

July 31, 2017

Dear Minister Duclos and Parliamentary Secretary Vaughan,

On June 21-22, Women's Shelters Canada organized a roundtable on housing, homelessness, and violence against women (VAW). The roundtable brought together a diverse group of leaders and experts including representatives from the VAW sector, the social and affordable housing sector, the homelessness sector, the anti-poverty sector, academics, and policy makers.

The roundtable initiated an ongoing dialogue on women's housing and homelessness, specifically survivors of domestic violence. Although we all work and advocate in different sectors, we are all committed to seeing the continuum of VAW, housing, and homelessness addressed in the upcoming National Housing Strategy (NHS). It is within this context that the following recommendations to the NHS were developed.

Domestic violence survivors are identified as a priority for a new National Housing Fund (NHF).¹ We welcome the recognition of the links between domestic violence, housing, and homelessness. There are several key reasons why a gender based analysis of family violence must be integrated into the National Housing Strategy and a National Housing Fund.² First, 7 in 10 people who experience family violence are women and girls.³ Second, research has shown that the majority of homeless families are led by sole support mothers.⁴ Third, in 2012, sole support mothers were considered the fastest growing demographic accessing homeless shelters (not including VAW shelters).⁵

We recommend that the National Housing Strategy:

- 1) Incorporate an intersectional human rights gender approach that recognizes the links between the lack of housing, homelessness, poverty, economic insecurity, colonization, racism, ableism, child intervention, and violence against women (VAW). An intersectional analysis of race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, immigration status, and disability is necessary to develop solutions that meet the needs of women living at different intersections;
- 2) Require current funding definitions of homelessness to be more inclusive of women, recognizing that their homelessness is invisible and that:⁶
 - Women who experience violence in their own homes are homeless
 - women who flee violence are homeless
 - women who stay in women's shelters are homeless
 - women who couch surf with family, friends, and strangers are homeless;
- 3) Create an Indigenous Housing Strategy that responds to the specific needs of Indigenous women and their families both on and off reserve, including co-operative housing and a provision that services are integrated at the beginning (e.g. child care, space for ceremony, collective kitchens, trauma-informed design);
- 4) Significantly increase the supply of social housing units and require that a minimum of 25% of units in all projects funded by the National Housing Strategy be fully accessible for women with disabilities and their families using principles of universal design;
- 5) Incorporate flexibility to make it easier to provide a continuum of housing services specific to meet regional needs. This is especially important in Northern, rural, and isolated communities where housing services are more limited;

National Housing Fund

- 6) Re-establish the shelter enhancement fund and dedicate 10% (\$50 million per year) in the National Housing Fund for shelters and additional funds for a continuum of housing for gender-based violence survivors;
- 7) Ensure that the shelter enhancement fund reflects the specific needs of VAW shelters, is distributed equitably, and accounts for regional differences including the costs associated with repairs, renovations, and builds to bring access to shelters to a national standard;
- 8) Include women survivors who are fleeing violence from non-partner family members, landlords, caregivers, and support workers on whom they depend for resources and housing;

Investment in Affordable Housing

- 9) Ensure there are dedicated funds in the agreements negotiated with the provinces and territories for shelters and a continuum of housing, including second stage/transitional and permanent supportive housing, for gender-based violence survivors;

Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS)

- 10) Address the limitations and inconsistencies across the provinces, territories and regions of the current community entity funding model and set parameters for operating funding so that women's shelters and organizations can apply directly to the federal government for HPS funding;
- 11) Support a continuum of housing beyond Housing First, including dedicated funding for permanent, temporary, and supportive housing provided by VAW services (including second stage/transitional housing) that serves survivors of violence and women coping with mental health and addictions. Additionally, there is a pressing need to support housing that is trauma-informed, low-barrier, and based on practices of harm reduction.

We believe that this is an important moment to share our expertise, knowledge, and insights on housing, homelessness, and violence against women. Coming together has deepened our understanding of the housing and homelessness sector and we aim to continue our dialogue to ensure that the National Housing Strategy and the policies enacted under the strategy commit to providing safe and affordable housing to all women fleeing domestic violence.

Sincerely,

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¹ “Budget 2017 proposes to establish a National Housing Fund to address critical housing issues and prioritize support for vulnerable citizens, including...survivors fleeing situations of domestic violence.” (Canada 2017: 134). See: Canada. (2017, Mar 22). *Building a Strong Middle Class: Budget 2017*. Online at: <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2017/docs/plan/budget-2017-en.pdf>

² Statistics Canada. (2016, Jan 26). *Infographic: Family Violence in Canada*. Online at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2016001-eng.htm>

³ Statistics Canada. (2014). *Homicide in Canada Table 6*. Online at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14244/tbl/tbl06-eng.htm>

⁴ YWCA Canada. (2012). “When There’s No Place Like Home: A Snapshot of Women’s Homelessness In Canada.” Online at: <http://ywcacanada.ca/data/publications/00000058.pdf>

⁵ Mosher, J. and Homes for Women (2013). “Housing First, Women Second? Gendering Housing First. A Brief from the Homes for Women Campaign.” Online at: <http://ywcacanada.ca/data/documents/00000382.pdf>

⁶ As reflected in the United Nation’s definition of Homelessness. See United Nations. (2015) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context*. Online at: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf