

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

July 31, 2025



WOMEN'S
SHELTERS
CANADA | HÉBERGEMENT
FEMMES
CANADA

List of Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: That the government 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: That the government invest in key social infrastructure to address the epidemic of gender-based violence in Canada and:

- a) Fully fund the continuation of the 10-year National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.
- b) Fully fund the renewal of a comprehensive Federal Strategy to prevent and address Gender-Based Violence.
- c) Dedicate a specific fund to support operational funding of national feminist organizations advancing systemic change.

Recommendation 3: That the government create an independent federal Gender-Based Violence Commissioner to monitor the implementation of Canada's National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and future efforts to end gender-based violence, with an annual budget of \$3 million.

Recommendation 4: That the government accelerate the 2024 Fall Economic Statement commitment of \$50 million from the Affordable Housing Fund's Rapid Housing Stream to build more women's shelter spaces. And renew the Women and Children's Shelter and Transitional Housing Initiative, announced in Budget 2021 and housed at Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), as an ongoing initiative of the National Housing Strategy.

Recommendation 5: That the government commit an initial investment of \$1 million for WAGE and ESDC to launch consultations on the development of a National Strategy for the Gender-Based Violence Workforce that addresses issues of precarious work, access to decent salaries, pensions, benefits, and supports for workers, and retention and recruitment issues.

About Women's Shelters Canada (WSC)

WSC provides a strong, unified, pan-Canadian voice on the issue of violence against women. 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

Gender-based violence 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 to 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 This is a number that we know 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 Shelters Funding Stabilization

VAW shelters/THs are in crisis. The demands are outpacing capacity more and more each year, and rising costs of operating, declining donations,² and funding instability are undermining their delivery of core operations. We have heard directly from shelters about the positive impact of increased funds to meet the crisis of the COVID-19 uptick in GBV. In fact, the levels of GBV have hardly declined since then, and the complexity of survivors' needs is rising. Investing in shelters is fiscally responsible. Shelters prevent homelessness,

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/>

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. To ensure that no one is turned away from safe shelter, ongoing funding is needed to ensure that shelters can continue to offer critical supports to those fleeing violence. 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 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 so they can continue operating effectively across the country.

Recommendation 2: Infrastructure to End Gender-Based Violence

Violence against women and gender-based violence are recognized as forms of discrimination and manifestations of gender inequality, as well as a violation of human rights.

Survivors often require more than just emergency accommodation. They need trauma-informed care, legal advocacy, support with immigration and child protection systems, and culturally appropriate services. Shelters can provide all these services, and they are part of an integrated and interdependent system of supports. To ensure that these services are available no matter where a survivor lives, works, or studies, organizations that support them need flexible funding with commitments that cover the full ten years of the initial National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence to 2032, with clear investments for the next five years.

A whole-of-government approach—one that includes prevention, legal reform, housing, health care, education, and justice—is needed to address the root causes and long-term

impacts of violence. To ensure that all parts of the federal government are ready to deliver on this, it is necessary to fully fund the renewal of a comprehensive Federal Strategy to prevent and address Gender-Based Violence.

Strong national feminist organizations are essential to ending gender-based violence (GBV) because they provide the leadership, coordination, and advocacy needed to drive systemic change. They help unify the movement, identify structural gaps, and push for comprehensive, intersectional solutions. They provide essential research and data that drive evidence-based solutions, and they need a dedicated fund to support advancing systemic change.

Recommendation 3: Accountability for the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and the Federal GBV Strategy

For the National Action Plan to meet its ambitious objectives, it requires an independent body to provide oversight and ensure accountability. The Mass Casualty Commission (MCC)’s Recommendation V.17 calls for a National Accountability Framework.

To fulfill the MCC recommendation, the government should establish and fund a GBV Commissioner position and office with powers similar to those of an ombuds institution. While this institution would have a broader mandate beyond overseeing the National Action Plan (NAP)—including monitoring Canada’s compliance with international obligations such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls—it would play a critical role in ensuring transparency and accountability for both the NAP and the federal GBV strategy. Strengthened oversight could lead to greater consistency across jurisdictions and support the identification and dissemination of best practices and effective strategies on a national scale.

Recommendation 4: Women and Children’s Shelter and Transitional Housing Initiative

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 Of all the programs under the National Housing Strategy (NHS), the Women and Children Shelter and Transitional Housing Initiative (WCSTHI) was the most impactful in meeting the needs of women and their children. This \$250 million investment supported

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

the construction, renovation, and repair of shelter beds and transitional housing units. Crucially, the program allocated funding for both capital and top-up operational costs.

More than \$1 billion in funding requests were submitted to the WCSTHI by shelters providing safe and affordable housing for women and children fleeing violence—an amount four times greater than what was available. As a result, many shovel-ready projects, already supported by other levels of government and proven to be financially viable, were left unfunded due to the limited resources of the initiative.

Shelters play a key role in the continuum of services desperately needed by women and children fleeing violence to rebuild their lives. Shelters contribute much more than a safe place to stay. They provide life saving services and resources that enable women and their children who have experienced abuse to recover from that violence, rebuild self-esteem, and take steps to regain a self-determined and independent life.

We strongly recommend that the WCSTHI become a permanent part of the NHS and that funding in the order of \$325 million be allocated in the 2025 budget towards the initiative.

Recommendation 5: Investment in a National Strategy for the GBV Sector Workforce

From 2022-2024, WSC undertook a study of labour issues and worker wellness in the VAW shelter sector.⁵ This study highlights a long-standing challenge in the sector—one that has intensified with the rising rates and severity of violence during the pandemic and ongoing global crises. Although workforce pressures are not new, organizations are now facing unprecedented difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff for this vital work. While increased funding is a necessary part of the solution, it must be accompanied by the development of a national strategy to support and sustain the anti-violence sector workforce.

Care work has seen increased attention, including through the 2024 federal government commitment to launch consultations into the development of a National Caregiving Strategy. Despite being similar to care work (highly gendered and comprised of high numbers of Black, Indigenous, and other women of colour⁶), GBV work has not been raised in discussions of the care economy. There are approximately 1400 organizations with about 30,000 staff in the anti-violence workforce. By comparison, this is similar in size to licensed paramedics,⁷ and active personnel in the RCMP.⁸ This is a sector that supports

⁵ 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>

⁶ Fernandes, S. & Lanthier, S. (2024). Roadmap to A Stronger Gender-Based Violence Workforce. Ottawa, ON: Ending Violence Association of Canada.

⁷ Rowland, E & Brydges, M. (2023) Paramedics. Optometrists. In I. Bourgeault (Ed.), Introduction to Health Occupations in Canada. (p. 295–310) Ottawa: Canadian Health Workforce Partners, Inc.

⁸ Statistica. (2020) Number of Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers in Canada in 2019, by level of policing and province. [Statista Research Department](#).

communities and contributes to local economies. Investment in the workers in this sector is not only necessary to support this life saving work but is an investment in communities across this country.

This strategy needs to analyse and address the following issues:

- Short-term, project-based funding creates precarious working conditions and undermines job security across the sector.
- Many workers lack access to essential employment supports, including pensions, benefits, and paid leave.
- Salaries and compensation are inconsistent, with significant gaps in providing living wages and meeting decent work standards.
- The sector continues to struggle with recruiting and retaining qualified staff, placing added strain on existing teams.
- Care work remains undervalued and deeply gendered, with Black, Indigenous, and other racialized women disproportionately represented in insecure and low-wage roles.
- Occupational health and safety concerns are widespread, particularly related to psychological impacts such as vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and chronic stress from repeated exposure to violence.