



OFFICE OF THE
POLICE COMPLAINT
COMMISSIONER

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British Columbia, Canada

NEWS RELEASE

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OPCC Annual Report highlights importance of systemic responses to police misconduct

VICTORIA - The Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner's (OPCC) 2019-2020 Annual Report was tabled in the Legislature of British Columbia today. The Report highlights the importance of independent oversight of investigations into police misconduct and the critical need for legislative reform to promote more accountable policing.

In November 2019, the *Special Committee of the Legislature to Review the Police Complaint Process* made several key recommendations to government for amendments to the *Police Act*. These would allow for timelier public accountability of serious police misconduct and enhance the OPCC's ability to address the systemic issues which led to that misconduct.

The Report highlights the investigations and disciplinary proceedings into complaints and allegations of misconduct involving municipal police officers in B.C. This year's report also reflects an increased focus on the role of municipal police boards in preventing misconduct through sound civilian governance. The Commissioner made 11 training, policy, and governance recommendations to police boards and/or the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to prevent underlying issues that lead to misconduct.

Additionally, serious complaints, such as workplace harassment, sexual assault, and excessive force, were investigated and resulted in the dismissal of eight municipal police officers, the most serious penalty under the *Police Act*.

Approximately 39% of all complaints were resolved through alternative dispute resolution, which reflects the OPCC's continued emphasis on alternative approaches to resolving complaints where appropriate.

Quote:

"Serious allegations of misconduct erode public confidence in policing. With a steady increase in complaints and investigations over the past year, I am urging government to consider early implementation of the changes to the Police Act recommended by the Special Committee of the Legislature in November, 2019." - Clayton Pecknold, Police Complaint Commissioner

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The Annual Report, including appendices, is available here:

<https://opcc.bc.ca/reports/annual-report/>

The 38 recommendations of the *Special Committee to Review the Police Complaint Process* is available here: <https://opcc.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Special-Committee-to-Review-the-Police-Complaint-Process.pdf>

Highlights:

Notable numbers –

- **Registered complaints up 10%:** The OPCC received 537 complaints about officer misconduct during the reporting period, up from 487 in 2018/2019.
- **Service and policy complaints up 70%:** The OPCC received 39 complaints about the policies and services of police departments, up from 23.
- **Ordered investigations up by 23%:** In addition to complaints from the public, the OPCC launched 97 investigations into officer conduct (65 of which were requested by the police department involved), an increase from 79.
- **89% increase in Adjudicative Reviews:** Adjudicative Reviews occur when the Commissioner disagrees with the decision by a senior officer either about whether an officer committed misconduct or the discipline imposed. There were 17 Adjudicative Reviews in 2019/2020, up from 9.
- **Recommendations up 175%:** In keeping with the Commissioner's increased focus on systemic issues, the most significant increase noted in the Annual Report was in the number of recommendations made to police boards or the Director of Police Services, from 4 in 2018/2019 to 11 during 2019/2020. These ranged from recommendations on improving municipal forces' workplace culture, to addressing inadequate officer training in areas such as sexual assault investigations and gender identity and diversity sensitivity.
- **Alternative dispute resolution is working:** A higher percentage of complaints (39%) were resolved using alternative dispute resolution (complaint resolution or mediation) than ever before.

Demographic information: The OPCC began collecting voluntary, self-reported demographic data of complainants over this period. A significant majority of complainants provided this information. It is an early but important step in learning more about who is using the police complaints process and how we can make it more accessible to those who are not.

Here's what we learned so far:

- **Gender:** 63% (314) of complainants were male, 37% (180) were female, and less than 1% (2) were transgender.
- **Ethnicity:** 55% of complainants were Caucasian; 12% Indigenous; 8% East Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese); and 7% South Asian; 4% Black (African-Canadian, Afro-Caribbean); 4% Middle Eastern; and 2% Latino.
- **Age:** The majority (47%) of complainants were between the ages of 25-44; followed by the ages of 45-64 (28%).

About the OPCC

- The Police Complaint Commissioner is a civilian, independent Officer of the Legislature overseeing complaints, investigations and discipline involving municipal police in British Columbia operating independently of governments and the police themselves.
- The Police Complaint Commissioner may accept complaints from the public or independently order investigations into allegations of police misconduct.
- The Police Complaint Commissioner may also refer certain decisions to retired judges for adjudication, call public hearings, refer matters to Crown Counsel for consideration of prosecution and make recommendations to police boards or to government regarding policies, practices or systemic issues that may contribute to the misconduct.
- The Police Complaint Commissioner is required under the *Police Act* to table a report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly once a year.

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