



WOMEN'S | HÉBERGEMENT
SHELTERS | FEMMES
CANADA | CANADA

Final Report: COVID-19 Emergency Funding

A Report for the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE)

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Introduction

Between 2020-2022, WAGE allocated \$36 million of COVID-19 Emergency Funding for violence against women (VAW) shelters/transition houses (THs) across the country, excluding those in Quebec and those funded by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) partnered with WAGE to deliver these funds to those shelters across Canada. This final report summarizes how that funding was spent.

The reports for funding recipients were due either on October 31, 2021, or March 31, 2022, depending on whether the shelter was an Indigenous shelter allowed an extension to spend funds. Any errors or changes to budgets after July 11, 2022 are not included in this final report. WSC continues to follow up with the three outstanding reports from this funding period.

All percentages are rounded up.

The report package includes the Survey Codebook, CSV raw dataset, analysis data tables, and the final report.

Demographics

In total, 302 organizations completed the COVID-19 Emergency Funding Final Report. Figure 1 and Table 1 show the number of respondents from each province and territory. There are no respondents from Quebec as that funding bucket was delivered by the Quebec government and not WSC. Shelters funded by ISC also received their funding outside of WSC.

Among the funding recipients, 25 (8%) identified as an Indigenous Organization.

Figure 1



Table 1: Respondents by Province/Territory

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Alberta | 39 |
| British Columbia | 78 |
| Manitoba | 17 |
| New Brunswick | 15 |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 10 |
| Northwest Territories | 3 |
| Nova Scotia | 12 |
| Nunavut | 3 |
| Ontario | 108 |
| Prince Edward Island | 1 |
| Saskatchewan | 13 |
| Yukon | 3 |
| Total | 302 |

Number of People Served

The total number of individuals (service users) who were supported by the funding was 182,984. The average number of individuals served was 605. Table 2 provides a compare means analysis indicating the differences across the country.

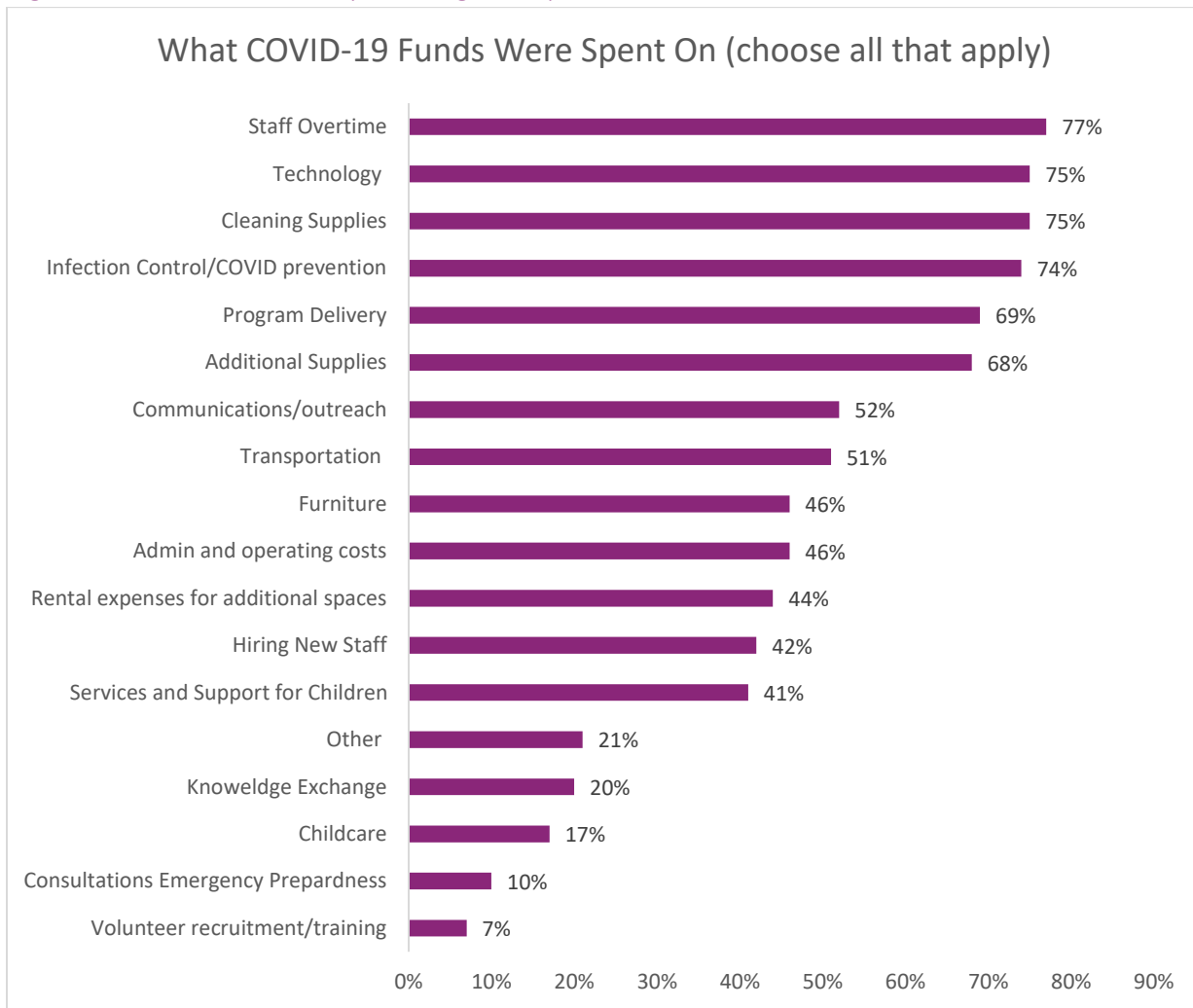
Table 2: Provincial/Territorial Breakdown of Individuals Supported by Federal Funding

| P/T | N | Mean | Sum | Median | Range | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------------------|-----|--------|--------|--------|-------|----------------|
| Alberta | 39 | 1047.1 | 40837 | 450 | 6700 | 1625.264 |
| British Columbia | 78 | 708.8 | 55283 | 236 | 8597 | 1371.348 |
| Manitoba | 17 | 402.9 | 6849 | 113 | 2000 | 625.226 |
| New Brunswick | 15 | 657.2 | 9858 | 120 | 6990 | 1766.791 |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 10 | 569.2 | 5692 | 175 | 2470 | 882.944 |
| Northwest Territories | 3 | 212.0 | 636 | 276 | 240 | 132.182 |
| Nova Scotia | 12 | 393.3 | 4719 | 321 | 1503 | 402.891 |
| Nunavut | 3 | 90.7 | 272 | 65 | 143 | 74.875 |
| Ontario | 108 | 484.8 | 52363 | 210 | 7800 | 1003.808 |
| Prince Edward Island | 1 | 500.0 | 500 | 500 | 0 | |
| Saskatchewan | 13 | 358.2 | 4657 | 333 | 811 | 238.244 |
| Yukon | 3 | 439.3 | 1318 | 200 | 908 | 499.075 |
| Total | 302 | 605.9 | 182984 | 232 | 8600 | 1190.259 |

How Were Funds Spent?

We asked respondents to share how they spent their COVID-19 Emergency Funds. The question provided an additional comment box to elaborate on a budget item that may not have been covered in the question. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that they had used the funding for a particular budget line. Respondents could “choose all applicable” and as such the graph shows the percentage of respondents who answered yes to the variable divided by the overall responses (n=302). For example, the majority (77%, or 234 of 302) of all respondents spent funds on staff overtime.

Figure 2: What the Recovery Funding was Spent On



Under one-quarter (21%) responded that they used the funds for “other.” Some key “other” expenses included: increased food costs, professional fees (cleaning, IT, etc.), renovations or adjustments to the space to meet public health requirements, wage increases and extra support for staff, and covering rental loss due to unoccupied units in second stage shelters/transitional housing. See the raw data tab FUNDS_OTH for the comments.

Of the \$36 million allocated, \$32,564,236 was sent directly to VAW shelters and transition houses across the country. Of that amount, \$30,326,539 was reported as spent. \$1,855,282 was reported as unspent. Please note that there are three outstanding reports from recipients; the breakdown of spent/unspent for the remainder in distributions will be updated as those reports are submitted to WSC.

Figure 3 provides a breakdown of how the funding was spent. Overall, funding recipients allocated \$13,658,940 to human resources (salaries, consultants, sick leave etc.). Operating costs (\$3,057,801), supplies (\$2,935,944), and infection control (\$2,921,764) were also significant expenditures.

Table 3: Budget Statistics

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | | | |
|--|-----|--------|---------|----------|-------|----------------|
| | N | Range | Maximum | Sum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Human resources | 275 | 288677 | 288677 | 13658940 | 49669 | 42362.65 |
| Alternative accommodations | 155 | 143799 | 143799 | 1923840 | 12412 | 21829.46 |
| Technology | 238 | 67140 | 67140 | 2689185 | 11299 | 12724.76 |
| Infection Control | 251 | 105427 | 105427 | 2921764 | 11640 | 14489.88 |
| Supplies | 230 | 83244 | 83244 | 2935944 | 12765 | 14489.33 |
| Transportation | 170 | 46956 | 46956 | 741323 | 4361 | 7763.94 |
| Telecommunication services & Outreach costs | 197 | 52001 | 52001 | 919189 | 4666 | 6151.83 |
| Operating costs | 199 | 184167 | 184167 | 3057801 | 15366 | 20376.28 |
| Other expenses | 137 | 78419 | 78419 | 1478533 | 10792 | 14694.95 |

Funding Gaps

Given the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to act quickly with Emergency Funds, we were curious to know whether there were any gaps in funding that would have been useful for shelters. Renovations (for example, creating additional bathrooms) and purchasing a shelter vehicle were noted as the top gaps in the Emergency Funding.

While it was appreciated that the funding was flexible, there were still gaps, which forced shelters to fundraise and seek out other funding pools during a pandemic crisis:

Firstly, I must say the very flexible and largely unrestricted use of funds was very much appreciated...If possible, we would have also spent funds on a capital project to renovate our basement space to allow for socially distant programming and activities. Fortunately, we were able to secure other funds to complete that project.

Many shelters reported that there was a dire need for capital projects to modify the shelter space to meet public health requirements and restrictions. A lack of capital funds meant that some shelters had to reduce their capacity. As one responded noted:

The challenge with the funding has been the inability to use it for capital projects. Currently our shelter has shared bathroom facilities. Therefore, we have had to reduce the capacity in the shelter to 50% to reduce the possible transmission of COVID. If the dollars were available, we would have had renovations to have an additional 2-3 bathrooms added. This has often created situations where we have had to decline providing shelter.

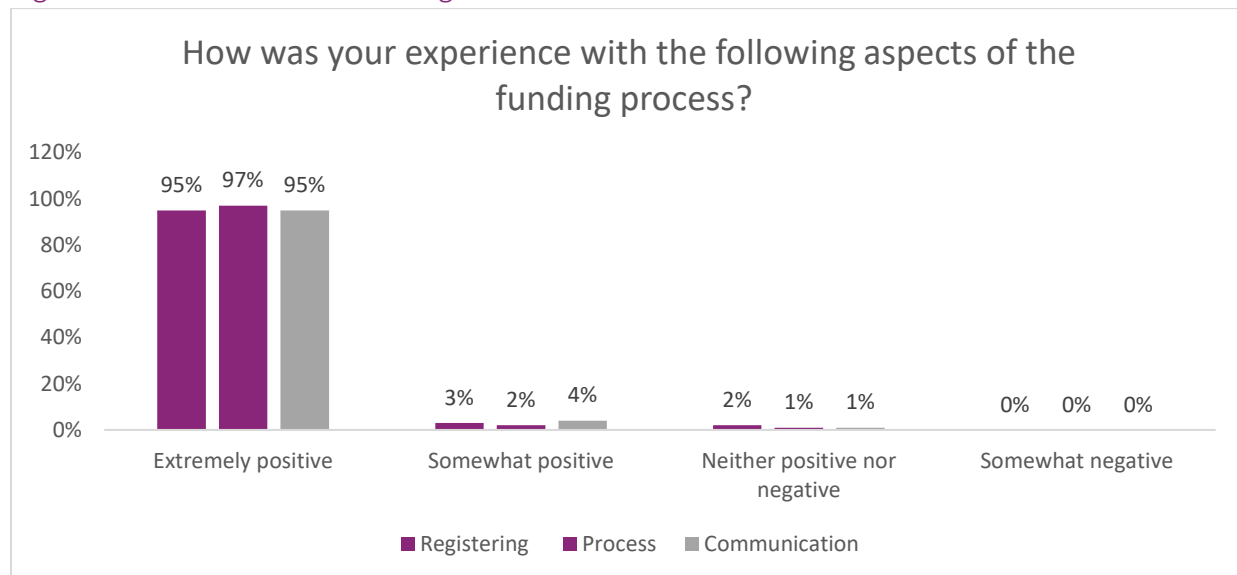
One funding recipient reminded us that, indeed, shelters are more than a bed or shelter and that must be considered for future funding initiatives:

Shelters are much more than “shelters” at any given moment; yes, they provide the necessities of comfort, care, food, emotional support, and resources in times of high trauma and crisis. However, they are also so much more in the moment for women and their children feeling gender-based violence. They are a refuge. They are also the spark that provides a woman and her family to catch their breath and breathe in safety and security. Given the fear and anxiety created by COVID on top of fleeing domestic violence (DV) and given the severity of DV, having funds to apply to clinical therapy modalities during this time would have been helpful to decrease and/or alleviate the impacts of the physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse experienced by the women and children.

Evaluation

WSC believes in the importance of an intersectional feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL). As such, we included some evaluative questions in the report to allow for shelters to provide their feedback on the process. This is meant to assist both WAGE and WSC in designing any funding collaborations in the future. Figure 3 indicates that the vast majority of funding recipients reported that their experience with the funding process with WSC was “extremely positive.”

Figure 3: Satisfaction with Funding Process



Comments from Funding Recipients

Access to this funding was made very easy, which is deeply appreciated. It came at a time when there was a lot of uncertainty and a lot of work to be done. By making access to the funding low barrier, it helped decrease the workload.

As an organization providing both a Transition House and Second Stage Housing, we were able to stay open and provide essential services to women and their children fleeing violence. We were able to provide online/hybrid services to youth and children who access our outreach and PEACE programs which impacted their mental health in positive ways. We were also able to provide wage overtime and incentives for front line staff.

[We are] very grateful for the funding received and to have had the opportunity to apply. These funds were very necessary in helping us not only survive the pandemic, but position ourselves to thrive in our recovery. While we have a ways to go until we are on the other side, funding opportunities such as this make a world of difference in helping to make the unthinkable, achievable.

From the bottom of my heart (I have been in this sector in management for over 30 years), I have gratitude for the flexibility and ease of applying and receiving this grant. These funds allowed us to more effectively provide support services to those in need in our smaller, rural setting located in British Columbia. It allowed for our agency to support staff during the pandemic when we would otherwise be asking them to work in the frontline at a much lower rate of pay which put them and their family at risk - particularly in the first and second waves of COVID. Our community thanks you, staff thank you, and of course the women and families supported thank you.

I am not sure how we would have managed without federal assistance. Fundraisers had been cancelled, donations were down, and we were worried as less than 1/3 of our operating budget comes from the Provincial Government. The funding application via WSC was quick and easy. I don't know that I could have coped with a complex and lengthy application at that time. The money arrived swiftly, and without multiple restrictions, allowing us to pivot and make what we felt were the necessary changes to our operations and environment quickly, ensuring continued services to clients, and a safer working environment for staff, volunteers, and clients. It can be rare to say you are "thrilled" with the way a service is delivered, but I am "thrilled" by the way in which WSC delivered this funding.

Obviously, we could use more funding as violence against women is a very systemic and real problem. We realize that the government is doing their best and this funding is a good start. Please continue to invest more funds in this most important issue so that we can continue to positively impact the lives of our women and children and provide them with not only a safe place to stay, but hope for the future as well. We are also very satisfied with the simple process and believe the territorial and other provincial governments should adopt a similar type of process to allow communities to access these urgent funds more easily.

The Federal Government investment recognized the national reality of gender-based violence and necessity of national leadership and investment to address a global pandemic that existed long before COVID-19 and continues to be profoundly and differentially impacted by it. The words mattered. The funding mattered. The speed of the investment, its scope, and its flexibility mattered greatly. It made commitment to address violence against women an action – a verb. It empowered communities and advocates to do what women who have experienced harm have been clear matters most. It was historic. Hopefully it will stand as a powerful example of what is

possible when we work together at a national level about a global issue & serve as an invocation to the actions required in the journey ahead.

Needs Post-Recovery

Funding recipients had a lot to say regarding their needs post-recovery. We asked respondents: What do you see as your most pressing needs for pandemic recovery? Among the 273 respondents, it was clear that there are some significant challenges facing the VAW shelter sector that are further complicated by pre-existing and intersecting inequalities and service gaps (see Table 4). Additionally, VAW shelters are facing an impossible situation with an increase in the demand for services alongside a crisis in labour shortages. Shelters reported that they are also seeing an increase in the complexity of the needs of survivors and heightened levels of violence.¹

Overwhelmingly, shelters reported staffing shortages, retention issues, vacant positions, and significant burnout, stress, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma across the sector and across positions within shelters. This is affecting frontline, leadership, and all staff. Consequently, shelter capacity and programming is affected. The functioning of shelters depends on the staff and leadership who run the programs and ensure that the daily operations run smoothly.

Another key area that VAW shelters will focus on will be renovations and adaptations to existing shelters to be better prepared for future pandemics. A move away from shared spaces to more suites or apartment style units as seen in second stage was a common solution mentioned. This will require significant capital investments and supports moving forward.

A common thread in the survey in the open-ended comments (evaluation, recovery needs, and final comments) was the need for consistent, stable, and adequate funding. As pandemic restrictions lift and some are returning to “normal,” shelters are still in the midst of a significant public health crisis or, as the jury at the recent coroner’s inquest stated, an “epidemic” of intimate partner violence. Additionally, among the 86 recommendations was one recommending adding the term femicide and its definition to the Criminal Code, as well as the implementation the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence in a “timely manner.”²

These same key themes were reflected in the survey’s final comments, demonstrating the pressing need to address these funding and servicing gaps.

Table 4: Most Pressing Needs for Pandemic Recovery

| Staffing | Services and Programs in Shelters | Renovations/Adaptations |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical staffing shortage - Addressing burnout, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue - Health and wellness support for staff - Training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mental health and harm reduction programs/supports - Substance use programs/supports - Food program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create second stage shelters where there is no housing for women - Covid isolation centre - Hotel and motel off-site isolation units - Private bathrooms |

¹ We found similar trends early on in the pandemic. See *Shelter Voices* (2020) <https://endvaw.ca/shelter-voices-2020/>

² See <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/i-want-change-daughter-says-after-jury-shares-recommendations-at-ontario-inquest-1.5966299>

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff retention of NEW positions - Lobby for changes to wages and benefits - Additional Human Resource support - Staff retention - Attract and retain new workers - Overtime pay/pandemic pay - Health and safety, ergonomics for virtual workspaces - Leadership and team building - Funding parity with other sectors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employment/income supports program - Children’s programs - Outreach (to meet increased VAW) - Gender inclusivity - EDI - Culturally sensitive/appropriate counselling for immigrant women - Indigenizing programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Redesign congregate living - Conducting site evaluation to maximize footprint - Build a new facility and expand - Shelter enhancements - Retrofitting shelter space - Spaces for single women - Upgrade ventilation systems |
| <p>Increased Demand for Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crisis services - Referrals from community - “Catch all” for everything - Increased need - Increased violence and severity - Increased needs and complexity of clients | <p>Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upgrade technology to support digital response to increasing need - Ensure virtual capacity for clients and staff - Improved client management system to ease working from home - Technology to support remote working/virtual workspaces - Increased access to technology and reliable internet in rural, remote, and northern (RRN) communities | <p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued flexibility - Stabilization funding - Continued program funding - Funding for all programs - Ongoing staff training - Children’s programming and supports - Financial support for families in need - Funding for all beds - Wage and cost of living increases from funders |
| <p>Safe, Secure, Stable, Affordable Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alternative accommodations - More second stage - Increases in rental costs - Housing crisis, reduced accessible and affordable housing - Increased homelessness | <p>Transportation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RRN communities lacking transportation - Vehicle for the shelter to transport clients | <p>Public Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase community awareness of what shelter does - Public education |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can't move women through the shelter into housing as there is no housing, can't take new clients | | |
| <p>Childcare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordable and quality public childcare | <p>RRN Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unique challenges - High costs of food - Technology constraints - Transportation issues | <p>Economic Supports for Women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employment and training supports - Financial supports to access housing - Access to childcare |

Comments from Funding Recipients

This funding was extremely beneficial during this very challenging time; however, we are concerned about the ongoing need for funding for our services. The demand for our supports and services continues to increase and the costs of providing supports and services continue to increase, however funding for these essential services do not. Funding needs to be permanent, particularly considering our need to adjust our programs to accommodate the protocols that will need to be in place for some time.

There will be increased demand for our services for years to come. We know that women have been hit the hardest in terms of job loss, lack of access to childcare, and isolation from community. The most pressing need we have is a coordinated response like the National Action Plan that targets the root and systemic causes of inequality that manifests in violence.

If there is recovery ahead, it will be important that our sector not get ignored or forgotten. We continue to need adequate funding for our ongoing operations and capital infrastructure.

The most challenging and pressing [issue] for all [VAW] shelters is to continue to lobby for changes to wages and benefits for our staff to be able to enhance Family Violence Prevention in the North. The NGOs do receive year to year core funding; however, this does not include benefits or wage increases for staff. This poses many challenges and barriers to recruitment and retaining staff. Presently we have identified a benefit program with the help of this WSC funding; however, we will have to lobby for ongoing multi-year funding to continue providing any benefits to our staff.

Mental health and wellness. Essential workers are exhausted. Domestic violence has increased and the need for safe, secure shelters are overwhelmed. Women and children are staying longer in shelter due to the lack of affordable housing stock.

It is a reality that the sector will need stabilization funding for another 2 years minimum. Most VAW agencies are dealing with a 4th wave of a pandemic, which involves a continued increase for demand for services compounded by little to no fundraising. For our organization, we had

only been in our new facility for a few months before the pandemic hit so we are also dealing with a huge transition period going from a small residential home to a 19,000 square foot facility. On top of ongoing operational funding shortages, we also had donors that were pledged to support a 5-year capital campaign for the new building. Some have had to pull their contributions and as a result our organization was forced to carry a mortgage much longer than anticipated, which has caused high financing costs.

Fundraising will continue to be difficult for organizations as small businesses are affected by the pandemic. Fundraising fills the gaps. Employee Health benefit packages will continue to be a high priority as employees weather the pandemic and mental health difficulties rise amongst employees. Access to therapists for clients, food security, accessible, safe, affordable housing are also important. With the rise in inflation rates, it is more difficult for clients to have affordable housing with the widening gap between low income and a livable wage. Incidents of violence and abuse are on the rise, and the intensiveness of abuse is also high.

Preparing for a new way of working and serving our community. Indigenizing our programs and procedures. Bringing the voices and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of colour into the center of our programming. Creating physical spaces and client practices reflective of cultural inclusion. Public education about the breadth of services that our agency delivers. Technology to look at mobile options to reduce geographical barriers.

We see women and children at risk of homelessness daily. The housing crisis in our area is very concerning. The problem we face is that we are now operating as a safe home and transitional house because women have nowhere to go once they are well enough to leave the safe home. We have seen a 400% increase in women, children, and youth at risk of homelessness trying to access our services. Our safe home is consistently running at capacity and then we have to house women in hotels/motels as well. We have had to pull a house out of our affordable housing complex to house women, children, and youth. The pandemic has caused a mental health crisis which has led to an increase in domestic violence and at the same time we are facing a housing crisis.

We are currently still dealing with four major crises: the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Overdose Crisis, the Domestic Violence Crisis, the Lack of Affordable Housing Crisis. We are in continued need of significant funding to be able to employ more qualified social workers to carry out programming in these areas. In general, our client numbers have literally gone through the roof. We are now dealing with 1,251 (May 2021) clients accessing our services on a monthly basis. This is for a small organization that is situated in the rural North of BC. We are seeing more and more women with children coming to our organization for basic needs such as food. Sadly, domestic violence in our area is also still increasing and the first violent death due to domestic violence happened in February 2021.

Final Comments

There is still much work to be done to address the challenges facing the VAW shelter/TH sector in Canada. The pandemic has shone a light on some of the key issues moving forward. Many of the final comments touched on the key themes and challenges for shelters and the women and children they support in Table 4.

Overall, shelters were deeply appreciative of the federal emergency funding. Many shared that without these funds, they might not have been able to keep their doors open.

They were especially grateful for how the funding was delivered:

- The government acted quickly
- WSC was responsive and supportive
- Flexibility
- Easy and quick application process
- Simple reporting system
- Recognizing VAW shelter/TH expertise

Thank You

Thank you to Women's Shelters Canada and the federal department for Women and Gender Equality for the availability and flexibility of funds and the granting process during a truly challenging time. The priorities expressed by your agencies is deeply appreciated.

I really appreciated the easy application and reporting process. I remember how terribly stressful it was last year and greatly appreciated not having to sit for days upon end to write a proposal. I just did not have the time as we were constantly putting out "fires" or crisis situations due to Covid. WSC Staff - thank you for your patience!

To continue to provide funding to Indigenous agencies as we are few and far between yet Indigenous women and children are six to eight times more likely to experience or become victims of domestic violence.

An increase in staffing models to assist with the aftermath of the pandemic will be important and the ability to assess organizational needs as we are the most familiar with needs in our communities. The pandemic has shone a light on the importance of proper mental health and connection as well as how vulnerable many not-for-profits are. Not-for-profits serve the country's most vulnerable population.

Just thank you - I don't know how we would have been able to keep our doors open without this support.

The women's based sector is facing a crisis as shelters continue to fundraise during a very challenging time in order to meet the ongoing demand as well as the increase in demand as a result of the pandemic. Violence against women is a pandemic within a pandemic. The shelter system across the country is grossly underfunded. While the majority of shelters began in the kitchens of strong and caring women across the country in the early 1980s, victims of family violence deserve a sustainable service model that they can count on, which will not happen if shelters are forced to fundraise for core operations. The time for action has never been more apparent.

We would like to send a sincere thank you to the federal department for Women and Gender Equality and Women's Shelters Canada for their continuous and quick support of our shelter

programs and services. Without the support of your organisations, we would not have been able to provide service to as many women and children in our community as we have. Thank you!

I want to thank the federal government for acting so quickly to provide this support to all shelters. Also, thank you for making access to this funding so easy for us. With so much information coming at us all at once, early in the pandemic, this was one thing we didn't have to stress about. Making the parameters wide enough to do what we needed to do to support women and children and keep everyone safe was very much appreciated as well. Thank you! The impact this funding has had on meeting the critical needs of the Indigenous community is incredible. Hundreds of women and children have benefited from the funds to address immediate crisis situations that would have left them in high-risk abusive situations with no alternatives. We were able to deliver all the basic needs to each one while keeping them in a safe and stable environment.

Thank you to the Federal Government, Women and Gender Equality Canada, and Women's Shelters Canada for knowing and trusting that women's shelters across the country know what to do in their communities, and within their own organization, to support women and children escaping violence and homelessness during a global pandemic. The wide scope of funding allowed us to shift and pivot with the changing landscape and it was the solid financial foundation we needed to keep our doors safely open.

Again, just to express sincere thanks to WAGE and WSC for the quick response in distributing funds during COVID and the flexibility to allow shelters/THs to apply the funds where it was needed the most. Provincial funders' allocations were not as flexible nor as easy to access and as a result, we stopped applying for provincial assistance as the administrative burden to administer the funds was too great at a time when our human resources were stretched beyond capacity. Without the immediacy of this funding, we would not have been able to maintain our operations during the height of COVID.

Thank you for supporting women's shelters across Canada in our efforts to help women who experience gender-based violence. Daily, we bear witness to endless examples of too many lives lost and opportunities thwarted by violence. We see and hear growing desperation from women who find it increasingly difficult to imagine that change is possible – for themselves, for their children, and for the boyfriend or husband who chooses not to control his rage within the walls of their home. It is more critical now than ever to ensure that women's equity rights are not eroded by the pandemic. Looking forward, as we plan for recovery, we have an opportunity to end gender-based violence.