



WOMEN'S NATIONAL
HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS
NETWORK

JUNE
2026

Strengthening Canada's Housing and Shelter Response for Women and Gender-Diverse People

*Submission to FEWO on the Role and Capacity of
Women's Shelters and Transitional Housing to Support
Women and Girls in Canada*



Recommendations

1. Establish **stable, multi-year, core-operational funding** for women's shelters, emergency shelters, and transitional housing across Canada, and maintaining and stabilizing funding for violence against women (VAW) programs under **Women and Gender Equality (WAGE)** Canada.
2. Ensure federal funding for women's shelters and transitional housing is gender-responsive, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, and includes **wraparound services**, especially for Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, trans, and gender-diverse people as well as their families.
3. Allocate **at least 40% of affordable and deeply affordable** housing units for women, Two-Spirit, trans, and gender-diverse people, through Build Canada Homes – ensuring that the current federal housing budget does not rely on a one-size-fits-all approach.

This should include **clear GBA+ implementation timelines and measurable targets to end homelessness** and housing precarity for women and gender-diverse people.

4. Create ongoing **advisory mechanisms** that directly consult with lived experts during federal housing and homelessness policy discussions—and ensure that this input meaningfully informs policy development, implementation, and evaluation.

Summary

The Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network (WNHHN) is a national collective focused on research and advocacy to advance critical policy change aimed at eliminating gendered homelessness. Our work consistently demonstrates that women and gender-diverse people experience some of the most severe impacts of housing instability due to persistent gender-based inequities. They often experience hidden homelessness – remaining in abusive relationships to maintain shelter, living in unsafe or inadequate housing to keep families together, engaging in survival sex for shelter, or couch-surfing and staying with friends or family.

This invisibility is often a direct result of insufficient capacity within shelter systems and transitional housing (TH) programs. It is also shaped by homelessness responses that have historically been designed around visible homelessness and the assumption that affordable, appropriate housing is readily available following a shelter stay or TH placement. The consequences of these gaps are compounded by the shortage of affordable, appropriate housing. Instead, these groups often return to homelessness after exiting programs or risk returning to or remaining in unsafe environments and relationships when no suitable housing options are available.

Women’s Shelter Canada’s 2024 survey¹ of 300 Canadian VAW shelters found:

- 97% reported it has become harder for survivors to find housing.
- 42% of emergency shelters and TH spaces, and 52% of second-stage shelters, reported operating at capacity more than once per week.
- 80% of emergency shelters and TH spaces, and 65% of second-stage shelters, reported extending stays beyond established length-of-stay policies, “contributing to higher turn-away rates and waitlists.”

This is supported by 2026 *Unaddressed Project*² data from Calgary, which found:

- 56% reported being unable to afford a place to live.
- 35% were unable to access a shelter bed when they needed one.
- 26% respondents reported being turned away due to capacity issues.
- Participants accessing TH reported being required to leave after exceeding maximum stay periods as a key reason for losing accommodation.

¹ Hoogendam, R. and Maduakolam, C. (2026). “Sheltering Under Pressure: Frontline Realities of Canada’s Violence Against Women Shelters and Transition Houses.” Ottawa, ON: Women’s Shelters Canada. <https://endvaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/WSC-ShelteringUnderPressure-April2026.pdf>

² Baig, K., Sherwani, A., Samimi, P., Eiboff, F., Seccia, S. (2026). *Unaddressed: The State and Scale of Housing Insecurity & Homelessness Experienced by Women & Gender-Diverse People in Calgary*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/68a3ae7d4e30836b0207cf61/t/69ceec7d358f916e15be62a4/1775168637554/Unaddressed_FinalReport_02042026.pdf

Capacity pressures within the shelter system remain a significant concern. In a study on shelters connected to Indigenous communities, Statistics Canada found that 82% of all turn-aways in Indigenous shelters were women, and 74% in non-Indigenous shelters – most commonly because shelters were full.³ This is particularly concerning for Indigenous women who already experience housing insecurity, homelessness, and violence more acutely than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Additionally, 52% of women in Indigenous shelters received services from the same shelter more than once in the previous year, and 26% in non-Indigenous shelters.

Capacity pressures within Indigenous-serving spaces further compound this precarity when access to culturally appropriate supports and safe spaces is limited.

*Unaddressed Project*⁴ data found:

- 23% of participants who accessed shelter spaces reported concerns about safety.
 - 17% felt a lack of belonging.
 - 14% cited issues with other residents, including judgement and discrimination.
- 20% reported lack of safety in available and affordable places as a barrier to finding or maintaining housing.

When supports are inaccessible or unsafe, women and gender-diverse people may avoid seeking supports altogether, including remaining in abusive situations to maintain shelter. This contributes to their underrepresentation in homelessness data and service systems. Point-in-Time Counts indicate that women comprise a sizeable share of the homeless population across major cities like Calgary (29%), Toronto (41%), and Vancouver (31%). However, these counts capture only visible homelessness and do not reflect the cyclical nature of gendered homelessness.⁵ As a result, the needs of women and gender-diverse people are not reflected in policy development, funding decisions, service planning, and access to housing and homelessness supports.

Inaction risks further entrenching women and gender-diverse people in cycles of housing instability that are increasingly inescapable. Responding to this crisis requires funding for

³ Maxwell, A. (2024). “Shelters for victims of abuse with ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada, 2022/2023.” *Statistics Canada*.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2024001/article/00008-eng.htm>

⁴ Baig, K., et al. (2026).

⁵ Calgary Homeless Foundation. (2025). *Point-In-Time Count, 2024*. https://www.calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2024_PIT-Report_Final.pdf

Homelessness Services Association of BC. (2025). *2025 Point-in-Time Homeless Count in Greater Vancouver*. https://hsa-bc.ca/Library/2024_25_HC/2025_PiT_Homeless_Count_for_GV_Preliminary_Data_Report_250730.pdf

City of Toronto. (2025). *2025 Point-in-Time Count*. <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/9790-street-needs-assessment-report-2024.pdf>

women's shelters that enables them to expand capacity, provide appropriate supports, and meet demand. The government must also allocate at least 40% of affordable and deeply-affordable housing units to women and gender-diverse people, recognizing that women-identifying people comprise a substantial proportion of the visible homeless population, and that current data frameworks undercount hidden homelessness. In doing so, ongoing advisory mechanisms must engage lived experts in decisions related to funding, housing, and the development of affordability and housing adequacy measures that reflect the experiences of those most affected by Canada's housing crisis.