessarily woven together or presented as an overall crime prevention strategy, yet the work is underway.

There is almost universal agreement that this work must be knowledge-based, and the shift towards evidence-based approaches to "what works" is permeating policy discussions at various community and government tables. But, moving in this direction will require a great deal more attention at both the local and national levels to what is needed to accomplish this task. As Homel and Solomon suggest on the basis of their research, the minimal requirements for success include: vision and leadership, adequately funded

and sustainable organizational structures, technical assistance and training, access to appropriate data, and supports for the development of collaborations and partnerships. We must also be leery about whether “model programs” from elsewhere can be easily transferred and replicated in the various regions of Canada. What works “there” may not work here, and we need to be constantly attentive to the need to respect the concerns and priorities of diverse communities and groups, as well as agreements and treaties with communities and other governments.

The current global fiscal crisis will impact each province and territory in different ways. Departments that are key to developing social and economic strategies will need to become strong allies with Justice to review opportunities to pool resources that will yield multiple positive outcomes; the Justice department alone can not affect long term social change. The UK experience as explained by Solomon and Homel, as well as an abundance of other research, informs us that it is comprehensive approaches that integrate the contributions of a number of key social sectors that will create the long term social fabric necessary to prevent crime and victimization.

These approaches require collaboration between all orders of government and, given their different roles and responsibilities, and the pressures they face, this will be a huge challenge. While we work to create long term strategies, we must also implement specific initiatives that focus on high risk offenders and those at risk of re-victimization. Involvement of the justice system and law enforcement will be key in this respect.

One message is clear in the work of both Homel and Solomon: the tendency for prevention policy to swing like a pendulum between social or structural approaches and individual or developmental approaches must stop. We need to develop and implement a dual track process. Research supports the effectiveness of each approach and highlights the necessity to invest in comprehensive approaches that address individual, community and structural risk and protective factors. To implement these approaches effectively, there must be coordination between all orders of government; long term funding; technical support for practitioners; flexible policies to meet the unique needs of the provinces and territories; and support for collaborative partnerships.

Canada is fortunate to have within its borders institutions such as the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (Montréal) and the Institute for the Prevention of Crime (at the University of Ottawa), as well as many local experts from various backgrounds who can help ensure that policies

and programs are informed by research. The provinces and territories will continue to create and support local strategies. Perhaps together, with support from the National Crime Prevention Centre and other federal partners, we could imagine a future that includes a robust social safety net that helps assure prevention in the long term, coupled with specific model interventions for high risk individuals and communities.