

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-2026



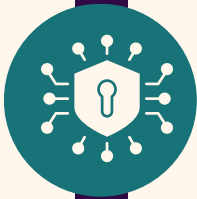


SHELTERS SUPPORT
WOMEN AND CHILDREN
FLEEING VIOLENCE.
WE SUPPORT THE SHELTERS.

Our Impact at a Glance



Distributed \$380,000+ to shelters across the country through the Purple Leash Project



Trained over 2,000 frontline workers from across the country in tech safety through 17 presentations and trainings



Brought together over 75 shelter staff to share knowledge and promising practices through our two CoPs



Trained over 600 people from 20+ organizations on supporting employees experiencing domestic violence



Launched the Refer Her campaign, which resulted in **64 million earned media impressions**



Supported two shelters successfully apply for **\$14,896,000 for their new build projects**

ABOUT US

Our Mission

We bring together the country's shelter networks to amplify the voices of survivors, shape policies, and share expertise. Together, we strengthen those who support women and children leaving a violent environment, ensuring they receive the safest, most compassionate care possible.

Our Vision

We are working towards a world where:

- Everybody matters – people of all genders, all cultures, all faiths, all abilities are valued and have equitable access to resources, power and justice, and all are safe from violence.
- Society uses an inclusive, intersectional, equity-based lens to make decisions.
- Organizations and systems are collaborative and accountable.
- The Earth, on which we all depend for survival, is protected.

Land Acknowledgement

Women's Shelters Canada acknowledges that the location of our office and the work that we do in Ottawa is on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHAIR OF THE BOARD

The 2025-26 year was the first full year of leadership for both of us – for Anuradha as Executive Director and Tsungai as Chair of the Board of Directors. And what a year it was! Across the country, more than 600 shelters and transition houses provided life-saving support to women, children, and gender-diverse people fleeing violence. At Women's Shelters Canada, our role is to strengthen those shelters through national advocacy, research, training, and coordination.

We often focus on the long road still ahead of us to achieve true equality and an end to violence. On the hard work that seems never-ending in this sector. While we work diligently to advance women's rights and gender justice, it's important to pause and celebrate the wins.

In April 2025, we jointly advocated with 50+ leading feminist organizations throughout the election period by highlighting priority feminist issues under the Demand Better umbrella and helped re-establish a full Minister of Women and Gender Equality in the new federal government.

In June, our new tech safety toolkit for rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous shelters was launched, while in September, we celebrated the grand opening of Stepping Stones Crisis Society's new building, which WSC staff have supported for years.

In January 2026, we launched the Refer Her campaign, highlighting our new Domestic Violence & Your Workplace training. We've had such strong, positive feedback on the campaign, with dozens of workplaces signing up for the training.

Anuradha Dugal
Executive Director



And finally, in March, we released a national report on the state of the women's shelter sector. It shows how funding gaps, housing instability, workforce pressures, and compounding crises are shaping women, children, and gender-diverse people's access to safety.

At the same time, levels of violence in Canada are on the rise. We are seeing a growing backlash against feminist and gender justice movements in Canada and around the world. These growing trends of incel culture, nationalism, and misogyny build on Canada's history of colonialism.

Despite real and growing backlash against the movement and, by extension, shelters, we remain hopeful thanks to the organizations across Canada and around the world that remain committed to the cause: supporting survivors, upholding dignity, and advocating for gender equality and gender justice as non-negotiables in our society.

We cannot do all the important work you are going to read about in this report without the dedication and commitment from our amazing staff, as well as our many partners, supporters, donors, and funders. Your partnership helps WSC achieve its goals in advocacy, research, public policy, and systems transformation, and in supporting shelters to meet the immense challenges of supporting survivors.

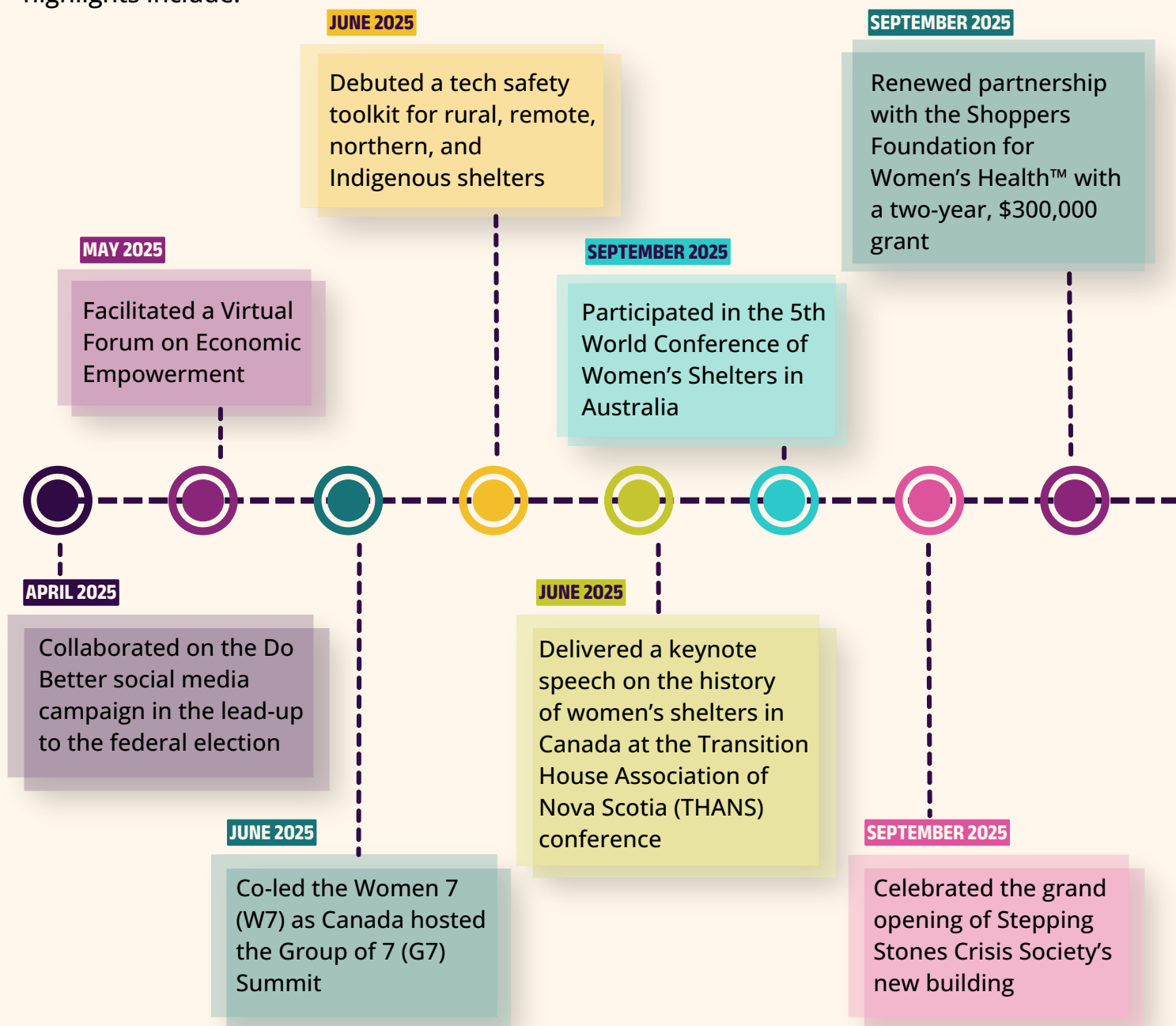
Thank you all for your work,

Anuradha & Tsungai

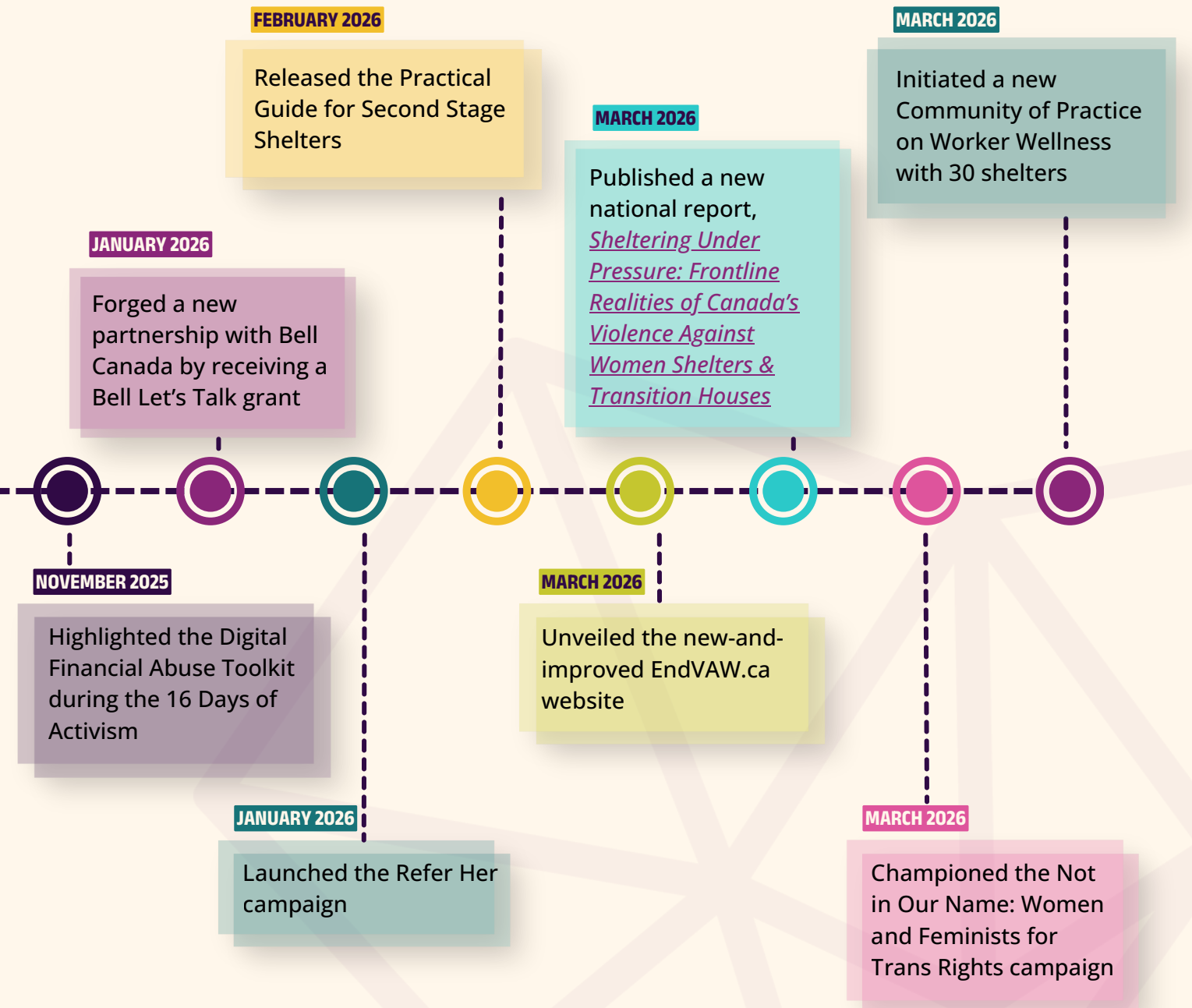
Tsungai Muvingi Van Landeghem
Chair, Board of Directors

2025-2026 REVIEW OF THE YEAR

This year was marked with wins and successes across our work, from the launch of new critical resources and groundbreaking reports to successful advocacy outcomes and vital new knowledge-sharing and training opportunities that support and strengthen our sector. We maintained our reach and scope, despite challenging times, and expanded programs and activities to make an even greater impact. Key highlights include:



2025-2026 REVIEW OF THE YEAR



EMPOWERING EMPLOYERS TO RESPOND TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

One in three Canadian workers will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. Of those, **over 80%** said it negatively affected their work. More than half reported that abusive acts continued at or near their workplaces, and **over 40%** disclosed to someone at work. When domestic violence shows up in the workplace, it affects the safety, productivity, and well-being of the entire team.

This year, funded by the Department of Women & Gender Equality Canada, Women's Shelters Canada launched the **Domestic Violence & Your Workplace training**, which helps organizations recognize and respond to the impacts of domestic violence at work. This two-hour training helps employers:

- ➔ Understand how domestic violence can show up in the workplace
- ➔ Recognize warning signs and know what to do
- ➔ Understand employer responsibilities under workplace legislation
- ➔ Feel equipped to support survivors in the workplace

In April 2025, WSC hosted a train-the-trainer event in partnership with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS). ACWS trained WSC and five provincial/territorial associations to deliver workplace trainings in their regions. So far, WSC and the participating provincial/territorial associations have delivered the training to **647 people** from **23 organizations**.



I now recognize that what was presenting as a performance issue is the result of the efforts of the abuser to control that individual"

– Workplace training participant

CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT

REFER HER

In January 2026, the Refer Her campaign launched to promote the Domestic Violence & Your Workplace training. Centring on a reference letter for the women who don't always get them, the campaign included national newspaper placements, digital media, influencer partnerships, and social media content.

As part of the campaign, WSC sent that reference letter to over 50 of Canada's leading companies, urging them to do their part and take this training.

The campaign also featured the multi-platform release of a PSA featuring activist, broadcaster, and filmmaker Sarain Fox.

Campaign resources encourage all workers to play a role in supporting colleagues experiencing domestic violence by remembering the three R's – Recognize domestic violence, Respond appropriately, and Refer to specialized support and resources.

The campaign generated over **64 million** earned media impressions and **124 media placements** across broadcast, print, and digital platforms. All information on the training and the campaign is available at ReferHer.ca.



COLLECTING DATA ON THE CURRENT STATE OF SHELTERS

Women's Shelters Canada constantly hears how shelters are continuing to do more with less. To advocate for better support for shelters across the country, we need up-to-date data on the state of shelters.

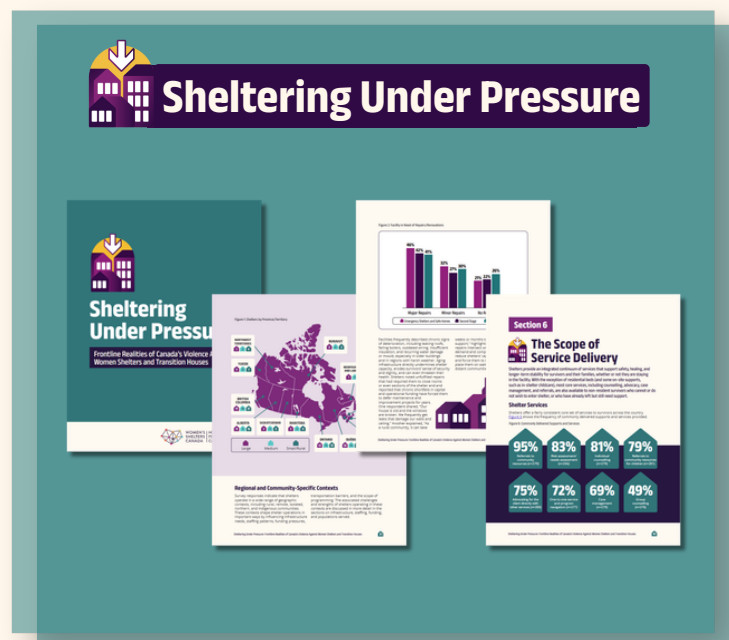
In March 2026, Women's Shelters Canada released *Sheltering Under Pressure: Frontline Realities of Canada's Violence Against Women Shelters & Transition Houses*.

Generously funded by the Royal LePage® Shelter Foundation™, the report outlined how shelters operate under sustained pressure from chronic underfunding, aging infrastructure, workforce pressures, and the ongoing housing crisis.

Drawing from data across the country, the report shows how these intersecting challenges shape shelters' ability to provide safety, healing, and pathways to independence for women, gender-diverse survivors, and their children. It also outlines key recommendations for governments to address these pressures and strengthen the shelter system.

Overall, *Sheltering Under Pressure* highlights a sector that is indispensable to Canada's response to gender-based and intimate partner violence, yet is operating under conditions that are neither sustainable nor equitable.

To support shelters, advocates, and partners in using this report for planning, advocacy, and awareness, we developed an advocacy guide, communications kit, infographic, and ready-to-use thematic government relations two-pagers that outline key issues and policy recommendations.



SUPPORTING SECOND STAGE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Second stage shelters are an essential part of the continuum of supports available for survivors of domestic violence in Canada. By combining longer-term housing with wrap-around supports, second stage shelters enable survivors to move further along the path to healing from abuse. While second stage shelters face many of the same challenges as emergency shelters, they also have unique needs, challenges, interests, and practices.

Recognizing this, Women's Shelters Canada **launched a Community of Practice (CoP) on Second Stage Shelter Operations in 2024** to create a dedicated space for second stage shelters to connect with and learn from one another.

Generously funded by CN and the Unifor Social Justice Fund, this CoP brought together **over 20 second stage shelters** from across the country to share their experiences, learn from each other, and collectively strengthen their practices. The CoP culminated in a national virtual gathering in November 2025, open to all second stage shelters across the country.

Shelter workers from across the country came together for two half-days of keynote presentations, panel discussions, and breakout room discussions on the reality of second stage shelter work today, major challenges and innovations, and where to go from here.



Being able to discuss and exchange ideas on common issues, even across geographically distant regions, is enriching for me, my colleagues, and the organization.”

– CoP participant

WSC also continued to support organizations building new units through our Second Stage Transitional Housing (SSTH) New Build project. This year, the SSTH team **provided direct project management services to three shelters**, one of which opened its doors in September 2026 (see spotlight), and supported **12 additional shelters** through knowledge and coaching calls.



"I cannot overstate the value that [the SSTH] New Build project has brought to our project...I have no doubt that, without WSC's support of this project, we would still be many years away from completion. Thank you, WSC, for going the extra mile to uplift services to women facing gender-based violence!"

– Project participant

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

STEPPING STONES CRISIS SOCIETY

In September 2025, after providing three years of support, Women's Shelters Canada celebrated the grand opening of Stepping Stones Crisis Society's (SSCS) new building, a critical new space that brings together all SSCS's existing programs under one roof, including emergency shelter, second stage transitional housing and support services.

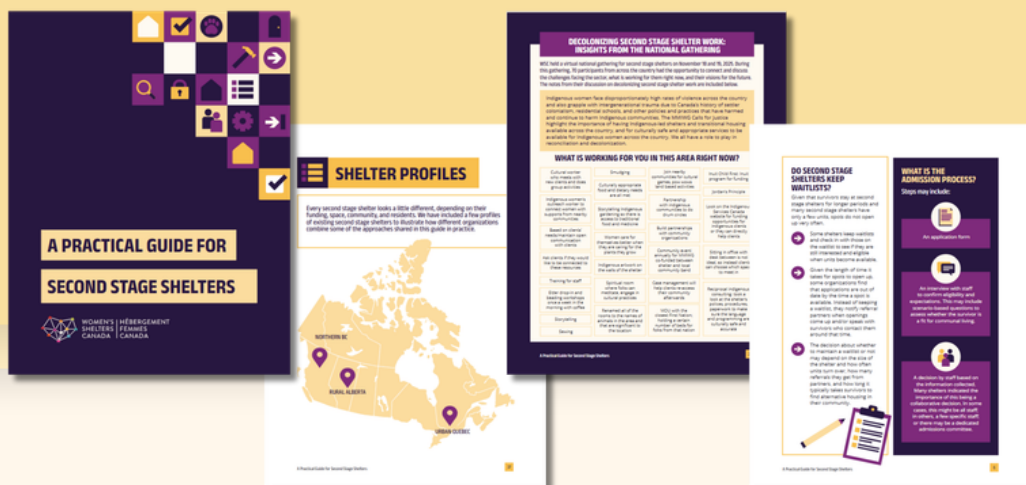


Located in Cold Lake, Alberta, the new building features 50,000 square feet of mixed-use space, using trauma-informed and accessible principles. It aims to reduce barriers, promote healing, and provide a more stable environment for survivors as they rebuild their lives. By housing multiple programs in one location, the facility reduces the need for survivors to move multiple times and helps them access the support they need, when they need it. This was the largest project WSC has supported to date, and WSC staff were thrilled to attend the grand opening in person.

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR SECOND STAGE SHELTERS

In February 2026, WSC released a [new practical guide for second stage shelters](#), providing an overview of the different practices and approaches used by shelters across the country. Each section of the guide covers a different aspect of second stage shelter operations, such as admission, rent and deposits, pets, staffing, and maintenance. There are also profiles of a few shelters across the country that show how this might look in practice within a single organization. Throughout the guide, there are notes from the national virtual gathering that highlight what is working right now for shelters across the country and their vision for the future.



BUILDING FINANCIAL LITERACY AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Financial abuse is one of the lesser-understood forms of domestic violence, but it can be one of the most detrimental as it limits a woman's ability to leave an abusive situation. In May 2025, WSC held a Virtual Forum on Economic Empowerment, generously funded by TD Bank Group. Over three half-days, the forum brought together anti-violence workers from across the country to share promising practices and discuss challenges related to supporting survivors in rebuilding their financial stability and independence after experiencing abuse.

This year, our Tech Safety Canada program also launched new resources related to digital financial abuse. The **Digital Financial Abuse Toolkit** was launched during the Virtual Forum and was highlighted during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Funded by TD Bank Group and Interac Corp., the online toolkit includes tools, safety tips, and resources for survivors and shelter workers in navigating this form of abuse. During the 16 Days, we also examined the role that banks, financial

institutions, and governments can play in strengthening their policies and frameworks to keep survivors safe.

Additionally, Women's Shelters Canada continued our Community of Practice (CoP) on economic empowerment, funded by Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada. **This CoP brings together 22 shelters** from across the country that offer economic empowerment and financial literacy programming for survivors of gender-based violence.



We are dreaming way bigger than we did prior to the CoP."

– CoP participant

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE WITH GOVERNMENT

As the national organization supporting shelters for women, children, and gender-diverse people fleeing violence, Women's Shelters Canada regularly engages with the federal government on issues such as the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence (NAP GBV), safe and affordable housing, femicide, and tech-facilitated gender-based violence.

This year, we joined other national women's rights and gender justice organizations in successfully advocating for a Minister of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE), after the position was initially cut, and an increased WAGE Department budget. We also successfully called for federal funding of national women's organizations.

In the lead-up to the April 2025 federal election, WSC prepared a feminist tool to support advocacy on GBV at candidates' meetings and shared it with members. We sent letters to each political party asking for information on how NAP GBV was represented in their platforms; the answers were subsequently shared on our website.

We then sent introductory welcome letters to each new MP with an overview of our role and mission and the importance of the NAP GBV.

Other highlights of the year included:

- ➔ Met the new WAGE Minister, The Hon. Rechie Valdez, and held meetings with Parliamentary Secretary Desrochers and MPs Idlout, Jeremy Patzer, and Will Greaves
- ➔ Published [Policy Shifts 2025: Canadian Legislative Change Impacting Violence Against Women](#), which tracks key bills, legislative changes, policy updates, and consultations related to gender-based violence at the federal level
- ➔ Submitted a brief to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women on anti-feminist ideology; filed a federal pre-budget submission; and presented to the NEHA Oral Dialogue on safe, permanent housing for survivors of GBV, including a written submission

➔ Attended the federal budget lock-up and participated in a webinar on the budget with other national women's organizations

➔ Invited to speak at a press conference with MP Lisa Hepfner on Bill C-223, the Keeping Children Safe Act

CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT

DEMAND BETTER

When the federal election was called for April 28, 2025, WSC joined other feminist and progressive organizations across Canada in a campaign calling on all voters to “demand better” for the economic well-being of our families. For decades, we have championed policies that make life better for everyone – affordable housing, healthcare, childcare, human rights, and beyond – so every person in Canada can succeed, regardless of where we live or what we look like. Feminist policies are good for the economy – period.

**Housing.
Pharmacare.
Childcare.
Economy.
Canada.**



KEEPING PEOPLE AND THEIR PETS TOGETHER

For many women, children, and gender-diverse people fleeing violence, bringing their pets with them to a shelter to ensure their safety as well is essential. This year, Women's Shelters Canada continued its partnership with Nestlé Purina PetCare Canada to fund shelters across the country in building the infrastructure needed to keep survivors and their pets together.

In Summer 2025, the Pet Ready Fund granted **\$140,000 to 10 shelters**.

Rebranded as the Purple Leash Grant in November 2025, **\$241,650 was distributed to 15 shelters** at the beginning of 2026. Grants have supported projects such as fenced dog runs, indoor kennel spaces, pet-proofed rooms, accessible pet bathing stations, and essential pet supplies.

Final reports for the 2025 grants showed **over 130 women and children and over 80 pets**, including dogs, cats, and rabbits, were directly impacted by these funds. This funding has helped **increase by six** the number of shelters across the country that can accept pets on-site. Each shelter's profile on ShelterSafe.ca has been updated to reflect this.

A continuing struggle is the funding gap for veterinary care. If pets are injured, sick, or not up to date on their vaccines, it's harder for shelters to accept them. In some cases, vets generously donate their services to survivors in shelters to fill this gap, knowing how important this is. WSC continues to look for ways to further support all aspects of having pets in shelters.



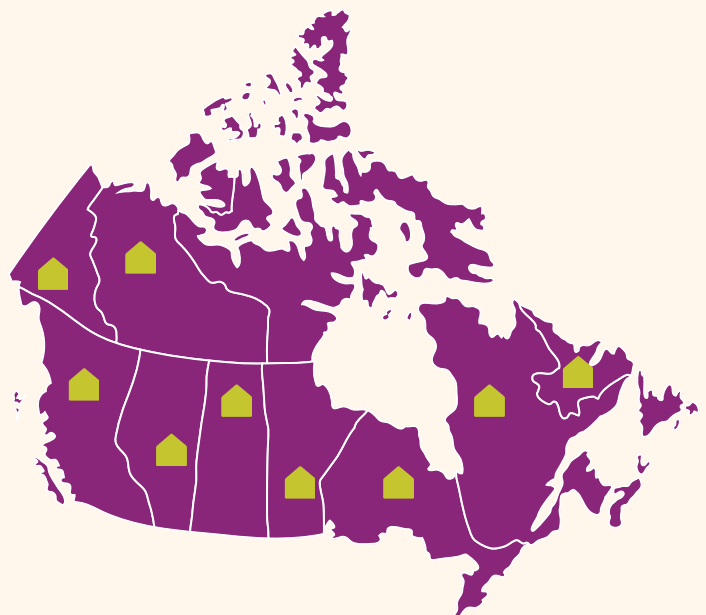


Perhaps one of the most underestimated impacts of this initiative was the sense of normalcy it brought to families during an extraordinarily difficult chapter of their lives. Being surrounded by the familiar presence of their pet – something unchanged and unconditionally loving – helped families feel a sense of continuity and comfort amidst the upheaval.”

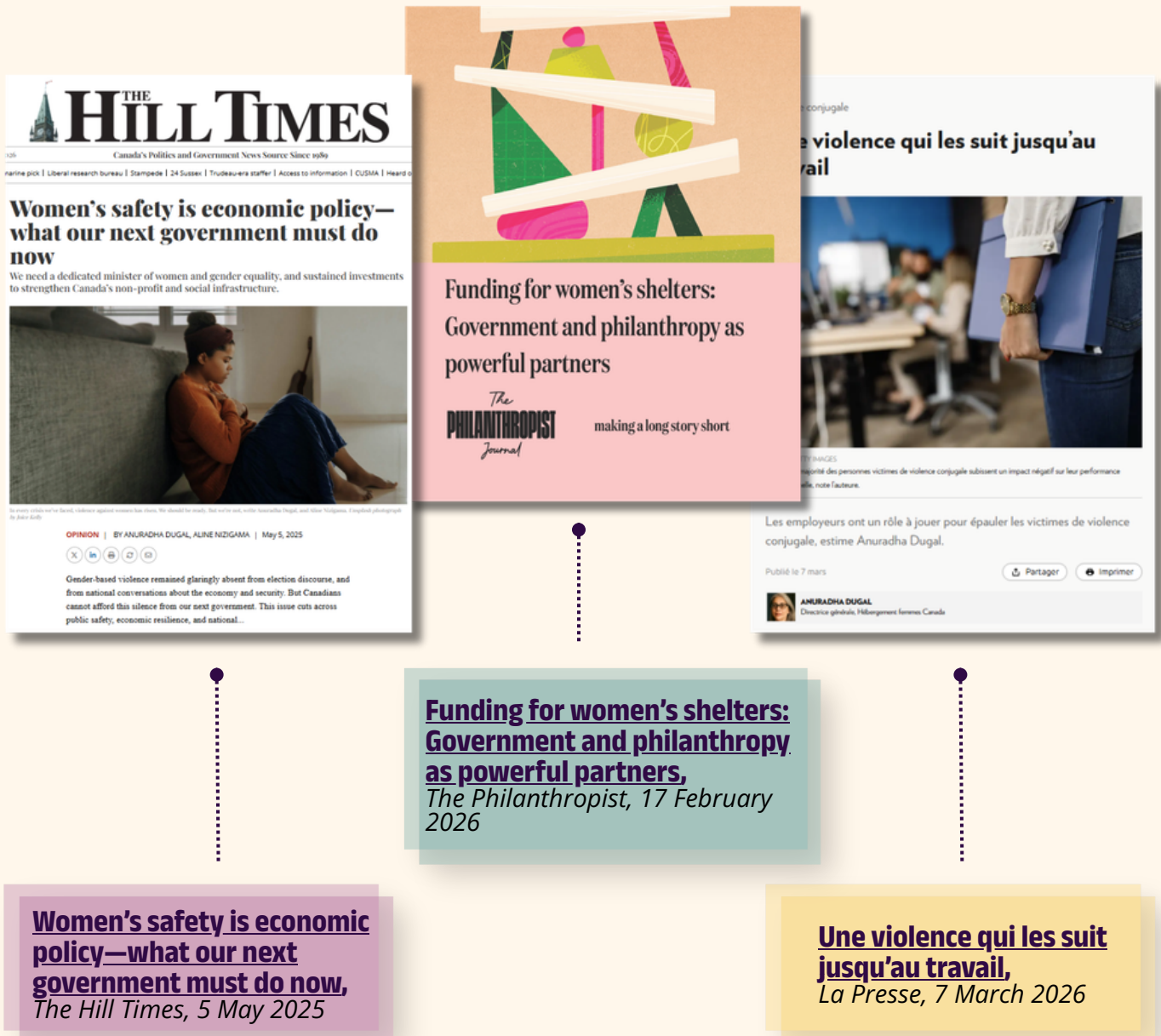
– Partner shelter, Purple Leash funding recipient

HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANT WORK WE DO

As this Annual Report has shown, Women’s Shelters Canada has an incredible impact on the more than 620 women’s shelters across the country and on the women, children, and gender-diverse people they support. Effectively communicating the impact of our work and amplifying the voices of those shelters means staff regularly attend conferences, give presentations, speak to the media, and post on our social media channels.



This year, WSC had **three** Op Eds published:



Promoting our work also means having an engaging organizational website. In March 2026, our [EndVAW.ca](#) website was redeveloped into a new and improved site that showcases the diversity of our work. One new section includes facts and figures on gender-based violence and women's shelters, while another showcases WSC's practical tools, guides, and learning resources on a single page, organized by topic.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

5TH WORLD CONFERENCE OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS

Three WSC staff attended the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters in Sydney, Australia, in September 2025. This global gathering brought together 1,208 delegates from over 60 countries to learn through presentations, panels, and workshops. Executive Director Anuradha Dugal spoke on three panels:

- ➔ **Unmasking the Rise: Countering Misogyny, Nationalism, and the Incel Influence**
- ➔ **The Erosion of Human Rights and Its Effects on the VAW Sector**
- ➔ **National Action Plans on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence – What Works and What Hurts**

Research and Policy Manager Robyn Hoogendam presented two sessions during the conference:

- ➔ **Connecting Research to Advocacy: The Study and Use of National Shelter Data in Canada**
- ➔ **Tech Without Violence: Empowering Canadian Northern, Rural, and Indigenous Shelters to Address Technology-Facilitated Gender Violence**



Additionally, in partnership with WESNET (Australia) and the Global Network of Women's Shelters, WSC hosted an international networking event for leaders of national shelter organizations. More than 30 participants from around the world attended the event to discuss advancing safety and privacy for survivors of gender-based violence. The evening fostered meaningful connections among global leaders, creating space for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and relationship building across international partnerships.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Hawa Dumbuya-Sesay (from September 2025) / Secretary
- Amy S. FitzGerald / Director
- Marlene Ham (until September 2025) / Director
- Maureen Levangie (from September 2025) / Director
- Nola Mahingen (until September 2025) / Public Director
- Maïra Martin (from September 2025) / Treasurer
- Dan Meades (until September 2025) / Director
- Tsungai Muvungi Van Landeghem / Chair from September 2025
- Michelle Parsons / Public Director
- Julie St-Pierre Gaudreault (from September 2025) / Director
- Mathilde Trou (until September 2025) / Co-Chair
- Dr. Julie Young / (Co-Chair until September 2025) Public Director



STAFF

- Anuradha Dugal / Executive Director
- Sarah McIntosh / Director of Operations and Finance
- Nikki Owens / Grants and Development Coordinator
- Stephanie McCullough / Operations & Communications Coordinator
- Destinee McDonald (from June 2025) / Administrative Assistant
- Leah Stuart-Sheppard / Director of Knowledge Exchange
- Nika Asgari / Knowledge Exchange Coordinator
- Rhiannon Wong / Tech Safety Manager
- Kyla Tanner / Second Stage Program Manager
- Megan Golfetto / Development Project Coordinator
- Robyn Hoogendam / Research and Policy Manager
- Chika Maduakolam / Research Coordinator
- Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich / Director of Communications and Advocacy
- Lynn Medi / Communications Manager



THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

Thank you to every individual, organization, foundation, and government department that generously supported Women's Shelters Canada this past year. The essential work detailed throughout this report – supporting women's shelters, researching ways to improve policy development, advocating for better laws and policies, raising awareness about gender-based violence – would not be possible without you.

It reflects gifts made during this fiscal year only and is not cumulative. We also acknowledge with gratitude the many individual donors whose ongoing support sustains us beyond this timeframe. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy.

Thank you for standing with Women's Shelters Canada.

ONGOING GRANTS

CN

RBC Foundation

Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health™

TD Bank Group

The Canadian Women's Foundation

The Hilary and Galen Weston Foundation

The Tree of Life Foundation

Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE)

YSL Beauty

DONORS

\$100,000+

Nestlé Purina PetCare Canada

Royal LePage® Shelter Foundation™

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women

\$25,000 – \$99,999

Bell Let's Talk Community Mental Health Fund

Leacross Foundation

Russel Metals Inc.

The Allstate Foundation of Canada

The Wawanesa Mutual Insurance Company

Unifor Social Justice Fund

\$10,000 – \$24,999

Interac Corp.

Ottawa Community Foundation

Ocean Park Foundation

\$1,000 – \$9,999

Alex & Nancy Christopher Family Foundation

Amazon

ATS Corporation

Department of Justice Canada

Endeavor Trust Corporation

Gallagher Re Canada Inc.

LDH Scissors Inc.

Logistik Unicorp

Loran Scholar Foundation

Marks & Clerk Canada

Natural Health Sense Inc.

Plusgrade Inc.

Primary Engineering

Soroptimist International Club of Edmonton

SPINCO (multiple locations across Canada)

The Houssian Foundation

VISIT WWW.ENDVAW.CA TO:

- Learn about our most recent work
- Find out how to support our work
- Sign up for our quarterly newsletter

VISIT WWW.SHELTERS SAFE.CA TO:

- Find a shelter near you for support, counselling, and safety planning
- Find your local shelter and their donation information

VISIT WWW.TECHSAFETY.CA TO:

- Access resources on tech-facilitated gender-based violence

FOLLOW US



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