

Final Report: Response and Recovery Funding

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

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Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada saw an increase in violence against women (VAW), higher demands for services, and reduced fundraising opportunities due to restrictions on in-person gatherings. For example, Women's Shelters Canada's (WSC) [2020 edition of *Shelter Voices*](#) found that over 50% of shelter respondents were seeing increased severity in violence, while over one-third (37%) indicated that they had seen a change in the types of violence experienced by women.

The federal government recognized these challenges and that additional funding and resources were needed for the VAW shelter sector after the conclusion of the 2020 COVID-19 Emergency Funding (contribution agreement NA 190184). As a result, the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) and Women's Shelters Canada worked together to continue to support VAW shelters across the country and the people they serve.

Between 2021 and 2024, WAGE allocated \$85,548,062 of COVID-19 Response & Recovery Funding for VAW shelters/transition houses (TH) across the country, excluding those in Quebec and those funded by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). WSC partnered with WAGE to deliver these funds to those shelters across Canada, including an administrative fee. This final report¹ summarizes how that funding was spent.

In total, \$83,427,189 of new funds were sent to VAW shelters, transition houses, and provincial associations. **The total amount of funds reported on was \$86,001,865.02**, the difference being unspent funds from the 2020 COVID-19 Emergency Funding that were already with organizations and were allowed to be reallocated as Response & Recovery funding.

The reports for funding recipients were due on October 30, 2023, unless shelters were offered extensions to spend unspent funds, in which case reports were due by March 31, 2024. Any errors or changes after June 24, 2024, are not included in this final report. Given that there are no outstanding reports, we do not anticipate any changes or amendments to this final report.

Background and Funding Approach

This report outlines the uses and impact of the funding received by Women's Shelters Canada and covers the activities undertaken under *NA 21915 – Enhancing the Capacity of Violence Against Women Shelters and Transition Houses to Respond to and Recover from COVID-19*. This contribution agreement was supplemented and extended to March 31, 2023.

The original agreement was signed on July 30, 2021, for \$79,101,620 plus \$2,446,442 admin for a total of \$81,548,062.

There was an amendment on November 15, 2022, to increase the grant amount to \$82,981,620 and the admin amount to \$2,566,422, for a total of \$85,548,062. This amendment extended the project to December 31, 2023. A final amendment in December 2023 changed the final spending date to March 31, 2024, and final report due date to June 30, 2024.

Women's Shelters Canada received previous funding under contribution agreement NA 190184 from April 2020, for *Support for Violence Against Women Shelters and Transition Houses to Respond to*

¹ All percentages are rounded up. Some quotes are lightly edited for spelling and grammar.

COVID-19. The final report for this activity was submitted on July 13, 2022, with an addendum sent on January 26, 2023.

Partnerships & Communications

The partnerships already established with the Canadian Women's Foundation (CWF) and WAGE through the previous contribution agreement were continued throughout this period and were deepened thanks to increased activity and sharing of information on grantees, internal processes, and staffing structures. We also worked with CWF to finalize the Shockproofing Communities Summit in March 2023.

There were regular weekly, biweekly, and ad hoc meetings to maintain regular communication and update each other. These meetings often focused on reporting structures with WAGE, or were dedicated to problem-solving, such as when we were faced with reporting delays, returned funds, extensions and changes to agreements. It was essential that this work be done in collaboration so that the funds, the impact, and the conditions for funding were consistent between WSC and CWF.

Biweekly, WSC also sent WAGE an update that included a short narrative with the total amount of funds sent to the total number of organizations for each fiscal and an Excel document with the details for each organization. WSC also regularly responded to requests for information from the Minister or other MPs, through WAGE, and provided testimonials from shelter organizations when requested.

Systems and Operations

Before 2020, Women's Shelters Canada had never acted as a granting organization. With the NA 190184 agreement, WSC staff quickly pivoted to get the funds out to shelters as quickly as possible. With the NA 21915 agreement, WSC already had systems in place that worked well – using Qualtrics for the applications, keeping track of funds in Excel documents, sending the funds to the organizations – but more staff were needed. A new Grants & Development Coordinator was hired to support this work, with the new Communications Coordinator also assisting, especially with Round 1. WSC also used the services of a freelance organization, Do Gooders based in BC, for especially busy times.

Criteria & Eligibility

These funds were in the context of the special circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and were flow-through funds from WAGE to WSC to women's shelters across the country. There were two eligibility requirements for each organization. They were that the organization:

- Operated a 24/7 residential facility for women, children, and/or 2SLGBTQ+ people fleeing domestic/family violence; and
- Was currently operating

Funds were sent to eligible organizations regardless of their CRA status.

WSC did its due diligence in ensuring that all VAW shelters, particularly those in rural and Indigenous communities, received funding. In the previous funding from 2020, the list of eligible women's shelters and transition houses were vetted by WAGE, WSC, the provincial/territorial shelter associations, and the provincial/territorial governments. That list of shelters was kept up to date by WSC as new shelters opened. Every shelter organization on that list was emailed an application link for each round of funding.

To ensure that every eligible shelter organization was aware of the funding and their eligibility, the following steps were taken:

- WSC's 16 member provincial and territorial shelter associations did outreach with their member shelters about these funds
- Every shelter organization that had not opened their email invitation from us was contacted by phone during Round 1
- In Round 2, every shelter that did not apply in Round 1 was contacted to ensure they were aware of the funding
- There were two info sessions in both Rounds 1 and 2
- Indigenous shelter organizations that had an extension to spend the previous NA 190184 funding were phoned during Round 2 so that they knew that they must apply in Round 2 if they had unspent 2020 funds

Every shelter that applied received funds. No shelter's application was rejected. Whenever an application had discrepancies or included a desire to use the funds for an ineligible expense, WSC staff worked with the organization to amend the application to be eligible.

Rounds of Granting

Following discussions with WAGE, the decision was made to distribute funds through two rounds of funding. Round 1 took place in November 2021 and Round 2 in February-March 2022. In Round 1, VAW shelters/THs could apply for funds for both or one of the following fiscal years: FY1 (19 July 2021-31 March 2022) and FY2 (1 April 2022-31 March 2023). In Round 2, they could only apply for FY2.

The maximum amount VAW shelters/THs could apply for depended on the number of shelters/THs from their organization included in their application:

- 1 VAW shelter/TH = up to \$200,000 per round
- 2-3 VAW shelters/THs = up to \$300,000 per round
- 4 or more VAW shelters/THs = up to \$400,000 per round
- Safe home organizations (only applicable in regions with safe homes, such as British Columbia) = \$200,000 per round
- Collaborative initiatives = \$150,000

Round 1

In Round 1, \$49,576,199.88 was requested and approved across 265 individual and 3 collaborative applications. The total requested and approved for FY1 was \$19,032,240.45; for FY2, it was \$30,543,959.43. The majority of funds were distributed before January 1, 2022. Funds distributed after that date were due to delays on the individual shelter/TH organizations' sides (e.g. signing funding agreements).

Round 2

Unlike previous COVID-related funding, some capital expenditures were eligible for FY2 as a result of advocacy from WSC and CWF to the federal government. This included renovations to enhance services and ensure the safety and security of clients, purchase of large appliances, HVAC systems, and air conditioning systems. This meant that organizations applying in Round 2 could apply for a broader range

of expenses; organizations who applied in Round 1 for FY2 could also re-allocate those funds to eligible capital expenditures.

In Round 2, 198 organizations applied individually; there were also 3 collaborative applications. The total requested for was \$34,082,406.58, which was \$4,556,986.46 more than the \$29,525,420.12 WSC had left to allocate after Round 1.

For the collaborative applications, WSC rejected one as that organization already had a collaborative application approved in Round 1. WSC approved the smaller ask in full and a percentage of the larger application. For the 198, WSC set up the following system:

- If an organization did not apply in Round 1, they would be approved for the full amount.
- If an organization applied in both Rounds but their total request was less than the maximum for one round, they would receive the full amount.
- For all other organizations, their requested amount was split into two amounts:
 - Amount A: an amount that would bring their Round 1 approved amount up to the maximum allowed in Round 1 (this amount could be 0 if they asked for the max in Round 1).
 - Amount B: this “leftover” amount was multiplied by 80.06333%.

This meant that \$11,225,097.14 was approved at 100% and \$22,857,309.44 was approved at 80.06333%, bringing that to \$18,300,322.98. This brought the total approved amount to \$29,525,420.12.

Therefore, all applications received between 80-100% of their requested amounts. The majority of Round 2 funds were distributed in April 2022. Organizations that received funding for FY1 (19 July 2021-31 March 2022) were required to submit a short progress report. If they had spent 75% of what was received, they could receive their FY2 amount. Organizations that spent less than 75% were told to contact us when they reached that threshold, after which their new funds would be sent. WSC set up this system to reduce the amount of unspent funds that would be returned at the end of the project.

Organizations that did not receive their full requests were told that, should more funds become available, they would be contacted. WAGE indicated that more funds were available, so the contribution agreement was amended in November 2022 and more funds were sent to WSC. This resulted in Round 3 of granting.

Round 3

Round 3 took place in November 2022 after an amendment to the NA 21915 contribution agreement resulted in more funds being available. Every shelter organization that was unable to receive its full request in Round 2 was eligible to receive the difference in Round 3. Organizations that received their full amount in Round 2, since they did not request the maximum, were able to apply for additional funds, up to \$20,000.

In total, \$5,703,080.78 was approved and distributed through Round 3 to 188 organizations. Of that, \$2,007,457.94 represented new asks (i.e. not funds that were requested in Round 2 and unable to be approved due to demand).

Round 4

In early March 2024, WSC staff approached WAGE with a request to re-distribute unspent funds that were being returned to WSC, up to \$150,000 total. This request was approved on March 14, 2024.

Organizations that had reported before or on the due date of October 30, 2023, were asked to indicate whether they could use an additional \$5,000. They also needed to confirm that they could sign an amended funding agreement by a certain date and that their banking details had not changed as new banking info requires the due diligence of sending a small test amount to ensure the information is correct. This was to ensure that all funds could be sent by the March 31, 2024, deadline.

Over 100 organizations applied for the additional funds. Following eligibility criteria, a group of organizations were chosen from the list, taking into account geographic distribution. Thirty organizations were approved for \$5,000 each, totalling \$150,000. However, only \$145,000 was distributed because one organization had an updated bank account, despite confirming twice that they did not.

Summary

In total, **314 organizations completed the COVID-19 Response & Recovery 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, not WSC. Shelters funded by ISC also received their funding outside of WSC.

Figure 1: Map of All Respondents

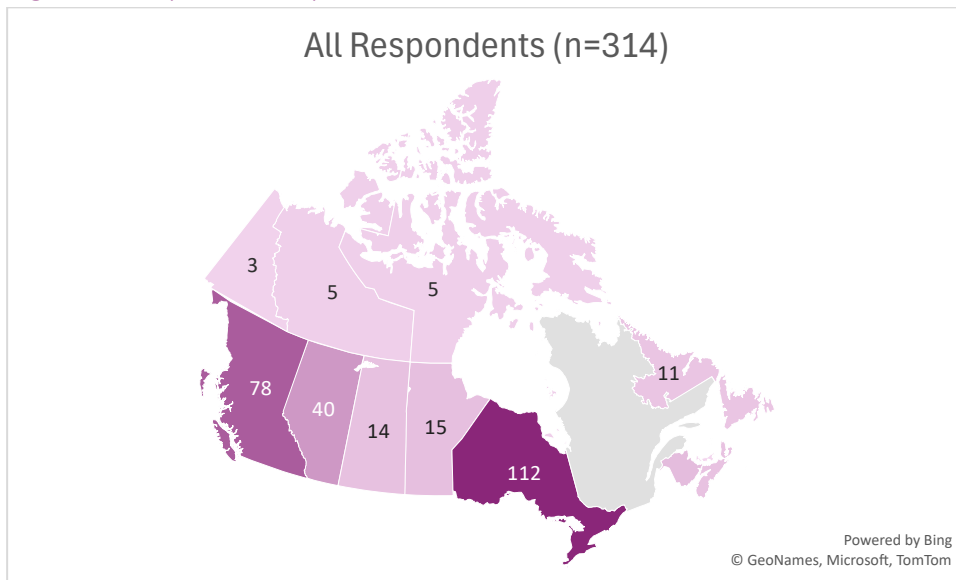


Table 1: All Respondents by Province/Territory

Alberta	40
British Columbia	78
Manitoba	15

New Brunswick	17
Newfoundland and Labrador	11
Northwest Territories	5
Nova Scotia	13
Nunavut	5
Ontario	112
Prince Edward Island	1
Saskatchewan	14
Yukon	3
Total	314

Number of People Served

The total number of individuals (service users) who were **directly supported by the funding was 663,730**. The average number of individuals served was 2,114. The total number of individuals who were **indirectly served by this funding was 1,214,613**. Despite reaching such a high number of people, there were also **137,129 individuals turned away** from service and/or residency.

Project Types

There were three different funding types that organizations undertook. These included individual shelter organization funds, collaborative projects, and provincial association projects. Collaborative projects included more than one organization, with the highest number including 12 partnered organizations.

Table 2: All Projects by Type

Individual Shelter Organization Funding	298
Collaborative Project	6
Provincial Project	10
Total	314

Individual Shelter Funding

WSC provided funding to 298 shelter organizations for a total of \$84,057,503.02 to be reported on.

Nine shelter organizations chose not to register for any funds. Ten shelter organizations returned unspent funds for a total of \$319,468.63. Some of this was re-distributed to other shelter organizations and the rest will be returned to WAGE.

The money spent was used to cover a wide range of operational, programmatic, and capital costs. Figure 2 and Table 3 show the number of respondents from each province and territory. Shelters from across the country applied for and received this funding with the exception of Quebec and ISC-funded shelters/THs. While we heard many things from funded organizations, there were two critical messages that were shared: (1) this funding was essential, supporting the maintenance of shelter services and the ability to remain open during a crisis. Organizations are deeply appreciative of this funding. (2) Organizations are concerned about the end of this funding and want WAGE to know that operational, capital, and unrestricted funds are critical to their continued operations.

Figure 2: Map of Individual Shelter Organization Respondents

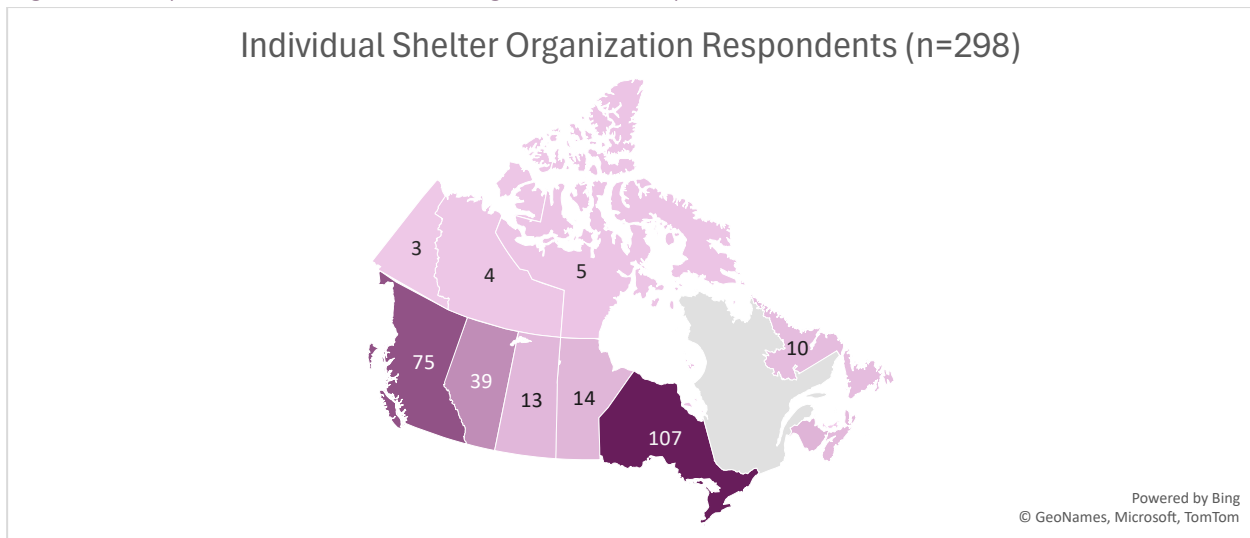


Table 3: Individual Shelter Organization Respondents by Province/Territory

Alberta	39
British Columbia	75
Manitoba	14
New Brunswick	15
Newfoundland and Labrador	10
Northwest Territories	4
Nova Scotia	12
Nunavut	5
Ontario	107
Prince Edward Island	1
Saskatchewan	13
Yukon	3
Total	298

Who Was Served

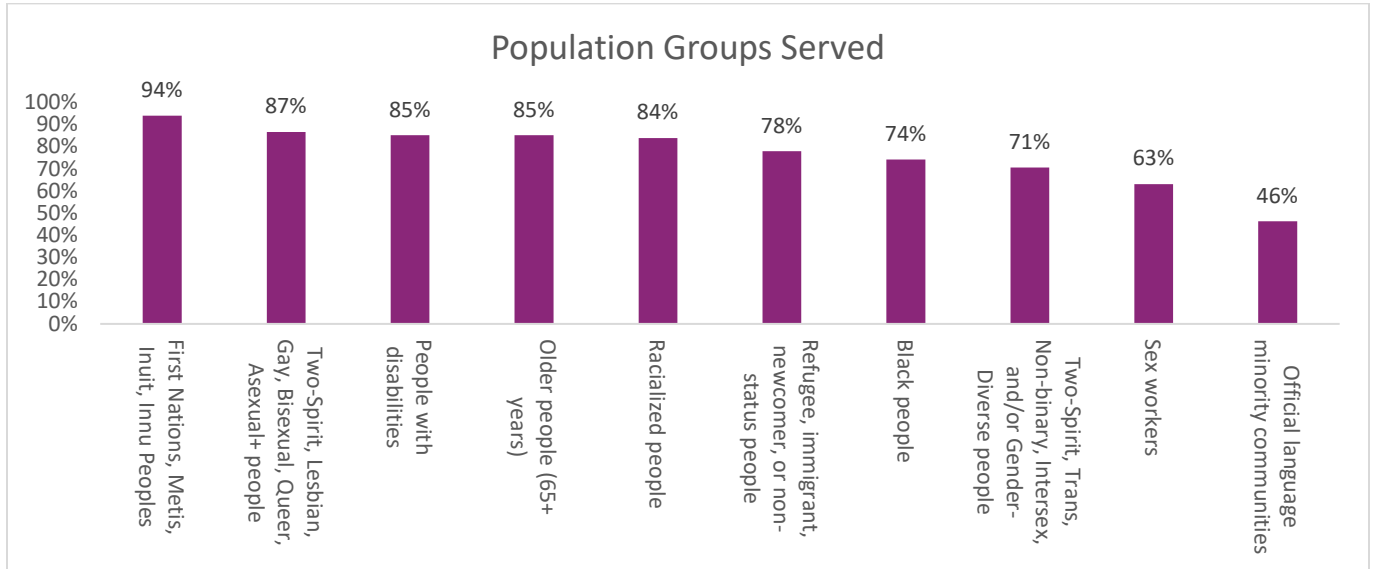
The total number of individuals (service users) **directly supported by the funding to shelter organizations was 662,300**. The average number of individuals served was 2,222. The total number of individuals who were **indirectly served was 1,170,216**. The average number of indirectly served individuals was 7,454. Despite reaching such a high number of individuals, **there were also 135,686 individuals turned away** for service and/or residency among 184 of the shelter/TH organizations. The average number of individuals turned away was 737 (n=184). This high turnaway rate speaks to the increased demand that shelters/THs are seeing as a result of escalating rates and severity of violence.² Further, the housing crisis is contributing to a bottleneck in shelters, where new residents cannot enter

² Canadian Women's Foundation et al. (2020) Resetting Normal: Systemic Gender-based Violence and the Pandemic. Montreal, QC: Canadian Women's Foundation. https://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/20-08-CWF-ResettingNormal-Report3_v5.pdf.

as existing residents are unable to find adequate and affordable housing options. Both conditions are contributing to rising runaway numbers, which are not decreasing with the end of COVID funding.

Shelters/THs serve a range of individuals. Figure 3 shows the rates at which shelters indicated that they serve marginalized or under-supported populations.

Figure 3: Population Groups Served



How Funds Were Spent

Figure 4 shows how many organizations spent within each funding category. **Nearly every organization funded indicated that they allocated funding toward staffing. The total amount allocated was \$40.5 million, or nearly half of all allocated funds.** Based on our Feminist Brain Drain Study³ (attached to this report), we know that organizations are facing a labour crisis. Shelters/THs find recruitment and retention of staff difficult due to under-resourcing, which contributes to salaries and benefits not being competitive. We frequently heard these types of issues among responses in these funding reports. While organizations were able to address some of these challenges through increased staffing, wage supplements, double staffing, and increased health and wellness benefits, for many these will cease with the conclusion of this funding. Among the most frequently cited positions being added to organizations were:

- Administrative supports;
- Cooks, housekeepers, and maintenance staff; and
- Outreach workers.

“We had the majority of our core staff leave within the last 3 years – citing burnout and fatigue during and following the pandemic. The funding from Women’s Shelters Canada allowed us to search for, train, and develop a new team.”

³ Hoogendam, R & Maki, K. (2024) Feminist Brain Drain: Labour Issues and Worker Wellness in the VAW Shelter Sector. Ottawa, ON: Women’s Shelters Canada. <https://endvaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/FBD-Final-Report.pdf>.

“As an Executive Director managing a VAW shelter during the COVID-19 pandemic, without this funding the doors would have been shut. There is no possible way that we could have operated without this critical support. For the first time in its 39-year history, we had adequate staffing on day shifts.”

The next most popular areas of spending were technology and operations and facilities, followed by materials and supplies, capital, and transportation. Technology was a critical resource to invest in during lockdowns, as it allowed organizations to remain connected to clients, both residents and non-residents. Organizations upgraded technology including hardware for both clients and staff and made improvements to software, including programs to improve staff collaboration and client outreach (e.g. Microsoft Teams and Zoom). In addition, organizations invested in their crisis lines and security systems. Operations and facilities funds were allocated to areas like utilities and groceries, which both have been significantly affected by inflation.

“Most importantly, this grant allowed us to concentrate on our work of supporting women and children fleeing domestic violence, rather than on securing funding to provide these essential services.”

All the top areas where funding was allocated **are areas that have been underfunded in this sector for a long time**. Organizations were deeply appreciative to have funding that allowed them to invest in building maintenance, staffing supports, and organizational necessities. This funding provided shelters space to breathe and invest in long-needed areas.

“We have found offering a cared for unit, that is attractive and appealing gifts [for] the family with the perception of being cared for and allows them during a difficult and humbling situation the opportunity to experience respect and dignity. This helps build an ethos of care and consideration which in turn makes room for a perception of safety. Once we have this our clients are in a place where they can begin the work of healing from their trauma.”

Figure 4: Funding Distribution by Category

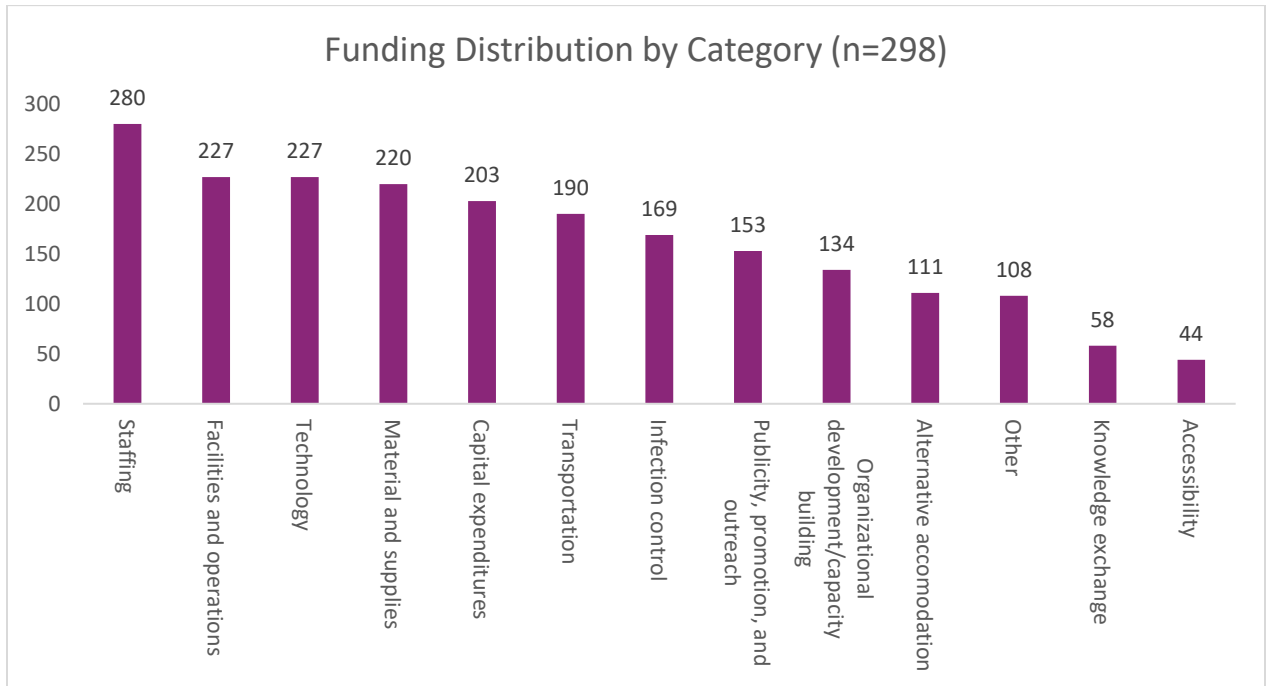


Table 4: What the Recovery Funding was Spent On

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Range	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total amount to report on	298	799323.00	800000.00	84057503.02	282072.16	156411.01
Staffing	298	641780.99	641780.99	40583,427.65	136186.00	113683.48
Alternative accommodation	298	150000.00	150000.00	1807913.40	6066.82	18301.04
Material and supplies	297	148735.66	148735.66	4113305.92	13849.51	19583.48
Transportation	298	62847.13	62847.13	1239373.57	4158.97	8155.27
Infection control	297	149135.00	149135.00	1920611.78	6466.71	15140.61
Facilities and Operations	297	359693.00	359693.00	8796262.51	29617.05	48982.29
Capital Expenditures	298	350000.00	350000.00	14146859.96	47472.68	69187.43
Technology	298	88794.99	88794.99	3133711.99	10515.81	14736.14
Knowledge exchange	297	81320.07	81320.07	451780.39	1521.15	6340.83
Publicity, Promotion, and Outreach	296	74476.22	74476.22	1653893.64	5587.48	11489.78
Organization Development and Capacity Building	297	303390.00	303390.00	2841718.77	9568.08	26181.42
Accessibility	296	25000.00	25000.00	189346.83	639.69	2781.21
Other	298	160505.00	160505.00	2854828.03	9579.96	22433.46

Unlike the first round of funding, organizations were permitted to allocate funding toward capital improvements. **Among those funded, 39% of organizations invested in capital projects.** As shown in our national study of VAW shelters,⁴ 80% of organizations' buildings needed repairs, yet nearly half did not have the funds to undertake this work. The average age of buildings in that study was 45 years, which means that they require regular maintenance and investment to stay in a good state of repair, yet many funders do not fund this needed work. The top areas listed for capital investment included furniture and appliances, renovations, HVAC systems, and exterior/outside upgrades. Many replaced aging appliances and furniture, noting that existing furniture degraded quickly with constant infection control cleaning and therefore new materials that were more durable and easier to clean were needed. Renovations were undertaken, which included items like painting and room improvements. HVAC systems were not only a COVID response, but also needed to address rising summer temperatures. Outdoor improvements were wide-ranging, from doors and walkways to yards and garages.

“The cost of running our organization has increased throughout the pandemic and accessing funds to do other things such as renovations and repairs has become increasingly difficult to access. The ability to access these funds has had a major impact on the quality of the shelter and the home that we provide our residents. Our organization is very thankful for this opportunity.”

Funding Environment

As mentioned above, shelters/THs noted that staffing was the top area where funding was spent. This includes money allocated to new positions, increasing staff salaries, adding double staffing, providing more benefits, including more flexible sick/mental health time, and wellness activities and resources for staff. The largest areas of spending after staffing needs, included:

- Providing supplies for clients, including food, gas and gift cards, rental supplements, technology, and resources for children.
- Infection control items including masks, air purifiers, sanitizing supplies, partitions, and signage.
- The continuation of programming. Many indicated that without this funding, programming would have been reduced or cut, and that with the funding they were able to ensure supports continued.
- Technology including new devices for staff and clients, new software (e.g. Teams and Zoom), new systems like client management or donor management systems.

“Beyond keeping our doors open, which was our first priority, we were able to use some of these funds for organizational development. These are functions that do not typically have a funding source but are essential to a healthy organization. We were able to complete a strategic plan, human resources tools update and development, develop a wage grid and job classification system, and a fundraising strategy. Without these funds we likely would not have been able to accomplish these much needed projects.”

“Overall, this funding has filled in the gaps and allowed us to add resources where we need it the most. Our largest spending, not surprisingly, was on staff salaries. Staff are our most important resource. They are the changemakers for those that we serve.”

⁴ Maki, Krys. (2019) More Than a Bed: A National Profile of VAW Shelters and Transition Houses. Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada. <https://endvaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/More-Than-a-Bed-Final-Report.pdf>.

“This funding was given at an exceptional time. The pandemic made the work much more difficult, and this funding allowed for a Kitchen Manager to be on site to prepare nutritious meals for our service users within the constrictions of COVID. It also allowed for our board to conduct strategic planning and board development, which is always needed, but never funded.”

This funding was an important resource for responding to and recovering from the pandemic. With more resources for staffing, organizations were better able to respond to increased rates of violence, cover for staff who were sick or isolating, and dedicate staff to pandemic responses including cleaning, keeping up with changing mandates, and ensuring shelter compliance. Several organizations noted that they had limited outbreaks of COVID in shelter, which were better controlled by having these resources on hand. The ability to access PPE and invest in health and safety, as well as investing in capital, renovations, and furniture, all contributed to a safer and more livable space during a difficult and scary time. In particular, the ability to add bathrooms and additional bedrooms allowed shelters to maintain spaces and keep residents separated as mandated. Additionally, new furniture or surfaces that were easy to clean and did not deteriorate saved staff time and prevented the spread of infection. Shelters/THs were also grateful to have the resources to invest in training for staff and new policies. Having these resources can contribute to long-term resilience to future pandemics, as well as preparing staff and the organization to better address areas like mental health concerns, addictions issues, and inclusivity and diversity.

Without these funds, the shelter/TH sector would have been devastated. Most recipients indicated that they would have been required to reduce their capacity, limit their services, and would not have been able to continue offering a high quality of service. Additionally, many also believed that without these funds they would have been forced to close their doors temporarily or permanently. The ability to support staff and hire more staff through these funds meant that retention levels were higher and staff wellbeing was better than they may have otherwise been. This also contributed to keeping shelters operating. The absence of this funding would have had a hugely negative impact on those attempting to flee violence.

While many organizations noted their reliance on these federal funds throughout the pandemic, **59% (n=297) indicated that they also received provincial/territorial funds to respond to the pandemic.**

While this funding allowed for expenses in many areas that are often not permitted through funding programs, and in fact many noted that there was nothing that they were not able to address, there are still gaps that organizations experienced. The primary concern that was raised was that the funding needs to be long-term and/or ongoing. While the funding was deeply appreciated, particularly as it did not come with the constraints of program funding, it still was time limited, and many organizations have already cut or reduced programming, positions, and activities that were brought in under this funding stream. A small number of people noted that the restrictions on purchasing a vehicle or property were problematic. Particularly for rural and more remote communities, transportation is a vital resource that is not readily available. Too often, responsibility for transporting clients falls on individual staff members using their own vehicles.

Given the long under-resourcing of the shelter sector, this funding was simply insufficient to address the backlog of organizational needs. While staff salaries could be increased during this period, these still could not be brought to a level where organizations could compete with other local organizations or government departments. Despite implementing retention incentives for staff, many noted that they

continued to see high turnover during the pandemic. Further, as discussed above, many shelter buildings are aging and there has not been funding available to keep these in a good state of repair. While these funds addressed some of the needs for repairs and improvements, it simply was not enough to fulfill the backlog of projects. Given rising inflation, increased demand for services, and a history of under-resourcing, for many this funding allowed them to keep their doors open and continue to serve their community, but without a commitment to long-term funding, it simply could not address all their needs.

“These funds were not able to address the ongoing underfunding of women's shelters.”

“Sadly, this funding provided a short-term solution, but the long-term problem of underfunding in this sector still exists. Lurching from crisis to crisis, more work, and clients than you can get through, more problems and no time to find solutions, tiredness, hopelessness, and frantically trying to fundraise off the side of your desk, slowly erodes hope and joy from the staff. This is when despair, lateral violence, and eventually burnout and compassion fatigue take out good, caring, passionate staff.”

“These federal funds addressed all of our needs. The only aspect the federal funds were not able to address is continuous, annualized funding beyond Sept 30, 2023. An additional \$200,000 each year would allow our shelter to function at an optimal level of staffing and supports to address the needs of our community.”

Because of the issues raised above, as well as the downward trend in charitable giving,⁵ **85% of shelters are deeply concerned about the end of this funding.** Some have indicated that they will be forced to reduce or cut programs, layoff staff, run a deficit, and/or close their shelter doors without sufficient funding.

Satisfaction with the Funding

Despite raising concerns about funding gaps and the lack of ongoing funds, there was overwhelming appreciation for the funding. Among funded organizations, **80% felt that the funding was extremely effective**, while 20% felt that it was very effective. When asked about their experience working with WSC to apply for, receive, and report on the funding, recipients were overall very satisfied with their experience, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Satisfaction with the Funding Process⁶

	Extremely Positive	Somewhat Positive	Neither Positive or Negative	Somewhat Negative
Registering for Funds	89%	7%	3%	0%
Process to Receive Funds	92%	5%	3%	0%
Communicating with WSC	92%	6%	2%	<1%

⁵ CanadaHelps. (2024) The Giving Report 2024. From Disconnection to Collective Action. CanadaHelps.

⁶ With rounding, numbers may not add up to 100%.

Shelters/THs expressed so much appreciation to both WSC and WAGE for these funds. Among their reasons for gratitude was a process that was simple, efficient, and did not overburden organizations; funding that was flexible; and funders who seemed like they understood and trusted those they were funding. Too often, funders ask for lengthy applications and reports that are not relevant for or useful to those accessing the funding or writing the reports. Recipients overall felt that this process was reasonable while still providing a level of accountability to government that they understand is a necessary part of the process.

“The funding process was excellent, easy to navigate and the application to apply for this funding was short and quick. It felt like the WSC trusted our requests.”

“We are extremely grateful for the funding! Thank you for making it an easier process than most funding opportunities. It leaves more time to do the work we are dedicated to doing.”

“I found the process to access funding and support at Women's Shelters Canada to be easily accessible with an expectation of accountability, and the staff working for the organization to be approachable, respectful, unassuming and very supportive.”

Many organizations expressed that funders do not understand their needs, nor feel like they are trusted to effectively spend their funds. With this funding, the ability to spend with limited restrictions made organizations feel like they had autonomy to make decisions. They also felt like their knowledge and expertise were trusted, as they were able to allocate the funding to areas that they identified as critical.

“Really appreciate the trust in organizations to use the funding as needed.”

“The flexibility of this type of operating funding is so incredibly helpful. It demonstrates that WAGE and WSC understand that maintaining high-quality existing services for survivors of violence is important and valuable. It also demonstrates trust in the non-profit and charitable sector to allocate funds responsibly, to where they are needed most. Thank you. We hope these types of trust-based funding opportunities are available in the future.”

“Our long history in communities is documented and our work is known, so it was very appreciated that we didn't have to spend time proving our worthiness for the funding.”

Finally, recipients appreciated the flexibility of the funding. Not only were the funds able to be used in a wide range of ways, including many that are often not permitted through other funders, but recipients also appreciated the flexibility that WSC staff offered through the process. Many noted that they received support with applications, received extensions to reports as needed, and had good communication with WSC staff.

“The hours and hours we spend trying to obtain funding at times is overwhelming. For the most part these funds are attached to a particular program/need and very rarely can you obtain funding for operational costs. For organizations to have the flexibility to determine where the funds were needed was simply amazing. There were so many times that things came up we could have never predicted but because of the flexibility of funding we had the ability to address the need. We have said time and time again, we have lived for a short time in a period of ‘what if’ to ‘we can.’”

“Thank you for making this funding so flexible. A huge thank you to staff at Women's Shelters Canada for always being available to answer any questions regarding use of this funding. The

process to apply for the funding was clear and the information sessions were very helpful. This report has been straight forward and clear to fill out.”

“The flexibility in how we were able to use this funding was just as important as the funding itself.”

Current Situation as a Result of the Funds

This funding not only supported organizations to respond to and recover from the pandemic, but has also supported them to become more resilient for the future as well. **More than half of funded shelters/THs created resources, policies, infrastructure, and capacity to better respond to future pandemics and other emergencies.** This is critical not only as COVID continues to have lasting impacts on organizations, but as organizations are facing more frequent climate disasters. Having emergency management and business continuity plans is becoming more important, and this was a major undertaking for many through this funding.

Many shelters/THs also invested in infrastructure for their buildings, including technology and capital enhancements. Both of these mean that the organizations and their physical spaces have more capacity to better serve those fleeing violence. Prior to this funding, many shelters had not expanded their services to text or virtual supports. With these funds to invest in technology, organizations are now able to serve more clients, particularly those who have limited access to shelters.

Shelters also invested in building staffing models that would extend past the funding period. These included creating HR plans, developing ongoing staff wellness strategies, and building greater staffing stabilization. While there are still many concerns about the future of staffing for the sector, many feel better prepared than they had pre-pandemic.

A final common area that was invested in was developing organizational policies and strategic plans. These set organizations up to better tackle issues as they occur, rather than acting reactively.

“I believe that we are now more prepared for future shocks, we are stronger as a team, we feel supported in our work, and we have re-developed updated emergency protocols.”

“During a pandemic or other type of extreme emergency, communications access is essential. The shelter was not prepared for that prior to the pandemic, but it is now thanks to the funding. The situation was serious as the former IT infrastructure had been cobbled together with no plan in the past. IT wiring was exposed on the floors, the control room had dead wiring with other systems built over top. It was causing internet-dependent safety equipment and communications to fail, exposing our shelter to safety breaches both in its physical perimeter by violent offenders and its ability to protect internal data, in addition to being unsafe for employees. In the event of another emergency, we now have strong systems and backup systems because the funding and its flexibility offered a solution to fund the correct experts to address the challenges faced.”

“We were able to hire a consultant to support us by updating our Policies and Procedures. Old policies were vintage. The urgency was having the pandemic response plan in place, and as the mandates were lifted having the Infectious Disease Policy to follow. These policies and procedures are a living document and continue to be updated with current and new policies.”

Despite organizations being better prepared for future shocks, now that funding has ceased, **they are having to reduce or cut programming and services brought in through this COVID funding.** This

includes reducing staff hours, laying staff off, and moving staff from new areas to core shelter functions. In addition, staff are also seeing the end of added staff benefits, COVID pay increases, professional development and training, and wellness benefits. With the loss of staff and staff supports, organizations anticipate difficulty retaining and recruiting employees. This could impact future levels and quality of service that can be offered to those fleeing violence.

“All benefits and wage top ups will now be stopped. Due to the already huge strain on the shelter from rising operational costs, we now will struggle to pay staff a fair wage. The ability to find staff that are trained and reliable will not be an option due to the wage offered. The women who work in the shelter don't do it for the money, they do it because of passion. Yet, one needs to be able to feed their families and be able to live.”

Not only are staff positions being reduced but programming, both new and pre-existing, is also being reduced or cut. Without added funding supports, organizations are unable to carry out all the programming that was being offered during the funding period. Many also noted that they needed to reduce the supplies and resources that are offered to clients including groceries, gift cards, rental supplements, and tech devices.

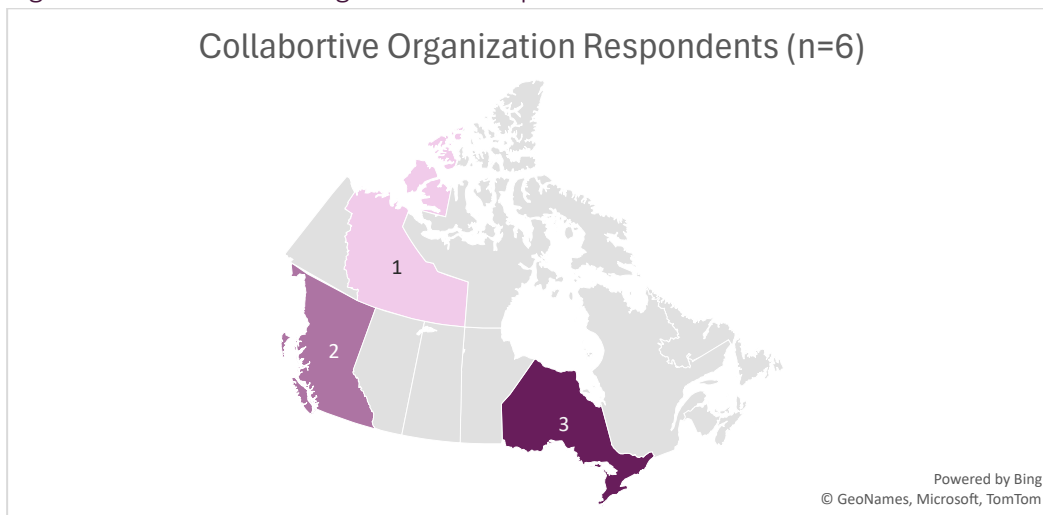
“We have had to halt the off-site shelter program. As homelessness becomes an even greater crisis, we are utilizing our boardroom as an emergency space on an alarmingly frequent basis. The motel program allowed us the opportunity to house those who were not at high risk, temporarily.”

While shelters are working to maintain all that was possible through this COVID funding, this requires extensive fundraising, which is becoming increasingly difficult as rates of giving continue to decrease.

Collaborative Project Results

A small number of organizations applied to do collaborative projects. These were projects where one organization acted as lead with one or more other shelters/THs in collaboration on service provision, joint programs, or sharing best practices. **In total, six collaborative projects were undertaken, which engaged 26 shelter/TH organizations. The total amount of funding to report on was \$719,702.**

Figure 5: Collaborative Organization Respondents



Number of People Served

The total number of individuals (service users) who were **directly supported by the funding was 1,188**. The total number of individuals who were **indirectly served by the funding was 39,050**. Despite reaching such a high number of individuals across a small number of projects, there were also **1,443 individuals turned away** from service and/or residency.

How Funds Were Spent

Much like the individual shelter organizations, the **vast majority of funds were allocated toward staffing** for the collaborative projects (nearly three-quarters). These projects including training programs, survivor projects, and bringing joint resources to shelters (like mental health services). This also allowed organizations to work together collaboratively to expand the reach of their services.

Figure 6: Funding Distribution of Category

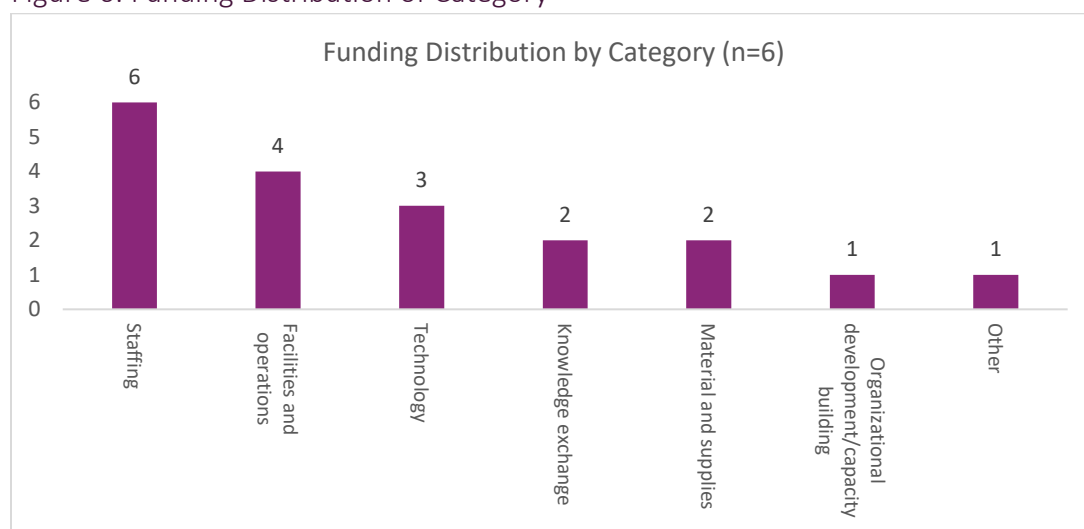


Table 6: What the Collaboration Funding was Spent On⁷

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Range	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total amount to report on	6	75000	150000	719702	119950.33	35236.569
Staffing	6	62055	120796	518859	86476.50	25115.876
Material and supplies	6	64653	64653	79526	13254.33	25817.744
Transportation	6	5	5	5	0.83	2.041
Facilities and Operations	6	27960	27960	55056	9176.00	10628.927
Technology	6	12353	12353	20030	3338.33	5367.874
Knowledge exchange	6	8000	8000	12885	2147.50	3469.660
Organization Development and Capacity Building	6	11180	11180	11180	1863.33	4564.216
Other	6	22161	22161	22161	3693.50	9047.190

⁷ No funding was spent in the following categories: alternative accommodation, infection control, capital expenditures, publicity and promotion, and accessibility.

Organizations found these collaborations valuable, as partnering facilitated the ability to reach more of their communities. These were also an opportunity to share skills, knowledge, and best practices, which contributed to better client services across all the organizations involved. This also contributed to reduced isolation that many organizations were experiencing throughout the pandemic.

“The other VAW organizations have shared values, principles, and philosophy which is really important to ensure consistent approaches that are couched within an intersectional feminist framework and are trauma-informed. We save a lot of time by not having to educate our partners. Being able to identify common needs and to develop regional approaches creates greater stability.”

“Honestly, working with the other VAW organizations broke the isolation one can feel when they are the only feminist resource in their community.”

Funding Environment

Unlike the individual organization projects, **these projects would not have gone forward at all without these funds.** These projects are often done off the side of people’s desks, so dedicated funds to focus on these projects allowed them to move forward. Unfortunately, most of the projects will not be able to continue beyond the funding period without securing ongoing funding.

Overall, there was high satisfaction with the efficiency of the funding (83% felt that the funding was extremely effective) and the experience of the funding application, process, and communication.

Table 7: Satisfaction with the Funding Process

	Extremely Positive	Somewhat Positive	Neither Positive or Negative
Registering for Funds	83%	0%	17%
Process to Receive Funds	83%	17%	0%
Communicating with WSC	100%	0%	0%

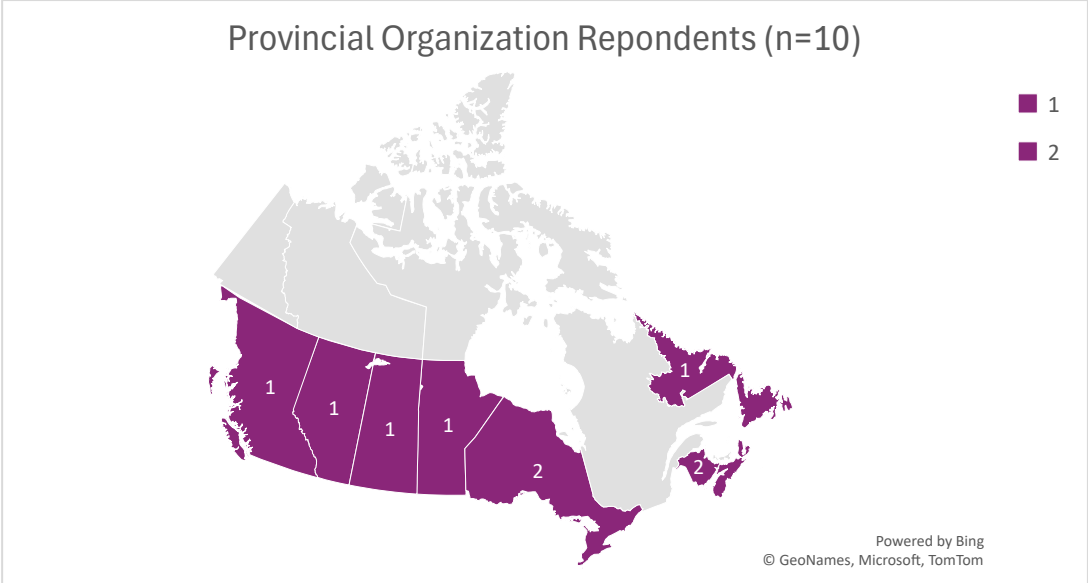
“This funding has been essential in developing a coordinated response for the people we serve in our region.”

“This stream of funding has been extremely beneficial and critical in addressing the gender gaps and safety of some of the communities’ most vulnerable and marginalized populations. We hope to see this work continue, and continue to be supported, as we see critical needs grow within our communities for these services.”

Provincial Organization Projects

WSC’s full members consist of the 16 provincial and territorial shelter/TH associations from across the country. Those members that run individual shelters were funded through the individual organization stream. We provided the provincial organizations outside of Quebec an opportunity to be funded to undertake projects, capacity building, and advocacy work. **There were 10 of these projects undertaken across eight provinces, for a total amount of \$1,224,660 to be reported on.**

Figure 7: Provincial Organization Respondents



Number of People Served

The total number of individuals (service users) who were **directly supported by the funding was 242**. The total number of individuals who were **indirectly served by the funding was 37,429**. No individuals were turned away, which makes sense due to the type of work undertaken.

How Funds Were Spent

Much like the other funds, the **vast majority was allocated toward staffing** for the provincial projects (60%). An additional 15% of the funding was directed toward organizational development and capacity building. These projects included implementing new systems and/or training in the region’s shelters (e.g. HIFIS, harm reduction, child welfare), designing tool kits and resources (e.g. housing, HR, service navigation), and undertaking regional studies to improve shelter services. Organizations also built their internal capacity by hiring bookkeepers and upgrading financial systems, hiring individuals to support advocacy efforts, and improving data collection through new online systems. Many organizations mentioned efforts to address issues related to HR issues in their particular region.

Figure 8: Funding Distribution by Category

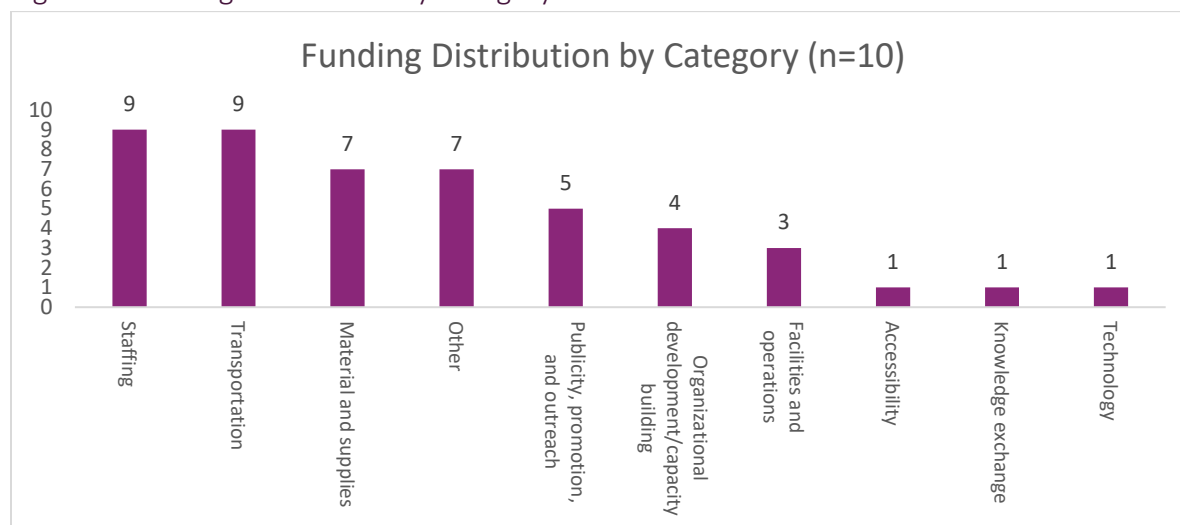


Table 8: What the Provincial Funding was Spent On⁸

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Range	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total amount to report on	10	125000	175000	1224660	122466.00	43197.099
Staffing	10	147164.00	147164.00	739973.80	73997.38	49957.82507
Material and supplies	10	14658.35	14658.35	29363.79	2936.38	4787.69008
Transportation	10	22068.00	22068.00	52238.36	5223.84	6427.76472
Facilities and Operations	10	15453.0	15453.0	26116.5	2611.65	5425.8021
Technology	10	11658.05	11658.05	11658.05	1165.81	3686.59911
Knowledge exchange	10	5498	5498	5498	549.80	1738.620
Publicity, Promotion, and Outreach	10	51299.80	51299.80	68496.15	6849.62	15955.64653
Organization Development and Capacity Building	10	126067.00	126067.00	187026.91	18702.69	39418.20294
Accessibility	10	194	194	194	19.40	61.348
Other	10	28471.44	28471.44	104094.44	10409.44	10670.43859

Through these projects, organizations expanded and strengthened partnerships, including bringing together shelter participants to learn and exchange knowledge. The provincial associations were also able to build their evidence base through research and information gathering, which allows them to better engage in advocacy and work with politicians.

Without this funding, many organizations would have either not been able to undertake this work, or it would have been more limited in its scope. While these funds were critical for undertaking projects, they do not address the sector’s need for sustained operational funding both for network organizations

⁸ No funding was spent in the following categories: alternative accommodation, infection control, and capital expenditures.

and shelters/THs. Particularly networked and representative associations, like these provincial associations, often do not have operational funding and are required to be dependent on project-based funding. For those that hired staff to work on these projects, few are going to be able to maintain these positions without seeking additional funding sources.

“Additional funding opportunities like this one are needed in the future to continue building the capacity of provincial associations and frontline services and strengthening the GBV sector. In addition to lingering outbreaks and effects of COVID-19, multiple sources have described GBV as an epidemic.”

“Thanks so much to WSC for the streamlined application and reporting process and for trusting that we and our member agencies know best what is needed for our organizations and our communities!”

“This is the best way to roll out government dollars, without seeing a duplication of effort in our sector.”

Identifying & Sharing Learning

In addition to supporting the growth and development of staffing skills and structures for the administration of these funds (see the following section), this project allowed WSC to expand and launch new work related to the impact of COVID-19 on shelters and women and children fleeing violence. These were projects that spanned the country and were inspired by what we saw happen as a result of the pandemic and the serious uptick in violence.

Feminist Brain Drain: Labour Issues and Worker Wellness in the VAW Shelter Sector

Throughout 2022, WSC undertook a [study on worker wellness in the VAW sector](#). This study included a national survey in partnership with the Victimology Research Centre at Algonquin College, a series of focus groups with shelter management and frontline staff, and an in-person symposium. Beyond the creation of the final report (attached), we also created a series of infographics to highlight best practices shared throughout study.

A critical issue that is driving the labour issue is funding challenges. Without regular operational funding increases tied to inflation for shelters/THs, organizations are unable to increase or offer competitive salaries and benefits. A few key findings include:

- More than one-quarter (28%) of survey respondents indicated that they thought about quitting their job.
- Nearly one-third of survey respondents reported that they worked an additional job to supplement their income.
- As staff turnover increases, existing staff are taking on more work, which is contributing to overwork and burnout.
- Among survey respondents, more than three-quarters (77%) were satisfied with their relationships with their colleagues, and 71% were satisfied with their relationships with their supervisors.

Funding – Advocacy Discussion Guide

Over 2023, WSC worked with the provincial and territorial shelter/TH associations to better understand the funding challenges that are faced by VAW shelters/THs. Based on our conversations, we created a

discussion guide for the associations to support their advocacy with their provincial or territorial governments. We recognize that different regions are at different stages of advocacy, so this guide provides key challenges, recommendations that can be brought to government, and steps for engaging in the advocacy process.

Shockproofing Communities: A National Summit for the GBV Sector

In collaboration with the Canadian Women's Foundation, WSC hosted a national summit with more than 500 leaders from gender justice and GBV organizations across the country from March 27-30, 2023, to exchange lessons learned during the pandemic to help "shockproof" the sector against future crises. This event included in-person and virtual activities, and a Hill Day to discuss the National Action Plan on GBV. Over the three days, there were more than 50 sessions. During the Hill Day, nearly 100 organizational leaders had over 50 meetings with MPs, Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, and Senators. For a complete overview of the Summit, [see the event program](#) or the [webpage](#). WSC also hosted a pre-Summit dinner and panel event for 134 shelter workers. A final report of the summit has been previously submitted to WAGE by the Canadian Women's Foundation

Northern Shelter/TH Gathering in Ottawa

In November 2023, WSC brought shelter representatives from all three territories together for training and networking in Ottawa. Participants engaged in sessions on trauma, [tech safety](#), strangulation and traumatic brain injury, and [PEACE for Canadian Children and Youth](#), sharing some of the common challenges faced by their shelters in the North. They also met with the Hon. Marci Ien, Minister of Women, Gender Equality, and Youth, and shared the urgent and ongoing needs of their communities. Given the size of the territories, isolation of northern communities, and cost of travel, territorial shelters are seldom able to come together. Yet, these shelters have many commonalities and similar needs, which are important to share. While WSC was responsible for the organization of this gathering, territorial shelter leaders established the directions for the events, as well as the needed training and sessions. We hope to see this network of shelters continue to collaborate and gather in the future.

"I really liked the idea that it was for women's shelters, and they were coming from all across the territories. I think it's really important to connect with each other and to bounce things off of each other because something that may not be working for me may be working at another shelter, so therefore I'll get some ideas." - Northern gathering participant

Engaging Men & Boys Awareness Campaign

LG2, the marketing company behind [WSC's More Than campaign](#), approached us about doing another (this time largely pro bono) campaign as part of an internal LG2 employee competition. The result was [Crickets: Calling out casual sexism](#). The Crickets campaign was meant to help counter some of the online violence women and girls experience. We believe that smaller actions, like calling out casual sexism online, can help feed the momentum needed to eventually end gender-based violence. Our goal was to make non-violent men feel comfortable calling out other men on their casual sexism by turning the cricket emoji 🦋 🦋 🦋 into a way of calling out a sexist joke made online. On March 8, 2024, International Women's Day, LG2 identified a sexist comment on social media and worked with influencers to reply with the cricket emoji 🦋 🦋 🦋. We spent some funds on research for the idea, which found that 78% of Canadian men don't always feel comfortable calling out sexist comments and jokes they encounter on social media. The Crickets account across multiple platforms had 191 posts, 117 likes, and a total of 20 followers. There were 2.2K organic views overall. There were also ads across various platforms, resulting in a summarized impression of 13,756,050 for segments and PR social. Paid media generated more than 16.3M impressions, at a value of \$170k (this was all in-kind media).

Lessons Learned & Reflections

For grantees, there were several key lessons learned from the impact of this project, particularly regarding the level of services they could provide to their communities when they had sufficient funding. Additionally, lessons were learned about the importance of collaboration and the concerns shelters have about a future without this funding. These learnings are referenced and expanded upon in the relevant previous sections of this report.

Since the start of the funding relationship with WAGE, WSC has built the internal strength and capacity to process increasingly large amounts of funding for shelters and associations. This includes the techniques and approaches for application, transferring funds, reporting, and accountability that were mentioned in earlier sections on our funding approach. This internal capacity is an important learning for the organization and its growth as a central pivot for understanding shelters throughout Canada, their funding needs, and the emerging issues that we are facing as a sector, especially in this phase of recovery in the COVID era. Some key lessons learned are expanded upon below.

Need for a Database and Increased Staffing

When WSC undertook the role of distributing COVID-19 relief funding to shelters/THs in 2020, we were a five-person organization with less than \$1 million in annual revenue. Today, WSC has 12 staff and has been able to expand our work to reach more shelters/THs and provide more support. This includes creating more resources, expanding our social media reach, and increasing communication with our members. Administrative funding was spent on several staff positions across grants & development, research & policy, knowledge exchange, operations, and communications. A small amount was also spent on a consultant to help tell the story of the Response & Recovery Funding, both for posterity and for potential future donors (e.g. foundations and private sector). We also invested in our first database, SmartSimple, of the over 600 shelters and transition houses across the country. This database will help ensure www.sheltersafe.ca is kept up to date and keep track of other support initiatives for shelters, such as future grants through Shelter Ready.

The Importance of Communication

As stated above, we learned how imperative it is for shelters to feel that they can communicate easily with WSC staff and receive answers when needed. This project was also an example of working closely with the federal government. We saw the significance of this two-way communication, in letting WAGE know when journalists were speaking to us about the funding, for example, and with WAGE reaching out for information on what we were hearing on the ground, such as the ease of accessing personal protective equipment (PPE). This strong relationship enabled WSC to successfully advocate with WAGE to expand the funding as of Round 2 to include certain capital expenses.

This project was also a rare opportunity for two national women's organizations to work together on a long-term goal: adequately funding the sector through an international pandemic. WSC enjoyed working with CWF throughout this project and exploring additional ways to collaborate, such as through joint webinars and events like the Shockproofing Communities National Summit. We learned throughout the project how important it was to communicate and collaborate to ensure that both organizations were asking grantees the same questions and treating grantees equitably throughout the project. It was also helpful to have a sister organization to bounce questions off of, and we look forward to continuing this strong relationship with CWF.

Lowering Barriers for VAW Shelters

WSC already knew that shelters and shelter workers were overworked and under-resourced. This only became more apparent through our administration of these funds. WSC saw evidence of the sector's challenges with budgeting and financial management throughout the process, particularly for smaller organizations, as we worked with them significantly in the application, funding agreement, and reporting stages. WSC staff ensured there was open communication throughout the process; we responded to shelter organizations by phone or email within two business days of being contacted. It was also imperative that no organization was rejected due to errors in their applications.

At a time when organizations were not always sure how they were going to keep the doors open, not only was this funding available, but it provided a level of flexibility that was largely unprecedented. This funding came through quickly, was easy to access, and many felt like they were trusted to spend the money as they needed. It was evident from comments we received that this lowering of barriers to receive the funds – and report on them – was integral to the success of the project.

“The flexibility of this type of operating funding is so incredibly helpful. It demonstrates that WAGE and WSC understand that maintaining high-quality existing services for survivors of violence is important and valuable. It also demonstrates trust in the non-profit and charitable sector to allocate funds responsibly, to where they are needed most. Thank you. We hope these types of trust-based funding opportunities are available in the future.”

“Just a huge THANK YOU for making this process easy and simple. The priority of getting the funds to the shelters in a timely manner was clearly evident and incredibly appreciated!”

Shelter Ready Fund

Through the experience gained through this distribution of federal funds, WSC saw the need for continued, flexible funding for the sector and the role we could play. As a result, WSC launched our own funding program, [Shelter Ready](#). We have undertaken two rounds of funding as of June 2024. In the first round, we granted \$500,000 of funds from the private sector to 20 organizations to continue, expand, or launch projects. In the second round, 20 organizations received \$5,000 each from the private sector to support the physical sheltering of companion pets along with clients. While we cannot offer the level of funds that were available to shelters through Response and Recovery, we see the value in being able to continue to support shelters that continue to be under-resourced. We hope to see these amounts expand throughout the life of our funding program.

Final Comments

We asked funding recipients to share final thoughts on funding through WSC and with WAGE. Overwhelmingly, people indicated how grateful they were for this funding. Many recipients hope that WAGE will consider renewing these funds in the future. Funding sources that are ongoing, flexible, and cover operational costs are rare and desperately needed to continue to offer safe, welcoming, and supportive spaces to heal and move forward from violence.

Thank You

“I just want to say thank you to the federal government for recognizing the need for shelters to be supported during this time.”

“Thank you so much for your work to support our organization and other shelters across the province over the past few years. Having access to accessible, flexible funding made our jobs so much easier and allowed us to do more for our community than would have otherwise been possible.”

“Thank you for making this funding available and for making the process for obtaining and using the funds relatively simple. It did make a positive impact for our organization, that without it would have made our operations much different and more difficult.”

“Again, just a big thank you to the WAGE and WSC for seeing this need and offering support immediately. Your hard work and dedication made a huge impact on the most vulnerable in our communities.”

“Just, thank you. Without your support, we could not have continued to support individuals experiencing domestic abuse in a time of great stress and uncertainty.”

“Being part of this grant was invaluable, and the support received was pivotal for our organization's efforts. The funding provided a lifeline, enabling us to address critical needs and extend our reach to those in vulnerable situations. It played a crucial role in sustaining our programs during a challenging period, allowing us to provide essential services, support, and resources... Thank you for recognizing the importance of our work and providing the necessary resources to make a meaningful difference.”