



Summer, 2010

**PROGRAM UPDATE: *Volunteer Police Information Check Program***

**The *Volunteer Police Information Check Program*:**

- ***Why use police services for police information checks rather than private background screening companies?***
- ***After year-one how has the program worked?***

**BACKGROUND**

The ***Volunteer Police Information Check Program*** (VPICP) began in April 2009 and is a three-year pilot program funded by the Government of Alberta, to cover the costs of obtaining police information checks (PICs) for organizations with volunteers in eligible circumstances. Volunteer Alberta administers the program and was influential in advocating for the VPICP as a means for providing greater protection for vulnerable populations, while reducing associated administrative for the nonprofit/voluntary sector.

As part of sound risk management practices, nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations obtain police information checks to screen volunteers. Organizations in the sector face two central concerns related to these checks. First are the costs of obtaining PICs for volunteers. The associated costs of the information checks divert funds away from front-line services and core missions and act as a barrier to volunteerism. Second, organizations strive to ensure the safety and wellbeing of populations they are benefiting. Thorough screening of applicants is necessary to protect vulnerable populations. Volunteer Alberta has worked hard to ensure the ***Volunteer Police Information Check Program*** can provide 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.

***Why use the Volunteer Police Information Check Program and not private background screening companies?***

Changes in December 2009 to background checks in Alberta have meant that only police are allowed to access crucial information about applicants. According to Heather Bettke (Supervisor Police Information Check Unit with the Edmonton Police Service) only police services can perform a Vulnerable Sector Search, which checks the Canadian Police Information Centre database for information about applicants. The change means private background screening companies no longer have access to complete criminal records, nor can they disclose pending charges from the courts or police files.



It is unfortunately not understood that information received from private background screening companies is not as thorough as that from police services. Volunteer Alberta maintains that police services are the superior provider of PICs. Despite the short turn-around time of private background screening companies of PICs, these businesses *cannot* access criminal records and they lack access to valuable information needed to thoroughly screen applicants.

Private background screening companies are "giving volunteer groups a false sense of security" said Karen Lynch, Volunteer Alberta's Executive Director, in *The Edmonton Journal's* article 'Tighter volunteer scrutiny lauded' (April 14, 2010). The **Volunteer Police Information Check Program** provides valuable clarifying information to organizations in the sector and coverage to eligible organizations using police services to screen their volunteers in order to best protect Albertans. Tighter screening practices for screening volunteer applicants "is absolutely a good thing," remarked Karen Lynch.

### **VOLUNTEER POLICE INFORMATION CHECK PROGRAM FACTS**

The Government of Alberta's three-year pilot project has already made great strides to protect vulnerable populations, while reducing administrative costs in the sector. Between April 1, 2009 and April 1, 2010, the *Volunteer Police Information Check Program* had the following impact:

- Volunteer Alberta received **449 applications** for the program
- **307 applications have been approved**, each receiving their own Volunteer Organization Authorization Number (VOAN)
- Volunteer Alberta worked with many of the applicants to assist them in improving their screening processes, which resulted in their subsequent approval
- **193 organizations** used their assigned VOANs for these checks
- Only 131 applications were rejected (for failing to meet program criteria)
- The Government of Alberta paid more than \$190,000 for the processing of **12,792 Police Information Checks to police services in Alberta**
- Based on the number of approved applications, once all organizations complete their PICs for approved positions, the Government of Alberta could be covering the cost for upwards of **63,437 Volunteer Police Information Checks** for individuals in 473 different volunteer positions in the nonprofit/voluntary sector.

The success of this pilot program depends on the uptake by nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations. If you know of an organization that could benefit from this program, please pass along the enclosed brochure or direct them to **Volunteer Alberta** at: <http://voan.volunteeralberta.ab.ca>