

AUGUST 2024

Provincial Youth Cyberviolence Prevention Strategy

STATUS UPDATE

WHAT?

The Government of PEI is leading the development of a Provincial Youth Cyberviolence Prevention Strategy.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

In the digital age, the prevalence and risk of cyberbullying among youth in Prince Edward Island is a serious concern. With a significant portion of young lives unfolding in virtual spaces, escaping cyberbullying seems almost impossible.

It is important that government and its agencies and the community develop a shared understanding of how best to promote a safer online environment, and to equip youth with tools to protect themselves from the occurrence of, and the lasting effects of, cyberbullying.

“In Canada, youth report experiencing cyberbullying at a rate of between 24.6% and 33.33%, with several vulnerable populations being more prone to victimization.”



WORDS MATTER: WHAT IS CYBERVIOLENCE? DON'T YOU MEAN CYBERBULLYING?

Although cyberbullying can take many forms, for the purpose of this strategy, cyberbullying has been defined as the use of computers, smartphones, or other connected devices to embarrass, hurt, mock, threaten, or be mean to someone online. (*Public Safety Canada*)

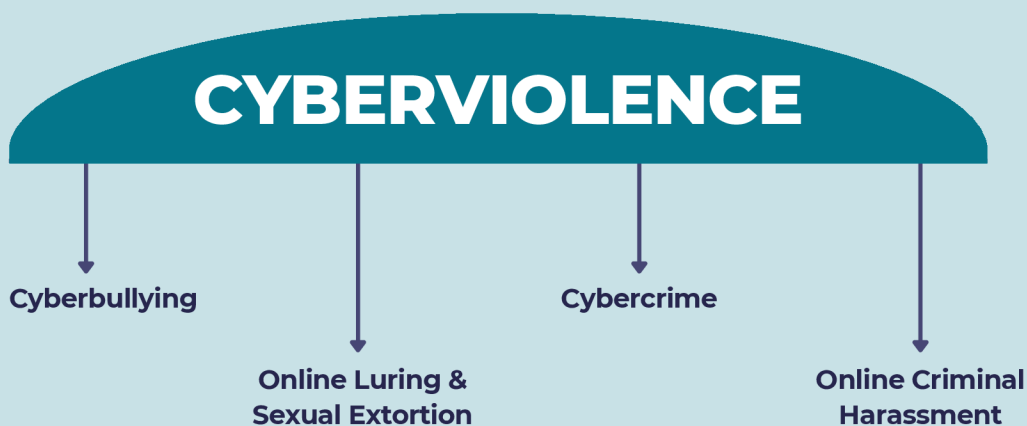
Cyberbullying can show up as:

- General harassment online
- Verbal and emotional abuse online
- Threats and intimidation
- Use of images for personal attacks
- Exclusionary practices and social isolation

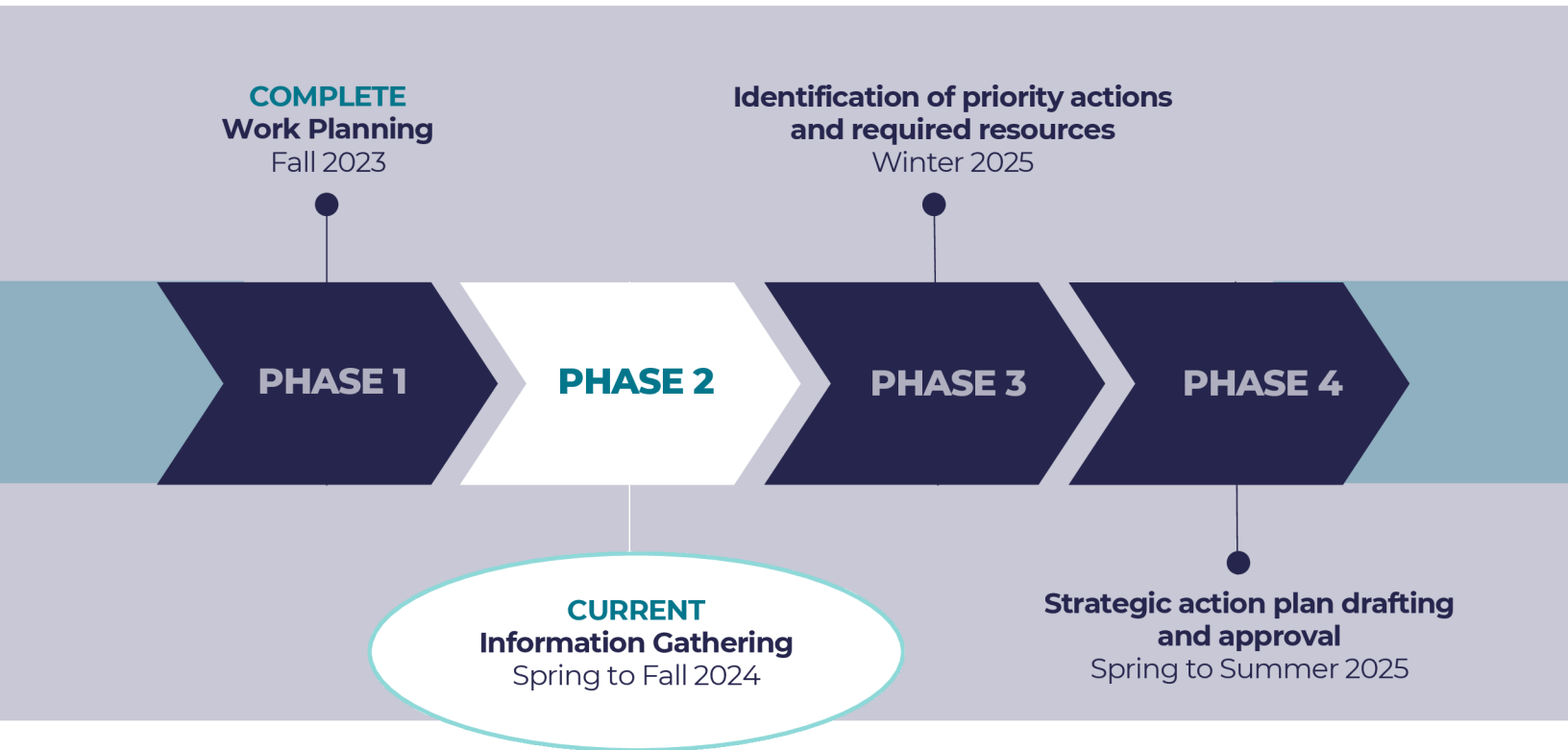
The term *cyberbullying* is increasingly used in mainstream media to describe cyberviolence incidents such as cyberstalking, identity theft, doxxing (publishing private information), sexual extortion, the sharing of images with the intent to intimidate or control, etc. These actions are far more serious than the word bullying suggests and include aggressive violations of personal safety and privacy. They demand interventions to address their severity and safeguard the well-being of youth effectively.

Although this strategy will focus on **youth peer-to-peer cyberbullying** in PEI, preliminary research conducted as part of the strategy has shown that many early prevention interventions and tools to address cyberbullying are also effective for other types of cyberviolence described above.

For the purposes of this strategy, cyberbullying has been identified as one of four types of cyberviolence.



THE PROCESS:



The first Stakeholder Engagement was held in Spring 2024 to better understand the prevalence and context of cyberbullying,

the impact it's having on youth, existing programs, training, or other initiatives that are working well, best or emerging practices, and input, guidance and recommendations for what should be included in a provincial youth cyberviolence prevention strategy.

This initial stakeholder engagement provided insight into the prevalence and context of cyberbullying in PEI, the impact on youth and best and emerging practices in the cyberbullying space.

The remainder of this document highlights some preliminary findings from this initial engagement that provide a solid foundation for the next steps of the strategy development.



The initial engagement identified a wide range of concerns about the impact of cyberbullying. The common themes were:

- **Mental health** and psychological impact on youth in the form of depression, anxiety, insomnia, self-harm, suicide ideation, and suicide.
- **Technology and social media** challenges due to the enduring nature of online content and the rapid evolution of digital platforms and apps.
- **Social and behavioral concerns** such as risky behaviour driven by a quest for social media likes, the impact on development of social skills and empathy in youth, and the minimal consequences that bullies often face.
- **Legal and policy issues** presented by emerging technology, such as AI, and the need to strengthen and enforce regulations for social media platforms.
- **The lack of media literacy**, education, and awareness among youth and adults.



The initial engagement and research suggest the following areas of focus for a Cyberviolence Prevention Strategy:

- **Education and Awareness** – implementation of cyberbullying programs and public awareness for youth, caregivers, educators and service providers. Education and awareness should be trauma-informed and guided by evidence.
- **Caregiver Involvement and Support** – education and resources on responsible technology use and the impacts of cyberbullying.
- **Mental Health** – programs should be integrated to educate on the signs of mental distress, build resilience, and ensure access to robust mental health resources for youth.
- **Community Engagement and Support Networks** – strong community networks and initiatives that enhance the capacity of local groups, to provide support and foster healthy relationships among youth.
- **Legal and Policy** – addressing the gap between cyberbullying incidents and effective provincial legal interventions.

Next steps:

- Collaborative work between government, its agencies, and the community.
- Additional engagement with youth, parents and caregivers in particular, and
- Identification of jurisdictional practices, best practices, and the local current state.

For more information or to find out how you can contribute to the Provincial Youth Cyberviolence Prevention Strategy contact: justicepolicy@gov.pe.ca