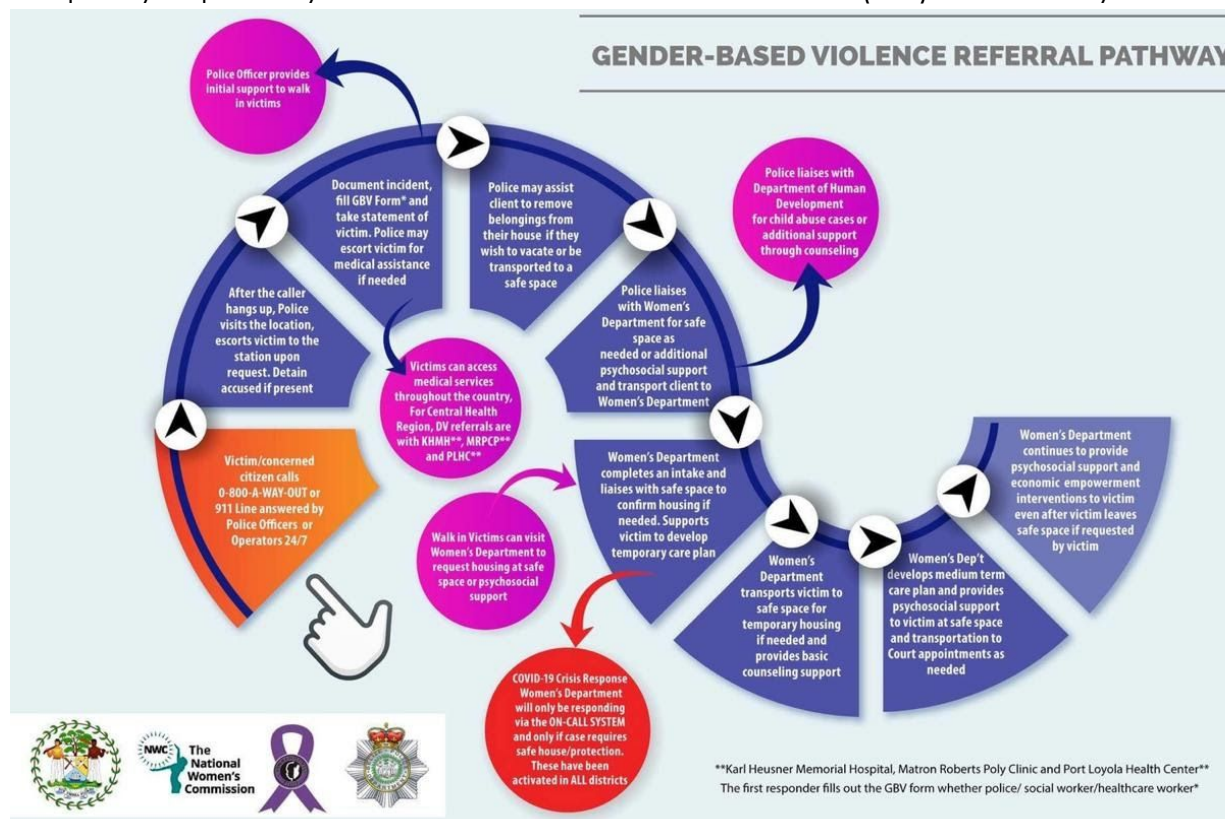




Call for the Inclusion of LGBT Persons into Belize's National Gender Based Violence Referral Pathway

We applaud the National Gender Based Violence Committee, the National Women's Commission and all its partners on charting and presenting the **Gender Based Violence Referral Pathway**. However, while termed as a "gender based" navigation system, the pathway promotes institutional exclusion through inadequate legislative protection, visible protocol and inadequate capacity-building agenda for duty bearers. As a system, it fails to deal with direct and implied biases and a trauma-informed approach to investigations.

The effects results in systemic iniquity in the promotion of unequal power relationships between genders which in turn lead to power imbalances and inequality especially for the lesbian, bisexual and trans (LBT) community in Belize.



Violence against LBT women in Belize stems largely from social stigma, which is manifested through the absence of legal protections, systemic denial of support services and generalisation of capacity-building agenda. Organizational norms, strict psycho-social standards within the family and community and punitive or discriminatory laws combine to leave the populations behind as citizens. There is





growing evidence of the many ways LGBT people in Belize are denied equal access to services, resources and opportunities that are essential to collective socio-economic development.

Gender-based violence for LBT women is different for they are at high risk for multiple forms of interpersonal violence committed against them by colleagues, family members, neighbors, or intimate partners. LBT women are also at increased risk of structural violence compared to heterosexual and cisgender women. The assumption that all women with children and a male partner is heterosexual is evidence that sexuality bias is informing the response of the state.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to address cases of intimate partner violence and domestic violence impact has not changed within the LGBT community in Belize. In our ongoing community study, entitled **COVID-19 Survey of LGBT Community in Belize**, 6% of our participants have reported that they are currently experiencing “increased family, intimate, or gender-based violence (verbal, physical and sexual)”. Within the **Gender Based Violence Referral Pathway**, there are several points of systematic exclusion:

1. The Belize Police Department has no policy nor legal obligation to address intimate partner violence experienced by LGBT persons in cohabiting relationships as domestic violence cases; therefore, LGBT cases are rendered irrelevant to state response. They will report these incidents as assault, wounding or related offences. This eliminates several aspects of the **Gender Based Violence Referral Pathway** for LGBT persons in Belize.
2. To access safe house programs in Belize are through the Belize Police Department and the Women’s Department, but they are not documenting intimate partner violence between LGBT partners. Resulting in denial of all safe house programs throughout the country.
3. The differential treatment under the law of LGBT relationships in Belize leaves the cohabitation of be looked at roommates, which seldomly leads to precautionary evacuation, as these “partners” would fall under the Landlord and Tenant Act¹ Which does not provide for immediate removal of the perpetrator, as with the Domestic Violence Act².

¹ Landlord and Tenant Act, Chapter 189 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011

² Domestic Violence Act, Chapter 178 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011





On behalf of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in Belize, we the undersign are making the following recommendations to the improvement of the **Gender Based Violence Referral Pathway**:

1. Support entities within the **Gender Based Violence Referral Pathway**, to develop action plans for LGBT inclusion, defining and integrating specific actions for prevention and response to violence as well as examining whether financial or technical capacity is needed to implement them or ensure sustainability.
2. Coordinate data collection and intervention investment with LGBT NGOs to improve the capacity-building agenda of duty-bearers surrounding the increased risk of violence faced by LGBT people in the community. Similarly, this should be done with governmental entities mandated to prevent or control violence.
3. Actively advocate for the strengthening of specialized services and “safe spaces” for the LGBT community, sexual minorities, and their families that cultivate education and empowerment and offer integral services for LGBT survivors of violence.
4. Actively lobby for the reform of discriminatory laws that are not linked to the criminal code; however still impacts the well-being and integrity of sexual and gender minorities. This includes the country's definition of family to create inclusion in such documents as the Gender Policy, Gender Based Violence Act, Families and Children's Act, etc.

Even more, during this trying time, an immediate action is required to ensure that **all** persons, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation or any other discriminatory factor, may be included in the complete response against gender based violence in Belize.

