

Domestic Violence Court Planning Document

Domestic violence court (DVC) is a therapeutic court designed to enhance offender accountability and victim safety through a collaborative, integrated, multi-sector, timely response to domestic violence. The DVC Treatment Option uses a therapeutic model to address the root causes and beliefs that lead to domestic violence through domestic violence programming. An accused who wants to participate in the treatment option must enter a guilty plea to some of all of their charges. Sentencing is delayed. A referral is then made to the approved program and, typically, upon successful completion of the program, the participant will receive a reduced sentence.

This document is intended to be used as a starting point or guide for those who are interested in creating a DVC in their community. While there are minimum standards and guidelines that all domestic violence courts in Saskatchewan should meet, there will likely be variation at the local level depending on the partners involved and available resources. This planning document provides an overview of the various steps in the process in starting a DVC and is intended to guide the working of the planning team in developing their new DVC proposal.

Steps in the Process and Things to Consider:

→ Create the **DVC planning team**:

- ✓ Ensure all of the right partners are included in the planning and that team members are in regular communication with the decision-makers in their organization.

The following individuals from the local community should be included in the planning meetings:

- Provincial Court Judge
- Provincial Prosecutions
- Legal Aid
- Community Corrections
- Saskatchewan Health Authority – Mental Health and Addictions and other potential domestic violence treatment providers
- Municipal police and/or R.C.M.P.
- Social Services (Child Protection)
- Victim Services
- Community agencies involved with domestic violence

The planning meetings should also include Dawn Anderson, Director of Therapeutic Courts, Court Services, Ministry of Justice. She can be reached by email at dawn.anderson@gov.sk.ca or by phone: (306) 787-8864.

→ **Gather data:**

- ✓ What is the problem you are trying to solve?
- ✓ What is the extent of the problem? Sources of data: police data, crime statistics, courts data, probations data, Crown file review, agency referrals.
- ✓ What resources are available in the community, and what is needed.

→ **Program design:**

- ✓ Identify the various program components, what will be required of participants?
- ✓ Document your plan, outline the entire process. This will include determining your target group, program eligibility criteria (consider type of charge, seriousness of charge, criminal history, current situation, etc.), court schedule, appearance requirements and reports, treatment programs and requirements/milestones, information sharing, and partner roles and responsibilities. Set requirements for program completion and discontinuation. Determine what program capacity will be.
- ✓ Victim inclusion – how will victims receive information, who will prepare risk assessments (if there is a request for non-contact conditions to be amended/removed), when will such requests be considered, how long will assessments take, who will receive those reports, how will victim feedback be reported to partners.
- ✓ Develop the partner protocols.
- ✓ Gather / create necessary forms and documents.
- ✓ Visit one of the existing domestic violence courts in Saskatchewan.
- ✓ What challenges do you expect and how will you mitigate for them?
- ✓ What will be the oversight roles and responsibilities – how will decisions be made?

→ **Gathering resources:**

- ✓ What resources are already in place, what else is needed and how will you get them?
- ✓ What are the staffing needs? For example, you will need a coordinator.
- ✓ Are budget submissions for additional resources required?

→ **Training:**

- ✓ What are the training needs?
- ✓ Develop a training plan. This information can also be used for program partner orientation manuals.

→ **Data monitoring and evaluation plans:**

- ✓ How will you know that you are meeting your objectives?
- ✓ How will you measure and demonstrate program success? Develop performance measures.
- ✓ What information do you need to collect and how will you collect it? Who will be responsible for gathering this information?
- ✓ What technology do you need?

Please refer to the *Domestic Violence Court – Overview and Standards* document for more information on target groups, eligibility and the referral process, and program design. Examples of forms and documents from other domestic violence courts are also available on request.

While this document is intended to assist you with developing a new DVC in the most efficient and effective way possible, developing and starting a new therapeutic court is still a lengthy process. It is not unusual for it to take 2-3 years, from initial planning to implementation, depending on community readiness and availability of resources. Detailed planning is necessary to ensure proper program design and implementation. Program evaluation is also important to ensure the program was designed and implemented as intended and that the DVC is meeting its intended outcomes.

Therapeutic courts are resource-intensive; throughout the planning process, members of each group or organization should be in regular contact with their head offices so that they are aware of any funding or HR considerations.

All requests for a new domestic violence court will be presented to and reviewed by the provincial Therapeutic Courts Oversight Committee which includes representatives from: the judiciary, Ministry of Justice (Court Services, Prosecutions), Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety (Community Corrections), Ministry of Integrated Justice Services (Victim Services), Legal Aid, Police / RCMP, Ministry of Social Services (Income Assistance), Ministry of Health (Mental Health and Addictions), Saskatchewan Health Authority (Mental Health and Addictions), Public Prosecution Service of Canada, and First Nations Inuit Health (Mental Wellness Programs).