

# **Federal Housing Advocate requests review into the failure to eliminate homelessness amongst women and gender-diverse people**

May 11, 2023 – Vancouver, British Columbia – Office of the Federal Housing Advocate

Today, Federal Housing Advocate Marie-Josée Houle made a request to the National Housing Council to launch a review panel on the failure to prevent and eliminate homelessness amongst women and gender-diverse people, particularly Indigenous women, gender-diverse, and Two-Spirit people.

The request comes in response to several submissions to the Advocate, including by the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network and the National Indigenous Housing Network. The submissions demonstrate that across Canada, many women, girls and gender-diverse people live in insecure or unsafe housing—or are made homeless—due to deliberate policy choices.

The lack of affordable, appropriate housing and overwhelmed emergency shelters mean that many women and gender-diverse people are forced to rely on dangerous survival strategies or remain in abusive situations to keep a roof over their heads.

It is well documented that women face gendered barriers that prevent them from accessing housing. They disproportionately live in core housing need, head single-parent households, and many face the impossible choice of paying the rent or feeding their children.

Meanwhile, Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people are experiencing some of the most egregious right to housing violations across Canada. They are over-represented in almost all aspects of housing insecurity, homelessness, and poverty, and are disproportionately impacted by violence and trauma linked to precarious living situations.

The failure to end homelessness is a human rights issue, and through the submissions to the Advocate, women and gender-diverse people are speaking out to claim their rights. This review panel will dig in to why, despite countless recommendations and commitments, homelessness among women and gender-diverse people, particularly those who are Indigenous, continues to worsen.

Central to the review panel is public participation, particularly for communities directly affected by systemic issues. In particular, the review panel is an opportunity to hear from Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender diverse people, as well as those who are members of disadvantaged groups. It is critical that rights holders be engaged and see themselves in the review panel process, as well as contribute the solutions they would like to see.

The review panel – made of up of three members of the National Housing Council – will issue a report with recommended actions that the government of Canada should take to address the failure to eliminate homelessness amongst women and gender-diverse people and advance the right to housing in Canada.

## Quotes

“Countless recommendations have been made on how Canada can do better at providing safe and affordable housing for women and gender-diverse people. Yet we continue to fail at upholding this basic right. We must listen to those who are affected and take real action to change this shameful reality.”

– Marie-Josée Houle, Federal Housing Advocate

“Homelessness among women and gender-diverse people has become so severe that we now recognize it as one of the most pressing human rights issues in Canada. We must make change – immediately – and this human rights review will hold governments accountable for doing so.”

– Kaitlin Schwan, Executive Director, Women’s National Housing & Homelessness Network

“It is unacceptable that anyone in Canada is homeless or inadequately housed, given the land's enormous size and resources. Indigenous women and gender-diverse people being homeless or precariously housed is a violation of our human rights and our rights as Indigenous Peoples. We believe a review panel is necessary to hold the Canadian state accountable for these human rights violations, and to demand that it end the violence, exclusion and colonialism perpetuated by current housing policy.”

– Marie McGregor Pitawanakwat, Co-Chair, National Indigenous Housing Network

## Background

- This issue was brought forward in several submissions to the Advocate, including by the Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network and the National Indigenous Housing Network.

These networks represent rights holders, organizations and individuals across Canada, and their submissions were developed with the input of people with lived experience of homelessness and inadequate housing. They are a voice for human rights claimants who are demanding that their rights be upheld.

Their submissions, and the review panel, will serve to amplify the voices and testimony of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and gender-diverse people facing homelessness.

- Review panels are a participatory, human rights-based, access to justice mechanism established by the National Housing Strategy Act, which recognized housing as a human right in domestic law for the first time. Instead of hearing individual complaints about human rights violations, review panels hold hearings on systemic housing issues.

The review panel will hold a hearing that allows for participation and meaningful engagement of women, gender-diverse and Two-Spirit people who have experienced homelessness and inadequate housing. The review panel will also consult individuals and organizations with expertise on housing and human rights.

- The findings and recommendations of the review panel will be set out in a report to the Minister, and include the review panel's findings on the issue and recommendations to address it. The Minister must respond to the report within 120 days and table that response in the House of Commons and the Senate.
- Further details about the review panel's launch and opportunities to participate will be provided by the National Housing Council.

## Related links

- [News release – Claiming Our Right to Housing: Historic Human Rights Review Begins! – Women's National Housing & Homelessness Network and National Indigenous Housing Network](#)
- [Human rights claims – Women's National Housing & Homelessness Network and National Indigenous Housing Network](#)

## Stay connected

Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

## Media contacts

Office of the Federal Housing Advocate  
[613-943-9118](tel:613-943-9118)  
[communications@chrc-ccdp.gc.ca](mailto:communications@chrc-ccdp.gc.ca)

Women's National Housing & Homelessness Network  
Kaitlin Schwan, Executive Director  
[promise@womenshomelessness.ca](mailto:promise@womenshomelessness.ca)