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## **Women's Shelters Canada 2025 National Survey – Survey Guide**

### **Introduction**

This guide is designed to assist participants in completing the Comprehensive Shelter/Transition House (TH) Questionnaire for the Women's Shelters Canada 2025 National Survey. It provides an overview of the survey's purpose, instructions for participation, and definitions of key terms. The guide also answers frequently asked questions.

We expect that this survey will take approximately forty-five to sixty (45-60) minutes. All questions, with the exception of the consent, are voluntary and do not require a response. If you are unsure of how to answer a question, you can provide an estimate or leave a blank response.

### **Purpose of the survey**

Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) is conducting this survey to update the national profile of shelters/THs serving women, children, and gender-diverse individuals fleeing violence. The survey will identify trends, challenges, and opportunities in the sector, helping to advocate for better policies and support services.

### **Importance of participation**

Your responses will contribute to Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) advocacy and awareness raising efforts for shelters/THs across Canada.

### **How data will be used**

The data will be stored on password-protected computers and will only be accessible to the WSC research team. Data from the survey responses will be reported as an aggregate. No



identifiers for individual shelters will be present in the collecting and reporting of data. Aggregated data will be included in reports, infographics, advocacy materials and/or any other dissemination format.

### **Voluntary participation and consent information**

Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. By participating in the survey, you agree to the following:

*Confidentiality:* No individual or organization will be identified.

*Partial Responses:* May be used for analysis.

*Aggregated Data:* Results will be grouped nationally or by province/territory. No individual shelter identifying information or data will be shared. If an individual shelter/TH could be identified because a province/territory does not have enough responses, we will report these at the regional level (e.g. Atlantic, rather than each province individually).

*Provincial Reports:* Summary reports will be shared with relevant provincial/territorial associations. These will be shared for the regional level unless there are insufficient responses to ensure anonymity.

If you do not consent to any of the above, you may exit the survey.

### **Contact Information for Assistance**

Please contact Robyn Hoogendam (Research and Policy Manager) or Chika Maduakolam (Research Coordinator) at [research@endvaw.ca](mailto:research@endvaw.ca)

### **Survey Structure**

Overview of sections:

#### **Section 1: Organizational Information**

We are collecting your contact information solely for follow-up purposes if clarification is needed, and it will not be shared. This section gathers basic details about your shelter/TH.

#### **Section 2: Emergency Shelter Length of Stay and Capacity**

This section collects information about your emergency shelter or safe house's licensed, funded, and actual capacity. If you operate a mixed facility, we will ask you to provide details only for the portion of your shelter that offers emergency services. You will not see this section if you indicated that you operate a second stage shelter under Section 1.



### **Section 3: Second Stage/Transitional Housing**

This section is for second-stage facilities, and where your organization operates a mixed facility, this section focuses on the second-stage portion of your shelter. You will only see this section if you indicated that you operate a second stage or mixed shelter in Section 1.

### **Section 4: Building Information**

This section gathers information about the physical shelter building and its infrastructure.

### **Section 5: Shelter Security**

This section focuses on the security measures in place at your shelter, as well as any additional security needs.

### **Section 6: Shelter Mandate and Clients**

This section collects information about the people your shelter serves, how survivors access your services, and the range of programs and supports offered.

### **Section 7: Employees**

This section gathers information about staffing, volunteers, and workforce-related policies at your shelter.

### **Section 8: Funding**

This section explores your shelter's funding sources, challenges, and financial sustainability.

### **Section 9: Service Delivery**

This section gathers information about the services your shelter provides, accessibility for survivors, challenges faced, and external partnerships.

### **Section 10: Pandemic Recovery**

This section explores ongoing systemic challenges post-pandemic, as well adaptations that shelters have continued in their operations and service delivery.

### **Section 11: Climate Crisis & Emergency Preparedness**

This section examines the impact of climate events on shelter operations and the organization's preparedness for future emergencies.

### **Section 12: Substance Use and Drug Poisoning Crisis**

This section focuses on the impact of substance use in shelters, including overdoses, available resources, and harm reduction strategies.



### **Section 13: Final Thoughts**

This section provides an opportunity to share any emerging trends, challenges, or opportunities that were not covered in the survey. It also allows shelters to provide any additional information or insights they feel are important regarding their operations, experiences, or needs.

## **General Instructions**

### **Completing the survey online**

To make participation as convenient as possible, we recommend completing the survey online. If you're unable to do so, you can request a PDF version to fill out, scan, and upload. If you'd like to review the survey questions beforehand, you can find them [HERE](#). If you need additional support, kindly email [research@endvaw.ca](mailto:research@endvaw.ca), and we can set up individualized support (phone or Zoom call).

Throughout the process of filling the survey, you can stop at any time and return later using the same survey link. Your progress will be saved. Also, you can skip any questions you are unsure of answering or are uncomfortable responding to.

Upon completion of the survey, you will be unable to access the survey. If you need to access the survey post-completion, please reach out to the research team at [research@endvaw.ca](mailto:research@endvaw.ca). At the end of the survey, you will have an opportunity to download your responses. If you have any issues accessing this feature, a copy can be sent to you by reaching out to the research team.

### **Use of Back/Previous Buttons**

Please note that some questions will not provide a back button. Some sections that do not include a Back button are outlined below:

\* The first question - Are you an Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, Métis), or Indigenous-led healing lodge, shelter, or transition house (can be on- or off-reserve)? - following the Consent section, if your selection is 'Yes' to the Consent section.

\* The first question asked about the physical building, as well as the building infrastructure under Section four (4): Building Information.

If you need to make use of the Back button to facilitate your survey filling process, please reach out to us at [research@endvaw.ca](mailto:research@endvaw.ca) for necessary support.



### Format of Printed PDF Document

Please note that after completion of your survey, if you proceed to print the PDF version of your survey, not all questions from the PDF version of the survey will appear. The printed PDF copy will only display the questions and responses you selected. An example is provided below:

Q3 Are you an Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, Métis), or Indigenous-led healing lodge, shelter, or transition house (can be on- or off-reserve)?

Yes (1)

No (2)

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**Display This Question:**  
If Are you an Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, Métis), or Indigenous-led healing lodge, shelter, or... = Yes

Q4 We follow OCAP® principles (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) when collecting information from Indigenous communities, and therefore will not be reporting on Indigenous shelters/THs without working in partnership with provincial/territorial/national Indigenous associations (e.g. National Indigenous Circle on Family Violence). Do you consent to share your shelter/TH/healing lodge's survey data with your provincial/territorial/national organization?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If you select, 'No' to question three (3), you will not have been provided the subsequent question, question four (4). Therefore, if you print/save the PDF copy of your completed survey, question four (4) will not appear in the document.

### Numbering of Questions

Please note that the survey is not numbered as your selected responses determine the questions the sequence of questions you will provide answers for.

### Explanation of different response formats

Where questions include 'Select all that apply', please make the necessary number of selections you find suitable in responding to the question. If the question asks you to select up to three options, you will not be able to advance to a next page if you have selected more.

For questions that ask for a whole number, you must enter numerical characters with no decimals.

Every open-ended question has a maximum response limit of one thousand, five hundred (1500) character count, approximately two hundred (200) words.



## Key Definitions and Terminology

**Accessible:** means a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.<sup>i</sup>

**Band Council:** A Band Council is the governing body of a band set up under the requirements of the federal Indian Act. Each First Nation is typically represented by a Band Council chaired by an elected chief, and sometimes also a hereditary chief.<sup>ii</sup>

**Behaviour-Based Policies/Approaches:** Building on established understandings of harm reduction, we understand behaviour-based policies and/or approaches to mean guidelines and/or actions that focus on influencing individual behaviors to minimize risks associated with harmful activities, such as substance use, unsafe sex, or self-harm. Drawing from Marlatt's (1996) paper, these policies/approaches encourage safer practices without necessarily requiring abstinence. They include interventions such as needle exchange programs, safe consumption sites, condom distribution, and behavioral counseling, aiming to reduce negative health and social consequences while respecting individual autonomy.<sup>iii</sup>

**Budget:** the money that is available to a person or an organization and a plan of how it will be spent over a period of time<sup>iv</sup>

**Building Infrastructure:** While some definitions of infrastructure include 'the physical components of various systems that provide the essential services a community needs to function'<sup>v</sup>, we refer to this term in the survey as the physical structure that ensures the shelter's effective operation and the well-being of its occupants.

**Child Welfare System:** A set of government and private services designed to protect children and encourage family stability. The main aim of these services is to safeguard children from abuse and neglect. Child welfare agencies will typically investigate allegations of abuse and neglect (these activities are called "child protection services"), supervise foster care and arrange adoptions. They also offer services aimed to support families so that they can stay intact and raise children successfully.<sup>vi</sup>

**Climate Crisis & Emergency Preparedness:** The survey relies on the UN definition for emergency response - the organization and management of resources and responsibilities for addressing all aspects of emergencies and effectively respond to a hazardous event or a disaster<sup>vii</sup>





**Community Engagement and Advocacy:** Community engagement is the step of actively working with the community to identify and address local ideas, concerns, and opportunities.<sup>viii</sup>

Advocacy is ensuring that you have your voice heard on issues that matter to you, whether the issue affects you directly or you're speaking on behalf of someone else who needs support.

Advocacy is about knowing your rights and doing what you can to enhance and protect those rights.<sup>ix</sup>

**Community Resources:** Anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life.<sup>x</sup>

**Critical Incident/Overdose Response Protocol:** Guidelines and procedures designed to effectively prevent, recognize, and respond to drug overdoses within an organization or community setting. These protocols aim to minimize harm and ensure the safety of individuals who use substances, as well as those who may witness or respond to an overdose.<sup>xi</sup>

**Damage Deposit:** A security deposit, also known as a damage deposit, is money collected by the landlord at the beginning of the tenancy and held until the end.<sup>xii</sup>

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Training and Policy:** Programs and guidelines designed to foster an inclusive and equitable environment within organizations. DEIA policies set organizational standards and expectations, while training equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to mitigate biases, promote inclusive behaviors, and comply with legal and ethical responsibilities.<sup>xiii</sup>

**Drug Poisoning (also known as drug toxicity):** A diverse array of adverse effects which are brought about through substance use at either therapeutic or non-therapeutic doses.<sup>xiv</sup>

**Harm Reduction:** Approaches and policies aimed at minimizing harm associated with substance use.<sup>xv</sup>

**Housing:** For the purposes of this survey guide, we include all types of shelter, and housing, as it applies to shelters, under this term. The survey may use a general term of housing, or the specific type of housing as provided below;

**Affordable Housing:** In Canada, housing is considered "affordable" if it costs less than 30% of a household's before-tax income. Many people think the term "affordable housing" refers only to rental housing that is subsidized by the government, but this is a very broad term that can include housing provided by the private, public, and non-profit sectors. This also includes all forms of housing tenure: rental, ownership and co-operative ownership, as well as temporary and permanent housing.<sup>xvi</sup>





**Assisted Housing:** We use this term, separate from Assisted Living, to cover any alternative long-term accommodation, or residences, exceeding two (2) years stay, where survivors can have access to both housing and necessary support services.

**Emergency Shelter:** Provides immediate, crisis accommodation or short-term housing for survivors of violence. While we have used the term Emergency Shelter, we recognize that these spaces have different names across the country, including transition house, first or stage housing.<sup>xvii</sup>

**Mixed Shelter:** Facilities that provide both emergency and second stage sheltering in one location.<sup>xviii</sup> For the purposes of this survey, shelters are classified as "mixed shelters" if they operate on the same property, share connected buildings, or have communal spaces, buildings, or property.

**Safe House/Home:** Community-based networks of private homes, hotels or motels, or other locations that shelter women and their children, typically for very short stays, and in rural communities where shelters/THs may not exist.<sup>xix</sup> For the purposes of this survey, safe houses/homes will answer questions posed to emergency shelters/THs. We can separate these types of shelters out for the purpose of analysis.

**Second Stage Housing:** Transitional, longer-term accommodation with additional supports. While we have used the term second stage housing, we recognize that these spaces have other names across the country, including transitional houses.<sup>xx</sup>

**Third Stage Housing:** Provide supportive housing for women who have left violent relationships and who no longer need crisis service support and offer independent long-term housing with lengths of tenancy from two (2) to four (4) years.<sup>xxi</sup>

**Mortgage:** The loan used to secure ownership of a property<sup>xxii</sup>

**Municipality:** Municipal governments are local elected authorities. They include cities, towns and villages, and rural (county) or metropolitan municipalities. They are created by the provinces and territories to provide services that are best managed under local control; from waste disposal and public transit to fire services, policing, community centres and libraries.<sup>xxiii</sup>

**Nalaxon:** an antidote to an opioid overdose/poisoning. It may temporarily reverse the life-threatening effects of opioid toxicity.<sup>xxiv</sup>

**Non-Resident Services:** Any services that are available to individuals that do not reside at your shelter/TH. These could include former residents, survivors that have never lived in shelter,



children in schools, or perpetrators. This may also include activities that are offered that are external to the shelter/TH, like community training or programming, outreach services, etc.

**OCAP Principles:** Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession guidelines for Indigenous data.<sup>xxv</sup>

**Pandemic Adaptations:** We understand that many shelters included some services and programs to support survivors during the pandemic period. The question on pandemic adaptations is concerned with these services/programs which the shelter continues to provide post-pandemic.

**Survivor:** We are using the term survivor to capture all individuals that come to shelter for support services. While we know that the majority of survivors are women, we also know that shelters across the country serve gender-diverse individuals, men, and children.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### Who should complete this survey?

A staff member with knowledge of shelter operations, funding, and programming should complete the survey. The link can be shared across teams, as it is unique to your organization.

### What if I operate multiple shelters?

Where your organization operates multiple shelters, please respond for your particular shelter. If you operate multiple shelters, we will reach out to individually to capture your organization's information.

### What if I don't know an exact number?

If you are unsure of an answer, please feel free to skip the question or respond with best efforts. We understand that there will be responses that need to be considered.

### Can I pause the survey and return to it?

Yes, you can pause and return later using the link provided. The survey responses provided will be automatically saved as you progress.

### How will my data be secured?

All data will be stored on password-protected computers and will only be accessible to the WSC research team. Any data that is shared, will only be available in the aggregate and will be stripped of any identifying information.

### What happens after I submit my survey?



You will receive a thank you message, acknowledging that your survey responses have been duly submitted and received. Any further correspondence post-survey will be shared with you via email and agreed communication channels.

## How participants will receive survey findings

Survey findings will be shared with participants through agreed communication channels such as email, and our newsletter. Once the survey is closed, we will provide preliminary findings of key insights through Women's Shelters Canada's website and social media channels. A full report and other research materials will be made available through these spaces in early 2026. The findings will be communicated in a clear and accessible format, ensuring that participants can easily understand the results and their implications.

## Appreciation for participation

We sincerely appreciate your time and effort in participating in our survey. Your insights and feedback are incredibly valuable and help us make significant impact in our sector. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us.

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<sup>i</sup> Accessibility at Penn State. (n.d.). Definition of accessibility. Accessibility at Penn State. Retrieved February 5, 2025, from <https://accessibility.psu.edu/accommodations/definition/>

<sup>ii</sup> Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada. (2025). First Nations: Frequently asked questions. Canadian Geographic. <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/fn-frequently-asked-questions/>

<sup>iii</sup> Marlatt, G. A. (1996). "Harm reduction: Come as you are." *Addictive Behaviors*, 21(6), 779–788. DOI: 10.1016/0306-4603(96)00042-1.

<sup>iv</sup> Oxford University Press. (2025). Budget. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/budget\\_1](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/budget_1)

<sup>v</sup> Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure. (2018, January 18). What is infrastructure? Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure. <https://www.aii.org/what-is-infrastructure/>

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<sup>vii</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). (2015). Proposed updated terminology on disaster risk reduction: A technical review. [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/45462\\_backgroundpaperonterminologyaugust20.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/45462_backgroundpaperonterminologyaugust20.pdf)

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<sup>ix</sup> CanAge. (2022). Advocacy toolkit 2022. CanAge. <https://www.canage.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AdvocacyToolkit-2022.pdf>

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