

# HOUSING



Native Women's  
Association of Canada

L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

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## HOUSING FOR FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, AND MÉTIS WOMEN

- Indigenous women are more at risk of becoming homeless due to the lack of community supports both on reserve and in urban centers.<sup>1</sup>
- The National Housing Strategy (NHS) puts forward that housing is a *human right*.<sup>2</sup>
- Providing access to Indigenous- focused, women-centered, trauma-informed services community supports, and care solutions allows violence prevention in coordination with housing programs to create an inclusive, holistic approach to addressing homelessness. This allows Indigenous women to access necessary services in an Indigenous

“Just as homelessness is multi-faceted so must be any response to addressing this as a social issue. A lack of comprehensive social policy that deals with the intersections between economics, social welfare, health care, justice, education, employment and housing increase the challenges associated with addressing homelessness.”<sup>3</sup>



## APPROACHING HOMELESSNESS

- Community-centered approaches to maintain stable housing, as well as initiatives to prevent homelessness, should be implemented in an Indigenous stream. This allows for holistic community supports for Indigenous women and girls in maintaining safe, reliable housing.
- Lived experience should be at the forefront of the National Housing Strategy and Homelessness Partnering Strategy, allowing Indigenous women and girls to pass on first voice knowledge and perspectives to promote safe, stable housing and prevent homelessness.
- Violence against women (VAW) shelters must be attuned to the specific needs and risks of homelessness and precarious housing for Indigenous women who access their services, working towards ensuring more safe spaces within their facilities to minimize the potential for systemic harm to Indigenous women.
- Housing in the North has unique and varying factors that place Indigenous women and girls in those communities at greater risk of losing housing and having to rely on VAW shelters. These conditions, such as the cost of constructing and maintaining infrastructure,<sup>4</sup> put women in the North at greater risk of becoming homeless and experiencing poverty.

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## Risk Factors for Homelessness for Indigenous Women<sup>5</sup>

- Gender-based, family, and intimate partner violence
- High unemployment and unaffordable housing
- Poverty, economic insecurity, and financial dependence
- Lack of culturally-appropriate VAW shelters
- Discrimination from landlords and service providers
- Impacts of colonization and residential schools
- Shortage of trauma-informed mental health and addiction services
- Social exclusion and isolation
- Criminalization

### Works Cited

- 1 YWCA Canada. (2016). *Counting women and girls into the national housing strategy*. Retrieved from: <http://ywcacanada.ca/data/documents/00000530.pdf>.
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- 3 Mclean, L. (2015). Beyond ending homelessness: An alternative perspective. Retrieved from: <https://www.calgarydropin.ca/cms/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/beyond-ending-homelessness.pdf>
- 4 See footnote 2.
- 5 Duchene, A. (2015). *Women and homelessness in Canada*. Retrieved from: <https://www.calgarydropin.ca/cms/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/beyond-ending-homelessness.pdf>
- 6 Statistics Canada. (2017). *Women and the criminal justice system*. Ottawa, ON: Minister responsible for Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11416-eng.htm>.
- 7 Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto. (2015). *Securing housing options for women*. Retrieved from: <https://www.efrytoronto.org/userfiles/files/SHOS%20Paper.pdf>
- 8 See footnote 1.

## Making the Connection to VAW

Indigenous women and girls experience violent victimization at twice the rate of non-Indigenous women. They also experience spousal violence at three times the rate of non-Indigenous women and experience more severe forms of abuse.<sup>6</sup> For marginalized and victimized women, housing and safety from violence are inseparable and efforts to address either must recognize their interconnectedness.

Establishing housing as a basic social support gives abused women and their children an alternative to VAW and homeless shelters. Despite the aims and intentions of VAW shelters, many Indigenous women have experienced discrimination, exploitation, and violence in accessing them. Other women may also be denied shelter space or feel excluded on the basis of their substance use or engagement in sex work.<sup>7</sup>

VAW shelters were not intended as a long-term solution for victims of gender-based and family violence but women may live for years in emergency shelters because there is no affordable housing available.<sup>8</sup> In order to support women leaving abusive situations, access to safe, affordable housing is essential.



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