



CAEH Conference October 26, 2017
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Sector terminology

- VAW – Violence Against Women (sector and services)
- DV – domestic violence
- IPV – intimate partner violence
- SPP – Special Priority Policy
- HIFIS – Homeless Individuals and Families Information System

Women's Shelters Canada – Who we are

- National Network for Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters and transition houses
- Provide knowledge exchange, networking opportunities, research, advocacy at the federal level
- Non-profit governed by board of directors
- Advisory council made up of provincial and territorial association coordinators
 - Provide expertise to guide our projects
 - Keep us informed on the regional changes (legislation, policy, funding etc.) across the country



ShelterSafe.ca is an online clickable map which serves as a fast resource to connect women with the nearest Canadian shelter that can offer hope, support and safety from abuse.

VAW, Housing, and Homelessness

- WSC's 2016 annual survey for VAW shelters/transition houses found that 30% reported no social housing supports in their community (higher for rural and remote).
- In 2017, 44% of shelters surveyed were full on snapshot day.
- Research, identify and evaluate what housing and homelessness supports are available to women fleeing violence (academic, policy, NGO reports etc.).
- Organize cross sectoral Roundtable on VAW, Housing, and Homelessness.
- Recommendations to the National Housing Strategy

Research – what supports and programs exists for DV survivors?

Purpose: highlight the links between domestic violence, housing instability, and women's homelessness.

- **Social and affordable housing**
- **Special Priority Status (SPP) for DV survivors social housing**
- Ontario Portable Housing Benefit for DV survivors (pilot project)
- Housing First Models

Evaluate social housing and homelessness supports:

- What are the eligibility requirements?
- How accessible are the programs?
- Are the benefits or programs coordinated with social assistance/income supports or other provincial government supports?

Access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing

Access to safe and affordable housing remains one of the leading barriers for women escaping violence and domestic violence (DV) is one of the main causes of homelessness among Canadian families. Research has demonstrated that DV survivors are most at risk for violence and homicide when they try to leave an abusive situation.

The lack of safe and affordable housing models, integration of safety planning and service delivery make it difficult for DV survivors to find, secure, and maintain housing.

Intake processes to access housing supports may revictimize and retraumatize DV survivors as they navigate various systems.

DV survivors at risk for housing instability and homelessness

- The link between domestic violence and homelessness is well documented.
- Housing remains one of the leading barriers for women escaping violence.
- DV is one of the main causes of homelessness among Canadian families.
- Women escaping violence are at high risk for escalating violence, homicide as well as housing instability and homelessness (intimate and systemic violence).

IPV researchers have documented that survivors' mental health (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, depression, anxiety, etc.) is exacerbated by housing instability, which makes it difficult for survivors to maintain their housing and puts them at risk for homelessness (Rollins et al. 2012).

Barriers to Social and Affordable Housing

- Survivors are vulnerable to homelessness as they wait for a unit to open up even with the Special Priority Status
- SPP eligibility criteria requires “proof” of abuse and cohabitation may be barriers to gaining status; can be re-victimizing/traumatizing for DV survivors (housing staff not trained to work with trauma survivors)
- Systemic discrimination within social housing towards survivors of domestic violence, racism and misogyny (Indigenous, immigrant and transgender women)
- Contradictions within systems (social assistance, child welfare and social housing)

Women's Invisible Homelessness

- Women's homelessness is vastly underestimated and often hidden.
- Homeless Partnering Strategy 2017 report: national data collected through the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and did not count women staying in VAW shelters as part of the homeless population.
- “The risks of violence associated with homelessness even extend into the shelter system for many women, which may also explain their avoidance of accessing these spaces and contribute to the relative invisibility of their condition” (Kirkby and Mettler 2016:114).

Limitations of data collection

”[I]f you’re looking at individuals who [have] chronic or frequent episodes of homelessness, women don’t always fall into the data. They purposely stay out of the data because if they have kids, they lose their kids” (Louis Sorin, CEO, End Homelessness Winnipeg, cited in Drabble 2017: 12).

Many reasons why women “stay out of the data”

- Concerns over safety in mixed gender shelters
- Lack of DV supports at mixed gender shelters
- Some mixed gender shelters do not admit women fleeing violence
- Avoid various social services to avoid apprehension of children

Recommendations to the National Housing Strategy #1, 2

Incorporate an intersectional human rights gender approach that recognizes the links between the lack of housing, homelessness, poverty, economic insecurity, colonization, racism, ableism, child intervention, and violence against women (VAW). An intersectional analysis of race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, immigration status, and disability is necessary to develop solutions that meet the needs of women living at different intersections;

Require current funding definitions of homelessness to be more inclusive of women, recognizing that their homelessness is invisible and that:

- Women who experience violence in their own homes are homeless;
- women who flee violence are homeless;
- women who stay in women's shelters are homeless;
- women who couch surf with family, friends, and strangers are homeless.

#3, 4, 5

Create an Indigenous Housing Strategy that responds to the specific needs of Indigenous women and their families both on and off reserve, including co-operative housing and a provision that services are integrated at the beginning (e.g. child care, space for ceremony, collective kitchens, trauma-informed design);

Significantly increase the supply of social housing units and require that a minimum of 25% of units in all projects funded by the National Housing Strategy be fully accessible for women with disabilities and their families using principles of universal design;

Incorporate flexibility to make it easier to provide a continuum of housing services specific to meet regional needs. This is especially important in Northern, rural, and isolated communities where housing services are more limited;

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National Housing Fund #6, 7, 8

Re-establish the shelter enhancement fund and dedicate 10% (\$50 million per year) in the National Housing Fund for shelters and additional funds for a continuum of housing for gender-based violence survivors;

Ensure that the shelter enhancement fund reflects the specific needs of VAW shelters, is distributed equitably, and accounts for regional differences including the costs associated with repairs, renovations, and builds to bring access to shelters to a national standard;

Include women survivors who are fleeing violence from non-partner family members, landlords, caregivers, and support workers on whom they depend for resources and housing;

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#9, 10, 11

Investment in Affordable Housing

- Ensure there are dedicated funds in the agreements negotiated with the provinces and territories for shelters and a continuum of housing, including second stage/transitional and permanent supportive housing, for gender-based violence survivors;

Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS)

- Address the limitations and inconsistencies across the provinces, territories and regions of the current community entity funding model and set parameters for operating funding so that women's shelters and organizations can apply directly to the federal government for HPS funding;
- Support a continuum of housing beyond Housing First, including dedicated funding for permanent, temporary, and supportive housing provided by VAW services (including second stage/transitional housing) that serves survivors of violence and women coping with mental health and addictions. Additionally, there is a pressing need to support housing that is trauma-informed, low-barrier, and based on practices of harm reduction.

Thank you!

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<http://endvaw.ca/>

Shelters of the Future Conference
June 2018

<http://www.endvaw.ca/nc2018/conference-streams/>



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