

## WOMEN, INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, & HOMELESSNESS

40%

of people in Canada experiencing visible homelessness – living in shelters or rough sleeping – are women<sup>1</sup>

25%

of those women cited domestic abuse as a factor leading to their most recent housing loss<sup>2</sup>

While the circumstances around individuals seeking shelter are complex and varied, we know that oppressive structures, such as economic injustice, racism, and sexism, play a key role. These systemic forces interact to shape the experiences of women living with intimate partner violence (IPV) and housing issues. The narratives in this newsletter come from the courageous women who shared their stories with advocates and researchers that work to bring greater understanding and attention to this serious social issue.

### This newsletter will:

- Explain the connections between IPV and homelessness
- Identify barriers to safe, secure, accessible, and affordable housing when fleeing violence
- Discuss the impacts of IPV and housing issues through women's narratives
- Highlight the resilience of women

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### DEFINITIONS

#### INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

includes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. IPV is predominantly perpetuated by men and against women.

#### WOMEN

Women have diverse and intersecting social identities depending on their age, social class, gender identity, sexual identity, race, culture, Indigeneity, physical and mental abilities, and other features.<sup>3</sup> Women self-identify and express their gender and sexuality in a variety of ways. Our organization and this newsletter are inclusive of trans, gender expansive, and two-spirit women.

#### HOMELESSNESS

refers to “the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability of acquiring it.”<sup>4</sup>

# BRINGING INTERSECTIONALITY TO THE ISSUE

Intersectionality is a useful framework for examining how forms of privilege and disadvantage shape women's experiences of violence and homelessness, and their access to resources and supports.

Fundamental to this framework is understanding social location, including that individuals belong to various groups or communities. Kimberlé Crenshaw describes how groups or communities intersect to influence an individual's social location and the way one experiences the world.<sup>5</sup> For instance, social class, gender, sexual identification, race, culture, disability, economic status, education, religion, age, immigration status, and occupation all contribute to social location.

An individual may face oppression based on their social location. Oppression produces inequality, exclusion, fear, and violence. It is created and reinforced through harmful social norms, practices, and institutions.

An intersectional approach tells us that the experiences of various groups of women will differ based on factors such as race, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc. These intersecting social locations and associated oppressions shape experiences of violence, homelessness, support seeking, and responses from services.



Click above image for video on intersectionality with subtitles.

We start with this core newsletter to set the stage and highlight the main links between homelessness and violence. Next will be a newsletter developed by women with lived experience so as to center their knowledge and highlight their narratives.

Four additional newsletters complete the series. Each is a piece of intersectional work and thought that focuses on groups often overlooked or given minimal attention, and who experience additional barriers when fleeing violence and seeking safe, secure, accessible, and affordable housing:

- Indigenous Women
- LGBTQ2S Youth
- Immigrant and Refugee Women
- Women Living with Disabilities and Deaf Women

## UPCOMING NEWSLETTERS

- Women's Voices**
- LGBTIQ2S Youth, Homelessness, and Violence** with Dr. Alex Abramovich (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)
- Indigenous Women, Homelessness, and Violence** with the Ontario Native Women's Association
- Immigrant and Refugee Women, Homelessness, and Violence** with the Ontario Council Of Agencies Serving Immigrants
- Women Living with Disabilities and Deaf Women, Homelessness, and Violence** with the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada

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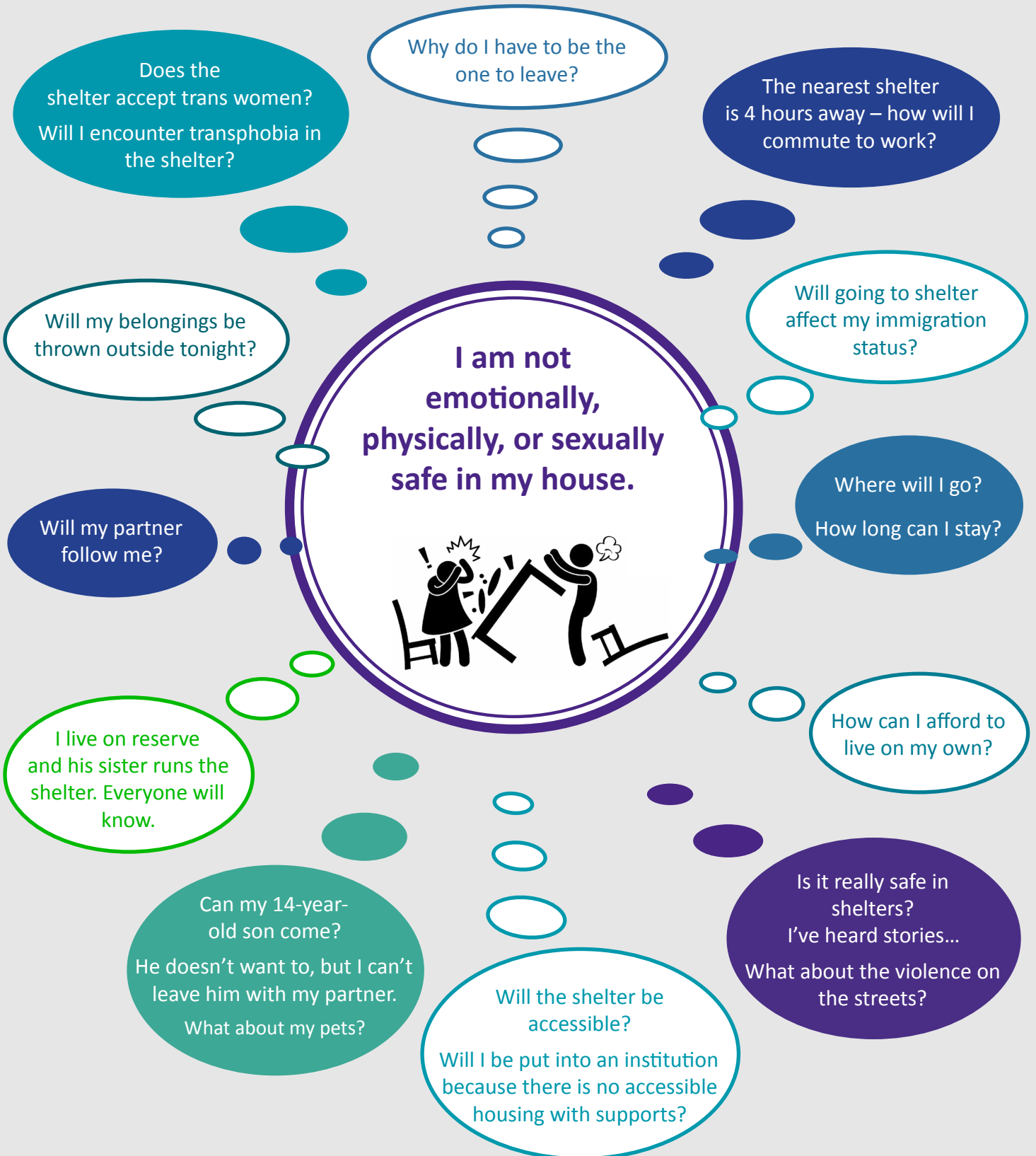


**CLICK HERE TO READ OUR NEWSLETTER ON INTERSECTIONALITY.**



# HOUSING IS ALWAYS AN ISSUE WHEN A WOMAN IS NOT SAFE IN HER HOME

These are some thoughts and considerations women have when fleeing violence:



# WHAT CAN A HOUSING ISSUE LOOK LIKE FOR A WOMAN?

Many women do not experience just one form of housing issue. Rather, the instability of their housing is felt in different ways depending on a multitude of factors including violence, race, immigration status, disability, and geographic location.



## HER HOUSING DIFFICULTIES MAY BE VISIBLE

**Her belongings are thrown outside by her partner and she sleeps in a tent.**

*"I lived under the bridge for three months... under the bridge, no blankets, having to sleep on rock and eat wherever you could, having to panhandle. Going to different churches, where you line up to be the first one to eat, for a good shower. There are lice in your hair."<sup>6</sup>*

**She stays in an emergency shelter with men and women for 2 days.**

**She lives in domestic violence transitional housing for 3 months.**



## OR IT MAY BE HIDDEN

**She loses her house while in hospital for physical abuse from her partner, and has nowhere to go once discharged.**

**She sleeps on a couch in an already overcrowded home.**

*"I stayed with one friend but she was such a drug addict that I would rather be on the street. It was horrible. It was crack cocaine and the house was dirty... I slept on a dirty mattress, a dirty pillow. I was scared that some guy was gonna come in my room; the door was kicked off."<sup>7</sup>*

**She engages in survival sex in exchange for a roof over her head.**



## EVEN WHEN SHE HAS HOUSING, IT MAY BE UNAFFORDABLE, INACCESSIBLE, & UNSAFE

**She may only be able to afford rent by paying it over bills, food, and other needs (e.g. hygiene products).**

**The house is not accessible to her as she is living with a physical disability.**

*"I was living in a big house but without peace because I was abused. Even the kids were abused. Mentally. Physically. Sexually. Every which way. And it didn't matter what size of house it is. It's the condition of living."<sup>8</sup>*

**She is unsafe in her house due to threats of violence and confinement by her partner.**

## A POEM OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

### **My Home**

*The lights that shine so bright at night  
Home on the streets just isn't right  
The sound of the cars as they pass by  
Try to relax, at least I try  
Sleeping in doorways, no way to live*

*To have a home what I wouldn't give  
Those cold winter nights that lie ahead  
Life on the streets is what I dread  
People pass by like they just don't care  
Life for some just isn't fair  
A home is a necessity would you not agree  
To have respect and dignity*

***Maggie Traynor***

**Women's Voices newsletter coming soon!**

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# WHAT BARRIERS TO SAFE, SECURE, ACCESSIBLE, AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING EXIST FOR WOMEN FLEEING VIOLENCE?

**Poverty** reduces options for a woman experiencing violence and may stem from her partner withholding wages, work absences due to abuse, low wages, precarious employment, and a lack of services and programs assisting women fleeing violence.<sup>9</sup>

*"I remember I would have to change my PIN number all the time because he would make me give him my PIN number and he would take all the money out of the account."<sup>10</sup>*

**Shortage of affordable housing** means that the housing that is available costs more than what is considered reasonable for most people. In Canada, housing that takes less than 30% of one's pay is considered affordable. When housing costs are more than that, the risk of homelessness increases, especially for women fleeing violence.



1 in 4 households spend more than what is considered affordable on housing<sup>11</sup>



4 out of 10 renters spend more than what is affordable<sup>12</sup>

**Discrimination** affects women's ability to obtain housing and employment. For instance, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation has found that landlords discriminate against women fleeing IPV, thus making their housing search even more difficult and limited.<sup>13</sup>

Transgender youth, in particular trans women of colour, face some of the highest levels of discrimination when seeking housing and shelter.<sup>14</sup>

10x

"Landlords were almost 10 times less likely to indicate that a rental unit was available to a caller staying at a shelter for battered women."<sup>15</sup>

## CHANGING NARRATIVES

Narratives around women fleeing violence and experiencing homelessness present homelessness as the fault of women, with a focus on weakness and damage, rather than recognizing the broader systemic conditions that create barriers for women to obtain and secure long-term housing.

**Lack of shelters** for transitioning from an abusive house to a safe, secure, affordable, and accessible home can result in women being turned away from shelters. When a woman cannot stay in shelter, she may sleep in her car or on the streets. If the shelter is not accessible, a woman living with a disability may be sent to the local hospital or a long-term care facility if there are no other options.

Lack of accessible shelters is felt especially by women fleeing violence in rural, remote, and Northern communities.<sup>18</sup>



**On April 16th, 2014: 338 women and 201 children were turned away from women's shelters.<sup>16</sup>**

**Out of those turned away, 56% were due to the shelter being full.<sup>17</sup>**

**Impacts of abuse and other stressors** compromise a woman's search for housing when leaving violence. Finding housing is stressful at the best of times. However, women experiencing IPV are trying to find housing while navigating the obstacles and risks generated by an abusive partner, such as threats against her and her children, stalking, withholding of money, and destruction of property.

*"I had three places and my partner would find out. He'd promise that he would smarten up and then the same thing. I got evicted. I'd get another place; he'd try to kick the door down. I got evicted. The last time he started fighting me. I got evicted. I got tired of forever moving and buying stuff; everything gets thrown out or he sells it."<sup>19</sup>*

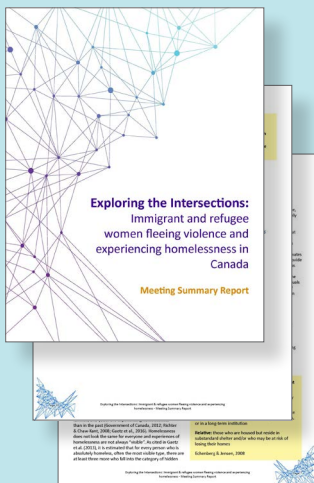
**Compounded barriers** are experienced by some groups of women who face oppression related to race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, social class, etc. A woman who is discriminated against due to her race, disability, sex, or gender has additional difficulties in securing housing and employment.<sup>20</sup>

*Cheryl is an immigrant from China who lives with a disability. When Cheryl leaves her abusive partner she makes active efforts to find a new house, but she needs a house that meets accessibility standards and she has trouble finding one.*



*When Cheryl is able to find a house that meets her needs, the landlord asks her various questions around why an immigrant woman would leave her partner who sponsored them and about the financial assistance Cheryl receives through the Ontario Disability Support Program. The landlord decides not to rent to Cheryl.*

**CHERYL FACES ABLEISM, RACISM, SEXISM, AND CLASSISM.**



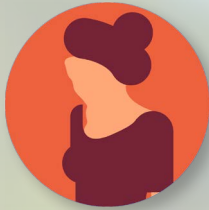
**Exploring the Intersections: Immigrant and refugee women fleeing violence and experiencing homelessness in Canada**

This 2017 report explores the intersections between immigrant and refugee women fleeing violence and experiencing homelessness, health/mental health and disability issues, and trauma in Canada.

# WOMEN'S NARRATIVES BRING IMPACTS TO LIFE

*Impacts of violence and homelessness can be visible, invisible, short-term, and long-term.*

*Supports are needed before, during, and after housing is secured to assist with healing and transitions.*



## Employment Difficulties

*"That's another pressure. I really would like to move out but I can't because before I don't find a job so it's kind of this circle. So I feel since a while a little bit depressed."<sup>21</sup>*

## Revictimization

*"Guys see you walking around with a black eye, then figure they can abuse you too. You've got to be very careful. I didn't want to go downtown cause I was scared I was gonna get raped or drugged. Or, some guys gonna beat the shit out of me and get me to be a prostitute. Because I'm on the street, I'm vulnerable."<sup>22</sup>*

## Substance Use

*"I became an alcoholic; I chose that life. I thought, maybe it's the way for me to get out. Now I know it's not. Alcohol does kill you. If not, somebody or something will kill you."<sup>23</sup>*

## Health Difficulties

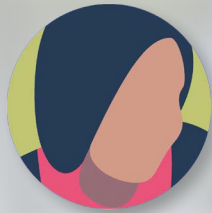
**Physical Health Issues**

**Mental Health Issues**

**Reproductive Health Issues**

*"It was stressful, having migraines all the time. I am the kind of person that only very rarely I get sick with a cold. And I was constantly getting sick with that. It felt like my immune system was just going down. Plus I was overeating, Oh, I had low self-esteem, where I felt that I couldn't accomplish anything."<sup>24</sup>*





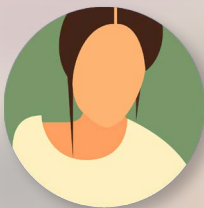
## Loss

*"I came back to my house. I had my kids' Christmas presents and bought a huge tree. The shelter donated some furniture and it was nice. He put gas all over and set my place on fire and stayed in the house. He was trying to kill himself."<sup>25</sup>*



## Compromised Parenting Potential

*"I had one kid. We ended up getting kicked out of an apartment because there was too much fighting and drinking on his [ex-partner] part. We ended up on the streets. It was pretty scary; I thought I was gonna lose my son. Three weeks we stayed from place to place and I knew that wasn't stable for my son."<sup>26</sup>*



## Lack of Psychological Safety

*"My current housing suits me very well, I like the independence, I like to have my own space, I feel comfortable here but I don't feel safe."<sup>27</sup>*



## Financial Problems

*"I was working and paying this girl a whole bunch of money, like for daycare and stuff and like, right, and so I'm like, yeah, I'm not making ends meet either even though I am in housing and my, my costs have gone up a bit, it's not market rent, but I was spending all this money on daycare... So I'm like, sure, come here for a month and then watch the kids for me, I'll give you a bit of money, and find a place to stay. And then I got the crap kicked out of me."<sup>28</sup>*



*"I'll never forget the day that I found out that we were evicted. I found the eviction notice in the glove box. He had been lying to me since October that he was paying the rent. We were in March. He got the eviction notice back, I believe it was end of February or early March. I got the letter like March 5 and they were going to be changing the locks with the sheriff on March 12. I was pregnant."<sup>29</sup>*

## WOMEN ARE RESILIENT



*Click above image for video of Rupri Kaur with subtitles.*

*“It takes a broken, twisted person to come searching for meaning between my legs, but it takes a whole, complete, perfectly designed person to survive it.*

*It takes monsters to steal souls, and fighters to reclaim them.*

*This home is what I came into the world with; was the first home, will be the last home.*

*You can’t take it.”*

- [Rupi Kaur in I’m Taking My Body Back](#)

Women have “the ability to succeed in the face of adversity” and to work with supports to heal and help those around them.<sup>30</sup>

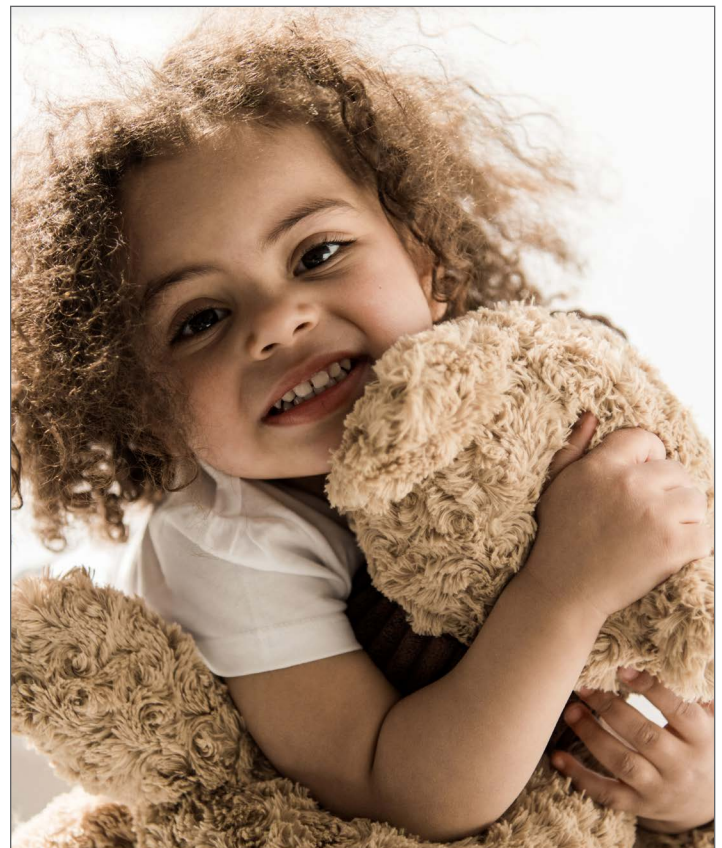
Resilience is not obtained in a single “a-ha” moment. Women experience extremely difficult times and setbacks. In spite of these adversities and even when things are at their worst, resilience exists and can be strengthened.

Resilience is in “the doing.”<sup>31</sup> It requires action, moving, and relating. At times, it will require experimentation so that a woman’s individual path to strengthened resilience can be found. Some possible routes include mentoring, peer support, safe spaces, culture, religion, and personal support networks. Women benefit when informal and formal supports recognize a woman’s potential and work with her to build on her strengths, like her passion for dance or her sharing through writing.

## THE RESILIENCE OF MOTHERS

Mothers experiencing homelessness continually note the importance of their children in their efforts to move forward. They want better lives for their children and use their strength to keep their children safe. The hopes and dreams of mothers continually include a healthy environment where their children are doing well in school and spending time with family.

*“I don’t know... my life has been like a real struggle but I’ve come to realize it’s going to take a lot more than the situations that I’ve come through to stop me from doing what I need to do to provide for my family.”<sup>32</sup>*



# THE NEED TO CREATE SAFE HOMES

**Housing First** is a promising model in the field of homelessness within Canada. It works to move those experiencing housing issues directly into their own independent house or apartment, with subsequent supports. This approach offers the most promise when adapted to the needs of particular groups and communities. Two examples of such adaptations include:



**Nikkh Housing First, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society** – A program based out of Homeward Trust in Edmonton that addresses Indigenous homelessness. It considers how to integrate Indigenous culture into

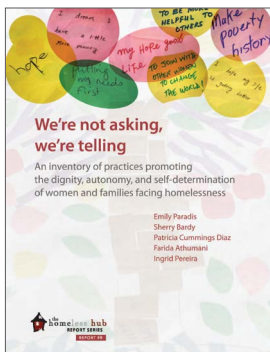
Housing First, including being representative of diverse Indigenous teachings, maintaining connections to local Indigenous groups, and having an inclusive governance structure.



**The Vivian** – A Housing First program from RainCity Housing and Support Society in Vancouver.

The Vivian is by women, and for women. It employs a harm reduction approach and its first goal is to provide a safe house in order to prevent violence while living on the streets.<sup>33</sup>

# LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE



**We're not asking, we're telling: An inventory of practices promoting the dignity, autonomy, and self-determination of women and families facing homeless**

provides a model to center the lived experiences of women through their use of participatory action research and a human rights approach.<sup>35</sup>



**All Our Sisters**  
**Toutes Nos Soeurs**

A groundbreaking example of inclusion and advocacy is **All Our Sisters**, a network focused on improving women's access to safe, secure, and affordable housing. They continually

embody the best principles of inclusion, as exemplified by their 2014 conference sponsoring 1/5 participants to share their lived experience.<sup>36</sup>



## A MUST READ!

Women's Shelters Canada created a list of 11 recommendations for the fall 2017 National Housing Strategy entitled **Housing, Homelessness, & Violence Against Women (VAW)**.

Their work is grounded in an intersectional gender-based analysis and was developed through a cross-sectoral roundtable on housing, homelessness, and VAW. Their recommendations include pieces on the national housing fund, investments in affordable housing, and a homelessness partnering strategy.<sup>37</sup>

### Housing, Homelessness, & Violence Against Women

**Women's Invisible Homelessness**  
We need a National Housing Strategy that recognizes the link between the lack of affordable and safe housing, homelessness, and violence against women. Women often do not show up in data collected on the homeless and as a result are left out of policy and programming to address homelessness. Additionally, women may not access the same services as homeless men because they fear for their safety in mixed-gender shelters; some homeless shelters will not take in women fleeing violence, often homeless shelters do not have the staff or resources to support survivors of domestic violence, and single mothers fleeing violence may be reluctant to seek help from social services and shelters for fear that child welfare authorities may apprehend their children.

**Recommendations to the National Housing Strategy**

- 1 Incorporate an intersectional human rights/gender approach that recognizes the links between 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.
- 2 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 Create an Indigenous Housing Strategy that responds to the specific needs of Indigenous women and their families both on and off reserves, including co-operative housing and a provision that services are integrated at the Indigenous-led, child care, space for ceremony, collective kitchens, trauma-informed design.
- 4 Significantly increase the supply of social housing units and require that a minimum of 20% 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.
- 5 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.

National Housing Fund	Investment in Affordable Housing	Homelessness Partnering Strategy
8 Re-establish the shelter enhancement fund and dedicate \$200 million per year to the National Housing Fund for shelters and additional funds for a continuum of housing for gender-based violence survivors.	9 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 support for housing survivors.	10 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.
7 Ensure that the shelter enhancement fund reflects the specific needs of VAW shelters, is distributed equitably, and accounts for regional differences and existing resources, and builds to bring access to shelters to a national standard.	11 Support a continuum of housing beyond Housing First, including dedicated funding for permanent, temporary, and transitional housing provided by VAW services (including second stage transitional housing) that serves survivors of violence and women coping with mental health and addiction.	11 Support a continuum of housing beyond Housing First, including dedicated funding for permanent, temporary, and transitional housing provided by VAW services (including second stage transitional housing) that serves survivors of violence and women coping with mental health and addiction.
6 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.		

Infographic created by Women's Shelters Canada and Homelessness Partners Canada  
http://endvaw.ca/ July 2017

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## ISBN:

978-1-988412-14-6

For full reference list visit:

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