



WOMEN'S
SHELTERS
CANADA | HÉBERGEMENT
FEMMES
CANADA

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Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2026 Federal Budget

May 7, 2026



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List of Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Stabilize the violence against women (VAW) shelter and transition house (TH) sector by adequately funding the core community-based, feminist, survivor-serving organizations. We recommend \$360 million from the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) over three years for VAW shelters/THs.

Recommendation 2: Invest in key social infrastructure to address the epidemic of gender-based violence (GBV) in Canada by:

- a) Fully funding the continuation of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (NAP) for the full 10 years with a commitment of \$200 million annually for the next five years, as of 2027-28.
- b) Funding the renewal of a comprehensive Federal GBV Strategy to address GBV at the national level with the ongoing funding of \$44 million annually.
- c) Create an independent federal GBV Commissioner to monitor the implementation of Canada's NAP and future efforts to end GBV, with an annual budget of \$3 million.

Recommendation 3: Ensure access to affordable housing and supportive options for survivors of violence. Coordinated federal, provincial, and territorial action must:

- a) Increase capital and operational funding for housing, fast-track approvals, enable rezoning, provide land contributions, and support retrofitting and renovations to expand the supply of safe, affordable, and appropriate permanent housing and grow the shelter sector, particularly second stage shelter and longer-term transitional options.
- b) Strengthen housing and income supports, including portable housing benefits, rent subsidies, and pathways to ownership.

Recommendation 4: That the government commit to providing operational funding of \$10 million per year for five years, starting in 2027-2028, to support 10 leading national women's rights organizations – whose primary mandates are to advance systemic change for women in all their diversity in Canada – to protect women's rights, address the epidemic of gender-based violence, and increase women's economic security and prosperity.

About Women's Shelters Canada (WSC)

WSC provides a strong, unified, pan-Canadian voice on the issue of violence against women (VAW). WSC brings together 16 provincial and territorial shelter organizations and supports over 600 shelters across the country for women and children fleeing violence. WSC increases awareness to ensure that policies, legislation, and regulations are informed by the experiences and insights of our members. WSC connects knowledgeable and dedicated individuals from coast to coast to coast, so that new ideas are born, best practices are promoted and transferred, and those who work in our challenging field feel more connected and supported. All of this helps to ensure that the women and children who turn to shelters and THs receive the most effective and compassionate support possible.

Justification for Recommendations

VAW and gender-based violence (GBV) are recognized as forms of discrimination and manifestations of gender inequality, as well as a violation of human rights. GBV is currently at epidemic-level rates across the country. On average a woman or girl is killed every 2.5 days, often by an intimate partner. Nova Scotia, Quebec and British Columbia have seen a recent spate of femicides, which can be linked to rising crises like the housing shortages, climate events, economic instability, global unrest, and slow post-COVID recovery. Anti-violence shelters work tirelessly to ensure that women and children do not become statistics on femicide lists, and their work has been greatly increased among this multitude of emergencies. When survivors impacted by violence cannot access the resources they need to heal, the costs to society are massive. Survivors without access to finances are forced to stay in abusive relationships or become homeless. Violence disrupts work and school, which can have long-term impacts on financial stability for survivors. In 2009, the annual cost of domestic violence was found to be \$7.4 billion, and this was only for police reported incidents.¹ We know this number has grown. When survivors have access to well-resourced shelters, safe housing, and the infrastructure needed to ensure their rights, they can be part of a strong economy.

Recommendation 1: VAW Shelter Funding Stabilization

VAW shelters/THs are in crisis. The demands are outpacing capacity more each year, and rising operating costs, declining donations,² and funding instability are undermining their delivery of core operations. We heard directly from shelters about the positive impact of increased federal funds to meet the crisis of the COVID-19 uptick in GBV. In fact, the levels

¹ Zhang, et al. (2012). An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada, 2009. Ottawa, ON: Department of Justice.

² CanadaHelps. (2024) "2024 Giving Report: From Disconnection to Collective Action." CanadaHelps. <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/the-giving-report/>

of GBV have hardly declined since then, and the complexity of survivors' needs is rising. Investing in shelters is fiscally responsible. Shelters prevent homelessness, reduce strain on police and healthcare systems, and support long-term recovery. Every dollar spent on shelter services saves public dollars in justice, health, and social assistance systems. The return on investment is not only financial but social and generational.

Targeted investment is needed for shelters and THs to address the disproportionate rates of GBV among different communities - particularly Indigenous women, racialized women, and women with disabilities – they need equitable, sustained, and culturally specific funding that is community-led and government-supported. Through WSC's experience in distributing COVID Response and Recovery funds, we were able to show the ways that federal dollars fill critical gaps for under-resourced shelters. These funds contributed to long-overdue renovations, expanding services and programming to better meet needs, and investing in staff who have often struggled with high workloads and pay that has not kept up with the cost of living. Shelters told us that when these funds ended, they would need to cut programming, lay off staff, or even close the doors, and in a recent WSC survey, we heard that 23% of responding shelters had to cut or reduce programming in the previous 12 months.

In addition to this funding, the following changes in funding mechanisms are needed to meet the immediate challenges of the current landscape:

- An equitable and consistent funding model across all departments that extends beyond project-based funding and covers operational costs, including extended funding terms, ability to invest in capital, and standardized reporting tools.
- Rural, remote, and Northern communities, including the territories, are experiencing severe service gaps. They need specialized funding not only to keep their doors open, but to ensure services are holistic, equitable, and effective.

We recommend \$360 million disbursed over three years to support over 600 VAW shelters in addressing aging infrastructure and chronic staffing challenges.

Recommendation 2: Invest in infrastructure to end gender-based violence

In this era of nation-building, Canada must also invest in existing social infrastructure, such as the Federal GBV Strategy and the National Action Plan (NAP) - not dismantle it and risk reversing progress. Canada has made important domestic and international commitments to address GBV, yet survivors' access to services remains uneven across the country, especially in rural, remote, and Northern communities. Until every survivor has access to services, and until rates of GBV are declining, we need a coordinated, well-resourced national response that ensures no one is left behind, including disabled women.

Preventing violence through a national campaign and addressing service gaps requires coordinated action across federal departments, provinces, territories, and community organizations. The federal government must work with advocates whose expertise is grounded in survivors' lived experiences to ensure solutions are evidence-informed.

To do this more effectively, the Mass Casualty Commission called for the establishment of a GBV Commissioner with an ombudsperson-like mandate. This office would oversee the NAP and the Federal GBV Strategy, strengthen transparency and accountability, and help ensure Canada meets its international obligations. It would also support greater consistency across jurisdictions and help ensure NAP funds are used efficiently. Establishing this role would bring Canada in line with jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Finland.

Recommendation 3: Housing for survivors of violence

Shelters cannot respond effectively to violence when survivors have nowhere safe and affordable to go when they leave transitional housing. Across the country, VAW shelters are turning away almost 1,000 women and children every night due to lack of space.³ In a 2024 survey, WSC found that 97% of shelter respondents indicated that over the preceding 12 months, it had become harder to support survivors to find housing.⁴

We see the potential of Build Canada Homes to expand affordable housing stock and recommend building at least 50,000 new rent-geared-to-income social housing units per year over the next ten years. This must include specific targets for housing vulnerable women and children, particularly those fleeing violence.

Shelters play a key role in the continuum of services desperately needed by women and children fleeing violence to rebuild their lives. The path toward healing from violence is neither linear nor the same for all survivors. For those in need of more time, longer-term transitional housing is crucial. In WSC's national survey, 50% of second stage respondents indicated that survivors can find affordable housing options when they reach their maximum length of stay, compared to 28% of emergency shelters, which shows the importance of the added time to heal from violence.⁵ We need dedicated targeted funding

³ Schwan, K., Vaccaro, M., Reid, L., Ali, N., & Baig, K. (2021). The Pan-Canadian Women's Housing & Homelessness Survey. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

⁴ Women's Shelters Canada. (2024). Shelter Voices 2024: Crisis within Crisis. Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada

⁵ Hoogendam, R. and Maduakolam, C. (2026). "Sheltering Under Pressure: Frontline Realities of Canada's Violence Against Women Shelters and Transition Houses." Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada.

to expand transitional housing across Canada, particularly in underserved regions, like rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous communities.

Benefits like the Canada Housing Benefit (CHB) for survivors of GBV are important supports for those working to living free of violence, yet with rising housing prices, such benefits need to be enhanced to ensure that no one is forced to stay in or return to violence.

Recommendation 4: Invest in National Women's Rights Organizations (NWROs)

National women's rights organizations (NWROs) support systemic change to achieve substantive equality for all women in Canada through research, legal expertise, policy analysis, and advocacy.

Gender equality is an economic issue. Data reveal these costs, for example:

- An estimated \$150 billion in incremental GDP over 7-8 years was unrealized due to barriers faced by women in Canada's economy (according to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce).
- Globally, it is estimated that developed markets like Canada, as well as emerging markets, could achieve increases of 5% to 6% in GDP if the pay and employment gaps between genders were reduced by half (according to Goldman Sachs).
- The economic cost to victims of sexual violence in Canada is \$14.8 billion annually (according to Ending Sexual Violence Association of Canada and Ripple Strategy).

Canada's NWROs face ongoing stress and instability due to project-based funding precarity that challenges their ability to protect rights and drive systemic change that can take years of focused work to achieve. As well, temporary project-based funding is inadequate at a time when regressive and extremist movements seek to roll back human rights, the GBV epidemic claims more and more lives with rising femicide rates, and women face growing economic uncertainty and employment insecurity due to geopolitical crises and the U.S. trade war with Canada.

The federal government does not support the basic activities of NWROs with operational funding. This is despite the fact that many other organizations benefit from such funding (for example, the government recently doubled its allocation of operational funding to more than 60 national sport organizations with the commitment of \$660 million over five years per year in the Spring Economic Update 2026).

The lack of operational funding for NWROs is putting women's rights and safety at stake. It is time to address this inequity regarding operational funding and support NWROs' operations and broader mission.