



September 2010

POLICY UPDATE: Alberta's *Volunteer Police Information Check Program*

**Implications of the RCMP Policy Implementation
Concerning Access to CPIC Database**

BACKGROUND:

As part of sound risk management practices, nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations often obtain Police Information Checks (PICs) to screen volunteers. However, organizations in the sector face central concerns related to these checks. Organizations strive to ensure the safety and wellbeing of populations they are benefiting. But the associated costs of the police information checks divert funds away from front-line services and core missions and act as a barrier to volunteerism.

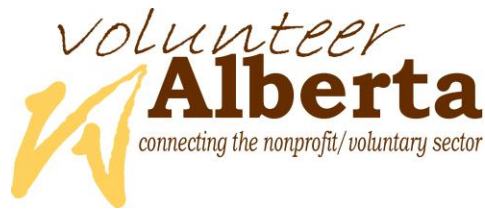
Thorough screening of applicants is necessary to protect vulnerable populations. Volunteer Alberta, with support and funding from the Government of Alberta, continues to focus on ensuring the ***Volunteer Police Information Check Program*** (VPICP) provides assistance for organizations in both these respects.

The ***VPICP*** emphasizes that **PICs are one step in a multi-step volunteer screening process** that helps protect Albertans, individual volunteers, and nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations. The program also aims to encourage the use of police services for accessing PICs and to educate organizations regarding the risk of using private background screening companies for processing PICs. Volunteer Alberta advocates that organizations with volunteers who will be engaging in higher-risk circumstances (volunteers engaging in activities with minor children, seniors and disabled Albertans) take advantage of the ***Volunteer Police Information Check Program***.

ISSUE 1: Media reports suggest that new enhancements may include fingerprinting, which increases cost and causes serious delays for nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations seeking police information clearances.

Facts

- Fingerprinting will only be necessary if a screening check reports that: the same gender and the same birth date match that of someone registered in the convicted and pardoned sex offender registry.
- Applicants are entitled to know why the fingerprinting is required. Once the prints are run through the National Repository in Ottawa, they are destroyed and not kept on any record.
- The balance of security and volunteer engagement is now an issue across Canada. The concern is that in the decision to ensure that convicted and pardoned sex offenders are not slipping through screening checks by changing their name, hundreds of male volunteers are being fingerprinted.
- The fact is the vast majority of convicted and pardoned sex offenders are male and volunteer engaging organizations whose volunteer demographics reflect a preponderance of males are going to be affected more than those whose demographics reflect female engagement.
- One solution is for police services to go to digital finger printing which would only require a 72 hour turnaround. We suggest that volunteer organizations encourage police services in their community to use this available technology.



ISSUE 2: Alberta nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations are continuing to contract with private screening services for volunteer screening even though private background screening companies do not have access to complete criminal records.

Facts

- Policy clarifications made in November 2009 to background checks in Alberta mean that **only** police service are allowed to access information in the Canadian Police Information Centre database.
- According to Heather Bettke (Manager in Charge, Police Information Check Unit, Forensic Identification Services Section, Edmonton Police Service and a member of the National Working Group in Ottawa for Dissemination of Criminal Record Information Policy Working Group) **only** police services can perform a Vulnerable Sector Search, which checks the Canadian Police Information Centre database for information about applicants.
- Private background screening companies **do not** have access to complete criminal records, nor can they disclose pending charges from the courts or police files.
- Alberta voluntary sector organizations seeking screening information from private screening companies are encouraged to connect with Volunteer Alberta on this issue.

ISSUE 3: The decisions around volunteers accessing police information checks are being made with no input from the nonprofit/voluntary sector.

Facts

- The Dissemination of Criminal Record Information Policy Working Group on Security Clearances does not have a single national nonprofit organization knowledgeable about volunteer inclusion (the obvious knowledge centre is Volunteer Canada) at the table discussions nor are they reaching out for advice or to check what the actual impact of their decisions might have on Canada's 161,000 voluntary sector organizations engaging volunteers at some level.
- The Alberta representative on the national working council, as a result of working with Volunteer Alberta and her experience with thousands of volunteer engaging organizations, is able to reflect the concerns of volunteers. It is one of the very few ways to receive accurate information on the national issue of security clearance processes.

More information about comprehensive volunteer screening and the **Volunteer Police Information Check Program** is available from **Volunteer Alberta** at: <http://voan.volunteeralberta.ab.ca>.