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# SHELTER PULSE

## Environmental Scan



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Overview of WAGE Canada

This project is funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada's Feminist Response and Recovery Fund. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Women and Gender Equality Canada works to advance equality for sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression by including people of all genders, including women, in Canada's economic, social, and political life.

In Spring 2021, WAGE Canada released a Call for Proposals to support a feminist response and recovery from the current impacts of COVID-19, particularly for underrepresented women, through systemic change projects across the Women's Program's three priority areas. The purpose of the Women's Program is to address or remove systemic barriers impeding the progress and advancement of women, in all their diversity, in the following areas:

- Encouraging women and girls in leadership and decision-making positions
- Improving women's and girls' economic security and prosperity
- Ending gender-based violence



Women and Gender  
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada

## Overview of MRWSA

Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association (MRWSA) was incorporated in 1990 and has since provided services to women and children in immediate need of safety and security due to domestic/family violence.

### MRWSA's Mission:

to build on our abilities to meet individual, family, and the changing needs of those impacted by gender-based violence by providing trauma-informed services, increase community engagement, and championing the voices of all survivors by creating safe spaces for help, hope and healing.

In September 2019, The Mountain Rose Center opened. This new location provides a 21-bed emergency shelter, 5 Second Stage/Transitional Apartments, an administrative office, and various Community Support Services.



## Overview of Rural Development Network

The Rural Development Network (RDN) works to equip communities with tools, information, and expertise needed to jumpstart projects with the goal of amplifying the collective voice of rural communities and improving the quality of life for rural Canadians.

At RDN, our primary initiatives are dedicated to supporting communities in addressing their needs for things like affordable housing through our Sustainable Housing Initiative, preventing and ending homelessness through our unique homelessness estimation process, attracting and supporting newcomers through our Rural Immigration program, developing agri-food initiatives, and revitalizing communities through our Rural Revitalization program. Our Health & Wellness team works alongside communities to develop responses in the areas of substance misuse, developing dementia friendly communities, mental health, and developing safer and healthier communities all through the lens of Reconciliation. In addition, RDN is the Community Entity through the Federal Government for Reaching Home funding for rural, remote and Indigenous communities in Alberta.

In addition to the Shelter Pulse project, RDN and MRWSA partnered on methodologies to estimate homelessness. This research resulted in the creation of RDN's award-winning [Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness](#).



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# TERMS & DEFINITIONS<sup>1</sup>

**Best Practices<sup>2</sup>** – Have been proven, through consistent published evaluations, to meet the highest formal standards for effectiveness.

**Domestic Violence (DV)** – Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour used by one person to gain power and control over another with whom they have or have had an intimate relationship. It may include physical violence, sexual, emotional and psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, stalking, and use of electronic devices to harass and control. Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of age, race, religion, sexual orientation, economic status or educational background. The individual engaging in abuse may be a current or former spouse or intimate partner or a family member.

**Family Violence (FV)** – Family violence is considered to be any form of abuse, mistreatment or neglect that a child or adult experiences from a family member, or from someone with whom they have an intimate relationship. Family violence can be considered a gender-based crime as most victims are women and girls.

1. Unless otherwise noted, all definitions are from the Learning Network. (n.d.) "Gender-Based Violence Terminology." London, ON: Western University Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.

2. Practice Exchange Project. (2016.) "The Practice Implementation Manual: A Guide for Sharing Promising Practices in VAW Transition Houses and Shelters." Ottawa, ON: Canadian Network of Women's Shelters and Transition Houses.

**Gender Based Violence (GBV)** - Gender-based violence is a term that recognizes that violence occurs within the context of women's and girl's subordinate status in society and serves to maintain this unequal balance of power. Gender-based violence is sometimes used interchangeably with "violence against women" although the latter is a more limited concept. While gender-based violence can happen to anyone, anywhere, some women and girls are particularly vulnerable - for instance, young girls and older women, women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex, migrants and refugees, Indigenous women and ethnic minorities, or women and girls living with HIV and disabilities, and those living through humanitarian crises. The existence and impact of gender-based violence are therefore often interconnected with other systems of inequality and/or vulnerability.

**Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility (IDEA)** - Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility policies are intended to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for people of less-privileged identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, class, religion, ability etc. The main goal of IDEA work is to restore power to people who have historically been separated from it.



**Innovative Practices<sup>3</sup>** - Apply emerging approaches and theories in real-life settings.

**Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)** - Intimate partner violence refers to physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse and can also be called dating violence between couples who are not married.

**Northern<sup>4</sup>** - A community or geographic location that is designated by the provincial government as being the Northern part of the provinces. All the Canadian territories are considered Northern.

**Promising Practices<sup>5</sup>** - Have shown effectiveness through more informal methods of assessment.

**Reconciliation** - Reconciliation policies are related to an organization's relationship with Indigenous Peoples including service users, partners and community. Particularly, to recognize, understand and address the historical and ongoing impact of colonization within and through your services. This should include addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations and/or MMIWG Commission Calls for Justice that are relevant to your organization.

3. Practice Exchange Project. (2016.)

4. Nonomura, R. & Baker, L. (2021).

5. Practice Exchange Project. (2016.)

**Remote<sup>6</sup>** - A community or geographic location that is not accessible by road year-round.

**Rural<sup>7</sup>** - A community or geographic location with low population density and a population less than 10,000.

**Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)<sup>8</sup>** - Trauma-Informed Care is an approach in the human service field that assumes that an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma, recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role trauma may play in an individual's life. Trauma-Informed Care requires a system to make a paradigm shift from asking, "What is wrong with this person?" to "What has happened to this person? The intention of Trauma-Informed Care is not to treat symptoms or issues related to sexual, physical or emotional abuse or any other form of trauma but rather to provide support services in a way that is accessible and appropriate to those who may have experienced trauma. Rather than providing a set of practices and procedures, the principles can be interpreted and applied in ways that are appropriate for a specific type of service setting. The Five Guiding Principles are: safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness and empowerment.

6. Nonomura, R. & Baker, L. (2021).

7. Nonomura, R. & Baker, L. (2021). Gender-Based Violence in Rural, Remote & Northern Communities. Learning Network Issue 35. London, Ontario: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children.

8. Institute on Trauma Informed Care. (2015). "What is Trauma-Informed Care." Buffalo, NY: Buffalo Center for Social Research, University of Buffalo.

**Trauma and Violence Informed Approaches (TVIA)** - Trauma- and violence-informed approaches expand the concept of trauma-informed care to emphasize the intersecting impacts of systemic and interpersonal violence and structural inequities on a person's life. This shift acknowledges both historical and ongoing interpersonal violence and their traumatic impacts and helps to emphasize a person's experiences of past and current violence so that problems are not seen as residing only in their psychological state but also in social circumstances. The specification of violence in TVI approaches draws direct attention to the broader structural and social conditions, as well as forms of ongoing and/or "institutional violence," and the need for service providers to conduct their work in full recognition of these contexts.

**Violence Against Women (VAW)** - any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

# BACKGROUND

## Introduction

Violence is a significant factor impacting the health and well-being of women living in rural, remote and Northern communities in Canada. Their experiences of violence are more frequent and severe and, yet, access to health and social services tends to be more limited. Women's shelters have come to play an integral role responding to local needs and priorities, particularly in communities with few or no alternatives for supports. However, a legacy of inadequate funding for women-serving organizations and rural communities have contributed to barriers that limit women's shelters' ability to deliver services that reflect the values, principles, and standards that are widely accepted throughout Canada's sheltering movement.

Women's shelters have collaborated for decades to advance their sector's overall capacity through knowledge and practice exchange. Shelter Pulse is a recent example of this sector's responding collectively to a capacity issue in order to advance service delivery: up-to-date organizational policies that can guide shelter leaders and their staff to implement services that align with the values, principles, and practices that are considered essential to supporting women affected by violence effectively.

Organizational policies are influential tools to precipitate changes to practice. Policies that are developed in rural settings are more likely to achieve their intended results when they are centered around the needs, assets, priorities, expertise, etc. of a specific place. This project recognizes that many rural women's shelters are facing insurmountable barriers to implementing effective practices that are beyond their control. Many also

have community-level assets and opportunities that can enhance their services to women.

This environmental scan is an overview of historical, individual, organizational, and external factors that may impact the content, design, and delivery of Shelter Pulse. Considerations for these factors and the ways in which they interact will inform an organizational policy tool that balances fidelity to the essential elements of shelter practice with adaptability to a range of service settings for hundreds of women's shelters in as many geographically and culturally distinct communities.

## **A Brief Overview of Women's Shelters in Rural Canada**

Women's shelters in Canada emerged out of a mostly grassroots second-wave feminist movement beginning in the 1970's to provide a place for women and children to find safety and consider their futures free of violence (Goodhand, 2017). Today, more than 600 organizations have been established across just as many culturally and geographically diverse communities across the country. And nearly half of these organizations and beds can be found in communities with a population less than 10,000 (Statistics Canada, 2018). Hundreds more operate in mid-sized communities (10,000–50,000 residents) in remote and/or Northern parts of Canada. In addition to providing a safe place to stay, these organizations have evolved to offer other services through their programming, including:

- Safe homes
- Second-stage housing
- Outreach
- Individual or group counselling
- Supports for children accompanying women to shelter
- Advocacy and system/service navigation support

- Counselling for men
- Prevention and public awareness

The suite of services delivered by each shelter is a reflection of their unique history and local needs, priorities, assets, and barriers, as are the approaches they emphasize in their delivery.

## **FOUNDATIONAL VALUES OF SHELTER PRACTICE**

While the women's sheltering movement is by no means standardized, it has developed upheld broad principles and theoretical frameworks to guide its implementation across varying contexts. The sector has grown and become more connected over time and, today, endeavours to reflect the diversity of women's shelters in its values. The following five lenses have become widely accepted as integral to shelter practice:

Feminism has a rich and complicated history and entails different meanings and applications for many people. The influential feminist bell hooks offers the following way of thinking about this term:

*"Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism<sup>9</sup>, sexist exploitation, and oppression...I liked this definition because it did not imply that men were the enemy. By naming sexism as the problem it went directly to the heart of the matter. Practically, it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult. It is also broad enough to include an understanding of systemic institutionalized sexism. As a definition it is open-ended. To understand feminism it implies one has to necessarily understand sexism."*

- Hooks, 2000.

9. Sexism stems from a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, erroneous assumptions and actions based upon an ideology of inherent superiority of one gender over another and may be evident within organizational or institutional structures or programs, as well as within individual thought or behaviour patterns. Sexism is any act or institutional practice, backed by institutional power which subordinates people because of gender. While, in principle, sexism may be practiced by either gender, most of our societal institutions are still the domain of men and usually the impact of sexism is experienced by women. (Learning Network, n.d.)

In the context of shelter work, feminism is about understanding that sexism is the core foundation that enables and perpetuates violence against women and gender-based violence (VAW/GBV), and that ending VAW/GBV means ending sexism (Learning Network, n.d.).

**Intersectionality** is a concept and analytic framework coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and further developed by numerous scholars, advocates, and activists. Increasingly, shelters have recognized that, “people of intersecting identities are affected by oppression in different ways and therefore have unique experiences of IPV,” and that by disregarding intersectionality, we risk “excluding survivors of IPV who exist at points of intersection between inequalities.” (Baker et al, 2015.) In the shelter sector intersectionality has become a, “framework for examining how forms of privilege and disadvantage shape women’s experiences of violence and their access to resources and supports” (Baker et al, 2017).

**Gendered Analysis** is a process that “reveals the connections between gender relations and the problem to be solved.” (Ochola et al, 2010. p.236) It is fundamentally connected to shelter’s feminist focus on sexism as a root of inequality that enables VAW/GBV. A gendered analysis process should:

- Highlight the fact that gender relations are an essential influence on the solution to a problem.
- Reveal what the gendered impacts of a proposed solution are likely to be.
- Surface alternate courses of action.

For shelter organizations in Canada, gender analysis may include using the Gender-Based Analysis Plus tool created by the Government of Canada.

**Reconciliation and Indigenous Lens** are related to the growing recognition, understanding and attempts to address the historical and ongoing impact of colonization within and through women's shelter services. Individual organizations and the sector as a whole are seeking to improve their relationships with Indigenous Peoples including service users, partner organizations and communities. Reconciliation directly addresses the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, the MMIWG Commission Calls for Justice and/or the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. An Indigenous lens includes a broader range of activities or initiatives encompassing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations.

**Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA)** work is closely connected to intersectionality and recognition in the sector that the safety created by shelters often prioritized the needs of white, cis-gendered, heterosexual and able-bodied victims/survivors to the detriment of other identities. IDEA work is intended to create more welcoming and supportive environments for people of less-privileged identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, class, religion, ability etc. The main goal of IDEA work is to restore power to people who have historically been separated from it. As the empowerment of victims/survivors is also a primary goal of shelter work, IDEA provides a structure for continued development of safe spaces for everyone seeking safety from violence.

## **DECADES OF CORE FUNDING SCARCITY**

Financial precarity contributes to many barriers that limit women's shelters' ability to uphold these values in their organizations (Boucher L. & T. McWhinney, 2017). Shelters operating in rural communities have been impacted by funding scarcity on two fronts: government divestment from



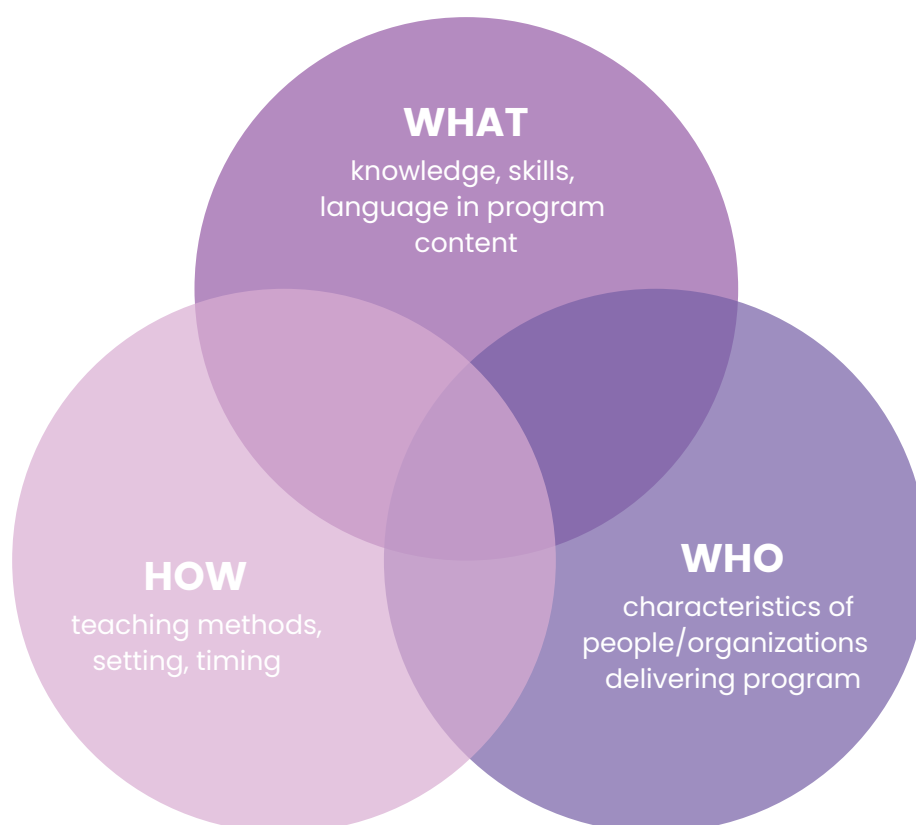
small population centres and the dismantling of the gender equality movement. Although the women-serving sector's role in overall social well-being and democracy was briefly recognized in 1970 by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, by the 1990s, liberal and conservative governments began defunding organizations and limiting their activism and political activities (Boucher L. & T. McWhinney, 2017). Consequently, women's shelters have entered today's era of resource-intensive grant- and project-based funding models favoured by most governments with a core funding deficit. Women-serving organizations are more likely than other non-profit groups to have:

- fewer resources available for service provision;
- reduced wages and benefits for employees;
- increased competition for limited funding, undermining efforts towards community building in the sector;
- lowered capacity to participate in ongoing training, skills development, and community engagement to better understand and meet the needs of their communities; and,
- increased reporting requirements for project funding, which has in many cases taken community organizations away from community and social justice work and placed limits on creativity and innovation (Boucher & McWhinney, 2017).

Women's shelters have developed a culture of collaboration to offset their individual financial limitations, building formal and informal relationships that leverage resources, knowledge, expertise, and political influence to build capacity as a collective (Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses, 2016). Many of these collaborations have responded directly to policy needs and/or provide valuable infrastructure to reach shelters and their workers to support organizational capacity building.

## PROMISING PRACTICES AND TACIT KNOWLEDGE

This legacy of resource scarcity has also informed the women-serving sector's focus on promising practices – interventions that have demonstrated measurable results in real-world settings – rather than best practices (Perkinson, L., Freire, K.E., & Stocking, M., 2017). Shelters – particularly those outside large population centres where most post-secondary institutions are based – have seldom been able to recreate essential elements associated with many best practices due to the costly nature of rigorous research, the smaller or variable scale of their service delivery, and the difficulty attracting and retaining specialized service providers, etc. (Moore, J.E. & S. Khan, 2021).



*Figure 1 : Who, what and how: examples of essential elements in violence prevention approaches (Perkinson et al., 2017) As the graphic shows, to maintain the fidelity of a best practice, a service provider needs the same who, what and how.*

Second, promising practices are better aligned with the sector's core values, which challenge hierarchical power structures and elevate the contextual expertise shelters and their workers hold about their communities (Perkinson et al., 2017). Knowledge about promising practices laterally has supported organizations' shelters in geographically and culturally distinct communities to find and adopt approaches that have demonstrated results in similar contexts and are, therefore, more likely to fit with their local needs and priorities (Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses, 2016).

This approach is promoted in the gender-based violence sector broadly and consistently with the shift away from evidence-based policies towards place-based approaches "that seeks to reveal, utilize and enhance the unique natural, physical, and human capacity endowments present within a particular location" (Markey, 2010). Governments and researchers are now recognizing that many "best practices" are not suited to rural, remote and Northern communities and, in some cases, contribute to negative outcomes for the people who live there. Recommended approaches to rural policy development targeting rural communities today emphasize multi-dimensional approaches that involve the engagement of a broad array of actors and multi-level governance mechanisms (OECD, 2020).

## Implications

While most women's shelters align to some extent with the values, principles and frameworks described above, the interpretation, prioritization and level of capacity to fully enact them varies greatly, as does how they are enacted through policy and practice. While Shelter Pulse has narrowed its target audience to rural, remote and Northern women's

shelters, there is still immense diversity that will need to be considered throughout development. See the Individual Factors and Organizational Factors sections for a deeper examination and analysis of that diversity.

As described above, a legacy of inadequate funding has shaped the structural and organizational realities affecting shelter operations and practices today, particularly in organizations outside large population centres whose fundraising capacity is limited. Further, this insufficient government investment in local people, organizations, and infrastructure limits shelters' ability to preserve essential elements of best practices (Moore et al., 2013). While decisions to adapt an intervention can improve its fit and effectiveness in local service contexts without impacting fidelity, many essential elements associated with best practices are embedded with such a bias towards urban service settings that they are impossible to implement in many rural, remote, and Northern communities in Canada.

*Table 1: Figures of Adaptation*

Area	Examples
Procedure	time, location, recruitment, deliver, staff
Dosage	number, length and timing of sessions or lessons
Content	adding or removing elements
Participants	targeting a different population
Cultural Relevance	language, definitions, metaphors, and imagery

Shelter Pulse is building a resource for a broad and diverse user base at a National level, as such it will be necessary to form some consensus on the baseline essential elements of each best practice with project stakeholders. At the same time, transparency about the limitations of the project and options for addressing them is important. Shelter Pulse can address urban bias through de-emphasising best practice and emphasising promising practice and/or emerging/innovative practices present in shelters or analogous projects.

Adaptation for the rural, remote and Northern contexts will necessarily be both cultural, contextual and logistical. Further, the final products of Shelter Pulse content should be adaptable by shelters that use it. Shelter Pulse may even consider providing support and guidance for adaptation embedded within the tool itself.

Factors that distinguish service delivery in rural, remote and Northern communities are complex and interrelated. Although we present them in distinct categories here they often overlap and combine to impact an organization's ability to deliver best practices. The factors sections below will attempt to highlight what is important that the Shelter Pulse Tool will need to respond to.

# FACTORS SHAPING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF AND RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Many principles that are considered foundational to today's women's sheltering movement have emerged out of research and practice in urban environments, which does not always resonate with the worldviews held in many rural, remote or Northern communities. Local knowledge and beliefs, skills and competencies, and social influences affect the behaviour and decisions of individuals receiving and delivering services and can point to necessary place-based adaptations.

## **VIOLENCE THAT IS MORE FREQUENT, SEVERE, AND TAKES MULTIPLE FORMS**

Women in rural, remote and Northern parts of Canada have more complex experiences with trauma. The frequency and severity of women's experiences of intimate partner violence is linked to health and well-being (Messing and Thaller 2015). In remote areas, most (95%) women who had experienced any IPV in the previous year said that it had happened multiple times compared to 17% of women in accessible areas.

Data has revealed the rate for domestic homicide in rural areas is as much as 3 times higher than urban areas across Canada, with the highest rates found in the territories and perpetrators are 2.5 times more likely to

use a firearm in domestic violence homicide (Jeffery et al., 2019). Few risk assessment tools have been specifically tailored for rural, remote and Northern populations and using generic tools may not be culturally relevant or capture uniquely rural risks (Moffitt & Fikowski, 2017). Some researchers have recommended that the following factors be assessed (in addition to general risk factors):

- Distance from the closest neighbour (Dudgeon & Evanson, 2014)
- Access to a telephone and transportation (Dudgeon & Evanson, 2014)
- Access to social support (Dudgeon & Evanson, 2014)
- Awareness of and willingness to use nearby services (Dudgeon & Evanson, 2014)
- Perpetrator misuse and abuse of firearms (Doherty & Hornosty, 2008)
- Perpetrator abuse of pets and farm animals (Doherty & Hornosty, 2008)

Many community-based anti-violence workers – most of whom are women – are likely to have been impacted by violence and trauma in their lives. In fact, for many it is these experiences that have led them to working in the anti-violence sector. In one Canadian study, close to 97% of transition house workers in remote, Northern BC communities had themselves experienced trauma (Bishop & Schmidt, 2011). Personal history of victimization and trauma place workers at increased risk of experiencing vicarious trauma depending on the severity and types of traumas they have experienced (Bishop & Schmidt, 2011; Choi, 2011; Dworkin et al., 2016; Killian, 2008; Klinik Community Health Centre, 2013; Wood et al., 2017).

## **WOMEN ARE AFFECTED BY MORE RISK FACTORS AND FEWER PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR VIOLENCE**

Canada has the largest rural-urban gap with respect to levels of education in the workforce. Rural communities are often focused on preventing their best and brightest youth from leaving for education or employment opportunities and invest little in the youth who choose to stay. Rural Canada contributes significantly to the national economy; however, few local residents have the education, skills, or training to meet Canada's rural labour market demands and improve their individual economic well-being (CRRF, 2015).

Economic well-being is an important indicator of gender equity. For individual women, it is characterized by their ability to consistently meet their basic needs, including food, clothing, housing, utilities, health care, transportation, education, and taxes. It is also characterized by the ability to make economic choices and feel a sense of security, satisfaction, and personal fulfillment with respect to finances and employment pursuits (U.S. Council on Social Work Education, 2016). Historically, women's economic well-being has been tied to familial and household relationships with men (Fox & Moyser, 2018). Women's choices to live a life free of violence are swayed by their ability – real or perceived – to be self-sufficient as an individual or lone-parent family (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2019).

Women in remote areas who had experienced IPV in the previous year were especially likely to report weak economic resiliency (48%), compared to women in accessible areas who had been victimized this way (24%). Factors associated with economic well-being – labour force participation, educational attainment, and after-tax income – are lower for women living in rural and remote communities. Further, resource extraction in rural and



remote Northern communities has seen the influx of highly paid temporary workforce which increases wage gaps and cost-of-living at an even higher rate than the rest of Canada (Quinless & Corntassel, 2019).

Violence and economic vulnerability are stressors that impact mental health and substance use, especially in women (Ogden et al., 2022). Women whose mental illness and substance use are left untreated are more vulnerable to further violence and worsening mental health outcomes over time (Baxter et al., 2018). Small population centres tend to have fewer specialized mental health and addictions services available to offer appropriate treatments. Accessibility barriers (lack of transportation, travel distances, etc.) also prevent many women from initiating or maintaining treatment when it is available.

### **CONCEPTIONS OF VIOLENCE AND GENDER NORMS THAT DO NOT FULLY ALIGN WITH THE SHELTERING MOVEMENT**

Traditional gender norms and stereotypical depictions of women in rural communities as “stoic” and “self-reliant” can create pressures to accept or withstand abuse. Women who internalize these gendered expectations may be more likely to minimize the severity of threats or violence they experience (Nonomura & Baker, 2021). Consequently, women may not seek out safety and support until a pattern of violence has escalated and the risks of femicide are greater (Jeffrey et al., 2019).

47% of Indigenous women in Canada live in rural areas, compared to 18% of the total female population. Shelters in non-urban communities serve large catchment areas and often respond to the needs of women affected by violence in nearby reserves. Likewise, Indigenous-led shelters are most often located in small/rural centres – 90% of shelters located in fly-in communities are predominantly Indigenous. (Maki, 2019.; Quinless &

Corntassel, 2019). While most shelters endeavour to create shelter environments that are culturally inclusive, many aspects of settler culture that have been foundational to the dominant sheltering movement continue to shape services and alienate Indigenous women. There is a need for shelter environments, use of language, practices, and more to resonate and promote safety for Indigenous women accessing and working in the gender-based violence sector and Indigenous-led advocacy and knowledge translation is being emphasized and mobilized across the sector as a result. The following Indigenous-centred policy development resources have been published in recent years:

Migrant agricultural workers in rural communities face an elevated risk of sexual violence. Fear of punitive action by employers, such as deportation, or not being re-hired the following year, are deterrents to women speaking out about their experiences. These barriers are often reinforced by language barriers, social stigma, racism, and isolation (Nonomura & Baker, 2021). Farming responsibilities, ownership of large farm animals, and generations of family farm ownership, can create challenges for women to stay safe, leave an abuser, or seek support (Jeffery et al., 2019). Seeking support may entail disclosing details to an individual or organization with a close connection to the individual committing violence (Nonomura & Baker, 2021).

### **LACK OF ANONYMITY AND SYSTEMS AVOIDANCE**

When the stereotype of the “stoic” and “self-reliant” rural woman is held by service providers, it may similarly lead to a lack of sensitivity or vigilance in addressing the needs and safety of clients. Stereotypes about the politics, values, and lifestyles of individuals in rural and remote communities can likewise obscure the actual needs and lived experiences of survivors (Nonomura & Baker, 2021). Other biases and stereotypes, particularly

about racialized women, newcomers, refugees and Indigenous women, can be heavily entrenched in rural communities and can impact effectiveness of services. Language barriers between service users and providers are exacerbated by the increased lack of access to translation services in these communities as well.

Lack of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality due to small populations contributes to dual relationships or familiarity between service users, service providers, law enforcement, health workers, justice workers and/or perpetrators (Jeffery et al, 2019). Becoming involved with criminal justice or child welfare systems is something that is often associated with accessing VAW shelter supports. Rural women may be reluctant to obtain protection orders because of lack of confidentiality, a fear of shame brought on the family, being charged fees, and slow or no response from the criminal justice system. In some Northern communities, circuit courts that process protection and restraining orders only visit 2 to 6 times a year (Quinless & Corntassel, 2019). Rural women also report more protection order violations than urban women (Logan, Shannon, & Walker, 2005; Logan, Stevenson, Evans, & Leukefeld, 2004).

## Implications

Community and interpersonal dynamics in small population centres have relational implications between staff and service users. The tight-knit bonds held by community members can provide a strong sense of belonging, identity, and connection. The familiarity that people have with other members of their community also affords a network of support if somebody is in need. However, as we see above, strong bonds in the community can also have the effect of silencing survivors in various ways. Similarly, service providers' personal histories of experiences of violence and trauma provides a connection point with service users as well as

valuable knowledge from lived experience. However, this can also pose challenges for defining reasonable standards of professionalism as well as impact staff well-being.

The need for harm reduction in rural shelters is evident. Women accessing them are affected by multiple risks of immediate harm and fewer resources and supports to mitigate them. Many factors contributing to risks in addition to violent victimization – namely untreated mental health and substance use – also influence their capability and motivation to engage with systems and community supports like shelters. Shelter staff must navigate these risks, often compromising their own sense of safety in the absence of sufficient community-level supports (see external factors for more information).

There are several considerations raised by the characteristics of both service users and providers that can inform the place-based adaptation process of the Shelter Pulse project. Beliefs, stigma and stereotypes must be challenged throughout the development process. Consultation with diverse frontline workers and community members, particularly from traditionally under-represented groups in rural, remote and Northern communities, will speak to common ways characteristics of staff and clients shape service demands and service provision.

The content of Shelter Pulse should place particular importance on providing or creating policies and procedures that address the unique risk factors facing rural, remote, and Northern service users (e.g., firearms, farm animals). The trauma- and violence-informed lens should be expanded to include human resource and other staffing policies.

# ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Each shelter organization is faced with challenges and opportunities shaped by their own unique history, geography, and developmental trajectory. The historical section discussed some factors that are common across the shelter sector. This section examines organizational factors that, while not universal, are very common and particularly relevant to rural, remote, and Northern shelters. Whereas shelters have minimal control the individual factors of service users and providers (as discussed in the previous section), or the external factors dictated by government priorities (as discussed in the next section), these are the factors that shelters have strongest ability to internally influence and/or adapt to with place-based policy adaptations.

## Community Context

### LIMITATIONS TO PRIVACY ASSURANCES

Shelters operating in small communities cannot offer the same privacy assurances as those in larger centres. Setting and maintaining boundaries may be more difficult in small, rural, and remote communities where advocates may have relationships with victims, their families, and community members impacted by crime, violence, and trauma (Logan & Walker, 2018).

### CHALLENGING CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN THE COMMUNITY

As one respondent to the 2018 More Than a Bed survey summarized, “public awareness is very important in rural Northern communities and has very unique challenges. Fundraising, support, referrals rest on

community acceptance, understanding and partnerships. Shelter staff and organizers may have to challenge some 'small town,' sexist, and/or racist values when providing education. This can be complicated when living in small communities" (Maki, 2019). From the beginning VAW shelters have been a disruption to the status quo and sexist societal norms. This is a difficult dynamic to manage in a small community where organizations require broad support to survive, not just from like-minded individuals.

Definitions for rural, remote, and Northern may not always resonate with members of those communities. For example, Zorn et al. (2017) found that the definitions used to describe populations of fewer than 1000 people (rural) did not necessarily encapsulate all isolated communities. Many Indigenous communities would not be considered rural, but they are still very isolated. Moreover, communities that would be considered rural in the territories do not necessarily resonate with the people living in those communities – they would not describe themselves as rural but rather as remote.

## **RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS**

The quality of relationships with other local service providers has a significant impact on service provision for rural shelters. For instance, having positive rapport and trusted individuals within law enforcement, child welfare, income support, etc. can mean the difference in a client considering accessing those services as well as the difference between a re-traumatizing experience versus a positive one.

The opportunity and challenge arises for rural, remote and Northern communities in that the champion for relationship building is often only one individual within a given organization or system. Relationships with umbrella organizations, such as the provincial shelter network or parent organization (e.g., YWCA), has the potential to greatly impact an

organization's capacity but could also present a limiting factor in terms of internal autonomy.

Ties to Indigenous communities and impacts of colonization.

In 2017/2018, more than half (59%, n=50) of the 85 VAW shelters across Canada that had ties to First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities or organizations were in rural areas. Most (72%, n=61) were in First Nations, Metis or Inuit communities, 30 of which were on-reserve (Maxwell, 2020). Indigenous Peoples continue to protest the ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous lands, communities, families, and individuals. The harms caused by these injustices, as well as the ongoing community solidarity in fighting against them, all affect how VAW/GBV manifests in the lives of Indigenous women and girls and the services they require (Nonomura & Baker, 2021).

## **Governance**

### **ALIGNMENT OF VISION, MISSION, AND GOALS**

Sometimes there is a disconnect between stated principles, values or language used by either high level networking bodies or shelter management and the frontline organizations and individual staff. While many of the shelters in Canada grew from feminist roots, there is also a history of organizations that were built on other foundations. Namely religious or community-based initiatives that had distinctly non-feminist values and motivations. This is seen particularly in the development of the shelter sector in Alberta, a province with a higher proportion of rural shelters (Goodhand, 2017).

The shelter movement is also not exempt from the impacts of anti-feminist backlash movements. As such, there is still a proportion of shelter organizations as well as frontline staff that do not resonate with what might be considered foundational and universal values of the shelter movement. The language used to express these values can sometimes be the source of alienation as terms like feminism, Reconciliation, etc. have been heavily politicized and robbed of nuance in public discourse.

## **BOARD AND EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

It is difficult to attract and retain quality candidates to board positions in target communities. Few board members will come to the position with knowledge of the VAW/GBV sector or the roles and responsibilities of a board. This can lead to conflicts and overstep with executive leadership or staff. In small communities, quality board members can sometimes serve on multiple boards and be overutilized among community organizations. This can lead to burnout, conflicts-of-interest, and poor succession planning. Poor governance can result in higher turnover, disjointed services, wasted resources, and in worst cases organizational collapse. However, if a shelter is part of a larger organization (e.g., YWCA) competent board governance may not be the issue, but rather lack of local representation and voice. Challenges attracting and retaining quality candidates for executive leadership positions are similar to those of attracting and retaining Board members with the added challenges of attracting and retaining staff in general (i.e., competitive salaries, local talent pool).



# Operational

## EXPANDING SERVICE MANDATES

As reflected in many studies (Wathen et al., 2015, 2016; Burnett et al., 2015, 2016) shelters are expanding their services to broader groups of women fleeing violence as well as expanding beyond exclusively serving victims/survivors of DV/IPV to include sexual violence survivors, women experiencing homelessness, women who have been trafficked, or unaccompanied children and youth, etc. (see Fig 1.). The number one reason given for this increase is that there is no other help available for these women (Maki, 2019). This is particularly true in rural, remote and Northern communities where shelters are often the only non-governmental support service.

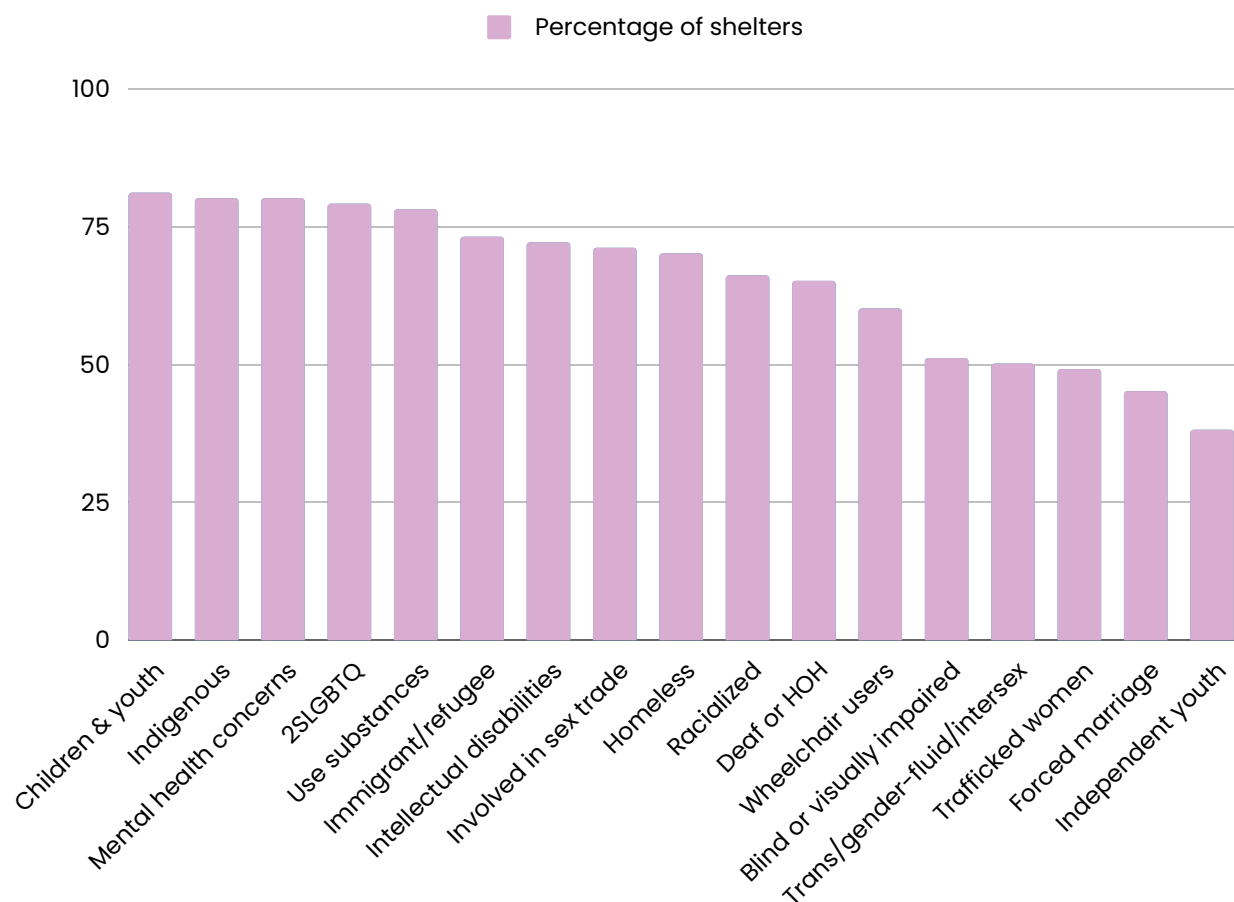


Figure 2: Groups that Shelters have Served<sup>10</sup> (Maki, 2019)

10. These are groups that shelters have knowingly served in the past, not groups that they could or would serve.

## **STAFFING**

In the 2018 survey of VAW shelters across Canada, 61% of respondents identified low pay and benefits as a “major challenge” facing their shelters. A further 55% indicated that turnover and burnout were a “major challenge”. It was noted that attracting and retaining high-quality staff is difficult when the salaries and wages are not comparable to those in similar fields (Maki, 2019). This is compounded by the limited candidate pool in rural, remote, and Northern communities and in some instances competing with high paying resource extraction industries for quality candidates. Most workers in women’s shelters are women whose economic well-being can also be a concern. Trauma exposed working conditions can often be harmful to their own mental health, leading to burn-out that contributes to high levels of turn-over.

## **UNMET NEED, CAPACITY, AND READINESS FOR SPECIALIZED SERVICES**

As we can see in Figure 1 above, the majority of shelters have served people with marginalized identities. However, this does not necessarily mean there are specialized policies, procedures, programs or staff training. For example, while 80% of VAW shelters reported serving Indigenous women, only 19% were “often” able to offer culturally appropriate programs. Despite the increased recognition of the need for and effectiveness of Indigenous specific services (Quinless & Corntassel, 2019; Dale et al, 2021), many service providers are not equipped to provide it (Nonomura & Baker, 2021).

Additionally, 34% reported it was also a “major challenge” to provide culturally appropriate services and support for women from different cultural, ethnic or language backgrounds (Maki, 2019). Similarly, 79% of the respondents who had served women with complex mental health and substance use concerns reported it as a “major challenge.” (Maki, 2019).

It is also important to note that the majority of this data is reported from the perspective of those working in shelters rather than those accessing services. Accurate data on gender identity and some others relies entirely on service user's disclosure to staff. As does information regarding the accessibility and effectiveness of specialized programs where they do exist. Further research including service users is needed to fill this knowledge gap.

- Open Doors Project – YWCA Canada 2016

### **LIMITATIONS OF SHELTER STANDARDS**

Where standards are outlined by provincial/government funders, they are mandatory and often inflexible to changes made at the organizational level. Where outlined by provincial umbrella organizations they remain voluntary guidelines with no mechanism for monitoring compliance. In all cases, standards vary widely in scope and detail of policies and procedures provided. Some include detailed operation-level procedures while others provide only high-level policy standards.

### **TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

There is currently no professional body, accreditation process or accredited program for VAW/GBV workers in Canada. Although work is ongoing to identify core competencies and move towards more standardization, training remains inconsistent across the country. High upfront costs, resources for ongoing reviews and updates and the necessary expertise are significant barriers for shelters developing their own specialized training. Most rely on training offered by umbrella/network organizations, large, often urban VAW/GBV organizations, or through third party specialty trainers. For rural, remote and Northern shelters additional barriers include lack of access training locally, significant expenses (travel

accommodation, fees, etc.) insufficient bandwidth for online training, and scheduling challenges due to higher percentage of p/t, casual and relief workers. It is also relevant to note that even shelter specific training is often developed with urban centres in mind.

- Recognizing Critical Expertise in Gender-Based Violence Work – Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children, ongoing.

## **INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY**

Many shelters regardless of size struggle with IT support, both for internal operations as well as public communications. Remote and Northern communities often rely on very basic and free software and services (e.g., Office suite and Facebook). Lack of access to the internet, devices and specialty software for documentation and data collection are also challenges for these shelters. Rural, remote, and Northern shelters have a higher proportion of staff who struggle with use of basic digital tools. Older staff, staff who are ‘off-grid’ by choice, and those with lack of access to internet, devices, and applications outside of work. Basic technological training (e.g., MS Office training) may be available but specialized training (e.g., database software, website development) is very often not. However, despite some challenges with computer literacy, most staff even in very isolated communities have access to and are comfortable and capable with smartphone devices.

## **AGE, CONFIGURATION, AND CONDITION OF FACILITIES**

According to Women’s Shelters Canada, 80% of VAW shelters need some form of repairs and renovations, and almost half (46%) are not able to afford them (Maki, 2019). Service environments offer an important tool to facilitate therapeutic interventions as well as provide passive,

non-therapeutic benefits. Physical accessibility is also a problem with less than half (48%) of shelters reporting that they could 'always' accommodate wheelchair or mobility device users and almost a quarter (23%) reporting total accessibility for wheelchair or mobility device users (Maki, 2019).

## **FUND DEVELOPMENT**

Not only are VAW shelters delivering increasingly complex services, but they are also struggling with underfunding and having to come up with solutions to meet the gap. This includes creating social enterprises, strict budgeting, applying for grants, and increased fundraising. In the 2019 More Than a Bed Report (Maki, 2019), 74% (n=160) of VAW shelter respondents indicated that not enough funding was a "major challenge," with only 5% respondents saying it was "not an issue." Further, the majority (55%) of VAW shelters could NOT meet their operating expenses without fundraising and 10% could not meet their operating expenses even with fundraising. Most shelters (86%) do not have fundraisers on staff, often leaving overburdened frontline staff to take on fundraising responsibilities just to keep the doors open. Most funders have not provided annual cost of living increases and overall increases to operational funding. "The constant applications for and reporting on grants as well as fundraising is sometimes overwhelming" (Maki, 2019). This burden of fund development is even more acute in communities that already struggle with qualified staff and an economically marginalized population.

## **INCREASED COST OF SERVICE PROVISION**

Costs for supplying necessities are a significant challenge for all VAW shelters but particularly those in rural, remote, Northern, and fly-in communities. In 2018, half of all VAW shelters reported food (51%) and transportation (52%) costs as a "major challenge." (Maki, 2019). There is a

greater deal of travel required for all organizational activities (e.g., client services, staff training, outreach, public education, partnership development, etc.) in our target communities. “The absence of a cost-of-living increase puts pressure on human resources and the ability of the organization to build on the experience of its staff, because turnover is so high. This can put the quality of services at risk as well as the mental and physical health of the staff. There is also high stress on management to ensure the functioning of the organization” (Maki, 2019).

## Implications

Rural, remote, and Northern communities have distinct community identities and characteristics that have the potential to act as either opportunities or barriers depending on how they are understood and approached. To survive in this context shelters must continually balance their position disrupting the status quo with maintaining strong organizational relationships as well as credibility and ‘fit’ within their communities. Communities which they both serve and rely on for support.

Shelter Pulse must also balance the duty to advocate for and centre its chosen principles and frameworks (i.e., intersectionality, Indigenous lens, etc.) with the obligation to meet stakeholders where they are at and produce a meaningful tool. To foster ownership of Shelter Pulse throughout the development process, space should be made to explore how these frameworks resonate with Shelter Pulse User groups. Areas to explore when engaging with impacted communities are conceptions and connections with intersectionality, gender expansive practices, and centering Indigenous lens (reconciliation, decolonization), feminism, anti-oppression, and anti-racism, etc.

Leadership of these shelters is also reflective of their communities, which in turn sets organizational values, priorities, and trajectories. The degree to which the values, priorities, and trajectories of shelters in non-urban centres align with 'mainstream' (i.e., urban) shelters is influenced both by community culture and identity but also by access to information, training, networks, and resources.

Shelter organizations recognize the need and have a strong desire for the program shifts required to meet the expanding needs of their service users, as evidenced by the origins of the Shelter Pulse project itself. However, they are faced with multidimensional operational challenges and lack of specialised resources to address them.

For the Shelter Pulse project, the most significant limiting factors are limited staff capacity and limited financial resources. As a multi-year project that requires diverse and meaningful stakeholder guidance throughout, it is imperative to create decision making guidelines and principles with stakeholders early to maintain project momentum and integrity.

Similarly, including the full scope of policies required to address all the services shelters provide and groups shelters serve is a limiting factor of this time-restricted project. Prioritization will be necessary. Developing Shelter Pulse User profiles in consultation with impacted parties can support a prioritization process. One priority that has already surfaced is the need for policies that support ethical practice, organizational development, governance, and human resources as well as client programing and community outreach.

Despite facing many challenges and barriers, it is important to adjust our view and consider how what may seem limiting may be an opportunity. For example, there may be a lack of operational funds for organizations to overhaul their policy books. However, if Shelter Pulse provided information on available funding as well as application support specifically for work like this it may in fact be a hook for engagement with the project.

Shelter partners will encounter the Shelter Pulse tool at various stages of need and readiness. Users should have a way to assess their organizational readiness quickly and easily for implementation capacity, policy needs, and framework alignment.

Capacity limitations of shelter partners are not issues that will be resolved within the timeframe of this project. Planning for embedded implementation support that is responsive to Shelter Pulse User profile needs should be considered early in the project. Strategies for implementation should include both technical support and training for initial roll-out as well as resources that are available on an ongoing, as-needed basis.



# EXTERNAL FACTORS

This section examines factors that significantly impact shelter organizations governance and operations but over which they have very little influence as single entities. We also examine how the shelter sector has worked to influence these factors and respond to challenges collectively through umbrella and networking bodies.

## Culture of Collaboration

Since a majority of early women's shelters are impacted by provincial jurisdictional and funding challenges, many of today's shelter networks have a regional mandate and membership. These organizations have become critical conveners for the sector, facilitating opportunities for collaboration between member organizations, enabling collective initiatives in concert with members that would otherwise, and participating in cross-sectoral collaborations. However, the priorities and services of these organizations vary across Canada with some addressing organizational policy development initiatives explicitly and others focusing on different priorities.

Examples of provincial initiatives targeting organizational policy development:

- [Policy Development Guide](#) – BCSTH, 2015
- [PEACE Program Policy Template and Guide](#) – BCSTH, 2018
- [Overdose Prevention and Response Guidelines](#) – BCSTH, 2020
- [A guide to policy development for feminist anti-violence programs](#)– OAITH, 2010
- [An Integrated Anti-Oppression Framework for Reviewing and Developing Policy](#) – OAITH, 2008

Other services offered to varying degrees by provincial networks include: advocacy, research, knowledge translation, public education, training, and, significantly, consistent member engagement to ensure member priorities and needs are reflected in their planning and programming.

## **INDIGENOUS-LED AND -CENTERED COLLABORATION**

The jurisdictional focus of provincial networks has been one of many barriers limiting the representation of Indigenous-led shelters in the women's sheltering movement. The many jurisdictional complexities outlined below meant Indigenous-led and mainstream shelters were often advocating to different levels of government, through different processes, for different needs. Indigenous women have also been excluded or sidelined from participation or consideration in the mainstream shelter movement which centres the needs and experiences of white women. As acknowledged in other parts of this document, there is currently a strong movement to address this disparity. There is a significant need to meaningfully engage with and elevate the knowledge and work of these organizations at all levels (grassroots, provincial, territorial, and national). However, a process of true engagement must examine, "the role of the state and colonial systems in the design and perpetuation of violence against Indigenous women," and include, "a frank reckoning with how to mobilize Indigenous knowledge for creating new systems based on old knowledge of prevention and response." (Dale, et al, 2021)

Organizations and initiatives that center Indigenous conceptions and experiences of gender-based violence provide integral support to women's shelters whose needs and priorities had been underrepresented or absent from the women's sheltering movement. The National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, and the Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario have developed many policy development tools that support shelters.

## **CROSS-SECTORAL AND -DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION**

While the VAW/GBV sector has successfully collaborated with other movements or sectors on research and advocacy in the past, the shelter sector in particular has been somewhat more hesitant to cross-sectoral collaboration. This protective stance comes from historical competitiveness for funding as well as general dismissal of tacit knowledge generated by the field; which were discussed earlier in this report. However, there have been big wins from collaborations involving organizations/sectors that bring unique perspectives and expertise not available within the VAW/GBV/shelter sector. For example, The Canadian Labour Congress survey in 2014 (Wathen et al.) led to guaranteed paid and unpaid DV leave for Federal employees and some form of paid or unpaid DV leave in all but Nunavut (proposed) and Yukon.

## **PROMISING POLICIES AND PRACTICES: SHARING ADAPTATION AND COMMUNITY ACTION RESEARCH**

The grassroots and decentralized origins of women's shelters have made it a place of promising practices and tacit knowledge development; approaches developed through lived experience and necessity, that are evaluated through iterative and non-academic methods (Practice Exchange Project, 2016). These approaches have achieved remarkable spread and scale via collaboration and coordination through provincial, national, and international knowledge-and-practice-exchange strategies and networks. Tacit knowledge creation has historically been underrecognized as 'legitimate' knowledge, particularly by researchers and policymakers who view practices validation through rigorous research methods.

- The Practice Implementation Manual: A Guide for Sharing Promising Practices in VAW Transition Houses and Shelters – Canadian Network of Women's Shelters and Transition Houses, 2016

# Geographic

## **COMPARING AND DEFINING RURAL, REMOTE, SMALL, MEDIUM AND NORTHERN COMMUNITIES**

These populations are similar in many ways, but research shows that they have unique contexts and considerations and cannot be defined by a single characteristic such as population size. Many small, low-density population centres and rural areas are close to major cities and have access to more complementary services. Likewise, many medium – and sometimes large – population centres are located in remote areas and experience many of the barriers that come along with geographic isolation.

### **A LACK OF CRISIS RESPONSE SERVICES**

Research has indicated that in comparison to urban women experiencing DV, rural women experiencing DV are less likely to call the police and/or to find the police helpful in DV situations (Shannon et al., 2006). If rural women do call the police, they find that it takes police longer to respond because there are fewer officers available at the time and there are longer distances to travel compared to in urban communities (Logan, Stevenson, Evans, & Leukefeld, 2004; Moffitt et al., 2013). Likewise, workers in women's shelters lack access to time-critical supports.

### **LACK OF OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES**

Accessing supportive services required for survivors such as specialized psychologists or counsellors and child-trauma workers is very challenging in rural, remote, and even some small-medium population centres. Even accessing family doctors and medical treatment has become difficult. Nearly 75% of patients lack access to a regular physician in some areas (Fleming & Sinnot, 2018). Supportive social services are also in short

supply in these communities. If a VAW shelter is present, they often gap-fill in the form of services for homeless women, youth programs and more.

### **LACK OF TRANSPORTATION**

Rural areas present challenges for those experiencing control through entrapment due to the simple scarcity of public transport and the distances between places. This condition is exacerbated for women in Northern communities. Of the 110 shelters in small/rural communities, less than half (42%) indicated access to public transportation. Among the ten rural shelters, only three reported public transit. (Maki, 2019). Transportation has become an even greater issue for VAW shelters, particularly in rural areas in Western Canada, due to drastically reduced Greyhound Bus service. Lack of integrated transportation infrastructure and services additionally puts service workers in positions of vulnerability as they will provide rides to women fleeing IPV to prevent these women from travelling in unsafe conditions or in the dark. Unless the structures that create the inequalities are dealt with, the barriers and struggles faced daily by individuals and service providers will not cease.

### **DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, EXTREME WEATHER, AND DISASTERS**

Climate change is having a profound effect on rural communities, especially those in the North. Longer growing seasons, changing habitats, new invasive species, increasingly unpredictable weather, melting permafrost, and coastal erosion are drastically changing the ways many rural, remote, and Northern peoples have lived. (Centre for Rural Economic Development, 2019.). Advocates in Canada's North have expressed deep concern with how the physical landscape has changed so rapidly because of climate change. Causing devastating impacts on traditional ways of life and food security for mostly First Nations and Inuit communities. Both

climate change and resource extraction activities are changing relationships of First Nations and Inuit communities to the environment, disrupting traditional ecological knowledge of landscape conditions. For example, small increases in climate temperature can drastically change sea ice conditions in ways that limit access to country foods and jeopardize the health of community members (Quinless & Corntassel, 2019.).

## **Economic**

### **FUNDING REQUIREMENTS AND SHELTER STANDARDS**

Funding models are delivered by different ministries in each province or territory. These policies have widely varying definitions of ‘core services’, minimum standards (sometimes lacking entirely), length of stay, reporting, legislative compliance and so on. Additionally, the development and review of these funding policies are often opaque and demonstrate, “lack of understanding about the actual services shelters offer and the communities they serve,” and can lead to “confusion and frustration for those in the shelter sector and interferes with their capacity to carry out their work” (Martin et al, 2019).

Table 2 : Summary of VAW shelter funding in Canada.

	Administrative Dept./Ministry	# of VAW Shelters Funded	Length of Stay Standard	Shelter Services Standard
ISC – funded Shelters	Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)	41 shelters, mostly on-reserve	NA	<u>National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence (NACAFV): Guidelines for Shelters</u>
AB	Community and Social Services	30 emergency shelters, 12 second stage shelters, and 2 seniors’ shelters.	21 days	Women’s Shelter Program Manual (Government of Alberta, 2002) and Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters Aspirational Service Standards (2005)
BC	BC Housing	68 transition houses, 27 safe homes, and 30 second stage houses	30 days	<u>Women’s Transition Housing and Supports Program Framework (2019)</u>
SK	Ministry of Justice	12 transition houses	6 weeks	<u>Saskatchewan Residential Services Act (2002)</u> and Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan Shelter Standards (2010) and <u>Saskatchewan First Nations Women’s Shelter Standards (2018)</u> .
MB	Department of Families	10 women’s shelters and 4 second stage shelters	30 days	<u>Manitoba Standards Manual for Women’s Shelters (2014)</u> .
ON	Ministry of Community and Social Services	96 emergency women’s shelters	NA	<u>Violence Against Women (VAW) – Emergency Shelter Standards and Standards for Ontario Indigenous Shelters (2017)</u> .
QB	Ministry of Health and Social Services	109 women’s shelters	NA	<u>No Shelter Standards</u>

	Administrative Dept./Ministry	# of VAW Shelters Funded	Length of Stay Standard	Shelter Services Standard
NF/LB	Department of Health and Community Services	12 transition houses	6 weeks	<u>Provincial Transition Houses Operational Standards (2010).</u>
NS	Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women	12 transition houses and 4 second stage shelters	6 weeks	Nova Scotia Standards for Member Organizations of the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia (2012)
NB	Department of Social Development	13 transition houses and 5 second stage shelters	30 days	<u>Standards &amp; Procedures for Adult Residential Facilities (2013).</u>
PEI	Department of Family and Human Services	2 emergency women's shelters	21 days	No Shelter Standards
YK	Department of Health and Social Services	3 women's shelters	30 days	No Shelter Standards
NWT	Department of Health and Social Services	5 family violence shelters	6 weeks	<u>NWT Shelter Minimum Standards (2011).</u> <sup>11</sup>
NVT	Department of Family Services	5 family violence shelters	6 weeks	<u>Saillivik Policy (2009).</u> <sup>12</sup>

11. Not formally implemented

12. According to this policy, all family violence shelters must enter into a Contribution Agreement, which outlines the minimum standards that family violence shelters must comply with.



## JURISDICTIONAL COMPLEXITY FOR FUNDING FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT VAW ORGANIZATIONS

There is significant complexity associated with funding for VAW shelters on-reserve as well as for First Nations women seeking services in off-reserve shelters. The National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence (Olsen Harper, 2006) highlights the following:

- Core funding comes from one main source – ISC (formerly INAC)<sup>13</sup>. One-source funding limits an organization’s independence, and growth is confined by the funder’s willingness to provide more adequate finances.
- Funding depends on the specific location of a shelter (such as being located on reserve) and on the specific status of a specific client in an urban setting (for instance, funding only applies if a client has had to leave her reserve to enter a shelter, if she has already left the reserve and within a predetermined period).
- Reserves are under federal jurisdiction and therefore they are not eligible for many provincial, regional or municipal grants.
- Some shelters encounter jurisdictional problems more than others do because their reserves overlap more than one boundary (international, federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal).
- Most non-Aboriginal<sup>14</sup> shelters have difficulty being reimbursed for Aboriginal clients because of jurisdictional problems.

Further to this, it was only in 2021 that shelters serving primarily Inuit populations and communities across Inuit Nunangat (regions across NWT, Nunavut, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador) became eligible for funding from Indigenous Services Canada.

13. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) was dissolved in 2017 and replaced by 2 new departments: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). ISC now oversees the funding of on-reserve shelters and VAW/GBV services for Indigenous women off-reserve and these challenges continue to persist.

14. Throughout this document we use Indigenous, Aboriginal is used here as it is the language used in Olsen Harper, 2006.

## **DEPOPULATION, DIVESTMENT, AND SYSTEMATIC DE-STRUCTURING OF RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Small population centres have been experiencing depopulation and aging. At the same time, diversity and social and economic inequities have been rising with the expansion of the non-farm populations, making intersectional considerations increasingly important in considering needs for services (Hanson et al., 2021). This has contributed to conditions in non-urban communities that exacerbate violence and inhibit the operational capacities and service provision for many women's shelters.

### **IT AND COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE**

In 2017, only 37% of rural households had access to 50/10 Mbps, compared with 97% of urban homes. Only about 24% of households in Indigenous communities have access to 50/10 Mbps. Slow speeds are a significant barrier to taking full advantage of opportunities offered by the modern internet. Limited to no cloud-based software applications, online learning resources or high-definition streaming videos. Organizational IT infrastructure is often too slow to support multiple users or to access essential services such as telehealth. There are also significant gaps in mobile connectivity. Particularly substantial gaps along highways and major roads as well as in communities with seasonal roads (i.e., ice-roads) or fly-in communities. The vast majority of communities in the Territories as well as Northern Manitoba, Northern Ontario, and Northern Quebec are 100% reliant on expensive satellite internet. (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2019.). For instance, the cheapest business internet plan in Hay River costs \$109.95 with speeds of 0.78/0.128 Mbps and a 30GB cap.<sup>15</sup>

15. Source Internet Pricing in NWT (Business) <https://www.fin.gov.nt.ca/en/internet-pricing-nwt-business>

## **RESOURCE INDUSTRIES**

Boom–bust towns near resource extraction projects attract a high number of transient workers. These towns are characterized by higher rates of substance use, and violence, with specific risks for Indigenous women and girls in these communities (Amnesty International, 2016). Extractive industries in northern areas are also associated with an influx of highly paid workers from the south. This drives income inequality between locals and non-resident workers as well as inflating cost of living in terms of housing and food. Resource extraction also impacts First Nations and Inuit community members' ability to harvest traditional food off the land, due to higher prices of equipment (e.g., snowmobiles and gas) as well as limiting access to harvesting grounds and contaminating wild food sources. (Quinless & Corntassel, 2019).

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS**

59% of rural and small population centre respondents to the 2018 More Than A Bed survey reported that they “always” have difficulty accessing affordable housing, compared to 45% in large and 40% in medium-sized population centres (Maki, 2019). Second stage housing is sparse in small and rural communities. In the same 2018 survey, none of the VAW shelters in rural communities reported having second stage shelters available. Of the 38 respondents from Indigenous shelters, only two were second stage shelters. None of the 10 respondents from fly-in communities were second stage shelters.

## **Public Policy Priorities**

### **NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY**

The 2017 National Housing Strategy (Department of Employment and Social Development) promises \$40 billion over 10 years to reduce chronic homelessness by 50% and pull up to 530,000 households out of housing need. The Strategy also commits to directing at least 25% of investments to specifically target the unique needs of women and girls including ongoing research about women's housing needs as well as new and repaired shelter spaces. The Strategy recognizes and prioritizes the unique housing challenges of vulnerable populations including survivors fleeing family violence, people in remote and Northern communities, as well as people that have mental health and addictions issues. It also recognizes the important role VAW shelters play in filling housing needs for survivors and sees the problems caused by lack of shelter spaces. Particularly in Northern communities where it is common for emergency shelters to serve as permanent housing for many women because of the lack of transitional and second-stage housing. Through the Increasing Affordable Housing for Victims of Family Violence (IAH) initiative and other funding streams, the federal government will support demonstrations of forward-looking technologies, practices, programs, policies, and strategies that develop or pilot innovative housing responses to situations of family violence. The Strategy will use the GBA+ Analysis.

### **FEDERAL ACTION TO ADDRESS POSTTRAUMATIC AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS INJURIES IN PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL**

While the breadth of occupations included does vary, the trauma impacts experienced by community-based anti-violence workers have been consistently absent from federal discussions of OSI and PTSI. The Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (2016) does

acknowledge that those who work alongside or support public safety personnel may also experience OSI; however, as it applies to work with people who have experienced crime and violence, including gender-based violence, the focus remains on systems-based responders to the exclusion of community-based anti-violence workers. This exclusion mirrors the academic literature on public safety personnel that consistently leaves out community-based anti-violence workers (Carleton et al., 2018, 2019).

### **CANADA'S CONNECTIVITY STRATEGY**

The Government of Canada has committed to addressing the national connectivity gap by increasing access to 50/10 Mbps internet speeds to 90% of Canadians in 2021, 95% in 2026 and 100% by 2030. While this strategy does focus on rural, remote, and Northern communities, its main concern is with enabling economic development. This may or may not have a positive effect on those experiencing VAW/GBV or delivering services for survivors, depending on the type of industries and businesses prioritized by individual communities. Unfortunately, there is no mention of a GBA+ Analysis for this strategy.

### **PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL ACTION PLANS IN CANADA**

An important factor in the current state of inconsistency in shelter services across jurisdictions is that provinces and territories develop and implement VAW response systems independently based on differing definitions and approaches. There is also a lack of reliable, generalizable data which is tied to overarching (federal) measures of success. While there is significant work currently underway to address these issues through the National Action Plan (see next section), it has not yet been finalized and implementation is still several years away. It is also important to note that not all provinces and territories have VAW/GBV action plans.

The table below gives an overview of the various Action Plans related directly or tangentially to VAW/GBV.

Table 3 : Action Plans implemented in each province.

	VAW/GBV	Sexual Violence	Indigenous	Elder Abuse	Bullying	Disability	Gender Equity	Homelessness	Violent Crime
AB									
BC									
SK									
MB									
ON									
QB									
NF/LB									
NS									
NB									
PEI									
YK									
NWT									
NVT									
	11	7	4	3	2	1	2	1	1

## Future Public Policy

In the previous section we looked at major policies currently affecting VAW shelters. This section will look at the most significant piece of policy under development that will shape the future of the VAW/GBV sector in the medium and long-term.

### **NATIONAL ACTION PLAN (NAP) TO END GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

The United Nations recognizes having a National Action Plan as a key tool for a country to coordinate effective prevention and responses to all forms of VAW/GBV. Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) has been calling for a NAP on VAW/GBV officially since 2013, emphasizing that the need for a NAP to, "establish a coherent framework and strategic long-term program of activity that address root causes of VAW, strengthen systems that respond to it (including legal systems), and assign accountability and appropriate resources" (CNWSTH, 2013. p. 8) so that regardless of where a woman lives in Canada, she has access to comparable, adequate services.

In January 2021, the Joint Declaration for a Canada free of Gender-Based Violence was endorsed by the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Ministers responsible for the Status of Women. This federal, provincial and territorial collaboration represents an important step in developing a NAP in Canada. In early 2021 federal department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) funded WSC to undertake a strategic engagement process with anti-violence leaders across Canada to produce recommendations to inform NAP development.

In April 2021, WSC released final Roadmap for the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence (The NAP Report). WSC recruited working groups of diverse subject matter experts for each

of the four pillars of the framework. Each pillar working group produced recommendations for action by federal, provincial, or territorial governments. Several in each pillar directly address issues relevant to Shelter Pulse project (i.e., the rural, remote and Northern community context, trauma-informed approaches, and VAW shelters, etc.). ‘Cross-cutting themes,’ concepts not confined to one pillar were also identified and detailed.

## **PILLAR RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations explicitly recognize that, “...those living in Northern, rural, and remote communities...experience high rates of gender-based violence,” and that flexible, region-specific responses are essential to NAP implementation. Being trauma and violence informed and promoting evidence-based policy and programs are also guiding principles of NAP work going forward. See Appendix A for details of the specific recommendations in each pillar that are relevant to Shelter Pulse Project priorities.

**Enabling Environment and Social Infrastructure** promotes true gender equality and economic justice through universal access to publicly funded basic services that form the core of social infrastructure. **Prevention** focuses on addressing harmful norms at the root of VAW/GBV to transform cultural, societal and institutional values and behaviours through inclusive educational programs and informed by robust data collection.

The **Promotion of Responsive Legal and Justice Systems** pillar focuses on the structures that set precedents that impact other systems as well as run the mechanisms that enforce state agendas, societal norms and rules. Recommendations seek to centre the most marginalized and create responsive justice systems with trauma-informed, strength- and human



rights-based strategies. **Support for Survivors and their Families** looks through the lens of those most often and most disproportionately victimized by VAW/GBV towards the creation of a continuum of formal and informal VAW/GBV services. Recommendations highlight the need for these programs to meet needs of safety, healing and justice with a wide-spread application of trauma- and violence-informed approach as well as ‘nothing about us without us’ design approach.

## **CROSS-CUTTING THEMES**

Present in every pillar where ‘cross-cut’ themes provide coherent through-lines and offer insights into implications for the Shelter Pulse project.

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is heavily emphasized in The NAP Report and discusses its importance in policy development. Particularly that, “the intersectional turn in policy development...requires us to consider the structural and group identity aspects of discrimination, in addition to the vulnerabilities that attract overt discrimination and marginalization of individuals.” (p.107)

### **The COVID-19 Context**

Economic fallout of COVID is particularly severe for women who hold the majority of precarious employment, minimum- or low-wage work. Covid reduced options for women seeking safety at the same time increasing opportunities and tactics for abusers. Trends of increasing abuse of all forms, but especially extreme physical violence (e.g. stabbing, strangulation) as well as higher risks of lethality among women admitted to shelters (WSC, 2020). At the same time shelters took on an increased burden resulting from drastic changes in service delivery due to health mandates and protocols, staffing issues and loss of fundraising revenue.

## **Harmonization and Addressing MMIWG**

The fifth pillar of the NAP, Indigenous Women’s Leadership, was assigned to the WAGE Indigenous Women’s Circle (WAGE IWC), separate from the WSC process. However, the WSC NAP leadership and Working Groups underscore the findings of the MMIWG Commission Final Report, that all work on the next phases of NAP development and implementation needs to, “ensure a distinctions-based approach in relation to particular Indigenous communities— Inuit, Métis and First Nations as well as to Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people” (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019).

## **Training and Education**

Every pillar had some aspect of training and education that incorporated trauma-informed or trauma- and violence-informed approaches. The recommendations repeatedly underscored the importance of a focus on anti-oppression as well as, “positive and identifiable outcomes, and a commitment to meaningful accountability” (p.121) for any educational initiative to produce institutional change.

## **Grassroots Response**

All working groups recognized the specialized expertise of grassroots, community based anti-violence groups and the essential role they play in knowledge and practice building. This theme requires NAP work to credit the work of these groups, particularly those that are feminist, LGBTQ2S+, equity-seeking and/or survivor led. Formal VAW/GBV services need to, “be evidence-based while also recognizing and integrating multiple ways of knowing.” (p.122)

## **Stable VAW/GBV Sector**

The need for adequate, consistent and long-term funding was a clear call in every pillar. The NAP recommendations also call for redesign of funding

formulas to prioritize those at highest risk of violence, including those living in rural, remote and Northern communities. Mental health and wellbeing of VAW/GBV workers is also a major factor in an effective, sustainable sector. Serious consideration should be paid to incorporating trauma- and violence- informed approaches into the workplace itself, not just service user programs.

### **Transportation and Transit**

While this theme recognizes the importance of safe and affordable transportation for all victims and survivors of VAW/GBV it emphasizes the particularly dire need among rural, remote and Northern communities. It also highlights unique challenges faced by some Indigenous women living on-reserve in accessing transportation while retaining privacy.

### **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)**

In 2016 the UN General Assembly declared internet access a human right. It is pointed out that the market-based approach has created substantial gaps to full equitable access, particularly in areas of Canada with the highest rates of VAW/GBV (rural, remote and Northern communities).

### **Data for Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)**

Following international best practice on coordinated responses, this theme discusses how extensive and thoughtful data collection strategy is essential to the successful implementation of that NAP. This theme contends that an intersectional feminist lens in MEAL planning is imperative to ensuring that evidence gathered supports the transparent, accountable and inclusive governance of NAP.

## Implications

The focus of the Shelter Pulse project is furthering the understanding and implementation of trauma- and violence-informed best/promising practices among small, rural, and remote DV shelters across Canada through effective policy. Large scale knowledge sharing projects are ultimately more successful when priorities and goals align with broader sectoral, political, and societal trends. However, alignment at the high-level must also be accompanied by a connection and resonance of these priorities and goals within the specific communities and with the workers who are tasked with making the necessary changes on the ground. This section highlights both areas of alignment as well as gaps and surfaces considerations for addressing challenges and areas of opportunity for the Shelter Pulse project.

Despite limited capacity many shelters find value in involvement with their networking body. Shelter Pulse should view these organizations as information holders themselves as well as leverage the connections for access to potential shelter partners. The prevalence of Indigenous communities among the target communities means the Shelter Pulse project must also be mindful of the policy realities governing these communities and associated shelter organizations. Therefore, both regional and Indigenous networking bodies should be engaged throughout the project.

Further, because a large proportion of Indigenous individuals reside in rural and Northern areas in Canada a direct analysis of how the intersection of VAW/GBV and colonialism shows up in policies and practices is essential in Shelter Pulse's adaptation work to address historical and current disparities (Nonomura & Baker, 2021).

Integrating what we know as ‘best’ practices with tacit knowledge and framing it in a way that resonates with frontline rural, remote, and Northern shelter workers will be a challenge for this project. Because while we must clearly maintain the integrity of Shelter Pulse’s core values and principles (e.g.intersectionality, etc.), the analysis and adaptation of policy must not rely on the presence or absence of discursive jargon or academic language, but by examining how they align with core principles in spirit and practice. Policy work by networking organizations highlighted at the beginning of this section is a good example of this balance.

Because of the diversity of the target communities for this project there is a clear need for Shelter Pulse User profiles to be developed with input from impacted communities. Some areas of consideration are population level, geographic area served, demographics, distance from other communities, accessibility, other services available, staffing structure, jurisdiction(s), etc. Policy and protocol development should prioritize considerations for the most extreme target communities, examining extreme isolation, lack of external resources, technological limitations, emergency preparedness, transportation, housing, employment, etc.

Another goal of the Shelter Pulse project is to enable a standard of care for people accessing VAW shelter services regardless of where they are in Canada. It is critical to consider both the realities of Shelter Pulse partners and product users under current systems as well as examine the implications of future policy developments.

At the provincial/territorial level there are policy pieces that could have an impact on how VAW shelters are able to participate in Shelter Pulse or that could influence the content desired in the final product. Shelter standards are a vital source of information to help prioritize policy development by highlighting common policy mandates across jurisdictions as well as an jurisdictional mis/alignment with Shelter Pulse values and principles. Standards can provide insights into the philosophical and legislative environment in which shelters are compelled to operate including the limitations shelters have on their autonomy to create and implement policies. For instance, Newfoundland and Labrador standards do not allow admission of clients who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol and prohibit drug or alcohol use on site, which would be a significant limiter to harm reduction practices. Shelter Pulse should also examine non-mandated shelter standards, which are more often created with shelter participation, for guidance on policy prioritization and common practice.

Provincial and Territorial Action Plans are also a valuable source of opportunities. Particularly regarding funding options that could be used by shelters for internal implementation of Shelter Pulse policies. Although there are gaps – a lack of gendered analysis and lack of recognition of shelter workers' role in public safety – in other regional policy initiatives related to rural, remote, and Northern development, there may still be opportunities such as possible new funding streams for shelters to support internal implementation projects.

At the Federal level, the National Action Plan (NAP) has highlighted the importance of governments to create environments that can enable women to choose lives without violence and shelters to provide impactful services in their communities. Many of the alignments with Shelter Pulse

have already been highlighted throughout this report. However, one that is only brought to light in the NAP is the importance of monitoring and evaluation. Mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation with specific accountabilities and systems that translate learnings into improvements are essential for sustainability. Shelter Pulse should include considerations for monitoring and evaluation into initial planning, consultation and design.

# DISCUSSION

This scan of individual, organizational, and external factors that influence the context in which potential users of Shelter Pulse create their policies has highlighted several considerations for the project. Some are potential areas to focus on types of adaptations and processes to develop them with shelter partners. Others point to ways in which the content of policies can be scoped and prioritized.

## Considerations for Shelter Pulse Development

### **ANALYZE EXISTING SHELTER POLICIES**

A review of existing shelter policies – as well as shelters’ experiences developing them – will provide valuable insight into the range of starting points from which users will be engaging with Shelter Pulse. Some shelters may be adapting their current policies to better suit their local context. Other shelters may be building policies from scratch and be interested in more foundational support to address their policy needs.

### **BUILD AGREEMENT AMONG SHELTER PULSE PARTNERS ON THE “ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS” OF PRACTICES FOR RURAL, REMOTE, AND NORTHERN SETTINGS**

The service environments for many shelters participating in Shelter Pulse will encounter significant challenges to overcoming urban biases and fulfilling the essential elements of many best practices. However, shelter partners may consider identifying which of these elements are reasonable and, where necessary, developing alternative elements that fit broadly for rural, remote, and Northern contexts. These will be promising practices that can support evidence-based decision making, which is a violence prevention best practice.



## **ARTICULATE AND, WHERE POSSIBLE, ADDRESS PROJECT LIMITATIONS**

Shelter Pulse will be a far-reaching project; however, all projects encounter limitations to their scope vis-a-vis budget, schedule and impacted community engagement. This project is tackling a complex need that is responding to inequities impacting organizations, women, and children outside Canada's major cities. Limitations for the project should be clearly articulated to shelter partners and other stakeholders. The project team and its shelter partners should work together to identify goals for the project that balance reach and depth for outcomes with these limitations in mind. That said, the project team should endeavour to resolve any limitations that can improve outcomes without compromising the scope of the project.

## **DEVELOP PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE DECISION-MAKING AND PROCESS DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS A BEST POSSIBLE OUTCOME WITHIN THE PROJECT'S SCOPE**

Principles for design and development can be useful to offset a project's limitations, particularly when stakeholders face barriers to direct participation. Principles should be developed with shelter partners and potentially approved with other affected stakeholders early in the project. Once established, principles can guide the project team to advance work on deliverables more quickly and allow direct engagement sessions to focus on major decisions.

Develop timelines for Shelter Pulse users to assess fit and readiness, etc. The content and design of Shelter Pulse will need to account for potential users' starting point for developing their policy manuals. As we've mentioned, limitations to the project's scope may preclude some shelters from benefiting from it without other support to enable policy implementation. The timing of assessing fit and readiness early on can

limit users (for now). At later stages or intervals, readiness and fit can be used to inform ways shelters might adapt policies to their needs.

## **BUILD FROM AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WORKS IN ANALOGOUS PROJECTS**

Shelter Pulse is not the first capacity building project aimed at spreading and scaling evidence to hard-to-reach services users and providers. Queriable, online tools to address policies, training, and user-friendly tools and interventions have been created for specific needs (target populations, service environments, learning needs, etc.).

Examples suited to one or more priorities identified for Shelter Pulse users can be analyzed with shelter partners to identify qualities that can be translated to this project.

## **PRIORITIZE ADAPTATIONS AND PROFILES FOR DIFFERENT SHELTER PULSE USER NEEDS**

Women's Shelters Canada, regional member organizations, and many other issue- and population-specific advocacy and capacity building organizations have explored policy needs for different profiles of shelters and shelter users that can inform this project's starting point. The factors outlined in this report that might distinguish policy needs are discussed in the following section: Considerations for Shelter Pulse Content.

## Considerations for Shelter Pulse Content

With more than 600 women's shelters across as many geographically- and culturally- distinct communities, it is possible that Shelter Pulse will encounter limitations to its reach and relevance to the very discrete needs of each shelter. Optimizing its effect on policy needs may require an initial focus on policies for specific shelter partners or areas of policies that are determined to be the highest priorities. These decisions can be made with shelter partners currently engaged in the project. Likewise, expansion of Shelter Pulse to a greater diversity of users can be considered in its design, as well as any systems established to support its long-term sustainability.

### DEFINE SHELTER PULSE USERS

1. Define and build profiles for rural, remote, small population centres, medium population centres, Northern communities and organizations that incorporate community context, jurisdictions (i.e., on-reserve), organizational characteristics, organization size and structure, etc.
2. Support assessment of fit. Give users the opportunity to reflect on their alignment to essential elements identified for the practices its policies are intended to support. Some areas of policy and practice may not be suited to some shelters at a given point in time, due to factors within and outside of its control.
3. Support assessment of readiness for change. Imbed a way for shelters to reflect on their ability to implement certain policies and practices, as well as provide guidance on how they might prepare their organization for change and achieve the outcomes intended for different areas of policy and practice.

## **EXTERNAL LIMITERS TO SHELTER POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Shelters may face structural barriers to their ability in developing and implementing new trauma and violence informed policies. Some of these barriers may also provide opportunities or considerations for the Shelter Pulse project.

1. Mandated shelter standards. Despite the variations across provinces there are some consistent policy elements present in most of the shelter standards. These commonalities could support Shelter Pulse efforts to organize and prioritize specific areas for policy development and adaptation (e.g., all standards publicly available include mandates around confidentiality).
2. Funding Structure. Updating policies and procedures takes staff time and therefore money. Core operation funding models vary across the country in their provision of dollars for routine maintenance/updating of policies. This may limit shelter capacity to participate in the project.

## **PLACE-BASED ADAPTATIONS**

Evaluation of existing and proposed policies based on:

- Profiles of target communities/organizations
- Definition of terms and alignment of values, principles and frameworks for the project.
  - Intersectional feminism
  - Anti-oppression, anti-racism
  - Cultural/worldview i.e., Indigenous – First Nations, Inuit and Métis
  - Trauma and violence informed
  - Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility
  - Harm Reduction

Thematic content needs, common to rural, remote, and Northern shelters emerged throughout the examination of individual, organizational external factors. Efforts should be made to include policies regarding these topics in Shelter Pulse.

1. **Risks and Safety.** Staffing challenges and access to community-based crisis response are only two key factors that shape women's shelters' ability to implement some aspects of trauma- and violence-informed approaches.
2. **Privacy, ethics, and conflicts of interest.** Likewise, pre-existing relationships among women and staff are more common in small population centres. Women staying in shelters often know one another and/or the staff working there and contribute to perceptions of privacy and limitations to shelters' ability to guarantee these rights.
3. **Absence or presence of specific supports.** The assumption of minimal access to local supports should be the default as opposed to the assumption of availability.
4. **Organizational development.** Policies across the organizational hierarchy, from board governance to frontline human resources and volunteer management.
5. **Selection of frames.** Cultural adaptations that reflect local beliefs, values, education, and conceptions of violence and can support decision makers and staff motivation to implement policies.

## **IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES**

Shelter Pulse policies are intended to support shelters to implement evidence-based practices and should consider incorporating resources and tools that can guide shelters through the process of operationalizing new policies. Many member-based/umbrella organizations provide training and capacity building supports to their members and may be

suitable to contribute this function to Shelter Pulse. However, disparities may arise since not all shelters participate in collectives with a capacity-building mandate. Many open-source training and resources might also inform how Shelter Pulse delivers implementation supports to its users:

- Information, training, and education sessions for users.
- Implementation guides, templates, and case studies.
- Change management guidance based on user profiles.
- Technical support.

## **Considerations for Feasibility and Sustainability**

### **LEVERAGE EXISTING KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE EXCHANGE TOOLS**

Address barriers to access knowledge and practice exchange tools.

### **IMBED MEASURING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND LEARNING FUNCTIONALITY INTO SHELTER PULSE.**

When making adaptations to ‘best’ practice it is particularly important. Considerations should be made early on for developing practical monitoring mechanisms, meaningful evaluation metrics, specific accountabilities, and systems for translating learnings into tool improvements.

### **ADAPTABILITY FOR CHANGE**

The growing focus on disparities affecting rural, remote and Northern communities is likely to shift the context in which many shelters are developing their policies. Shelter Pulse should plan for likely areas of change - funding to renovate facilities, training, upskilling, and re-skilling, broadband expansion and access to virtual supports and services, etc. - to allow shelters to respond to new opportunities.

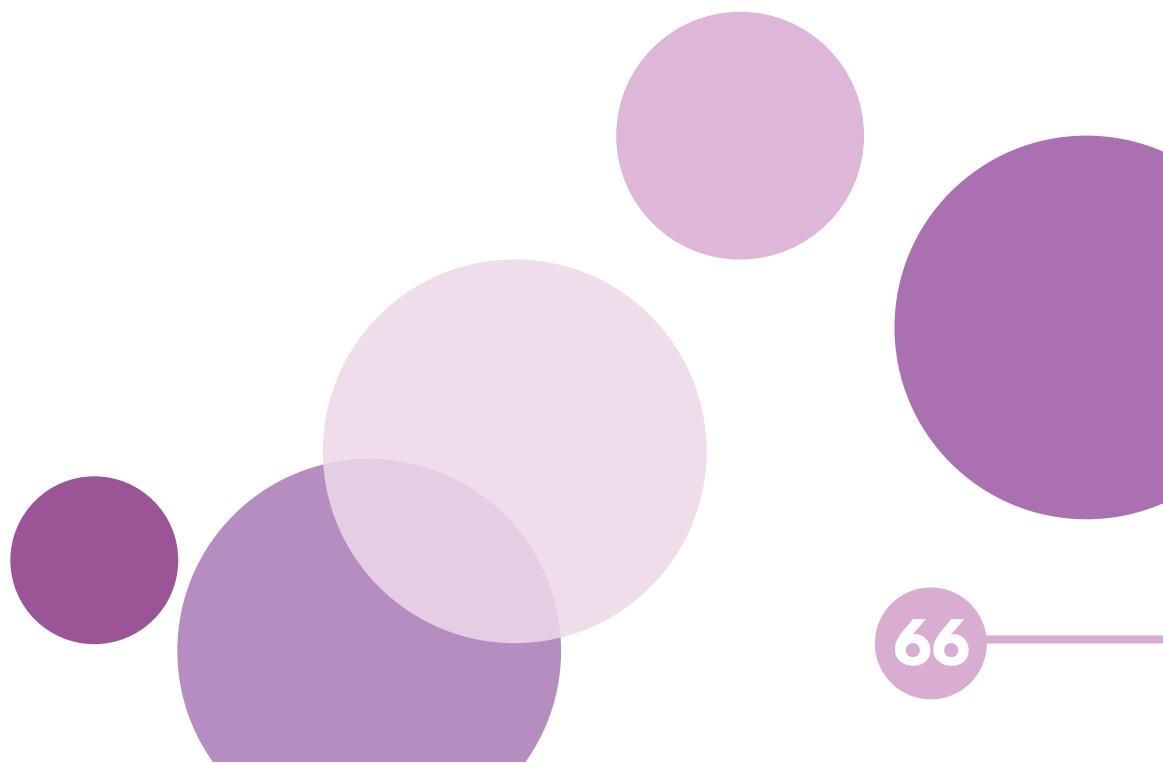
# CONCLUSION

The Rural Development Network (RDN) has undertaken a project with a broad national scope that requires developing new partnerships with a previously unfamiliar sector. Both of these aspects present unique challenges. Without claiming to be exhaustive, this Environmental Scan has ventured to provide thorough contextualization of the VAW shelter sector in rural Canada as well as guidance for navigating the barriers and opportunities it presents for this project.

Due to the broad scope and demonstrated diversity of our partners' needs, scope management through prioritization will be a significant challenge for this project. It may require difficult decisions about who and/or what to include, and therefore exclude, at different phases throughout this project. Awareness of our partner's lack of capacity to engage as actively as would be ideal can be mitigated by the strong communication as well as creative and considered engagement with proxies.

As is clearly seen throughout this report, Shelter Pulse target organizations have a strong affinity for their rural, remote or Northern identity and development. This affinity means that despite lack of previous familiarity with the VAW shelter sector, RDN is optimally positioned to do this work. RDNs expertise and dedication to rural perspectives, needs and realities is a considerable asset in creating buy-in and upholding relevancy. Responsiveness to and prioritization of rural partners will allow RDN to demonstrate and utilize the value of their particular expertise as well as develop the most effective deliverables.

The legacy of limited capacity continues to significantly impact VAW shelters' ability to create, implement and share policies that reflect sectoral values as well as best, promising and innovative practices. However, the legacy of the Shelter Pulse project of an accessible tool that provides effective, place-based policy has the potential to alleviate a substantial burden for shelters providing care for people experiencing violence in rural, remote and Northern communities.





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# APPENDIX A: NAP RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations in the Survivor Supports pillar relevant to the Shelter Pulse Project.

<p>Recommendations that recognized rural, remote, Northern communities as underserved and in need of particular attention or directly address their most pressing needs.</p>	
1S	<p>Assure adequate and consistent provincial/territorial and federal budgets including consistent operational <b>funding to ensure the availability and accessibility of core services for VAW/GBV survivors.</b></p> <p>a) <b>Shelters/safe place/second stage housing</b></p>
2S	<p>Ensure accessibility and equity in all survivors' access to core services on VAW/GBV.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying, through community-led and transparent consultations, gaps in services for under-resourced communities (rural, remote, Northern, Indigenous); Black and other racialized communities; gender-diverse people; people with disabilities; people with precarious/no immigration status; sex workers; older adults; LGBTQI2S+ communities; male survivors of childhood sexual abuse; criminalized women; and gender-diverse people. Developing an equitable and responsive funding model, within five years, for these communities.</li> </ul> <p>c) <b>Ensure that every community in the North has 24/7 access to a safe place to shelter from violence and access to sexual violence services; ensure strategies to support safe access to services for these communities/individuals (e.g. mobile programs, local dispatch, access to services in local languages).</b></p>
19S	<p>There is a need for <b>virtual support services to augment traditional services</b> (e.g., crisis lines, online peer support), <b>especially for those individuals and communities who would most benefit from additional accessible options</b> (e.g. Northern/rural and remote communities). These must be supported by appropriate infrastructure (e.g. Wi-Fi access) and not replace traditional, face-to-face services.</p>

Recommendations that highlight the need for trauma and/or violence informed approaches.	
1S	d) 24/7 Helplines staffed by those with training in <b>trauma-informed and violence-specific interventions.</b>
2S	a) One initial focus should be to reduce wait times by providing new resources for feminist, <b>trauma- and violence-informed counselling services.</b>
3S	<b>Apply a trauma- and violence-informed care analysis to all VAW/GBV services to expand the concept of trauma-informed care to account for the overlapping impacts of interpersonal violence and systemic, structural, and institutional inequities affecting a survivor's life.</b> To develop and deliver services that are responsive to trauma and violence, including substance use and poor mental health. View this impact as a predictable consequence of highly threatening events recognizing that for many survivors, inequity and system-induced trauma are ongoing.
6S	Ensure that informal supports and peer supports have necessary resources, information, and training to effectively <b>support survivors in a trauma- and violence-informed way.</b>

## Recommendations in the Legal pillar relevant to the Shelter Pulse project.

<p>Recommendations that recognized rural, remote, Northern communities as underserved and in need of particular attention or directly address their most pressing needs.</p>	
1L	<p>To ensure equitable access to justice for survivors of VAW/GBV, we recommend <b>ongoing, mandatory education and training for all legal and justice actors who work or could work with VAW/GBV survivors in their respective roles.</b></p> <p>b) <b>All such education shall be grounded in the intersectional experiences of bias and discrimination faced by people</b> living in poverty, with mental health and/or substance use challenges, disabilities, Indigenous, Black, racialized, cis-women, gender non-conforming, trans, and migrant people (including those who are precariously employed or who have precarious immigration status or no status), those living in rural and remote communities, and others who have been historically excluded.</p>
13L	<p><b>That all levels of government work together to ensure continuous (not short-term or project-based) funding for Survivor Advocates with specialized training in VAW/GBV,</b> including DV and IPV to represent and advance survivor interests through legal systems including criminal, family, immigration and workplace and administrative tribunals. <b>Survivor Advocates can also provide a continuum of legal support services in rural and remote communities that may lack legal services and courthouses.</b></p>
14L	<p><b>That all levels of government work together to ensure a continuum of services, including transition housing, second stage housing, counseling, interpretation, and advocacy within provinces/ territories and across Canada to ensure women and gender-diverse people in rural and remote communities, and communities on and off reserve, receive comparable levels of service.</b></p>
25L	<p><b>That the FPT ministers of justice work together to review the use of technology in delivering legal services to survivors in rural and remote communities, and rapidly transition to make long-term use of technological solutions piloted during the COVID-19 pandemic.</b></p>

30L	<p><b>The FPT governments must take steps to ensure that the bail system operating in all jurisdictions—including rural, remote, and Northern communities</b>—is sufficiently well resourced and staffed to ensure the rights of accused persons to not be denied reasonable bail without just cause (s. 11(e)) and to be presumed innocent until proven guilty (s. 11(d)) are properly respected.</p>
<p>Recommendations that recognized rural, remote, Northern communities as underserved and in need of particular attention or directly address their most pressing needs.</p>	
1L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using the intersectional lens identified above, this training shall address, among other topics: <b>the need for trauma-informed services; the impact of trauma on family court litigants who have survived family violence.</b></li> </ul>
9L	<p><b>All levels of government shall coordinate and commit to ensuring that survivors and targets of VAW/GBV have adequate access to effective legal representation and supports.</b> Specifically:  d) <b>this funding shall extend to trauma-informed, survivor-centred systems navigators</b> to support access to justice by survivors of VAW/GBV.</p>
13L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Priority for funding should be given to advocacy organizations that promote</b> gender equality, provide culturally appropriate and trauma-informed services, and that provide accessible and inclusive services.</li> </ul>
26L	<p>Develop a cross-ministerial strategy to <b>address VAW/GBV online and technology facilitated VAW/GBV</b> focused specifically on the creation of expeditious, accessible, and meaningful remedies/relief for survivors. <b>This strategy should be trauma-informed and survivor-centred in both its development and implementation.</b></p>

## Recommendations in the Prevention pillar relevant to the Shelter Pulse project.

<p>Recommendations that recognized rural, remote, Northern communities as underserved and in need of particular attention or directly address their most pressing needs.</p>	
1P	<p><b>Provide safe drinking water to everyone living in Canada.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to safe water is an alarming problem facing many people in Canada, <b>particularly in First Nations communities.</b></li> </ul>
6P	<p><b>We call upon the federal government to build a national data collection framework on VAW/GBV in Canada.</b> This includes data collection on all manifestations of VAW/GBV, including (but not limited to): family violence, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, adolescent dating violence, femicide, hate crimes, elder abuse, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, child abuse, harassment, stalking, technology-facilitated violence, workplace violence, and police violence. Data collection and analysis are critical to understanding and ending VAW/GBV in Canada. To this end, these types of data should also be publicly accessible so that they can be used by local communities. Finally, <b>we call for oversampling in all national survey data collection for socio-demographic categories, including but not limited to:</b> Indigenous women, girls and non-binary individuals; visible minority women, girls and non-binary individuals; women, girls and non-binary individuals experiencing dis/abilities; youth with dis/abilities; women, girls and non-binary individuals experiencing homelessness; <b>women, girls and non-binary individuals living in rural/remote locations;</b> and 2SLGBTQQIA+ populations, in order to allow sufficient sample size for intersectional analysis.</p>
21P	<p><b>We call upon the FPT and municipal governments to ensure that the policy development process for VAW/GBV ensures an increase in participation and support for the leadership of marginalized women and gender non-binary peoples</b> (e.g. women and gender non-binary peoples with dis/abilities, Indigenous, racialized, low-income, rural, 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, refugees, Blacks/Africans, youth) <b>in all stages of policy making, as well as prioritizing policy issues that are important to those groups.</b></p>



Recommendations that highlight the need for trauma and/or violence informed approaches.	
23P	<b>Create and fund open youth-led programs and projects that are culturally competent, gender specific, and trauma-informed.</b> Appoint youth to boards, task forces, and research units—anywhere that decisions are made about this topic.
36P	Fund accessible and multiple options for services, supports, healing, and accountability in parallel to or complementary of prevention education efforts—e.g. disclosure and <b>trauma training—with a focus on underserved areas and communities, rural and remote areas.</b>

**Recommendations in the Enabling Environment pillar relevant to the Shelter Pulse project.**

Recommendations that recognized rural, remote, Northern communities as underserved and in need of particular attention or directly address their most pressing needs.	
5E	<b>Immediately implement the right to housing for all women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals taking into consideration the needs of different groups</b> (e.g. people living in rural and remote communities, newcomers, seniors, youth, Black, Indigenous, racialized communities, people with precarious immigration status, LGBTQI2S+ people, victims of human trafficking, persons with disabilities).
6E	<b>Increase funding for the expansion of, and reduction of barriers in access to emergency shelters, second stage (transitional) housing, and accompanying wrap-around services to meet the unmet needs of people facing VAW/GBV, with attention to the needs of different groups</b> (e.g. people living in rural and remote communities, newcomers, seniors, youth, Black, Indigenous, racialized communities, people with precarious immigration status, LGBTQI2S+ people, victims of human trafficking, sex workers, and persons with disabilities). Actions shall include: a) Formal Services— <b>Emergency shelters/safe spaces</b> for those seeking

6E	<p>immediate safety from violence, with particular emphasis on under-resourced communities (e.g. the North) to i) Ensure that every community has 24/7 access to a safe place to shelter from violence, addition of strategies to support safe access to services for these communities/ individuals e.g., mobile programs, local dispatch, access to services in local languages; and ii) Ensure transportation to safe shelters as required.</p> <p>b) <b>Second stage housing</b>—increasing capacity of second stage housing as well as core (ongoing operating) funding.</p> <p>d) <b>Remove time limits on stays in shelters and transitional housing</b>—recognizing that shelters and transitional housing spaces will require enhanced funding and resources to support longer short-term stays for people facing complex VAW/GBV and working towards long-term housing options.</p>
15E	<p><b>Increase access to primary care, recognizing the public health crisis of VAW/GBV and the devastating impact of traumatic brain injury (TBI), particularly for those facing the largest health disparities (e.g. people living in rural and remote communities, Northern communities</b></p> <p>newcomers, Black, Indigenous, racialized communities, incarcerated women, people with precarious immigration status, LGBTQ2S+ people, persons with disabilities), and work with the provinces/territories to ensure uniform coverage across Canada for gender-affirming surgeries and other medical care for trans people</p>
18E	<p>Ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all by:</p> <p>a) Enforcing the Canada Health Act by withholding funding transfers from provinces/territories failing to ensure the availability and accessibility of abortion services, and work to narrow access gaps for abortion services in rural and remote regions.</p>
20E	<p>Build a pan-Canadian <b>safe, accessible, and affordable transportation system.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify the greatest needs related to domestic and VAW/GBV in urban, rural, and Northern locations, and develop action plans to address them.</b></li> </ul>

21E	<p><b>Implement universal access to information and communication technology</b>, including infrastructure (e.g. high-speed internet and cellular service), services (e.g. cell phone and data plans), and hardware (e.g. cell phones, computers, laptops, tablets, and other devices).</p> <p>c) <b>Enabling affordable access to services and hardware in the identified under-resourced areas</b> (e.g. rural and remote areas).</p>
<p>Recommendations that highlight the need for trauma and/or violence informed approaches.</p>	
17E	<p><b>Improve mental health services and access to comprehensive, gender-responsive addictions supports in all areas of Canada</b>, targeting resources for those in greatest need and <b>with a particular focus on trauma- and violence-informed care</b>.</p>
19E	<p><b>On-going and in-depth training on VAW/GBV for all healthcare professionals</b>, including workers in long-term care, home care, and workers providing care services for people with disabilities. Training must integrate a consideration of the factors impacting the experiences of VAW/GBV, the experiences of those suffering from TBI, barriers to support for people with multiple and intersecting identities, and <b>support for trauma-informed responses</b>.</p>