
Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

Report of Community Health Impact Assessment

July 22, 2002

**What impact would the proposed funding cuts
from the Department of Community Services
to the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC)
have on the health of the community
(Antigonish Town and County)?**

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In the provincial budget brought down on April 4, 2002, the Government of Nova Scotia proposed cuts to women's centres, transition houses and men's intervention programs amounting to \$890,000. People from across Nova Scotia rallied to protest these cuts and to insist that the services provided by women's centres, transition houses and men's intervention programs were programs valued by their communities.

In Antigonish, the Chairperson of the Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board suggested to the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) that the Community Health Impact Assessment Tool created by the Community Health Board be used to determine the impact that cuts in funding to the Women's Centre would have on the health of the community. The Women's Centre accepted the invitation. The gathering was convened by the Community Health Board.

People from organizations and institutions in the community that were knowledgeable about the work of the Women's Centre were invited to participate in the community health impact assessment. Each spoke from their own knowledge and experience and were not asked to represent, necessarily, the views of their organizations. The participants included:

- Diane Roberts, Deputy Mayor, Antigonish Town Council
- Donny MacDonald, Councillor, Antigonish County Council
- Doris Gillis, PATH Network, Department of Human Nutrition, St.. Francis Xavier University.
- Peggy Mahon, PATH Network, Women's Centres Connect! Coordinator
- Colleen Cameron, Chair, Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority
- Evelyn Lindsey, Chair, Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board
- Nelda Armour, Addictions Services
- Sr. Mary Eileen MacEachern, Sisters of St. Martha
- Jean Crosby, Coordinator, Rural Youth Healthy Relationships Project, AWRC
- Nancy Forestell, Department of Women's Studies, St.. Francis Xavier University; AWRC Board Member
- Heather Mayhew, Co-Chair, Board of Directors, Antigonish Women's Resource Centre
- Lucille Harper, Director, Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

The impact assessment was completed in two sessions. The sessions were facilitated by Susan Eaton, Project Coordinator for the PATH II Project that worked with the Antigonish Town County Community Health Board to develop their community health impact assessment tool.

The question the impact assessment answered was:

What impact would the proposed funding cuts from the Department of Community Services to the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) have on the health of the community (Antigonish Town and County)?

Working through the questions posed by the tool, the impact assessment participant group responded as follows.

A healthy community is a dynamic community.

The AWRC provides avenues through which people (particularly, but not exclusively, women and youth) can participate in community development initiatives and in social advocacy. It provides leadership development and volunteer opportunities. Cuts to the AWRC would negatively impact community social change activities.

Note: More information is required to assess the impact on the support institutions lend to community activities.

A healthy community is a changing community.

The AWRC provides opportunities for people of different generations to work together. AWRC services and programs support people in dealing with changes and events in their lives. Cuts would have a negative impact on changing relationships between people within the community as well as between people of different generations. It would not impact the size of the community.

In a healthy community, assets are valued.

As an organization committed to creating a just and equitable society, the AWRC provides an alternative voice and perspective that reflects the realities and issues that face women and their families. The AWRC makes visible and audible people who are not normally listened to thus enabling them to and supporting them in raising issues. Cuts would have a significant negative impact on utilizing the talents and skills of people.

In a healthy community, diversity is valued.

The AWRC strives to involve and to work with women from all parts of the community, people from racial minority groups and marginalized populations. As an organization we recognize that we need to work harder to include and to reflect the needs and perspectives of racial minority groups. The AWRC has had a significant impact on identifying and challenging stigmas related to gender, social status, and income level.

Cuts would be most negative in terms of gender and class. With respect to racial diversity, we perceive there would be some negative impact. In order to more accurately assess the impact, we need to ask people from racial minority groups.

In a healthy community, people work together.

The AWRC has a history of working as a catalyst in the community to bring people together to work on community development initiatives and social advocacy/public policy endeavours. These activities provide a forum in which people can learn leadership and organizational skills. While cuts would have a negative impact on the community as a whole, they would particularly negatively impact women.

Note for ourselves: We would like more information on the extent to which cuts would impact cooperation between communities. Currently through the work of the PATH Network and the Rural Youth Project, we are working with a number of communities and involving people from different counties.

In a healthy community, the goal is the overall health of the community.

- **Income and social status**

Through its projects, the AWRC brings money into the community which is spent in the community. Cuts would negatively impact the ability of the AWRC to access project funding and would have some degree of negative impact on the economic well-being of the general community.

The AWRC provides programs and services that directly impact women's ability to enter the workforce as well as to maintain their labour force participation. As well, the AWRC advocates for public policies that support women's economic stability and independence. This, in turn, impacts the economic well-being of women's families and the larger community. Cuts would negatively impact the income and social status of women who use AWRC services and programs. Further, cuts would impact the ability of the AWRC to influence public policy and, thereby, would have a negative impact for all families in a lower income bracket. By extension this would reduce spending in Antigonish thus negatively impacting the larger community.

- **Social environment and support networks**

The AWRC provides a social and cultural function within the community that connects people and breaks down their isolation - particularly for women and youth. The AWRC is community-based and is integrated into the community. AWRC programs provide people with the skills and supports they require to participate in the larger community. Cuts would not only have an impact on vulnerable individuals, they would have a negative impact on the fabric of the whole community. As one member of the Community Health Impact Assessment group pointed out, "People go into the women's centre as victims and come out as community organizers."

- **Education**

Education of individuals and the broader community are ongoing activities of the AWRC. The AWRC sponsors specific programs for women and youth as well as community-requested public education sessions. Cuts would result in a significant negative impact on the availability of public education, re-entry, student placement, peer education training and literacy programs.

- **Employment and working conditions**

The AWRC offers programs that increase the employability of women and youth and that inform them about their rights as workers. As well, the AWRC offers programs and services that help women and girls develop healthy life and career goals, skills and decision-making abilities. Cuts would negatively impact the employability of women and youth. As a community employer, cuts to the AWRC would reduce paid and volunteer employment opportunities in the community.

- **Physical environment**

Cuts to the AWRC would have no impact on the physical environment.

- **Biology and genetic endowment**

Community health impact assessment participants agreed this is not a clear category. In most cases biology and genetic endowment are not amenable to change through AWRC activities.

- **Personal health practices and coping skills**

The AWRC provides programs and services to women, youth and their families that directly support the development of healthy personal health practices and life skills. Further, the AWRC advocates for healthy public policies that support positive personal health practices and the well-being of women and their families. Cuts would have a significant negative impact on the well-being of women, youth and their families in Antigonish as well as on the efforts of the community to advocate for healthy public policy.

- **Healthy child development**

Along with programs and services to women and youth, the AWRC advocates for public policies and programs that enable women to provide adequate housing, food security and family income for their children. For the reasons stated in the section on Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills, cuts would have a significant negative impact on the well-being of children in the community.

- **Health services**

The programs and services provided by the AWRC are in line with population health strategies. The AWRC has collaborated with individuals and groups in the community that support a shift towards health services that support health promotion. The AWRC addresses many of the determinants of health and, as such, cuts would have the greatest negative impact on the health promotion activities of the AWRC.

- **Gender**

The social, economic, political and spiritual well-being of women is the focus of the work of the AWRC. By supporting and enabling the well-being of women, the AWRC supports the well-being of families and the community. Community concerns are women's concerns. Cuts to the AWRC would have a significant negative impact on services and programs for women, opportunities for women to voice their concerns, and the quality of information available to the community reflecting women's perspectives and about women's concerns.

- **Culture**

The AWRC provides an alternative voice in the community. Although women and youth from First Nations and the African Nova Scotian communities use the services of the AWRC, it is to a limited extent. While it is our perception that cuts would have some impact on how the community addresses cultural diversity, we require more information to identify the impact for any particular group.

Summary Statements

The community members assessing the impact of cuts to the AWRC agree that there will be a negative impact on many of the determinants of health and, therefore, on the health of the community.

As an organization that focusses on women and the role women play in their families and communities, the AWRC not only provides women with information and support, it "belongs" to women. It is in the community and it is community-based. If the AWRC is not funded, issues such as affordable housing, sexual violence, and women's poverty will not be addressed. Women and youth will lose access to programs and support services which they trust and on which they rely.

The AWRC is an essential service that provides essential services to the community that are not offered elsewhere in the community. The AWRC is integrated into the community where it acts as a catalyst for change, working in collaboration and cooperation with community members and organizations on a broad range of issues. The AWRC contributes to the social fabric and overall health of the community.

The cumulative effect of the programs, services, community development and social advocacy work of the AWRC is more important than individual impact of any one program. More than the sum of its services, the impact and value of the AWRC to the community is in its interaction with the community on the determinants of health.