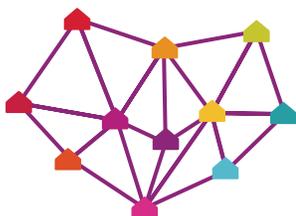


Mapping VAW Shelters and Transition Houses:

INITIAL FINDINGS OF A NATIONAL SURVEY



WOMEN'S
SHELTERS
CANADA

HÉBERGEMENT
FEMMES
CANADA

Survey Background

Developing a National Profile of Violence Against Women Shelters and Transition Houses

Since their inception in the 1970s as small grassroots feminist collectives providing temporary safety to women and children fleeing violence, violence against women (VAW) shelters and transition houses (THs)¹ have grown significantly in numbers and in the extent of the work they do. VAW shelters/THs do much more than provide a bed and basic needs. Today, they are considered the “major institutional response to violence against women.”² Many provide advocacy and a variety of services for residents.³

WSC defines a shelter or transition house as a facility whose core mission is to provide residential services to women escaping violence. However, women who are experiencing or fleeing abuse or violence do not need to reside in a shelter to access these services. Many women access outreach services without ever living in a shelter, and many who do live in a shelter for a period of time continue to use those services after leaving. Women’s Shelters Canada (WSC) estimates that for every two women receiving support while living in a shelter, there are five accessing outreach services.⁴

The First
National VAW
Shelter Survey
developed by
and for the
VAW Sector.



WSC estimates that there are currently over 530 first stage, second stage, and mixed shelters/THs across the country mandated to serve women and children escaping violence.⁵ There is no single model or governance structure for VAW shelters/THs – they are all run individually and governed by their own boards.

Survey Objective

The objective of the survey was to build a profile of VAW first stage and second stage shelters/ transition houses in Canada to illustrate and understand the scope, capacity, infrastructure, services, accessibility, and staffing across the country.

Definitions

First stage emergency shelter/transition house: *provides shorter-term shelter to women in crisis. Length of stay can be days, weeks, or months, depending on the shelter.*

Second-stage housing/ transitional housing: *provides longer-term accommodation to women who may no longer be fleeing immediate abuse but still require continued support and safety. Longer-term accommodation may be months or years, depending on the shelter.*

Mixed facility: *provides both first stage emergency shelter and longer-term second stage housing in one building under one administration.*

Intersectional Feminist Approach

“It is important to understand intersectionality of the work we do. The continuum of supports and services women need [should] be formal and informal. There needs to be 2nd stage and 3rd stage housing accessible within all transition houses...All of our programs should provide childcare, employment training, career planning, housing options, etc.” (Quebec survey respondent)



40% of shelters/THs operate an additional non-residential facility such as:

- Administration Office
- Community Counselling/ Services
- Outreach Office
- Women’s Resource Centre
- Sexual Assault or Rape Crisis Centre

Much of the research conducted about VAW shelters/THs, such as Statistics Canada’s Transition House Survey (THS), focuses primarily on the women and children who stay in shelters or use shelter services and resources.⁶ Academic studies on shelter service delivery, while illuminating, have focused on provincial policies and standards.⁷ WSC’s survey has a unique focus on the shelters themselves, examining such aspects as the services they offer, human resources, prevention work, the challenges they face, and their budgets.⁸

Survey Methods

The survey was developed in consultation with WSC’s Advisory Council,⁹ the DisAbled Women’s Network of Canada, Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario, and the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, as well as with shelter/TH directors and staff. Engagement with shelters across the country ensured that the survey captured the reality of the pressing issues facing this sector. The WSC survey is the first national inquiry of its kind developed by and for the VAW sector.

The online survey, offered in French and English, was officially launched on September 19, 2017, and remained open until March 7, 2018. Some participants noted the length of the questionnaire as a barrier to participation, which led to the development of a shorter version released on January 12, 2018. The survey was open to shelters/THs that serve women fleeing violence.¹⁰ Participants were recruited through WSC’s network, along with the assistance of provincial and territorial shelter/TH associations and Indigenous partners.

The long form of the questionnaire consisted of over 95 questions and took 1-1.5 hours to complete, while the short survey contained over 60 questions and took 15-30 minutes to complete.¹¹ Respondents were able to add comments, which provided rich qualitative data.

Survey Results

Who took part?

WSC was very pleased to have a response rate of over 75%, which is rare for a national survey of this kind.¹² This high response rate, as well as positive feedback we received from participants, demonstrates the need in the VAW sector for this type of data. Overall, 401 shelters/THs participated in the survey, including responses from each province and territory as well as from rural, remote, and Northern shelters and Indigenous shelters.¹³ All data are marked with the “n” which refers to the number of responses for a particular question. The totals vary due to non-response or not applicable answers.¹⁴ Overall, 75% of respondents completed the survey in English and 25% in French.

Table 1: Survey Participants by Type of Shelter and Province/Territory

Shelter Type	Province/Territory													Total	%
	YT	NT	NU	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PE	NL		
First Stage	2	4	3	47	27	12	8	79	77	13	9	1	8	290	72.3
Second Stage	1	1	0	13	8	2	5	24	17	2	4	2	6	85	21.2
Mixed Facility	1	0	0	5	4	1	3	3	7	0	0	1	1	26	6.5
Total	4	5	3	65	39	15	16	106	101	15	13	4	15	401	100

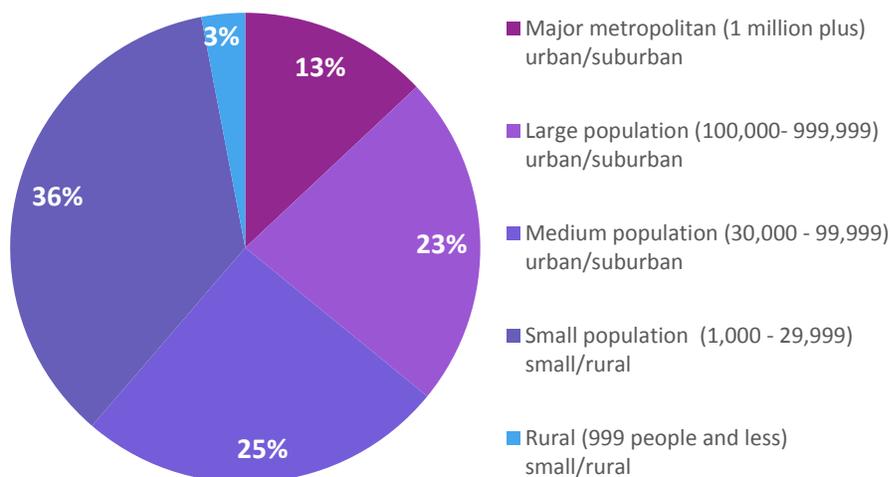
Of the responses, 72% were first stage or emergency shelters/THs, 21% were second stage shelters/THs, and 6% were mixed facilities (first and second stage accommodations under one roof). More than half (58%) of the respondents operated one shelter/TH and 42% managed more than one residential facility.¹⁵ Over a third (38%, n=384) of shelters/THs reported that they serve women escaping multiple forms of violence and abuse in addition to domestic violence/intimate partner violence (IPV). As indicated in Figure 3 (page 6), VAW shelters/THs support women fleeing many forms of violence or abuse, including survivors of human trafficking, women involved in sex work, family violence, and women experiencing homelessness.

Population Size

In line with other studies, survey results show that VAW shelters/THs are located primarily in urban and suburban centres (Figure 1).¹⁶ A majority of shelter respondents (61%) reported that the population size of their community is greater than 30,000 people (urban/suburban), while 39% are in population centres with less than 30,000 people (small/rural) (n=398).¹⁷

Overall, twelve (3%, n=401) shelters/THs reported that they were located in a rural population center of fewer than 1000 people. Of the small population and rural shelters combined (n=155), 10 were located in fly-in communities (two respondents noted that their community is only accessible by ice road or by boat).

Figure 1: Location of Shelters According to Population Size of Community



Among the urban/suburban shelters/THs, over 96% (n=243) of respondents have a hospital, medical or health centre, mental health or victim support for children, victim services, and a police station or detachment within a one-hour drive of their shelter.

Small population and rural shelters reported similar access to services except for public transportation and mental health/victim supports for children. Less than half (45%, n=153) of shelters/THs in small and rural communities reported access to public transportation in their community (Figure 2). For the twelve rural shelters, only 4 (33%) reported public transportation in their community. The majority (96%, n=243) of urban/suburban shelters/THs reported access to mental health and victim support for children, while 85% (n=153) of small and rural shelters had access to these supports.

Unique Regional Needs

“The housing needs in our community are in great demand but our community is very limited in available housing. It would be great for our community to have second stage housing... In addition to having emergency and second stage housing options I think it is very important to have education and awareness programs both for residential clients and for the public at large.”
(Northwest Territories survey respondent)

“I feel that shelters need adequate funding to accommodate their specific needs. Rural versus urban and accessing resources is a challenge when transportation is limited. Recognizing this work and providing funding would be of great benefit to most facilities.”
(New Brunswick survey respondent)

90% of First Nations shelters/THs are located in small and rural communities.

78% of all shelters/THs are in need of renovations or repairs to their shelters



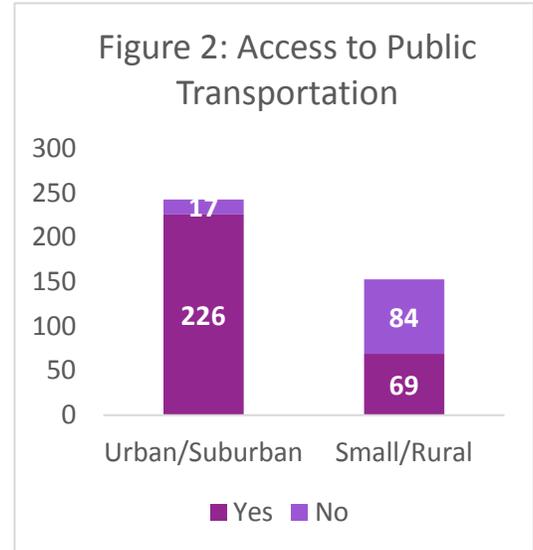
Almost **half** of shelters/THs did not have the funds needed for repairs or renovations

Indigenous Shelters/THs

Of all survey respondents, fifty-six (14%, n=401) reported that their shelter/TH was in a community where over half the population is First Nations, Metis, or Inuit. Of the 41 shelters on First Nations reserves across Canada,¹⁸ almost half (20) participated in the survey.

To capture Indigenous shelters/THs that operate on and off First Nations reserves, the questionnaire asked respondents if they were an Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, or Métis) or Indigenous-led healing lodge, shelter, or transition house (on or off reserve). Of all responding shelters/THs, thirty-eight (9%) identified as an Indigenous or Indigenous-led healing lodge or shelter/TH.

The majority (63%) of Indigenous shelters/TH were located in small/rural population centres, compared to only 36% of the 363 non-Indigenous shelters/THs (n=401).



Physical Structure, Age of Shelters/THs, and Ownership

The majority (69%, n=389) of shelters/THs own their buildings and 59% (n=299) have paid off their mortgages. For shelters/THs who do not own their buildings, many reported that they had partnerships with various housing and governmental bodies, were jointly owned, and/or had a forgivable loan with Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation or a non-profit housing organization.

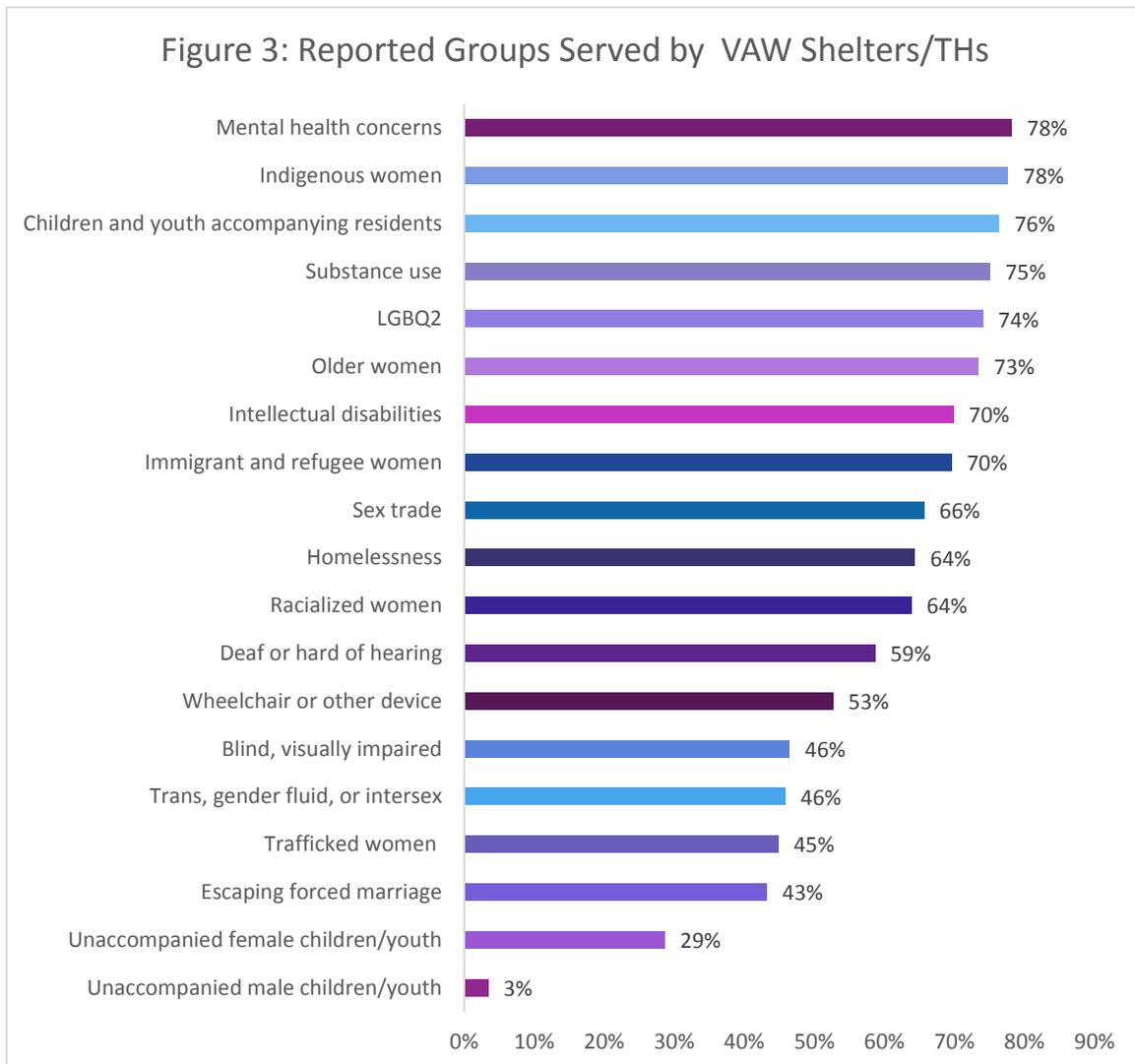
Of the shelters/THs who knew what year their shelter was built, over one-third (39%, n=277) indicated that their shelter was built in or prior to 1980, demonstrating that a number of shelters are aging. The majority (78%, n=389) of shelters/THs are in need of some form of repairs and renovations. When asked if the shelter/TH had the funds to make the necessary repairs or renovations, 47% (n=251) did not.

Reported Groups Served by VAW Shelters/THs

We asked shelters/THs if their mandate is to serve victims/survivors of IPV exclusively, with the majority (62%, n=384) indicating that they did.

As expected, they serve a wide range of women fleeing violence (Figure 3). The majority of respondents indicated that they provide amenities and services to women with significant mental health concerns (78%), Indigenous women (78%), children and youth (76%), women struggling with substance use (75%), LGBTQ2 people¹⁹ (74%), older women (73%), and women with intellectual disabilities (70%).

Respondents noted that they might have served trafficked women or transgender women but that some clients did not disclose this information. Several shelters also allow family members in addition to dependent children stay in the shelter with the women fleeing violence, and several will also accommodate men fleeing abuse.²⁰



Next Steps

We aim to publish two comprehensive reports, one on first stage/emergency shelters/THs and another one on second stage/transitional housing. Stay tuned for our comprehensive report on first stage emergency shelters/THs, to be released in December 2018!

Acknowledgements

The development of the survey was a collaborative effort between Women’s Shelters Canada, fourteen provincial and territorial shelter/transition house associations, the DisAbleD Women’s Network of Canada, the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario, our academic partners Holly Johnson and Nadine Wathen, and consultant Marika Morris, who helped design the survey. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of Kaitlin Bardswich for the copy edit and Michèle Briand for translation. WSC would also like to express its appreciation to all the shelter/TH staff and directors who generously offered their time to complete the survey. Cover page graphic by The Public. Other graphics made in Piktochart. All Tables and Figures by WSC.

Women’s Shelters Canada, formerly the Canadian Network of Women’s Shelters and Transition Houses, would like to thank Status of Women Canada for providing funding support for this project. The opinions expressed in these documents do not necessarily represent the official policy of Status of Women Canada.



WSC acknowledges that the location of our office and the work that we do in Ottawa is on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people.

How to cite this document

Maki, K. (2018). “Mapping VAW Shelters and Transition Houses: Initial Finding of a National Survey.” Ottawa, ON: Women’s Shelters Canada.

References/Notes

¹ Across the country, some provinces and territories use the term “shelter” while others use “transition house” to describe VAW residential and outreach facilities and services. The terms shelters and transition houses are used interchangeably in this report as a result.

² Tutty, L. (2015). "Addressing the safety and trauma issues of abused women: A cross-Canada study of YWCA shelters." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3): 103; Harris, R., Wathen, N, Lynch, R. (2014). "Assessing Performance in Shelters for Abused Women: Can 'Caring Citizenship' Be Measured in 'Value for Money' Accountability Regimes?" *International Journal of Public Administration*, 37: 737-746.

³ Services and advocacy include helping to navigate social supports (affordable housing, social assistance, subsidized childcare, community health centres); assisting immigrant and refugee women find culturally sensitive and language specific services; individual and group counselling; programs for children who have witnessed abuse; safety planning; legal and court support; Indigenous cultural programming; and supporting women with addictions and mental health challenges. See Burnette, C., Ford-Gilboe, M., Berman, H., Wathen, N., and Ward-Griffin, C., (2016). "The Day-to-Day Reality of Delivering Shelter Services to Women Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence in the Context of System and Policy Demands." *Journal of Social Service Research*, Vol 0 (0): 1-17.

⁴ Women's Shelters Canada. (2017). "Shelters and Transition Houses are much more than refuges from violence - they are places where women rebuild their lives." Available online at www.endvaw.ca/shelters-refuge-violence

⁵ Women's Shelters Canada's internal database.

⁶ Beattie, S. and Hutchins, H. (2015). "Shelters for Abused Women in Canada, 2014." *Juristat*. Available online at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14207-eng.htm>; Tutty (2015).

⁷ Burnette et al (2016).

⁸ In collaboration with our academic partners, WSC revised some of the survey measures used in an Ontario study to incorporate a pan-Canadian focus. Dr. Nadine Wathen graciously shared the survey instrument used in her study of Ontario shelters (see Harris et al 2014).

⁹ WSC's Advisory Council consists of fourteen provincial and territorial associations that are full members of WSC: Alberta Council of Women's Shelters; L'Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de 2e étape pour femmes et enfants victimes de violence conjugale (Quebec); BC Society of Transition Houses; Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes (Quebec); Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters; New Brunswick South Central Transition House and Second Stage Coalition; Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses; PEI Family Violence Prevention Services Inc.; Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan; Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale (Quebec); Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador; Transition House Association of Nova Scotia; The Yukon Women's Transition Home Society; and YWCA Northwest Territories.

¹⁰ Some women's shelters, such as women's homelessness shelters, serve different populations; however, for this national survey, the focus was on violence against women shelters/THs that are mandated to serve women and children fleeing violence. Safe homes, which are specific to British Columbia, were also not included. The overall survey count includes two shelters/THs that serve primarily women experiencing homelessness who are also fleeing violence. We included these shelters because they met the criteria of serving women and children fleeing violence.

¹¹ Most survey participants finished the long or short survey; partially completed surveys were included if participants answered the first block of questions. We felt this was important because the first section covered regional specifics (services within a one-hour drive, number and types of shelters, Indigenous shelters, affordable housing, etc.). The long survey took on average 1-1.5 hours to complete depending on the number of shelters an organization operated. Those with multiple shelters that operated under one administration or budget were asked to answer questions for each of their locations (for the short survey, they only answered for one location and it took 15-30 minutes to complete). Due to the time commitment of the long survey, some participants were unable to complete all the questions, resulting in different response rates for many questions. Additionally, the short survey had fewer questions, which altered response rates. All data are marked with the response rate (n) for clarity. There are several reasons for different response rates to survey questions: lack of time, staff, or resources to complete the survey; lack of knowledge of the answers to some of the questions; prioritizing certain questions that were important or relevant to their own shelter; selecting an incorrect option for the survey logic and consequently being sent to different sections of the survey thereby skipping a series of questions; completing the short survey with fewer questions; and response fatigue.

¹² WSC's internal shelter/TH database is updated annually. To date, we estimate 530 shelters/THs that are explicitly mandated to serve women and children fleeing violence.

¹³ Overall, survey respondents completed 297 long surveys and 65 short surveys for a total of 362 completed surveys. Some of these surveys included responses for multiple locations (a condition was used to loop respondents through a series of questions for each facility) resulting in data on 401 VAW shelters/THs.

¹⁴ Percentages cited in the body of the text, charts, and graphs may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

¹⁵ Specifically, 25% of respondents had more than one shelter building under one budget and administration, and 17% had more than one shelter building with separate budgets for each shelter.

¹⁶ Harris, Wathen and Lynch (2014); Tutty (2015).

¹⁷ The survey asked population size based on five categories (major metropolitan, large, medium, small, and rural population). For the purposes of this report, we define communities of over 30,000 as urban and suburban and populations lower than 30,000 as small and rural.

¹⁸ Government of Canada, Indigenous Services of Canada. (2018, April). "Family Violence Prevention Program." Available online at <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100035253/1533304683142>.

¹⁹ For the purposes of this report, LGBTQ2 refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer and Two-spirited persons.

²⁰ This includes referring men to alternative services, putting them up in a hotel, and sometimes sheltering them on the premises.