

More Than A Bed

A National Profile
of VAW Shelters
and Transition Houses



**WOMEN'S
SHELTERS
CANADA**

Shelters and
Transition Houses
United to End Violence
Against Women



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Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) is based in Ottawa. Bringing together 14 provincial and territorial shelter organizations, we represent a strong, unified voice on the issue of violence against women on the national stage. Through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and adoption of innovative practices, we advance the coordination and implementation of high quality services for women and children accessing VAW shelters and transition houses.

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.

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May 2019

Women's Shelters Canada would like to thank the Department for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE), formerly Status of Women Canada, for providing funding support for this project. The opinions expressed in these documents do not necessarily represent the official policy of WAGE.

Acknowledgements

WSC would like to thank the provincial and territorial shelter/transition house associations and academics Holly Johnson and Nadine Wathen, who reviewed this document as well as the national survey on which it is based. We would also like to thank Marika Morris, the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario, and the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence for reviewing the survey.

Thank you to Michèle Briand for translating this document into French, LJ Robinson at The Public for the creative and layout, and Sylvie Ouellette and her team at Versatil for their assistance with data cleaning.

Kaitlin Bardswich (Communications and Development Coordinator) and Lise Martin (Executive Director) edited the report and reviewed the French translation.

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How to Cite this Document

Maki, K. (2019). "More Than a Bed: A National Profile of VAW Shelters and Transition Houses." Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada.



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Executive Summary



Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) connects and engages with violence against women (VAW) shelters and transition houses across the country. As part of the continuum of services to support survivors, VAW shelters¹ are integral to ending violence against women.

Since their inception in the early 1970s, the extent of the work carried out by VAW shelters has substantively increased to respond to the needs of women and children fleeing violence. Every year, violence against women results in thousands of women and children living in fear, with many fleeing for their lives. In addition to providing safety, VAW shelters help women rebuild their lives, heal from abuse, develop resiliency, and move towards living violence-free lives.

VAW shelters, feminist scholars, and policymakers have long recognized the need to better understand the scope of services and supports provided to women and children fleeing violence at the national level. Together with shelters, WSC developed a survey with the objective of building a comprehensive national profile of both VAW and second stage shelters. The survey examined the services shelters offer, human resources, prevention work, funding, accessibility, and the challenges faced in all these areas.

The survey was developed in consultation with the provincial and territorial VAW shelter associations, the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada (DAWN Canada), Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario, and the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence,

as well as with VAW shelter executive directors and staff. Engagement with shelters across the country ensured that the survey captured the regional issues facing this sector. This survey is the first national inquiry of its kind developed by and for the VAW shelter sector.

The online survey, offered in French and English, was officially launched on September 19, 2017, and remained open until March 7, 2018. A link to the survey was sent to 517 VAW, second stage, and mixed shelters. Overall, 401 shelters participated in the survey, a response rate of over 78%, and included responses from every province and territory as well as from rural, remote, Northern, and Indigenous shelters.

This report provides information on: physical structure, age, and security features of VAW shelters; their size (number of beds), length of stay, and capacity; the various groups they serve and their accessibility; their service delivery and programming; labour, salaries, and types of work conducted; and funding and expenses. Where relevant, the report presents a cross-section of data at the regional and population size levels to illustrate differences across the country, as well as between larger and smaller communities. Findings specific to second stage shelters are presented in a separate report.²

Summary of Results

The data clearly show that VAW shelters are providing ever-expanding services without



comparable funding increases. Too many VAW shelters are already operating at capacity, while funding is not keeping up with inflation. VAW shelters are also seeing increasingly complex cases of violence accompanied by trauma-induced substance abuse, severe mental health concerns, and disabilities such as traumatic brain injury.

VAW shelters work with large and diverse populations – women fleeing different forms of violence, women with disabilities, racialized women, LGBTQ+ people, older women, and children. They find creative solutions to keep women safe even when they have no more funded beds available. Capacity challenges are compounded by the lack of safe, affordable, and appropriate housing for women and their children across the country.

And yet, VAW shelters are much more than a bed. In addition to providing a safe space to sleep, they assist and advocate for women and their children in navigating legal systems, immigration services, social services, child protection services, health care, and more. They provide counselling, child-specific programming, safety planning, parenting classes, outreach services, help finding housing, programs for perpetrators, and prevention and awareness programming. Yet survey results demonstrate that prevention and advocacy work – work that can save lives and create societal shifts in attitudes about ending violence against women and girls – are often not funded by government funders.

Funding issues, including underfunding and lack of stability in funding, have significant repercussions on the work of VAW shelters. They are unable to provide competitive salaries, which, coupled with

burnout, leads to high turnover among staff. Many have to fundraise to meet their operating costs, with some not meeting their costs even with fundraising. Consequently, not all VAW shelters can offer the same level of services. Thus, a woman accessing a shelter in a metropolitan area will find different services than if she was in a rural or Northern community.

Key Findings

The key findings³ of this report are:

- 1. In addition to providing safety, VAW shelters are helping women rebuild their lives, heal from abuse, develop resiliency, and move towards living violence-free lives. However, the data presented in this report point to a lack of sustainable and adequate resources to do this work, with VAW shelters increasingly being expected to do more with less.**
- 2. Far too often, women and children cannot access VAW shelter services.**
 - a) Four in ten VAW shelters reported operating at capacity “almost always.”
 - b) VAW shelters reported taking in more people than they have funded beds. While the average number of funded beds is 16, the average maximum number of persons shelters can accommodate is 19.
 - c) The majority (74%) of VAW shelters reported providing extensions to women residing in the shelter beyond the provincial/territorial length of stay guidelines, which reduces their capacity to take in new women who are seeking shelter from abuse.

d) The lack of affordable housing is a significant barrier for survivors to move into secure housing, with only 31% of VAW shelters indicating that residents were able to find and acquire affordable housing during their stay at the shelter.

3. VAW shelters strive to be as inclusive and barrier-free as possible. However, capacity and funding issues make this challenging.

- a) VAW shelters are increasingly serving a broader group of women fleeing violence. Over one-third (37%) of respondents reported that they served women escaping different forms of violence and abuse in addition to intimate partner violence.
- b) Less than half (47%) of VAW shelters reported that all shelter services were “generally accessible” for women who use a wheelchair or other mobility device; 26% were “somewhat” accessible and 26% were “difficult to access.”
- c) While 80% of VAW shelters reported serving Indigenous women, only 19% were “often” able to offer culturally appropriate programs.
- d) 79% of respondents that had served women with complex mental health concerns and 79% that had served women with substance use concerns reported that it was a “major challenge” for their shelter.
- e) Half (50%) of VAW shelters reported that they had served trans, gender fluid, or intersex individuals fleeing violence. Among this group, 57% indicated that they could “always” and 42% said that they could “sometimes” accommodate them.

f) Only 17% of VAW shelters reported that providing culturally appropriate supports and services was “not an issue.” For 34%, it was a “major challenge” and for 49%, a “minor issue.”

4. VAW shelter workers are the experts in their field and provide direct support to survivors. However, maintaining quality full-time, part-time, and casual staff is a challenge facing many VAW shelters across the country.

- a) Over half (55%) of respondents indicated that staff turnover and burnout were a “major challenge” for their VAW shelters.
- b) 61% of respondents identified low pay and benefits as a “major challenge” facing their shelters. It was noted that maintaining high-quality staff is difficult when the salaries and wages are not comparable to those in similar fields.
- c) Of the 5,567 reported workers, almost one-third (32%) were precariously employed as casual and relief workers.

5. VAW shelters are dealing with aging buildings in need of repair.

- a) The average (mean) age of facilities was 45 years old (built in 1973-1974), demonstrating that a number of shelters are aging.
- b) 80% of VAW shelters are in need of some form of repairs and renovations, and almost half (46%) are not able to afford them.

6. VAW shelters are struggling with a lack of funding despite having to engage in increasingly complex service delivery.

- a) 74% of VAW shelters indicated that insufficient funding was a “major challenge” facing their shelter, while only 5% of respondents said it was “not an issue.”
- b) The majority (64%) of VAW shelters do not receive an annual cost of living increase from their main government funder. One in five indicated that they had NOT received a funding increase in ten years or more.
- c) Supplying basic necessities are a significant challenge for VAW shelters. Half of all VAW shelters reported food (51%) and transportation (52%) costs as a “major challenge.”
- d) The majority (55%) of VAW shelters could NOT meet their operating expenses without fundraising and 10% could not meet their operating expenses even with fundraising.
- e) Almost one-third (32%) of respondents indicated that they did not receive funding from their main funder to do prevention and awareness work.
- f) The majority of shelters (86%) do not have fundraisers on staff, often leaving overburdened frontline staff to take on fundraising responsibilities just to keep the doors open.

Recommendations

The role of VAW shelters in addressing the pandemic that is violence against women needs to be fully recognized by governments across the country. Women’s Shelters Canada recommends:

1. **The number of shelters in Canada must be increased to respond to a) the fact that turn-away rates are alarmingly high in major cities and that b) far too many women in rural and remote areas simply do not have access to shelter services.**
2. **Sustainable, core operational funding for all VAW shelters is required as are yearly increases in accordance with standard of living costs.**
 - a) Public education, prevention, and awareness work with the general public should be included in core funding as a proactive solution to ending violence against women.
 - b) The capacity to have more than one staff person on-site at any time (double staffing) should be included as part of core funding.
 - c) Funding is needed to support VAW shelters in developing, upgrading, and retrofitting fully accessible spaces so that all women fleeing violence can access shelter facilities and services.
 - d) Increased funding for training is needed to provide workers with adequate knowledge and tools to work with populations with severe mental health and substance use concerns, as well as specific funding for mental health and addictions positions within shelters.



- e) Specific funding must be allocated for Indigenous cultural programming within VAW shelters to ensure that Indigenous women have access to culturally appropriate supports during their stay.
- f) More resources and training are needed for VAW shelter workers to work with the trans, gender fluid, and intersex community as well as women of varying cultural, ethnic, and language backgrounds.
- g) Improved sustainable federal investments are needed to enhance and improve the condition of VAW shelter buildings.

3. WSC supports the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence (NACAFV)'s recommendation to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women on November 19, 2018:

“Currently, Canada does not provide Indigenous women access to equal, equitable and culturally appropriate protection from domestic violence. Canada must fund and provide equal, equitable, and culturally appropriate shelter services and programming. This would be for the Indigenous women and their children who are fleeing or at risk of experiencing domestic violence. This means that services and programs must be tailored to the unique geographical, cultural, and historical circumstances of women who are accessing the 40 ISC [Indigenous Services Canada]-funded shelters in Canada.”

4. WSC calls on the federal government to develop and implement a National Action Plan on Violence against Women.

Key findings from this report support the call for a National Action Plan (NAP) on VAW so that regardless of where a woman lives in Canada, she has access to comparable, adequate services. An NAP would ensure a shared understanding of the root causes of VAW as well as coordinated and effective efforts across the federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal levels.

Introduction

The First National VAW Shelter Survey Developed by and for the VAW Sector



Since their inception in the 1970s as small, grass-roots feminist collectives providing temporary safety to women and children fleeing violence, violence against women (VAW) shelters and transition houses⁴ have grown significantly in numbers and in the extent of the work they do. VAW shelters do much more than provide a bed and basic needs. Today, they offer a variety of services for residents while also doing advocacy, outreach, and public education (see Section 6).⁵

Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) developed its national survey in 2017 to capture and better understand how the VAW shelter sector operates across the country. The objective of this survey was to build a comprehensive national profile of VAW and second stage shelters⁶ and transition houses.

Drawing on data collected from this survey, this report provides information on 290 VAW shelters' physical buildings; shelter size; length of stay and capacity; the various groups served and the accessibility of shelters for different survivors; service delivery and programming; labour, salaries, and types of work conducted; and funding, finances, and reporting. Where relevant, the report breaks down responses based on region and population size to illustrate differences across the country, as well as between larger and smaller communities.

Across Canada, the terms used to describe VAW shelters vary greatly. They are referred to as transition houses, safe homes, women's shelters, family violence shelters, VAW emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, healing lodges, or first stage shelters. **For the purposes of this report, VAW shelters will be used.**

WSC defines a VAW shelter as a facility whose core mission is to offer residential services to women and children escaping violence. While all VAW shelters provide residential services, women who are experiencing or fleeing abuse or violence are not required to live in a shelter to access services. Many women access outreach services without

VAW SHELTER: *provides short-term shelter to women in crisis.*

Length of stay can be days, weeks, or months, depending on the shelter.

ever residing in a shelter, while many who live in a shelter for a period of time continue to use services after moving out.

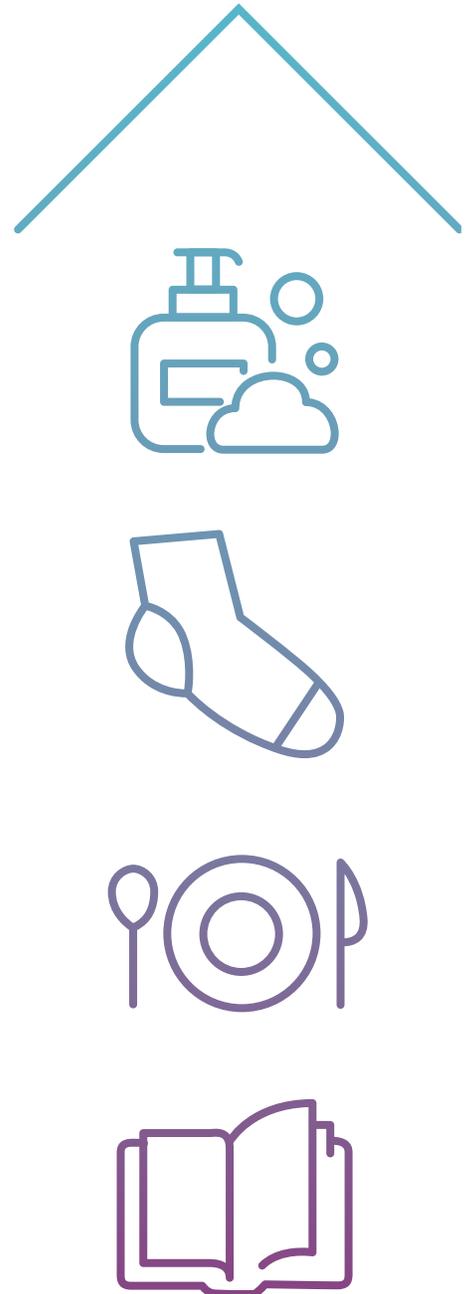
There are currently over 560 VAW, second stage, and mixed shelters⁷ across the country mandated to serve women and children escaping violence, according to WSC's database. Findings specific to second stage shelters are presented in a separate report.⁸

VAW and second stage shelters are non-profit, registered charities, and receive operational funding through one or more provincial/territorial departments.⁹ Monies are for "core services," as defined by government agencies, and/or for distinct projects or programs. The services and programs that ministries fund differ from one province/territory to the next, as do the amounts of funding provided, the types and lengths of agreements, the naming of services, accessibility, and guidelines and standards related to admission criteria, length of stay, staff training and remuneration, reporting, legislative compliance, and so on.

There is no single model or governance structure for VAW shelters – they are all run individually and governed by their own boards. Some configurations include: one shelter building; multiple buildings that operate under one budget; multiple facilities governed by one organization that operate with separate budgets; shelters owned and operated by Band Councils; and shelters that form part of a larger organization that offers multiple services to the wider public (such as YWCAs). In addition to differing governance and structures, services, policies, and practices can differ significantly from shelter to shelter – often depending on local context, available funding, and community needs.

Facilities and Services

VAW shelters provide short-term accommodation to women fleeing domestic abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV).¹⁰ Increasingly, VAW shelters are serving women escaping different forms of violence and abuse in addition to domestic violence/IPV. This may include human trafficking, forced marriage, and family violence (abuse from family members other than an intimate partner) (see Section 5).



Typically, VAW shelters provide women and their children with free accommodation and basic needs (food, clothing, and toiletries), as well as programming. The length of time a resident can stay at the shelter varies from days or weeks to months, depending on the shelter, the needs of the individual woman, and provincial/territorial policies (see Section 4). VAW shelters are staffed 24/7 and are equipped with various security measures and protocols to keep residents safe (see Section 3).

The majority of VAW shelters operate in a communal environment with residents having access to common spaces such as a kitchen, quiet rooms, laundry, living room, bathrooms, and backyard along with either shared or private bedrooms. This structure varies from shelter to shelter depending on available resources and the physical layout of the building. For larger shelters with more resources, there may be additional space for residents such as health and wellness spaces (e.g. a room with exercise balls, yoga mats, and cardio machines), children's playrooms, and private bathrooms. There are often administrative and meeting spaces onsite for individual and/or group counselling as well as areas designated for intake.

VAW shelters offer a variety of services for residents and non-residents alike such as individual and group counselling, children's programs, parenting classes, mental health and addiction services, nutritional classes and community kitchens, Indigenous programming, legal and housing services, support for immigrant and refugee women, men's programs (for both those who have abused and those who have experienced abuse), and assistance with applications to educational and apprenticeship programs (see Section 6).

Feminist and Trauma-Informed Service Delivery

VAW shelters centre women's experiences and incorporate a gender-based analysis while also recognizing other social structures and power relations that affect women's lives (racism, ableism, heterosexism, etc.).¹¹ Many VAW shelters use a feminist, trauma-informed approach,¹² working from an intersectional feminist framework that applies a critical lens to systems of power (patriarchy, colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, etc.).¹³ Many VAW shelters explicitly state that they operate from a feminist, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive mandate.

A trauma-informed framework enables VAW shelters to be more inclusive by recognizing diverse experiences of violence (both systemic and individual) and the different barriers to accessing support depending on one's social location.¹⁴ An intersectional feminist framework also recognizes that feminism means different things to different people and that VAW shelters adopt a feminism that meets the local and unique needs of the women accessing their services.

A trauma-informed approach focuses on creating safety for survivors while also recognizing that trauma affects individuals on multiple levels, that institutions (including VAW shelters) can re-traumatize those who have histories of trauma, and that having an understanding of the impacts of trauma and access to quality services is crucial to the healing process.¹⁵



Gradually, more VAW shelters are integrating a harm reduction approach, including low-barrier access, so that women living with substance use and severe mental health concerns can access services.¹⁶ Harm reduction refers to person-centred services that meet women where they are at in both their recovery and healing journey.¹⁷

“

It is important to understand the intersectionality of the work we do. The continuum of supports and services women need [should] be formal and informal. There needs to be 2nd stage and 3rd stage housing accessible within all transition houses...All of our programs should provide childcare, employment training, career planning, housing options, etc.”

Quebec respondent



1

Developing a National Profile of VAW Shelters and Transition Houses

Much of the research conducted about VAW shelters, such as *Statistics Canada's Transition House Survey (THS)*, focuses primarily on the women and children who stay in shelters or use shelter services.¹⁸ Academic studies on VAW shelters, while illuminating, have concentrated on provincial VAW shelter service delivery, standards, and policies.¹⁹

WSC's survey uniquely focused on VAW shelters themselves on a national level, examining the services they offer, human resources, prevention work, the challenges they face, and their financial situations.²⁰ Providing a national analysis of the operation and work of VAW shelters gives insight into different challenges and regional contexts, as well as the resiliency of VAW shelters to provide quality services.

Survey Methods

The survey was developed in consultation with provincial and territorial VAW shelter associations (WSC's Advisory Council),²¹ as well as with individual VAW shelter directors and staff. Engagement with executive directors and frontline workers from across the country ensured that the survey captured the reality of the regional issues facing this sector.²² WSC sought the expertise of the

DisAbled Women's Network of Canada (DAWN Canada), Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario, and the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence to ensure that questions captured accessibility in VAW shelters and the realities facing Indigenous VAW shelters. This survey is the first national inquiry of its kind developed by and for the VAW shelter sector.

The online survey, offered in French and English, was officially launched on September 19, 2017, and remained open until March 7, 2018. The survey was open to all VAW, second stage, and mixed shelters that serve women fleeing violence.²³ A link to the online survey was sent to 517 shelters.²⁴ The survey was designed to be completed by an executive director who oversees the daily activities and management of the shelter.

Participants were recruited through WSC's network, along with assistance from provincial and territorial shelter associations and Indigenous partners. During outreach, WSC also learned of new shelters and invited them to participate in the survey.

To make the survey accessible to everyone, participants with limited internet access could complete the survey over the phone (one survey was conducted this way).

Using the survey platform Qualtrics, VAW shelter executive directors were sent an individualized link to the online survey. They could save their progress and return at a different time, which was important if they were called away to deal with an unexpected issue. Additionally, the survey link could be shared with others within an organization to complete sections such as Funding and Human Resources.

Some participants noted the length of the questionnaire as a barrier to participation, which led to the development of a shorter version released on January 12, 2018. The longer questionnaire consisted of over 95 questions and took 1-1.5 hours to complete, while the shorter survey contained more than 60 questions and took 15-30 minutes to complete.²⁵ Respondents were able to add comments to many of the questions, which provided rich textual data.

During our consultations, we learned that there are many different configurations of VAW shelters. To capture the data for each facility, we developed different conditions in the survey to move the respondent through a series of questions that matched their organization (Figure 1). Respondents received questions based on the **type** of shelter (VAW, second stage, or mixed) and **how many** facilities they operated. For those who operated multiple facilities that had different budgets, they were asked to complete a separate survey for each facility.

Data Analysis

The results in this report are primarily descriptive – we use unadjusted percentages to show the proportion of respondents endorsing a specific response (or in some cases multiple responses) to the questions. The compare means (averages) procedure was used to compare differences in descriptive statistics across one or more variables. For example, means of shelter size (number of beds) and wages were

Figure 1: Survey Conditions

1 Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No condition
Multiple Facilities + 1 Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looped through specific questions related to the shelter configuration Collected organizational level data once (e.g. funding), shelter specific data collected for each facility (building, capacity, policies etc.)
Multiple Facilities + Multiple Budgets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asked to complete a separate survey for each shelter that had their own budget
Mixed Shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saw specific questions related to VAW shelter and second stage component of the facility



compared across different provinces and territories as well as population sizes. Analysis was conducted using SPSS 25. Descriptive statistics/frequencies for the majority of the questions were computed. Comments provided by respondents in text boxes and open-ended questions were uploaded to NVivo and coded for themes. Word frequencies and relationships between words were also run.

Survey Limitations

There were some limitations to our outreach because of turnover in the VAW shelter sector. Despite extensive outreach by phone and email, we were unable to contact all shelters, particularly those in remote areas, those with spotty reception, and shelters that did not have an online presence (common for rural and remote shelters). Some of the contact information we had was incorrect or went to the wrong person.

Some participants were unable to answer every question, resulting in different numbers of responses. There are several reasons for this including lack of time or staff and response fatigue. In instances where there were interim or new executive directors, some felt they lacked the knowledge required to supply accurate information.

Additionally, the survey design may have created some challenges for respondents. For example, if they selected an incorrect option for the survey logic, they were automatically sent to different sections of the survey thereby skipping a series of questions. The shorter survey had fewer questions, which also altered overall response numbers.

To create flexibility in the design, we did not force any responses; respondents had the option to skip questions to which they did not want to respond or did not know the answer. For clarity, all data in this report are marked with the number of responses to each question with either an “n” or an indication in the text.

Lastly, the financial questions were challenging for many executive directors who did not have a full-time finance officer to provide this information, creating insufficient data for these questions. For Indigenous VAW shelters that are owned and operated by Band Councils, many did not have access to this financial information. As a result, some of the financial questions have been excluded from the analysis.



“ Thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in this survey...I look forward to seeing the results of this survey across the country, to see where the needs are the same and different.”

Saskatchewan respondent



2

Who Took Part

Of the 517 VAW, second stage, and mixed shelters that were sent the survey, we received data from 401, representing a 78% response rate.²⁶ Overall, 290 of the respondents were from VAW shelters, 85 from second stage shelters, and 26 from mixed shelters (Table 1).

This report focuses exclusively on the 290 VAW shelters.²⁷

Overall, VAW shelters completed 248 long surveys and 42 short surveys. The majority (67%) of VAW shelters indicated that they operated only one facility. The survey was completed in English by 72% of respondents, with 28% responding in French. This is reflective of the anglophone and francophone demographics across the country.

Table 1: Shelter Respondents by Type (n=401)

Shelter Type	Province/Territory													Total	%
	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PE	NL	YT	NT	NU		
VAW	47	27	12	8	79	77	13	9	1	8	2	4	3	290	72.3
Second Stage	13	8	2	5	24	17	2	4	2	6	1	1	0	85	21.2
Mixed	5	4	1	3	3	7	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	26	6.5
Total	65	39	15	16	106	101	15	13	4	15	4	5	3	401	100

Population Size of Community

There were VAW shelter respondents from every major city as well as smaller cities and rural, remote, and Northern communities, providing data to better understand the similarities and differences between VAW shelters across Canada.

To simplify analysis, we combined the five population categories used in the survey into three to represent large centres, medium-sized centres, and small/rural communities (Table 2).²⁸

Respondents to the survey were split relatively equally between large, medium, and small/rural population centres on a national level (Figure 2). However, as illustrated in Figure 3, respondents were not necessarily evenly represented in each province or territory, even where shelters exist

Table 2: VAW Shelters by Population Size (n=290)

Size of Community	Population Size	Category	Count
Major Metropolitan Area	1 million and more	Large	36
Large Population Centre	100,000 - 999,999	Large	65
Medium Population Centre	30,000 - 99,999	Medium	77
Small Population Centre	1,000 - 29,999	Small/Rural	102
Rural Population Centre	Fewer than 1,000	Small/Rural	10
Total			290

across all three categories. For example, respondents from Newfoundland and Labrador were all from small/rural population centres even though there are shelters in large population centres in that province. As such, it is important to consider the regional differences between provinces and territories in accordance to the average size of the VAW shelter, its maximum capacity, and the number of staff (see Sections 4 and 7).

Respondents from Rural, Remote, and Northern VAW Shelters²⁹

VAW shelters located in rural, remote, and northern Canada (provincial North and the territories) have unique challenges. Specifically, these VAW shelters often have a large catchment area, providing outreach to isolated communities in the surrounding areas.

The territories are expansive with very few VAW, second stage, or mixed shelters serving the area. The Yukon Territory spans 482,443 km² but only has four VAW, second stage, or mixed shelters (two are located in the city of Whitehorse). The Northwest Territories extends 1,346,106 km² with five VAW, second stage, and mixed shelters and Nunavut covers 2,038,722 km² with only six shelters (Figure 4).³⁰

Figure 2: VAW Shelters by Population Size (n=290)

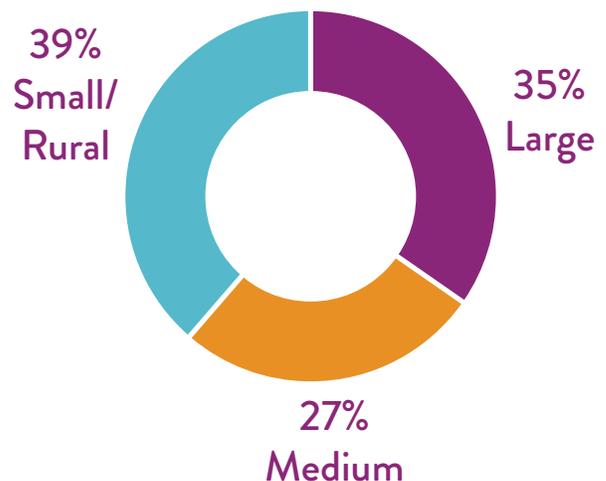
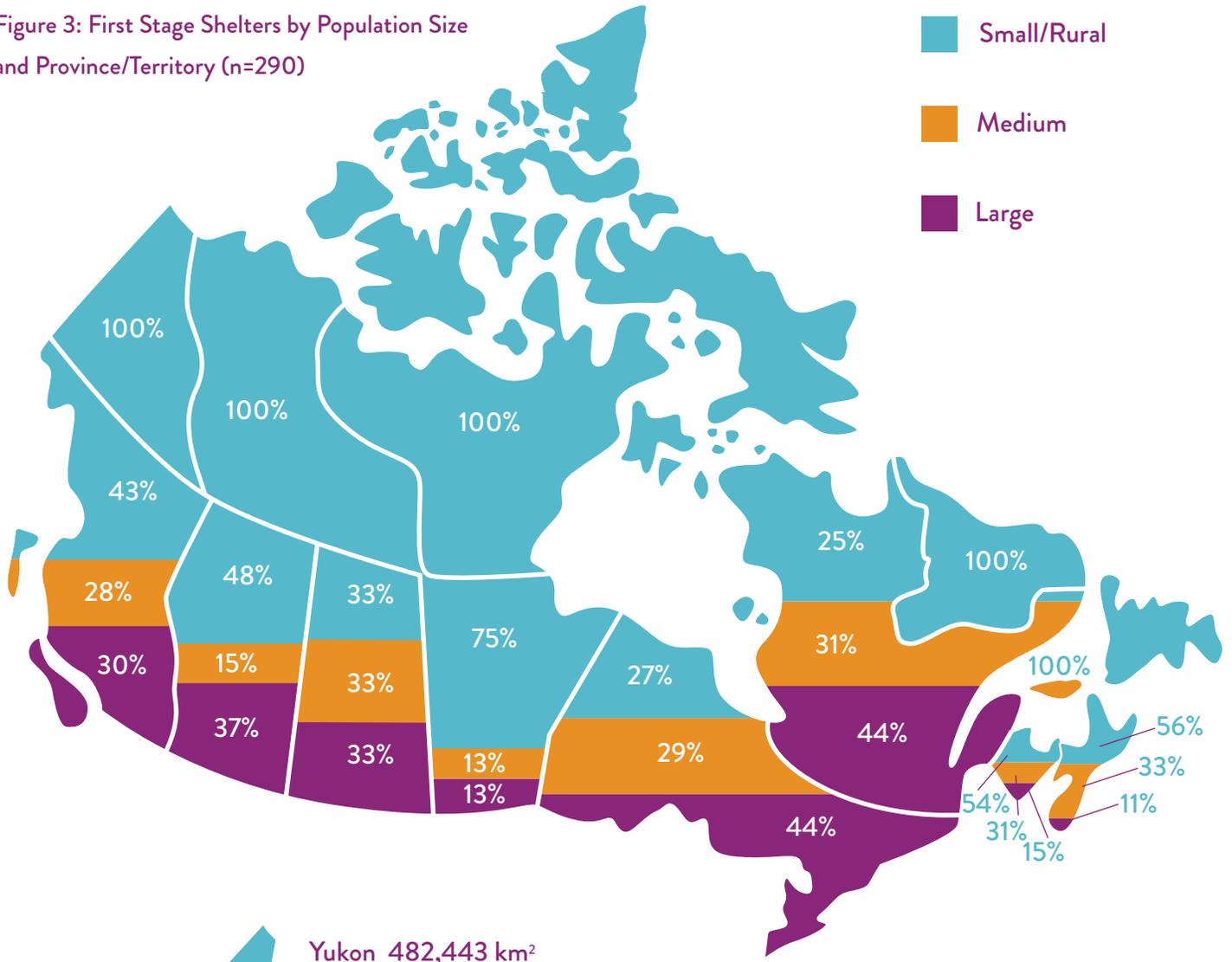


Figure 3: First Stage Shelters by Population Size and Province/Territory (n=290)



Yukon 482,443 km²
4 Shelters

Northwest Territories 1,346,106 km²
5 Shelters

Nunavut 2,038,722 km²
6 Shelters

Figure 4: Ratio of Area to Number of VAW, Second Stage, or Mixed Shelters in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut

2 WHO TOOK PART

VAW shelters located in communities that were only accessible by air, boat, or ice roads were considered “fly-in” communities. Ten respondents were located in remote fly-in communities: three in rural population centres and seven in smaller communities. Two respondents noted that their community was only accessible by ice road or by boat depending on the time of year.

VAW shelters that were located in communities where the population was under 1,000 residents were considered “rural” (see Table 2). Overall, there were respondents from 10 (3%, n=290) VAW shelters in rural areas.

The 10 respondents from rural VAW shelters were located in remote areas of British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador. The majority (60%) of rural VAW shelters were located on First Nation reserves. The territories did not report any rural VAW shelters as their shelters are primarily located in cities or towns with populations of more than 1000 people. However, these communities are considered “remote,” as many Northern cities are quite isolated.³¹

Regional Context



“Funders need to look at a shelter’s location, cost of living, etc. [Because we are] living in a rural community with the lack of housing, transportation, high utility costs, high costs of food, our budget needs to be increased because of these financial differences. Living in Northern Ontario is a lot different then living in Southern Ontario or even Thunder Bay.”

— Ontario respondent

“We spend too much time and resources attending meetings that are more than a two-hour drive. Maintaining community partnerships is very time-consuming.”

— Nova Scotia respondent



Respondents from Indigenous VAW Shelters and Healing Lodges

Indigenous VAW shelters and healing lodges face specific challenges due to expansive catchment areas in rural, remote, and Northern regions, the ongoing effects of colonialism, and a heightened rate of violence against Indigenous women.³² Overall, 14% (n=289) of respondents indicated that they were located in a community where more than half the population is Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, or Métis).

To capture the number of Indigenous VAW shelters that operate on and off First Nations reserves, the survey asked respondents if they were an Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, or Métis) or Indigenous-led healing lodge, shelter, or transition house. Overall, 31 of the 290 respondents (11%) identified being Indigenous or Indigenous-led. Of these, nearly half (15) were located on First Nation reserves.

The majority (61%) of Indigenous VAW shelters were located in small/rural population centres. Additionally, 90% of shelters located in fly-in communities were in a community where over half of the population was Indigenous; of those, two were located on a First Nations reserve.

For on-reserve VAW shelters, 10 of the shelter buildings were owned by Band Council, two were owned by the shelter organization itself, two were owned by another organization, and one respondent did not answer the question (Table 3). For off-reserve Indigenous VAW shelters, eight were owned by the shelter itself, three by the province or municipality, three by Band Council, and two by other organizations.

Overall, of the 281 respondents, 7% (19) indicated that they were dedicated to serving only or primarily Indigenous women fleeing violence – the majority of which (14) identified as Indigenous VAW shelters.

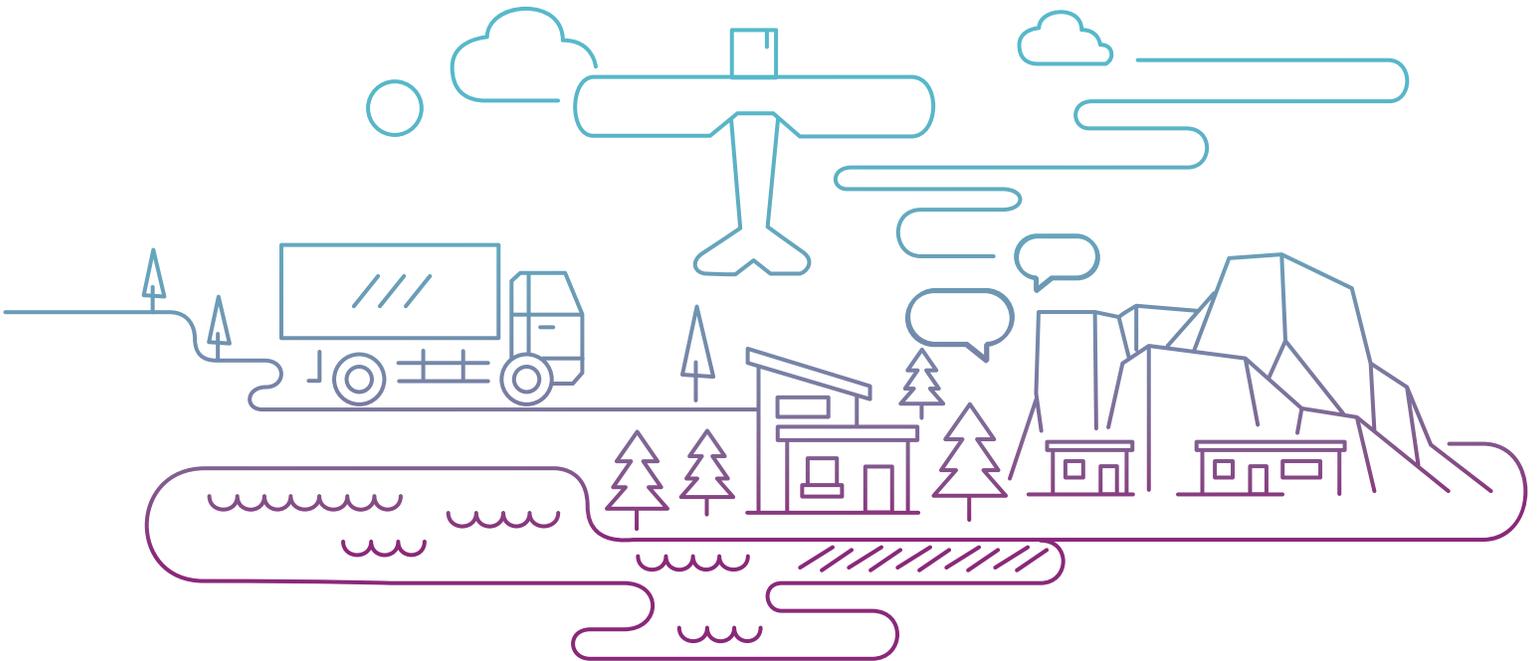
WSC is working with Indigenous partners to further examine the data from Indigenous VAW shelters and healing lodges.

Table 3: Indigenous VAW Shelter Ownership

Indigenous VAW Shelters	Band Council	Shelter Itself	Other Organization	Province or Municipality	Total
First Nations Reserve	10	2	2	0	14
Indigenous (Off Reserve)	3	8	2	3	16
Total	13	10	4	3	30

**“ Due to geographic location,
a great deal of travel is
required to ensure that our
voice is heard in the district.”**

Ontario respondent



3

Bricks and Mortar

KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of VAW shelters own their buildings (69%) and have paid off their mortgage (66%).
- The average (mean) age of facilities was 45 years old (built in 1973-1974), demonstrating that a number of shelters are aging.
- The vast majority (80%) of VAW shelters are in need of some form of repairs and renovations, with almost half (46%) unable to afford them.
- Less than half (47%) of VAW shelters reported that all shelter services were “generally accessible” for women who use a wheelchair or other mobility device. Nearly three-quarters (72%) reported that accessibility was a “major challenge” or “minor issue” facing their shelter.

The physical state of VAW shelter buildings varies widely across the country. The vast majority of VAW shelter buildings are aging, which has consequences in terms of physical accessibility. All shelter workers want their facilities to be clean, inviting, and secure. However, many VAW shelters cannot afford to repair or renovate their facilities, and some may not have access to all desired security measures.

Ownership and Mortgages

The majority (194 of 281, or 69%) of VAW shelters indicated that they own their buildings. Other respondents reported they had partnerships with various housing and governmental bodies, jointly owned facilities, or a forgivable loan with Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) or a non-profit housing organization (Figure 5).

The survey also asked respondents if their mortgage was paid off.³³ Of the 220 respondents who were able to supply this information, 66% had paid off their mortgage, 26% had not, and 8% were unsure.

Age of VAW Shelter Buildings

Considering the wear and tear on shelters' physical buildings, VAW shelter buildings that were 10 years or older were defined as aging or "older" facilities.

Of the 206 respondents who knew what year their shelter was built, 194 (94%) indicated it was in or before 2009, demonstrating that a number of shelters are aging (see Figure 6). The average (mean) age of facilities was 45 years old (built in 1973-1974); the oldest VAW shelter was built in 1800 and the newest in 2016.

Need for Repairs and Renovations

The majority (226 of 281, or 80%) of respondents indicated that their shelters needed some form of repairs and renovations. When asked if the shelter had the funds to make the necessary repairs or renovations, almost half (46%) of the 190 respondents did not. Only 4% could do so with operating funds, 5% with capital funds, and 5% from additional fundraising, with one-third (33%) needing to cobble together funds from a combination of sources.

Figure 6: Age of VAW Shelter Buildings (n=206)

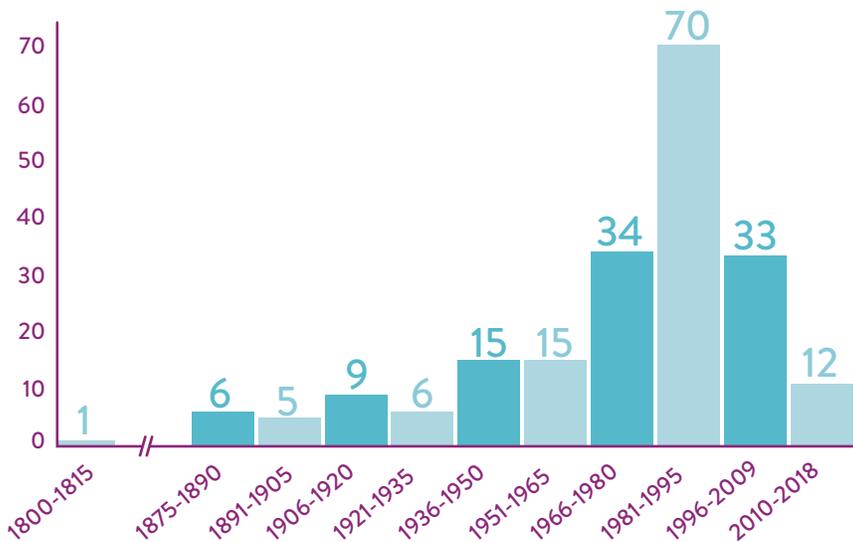


Figure 5: VAW Shelters by Type of Ownership (n=281)

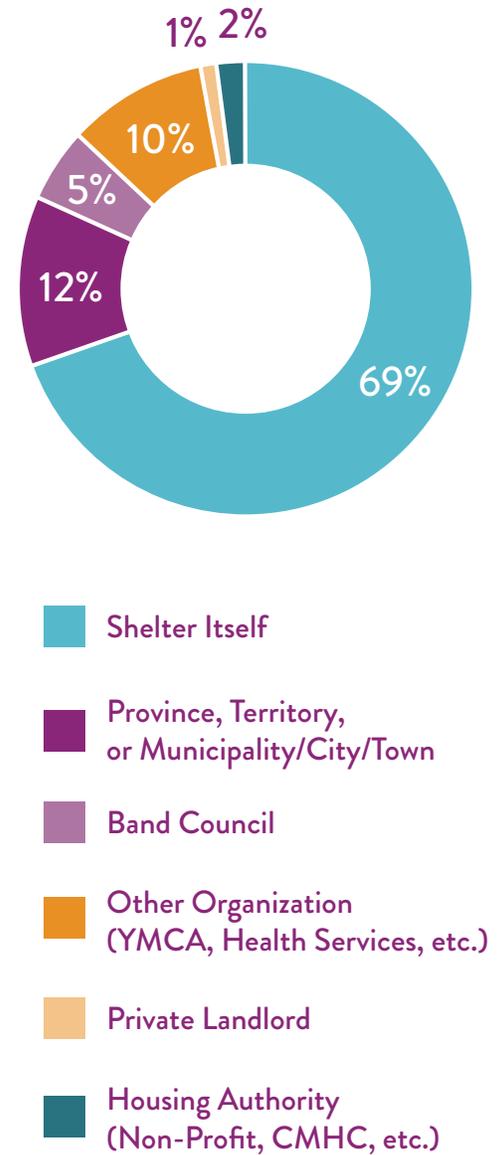
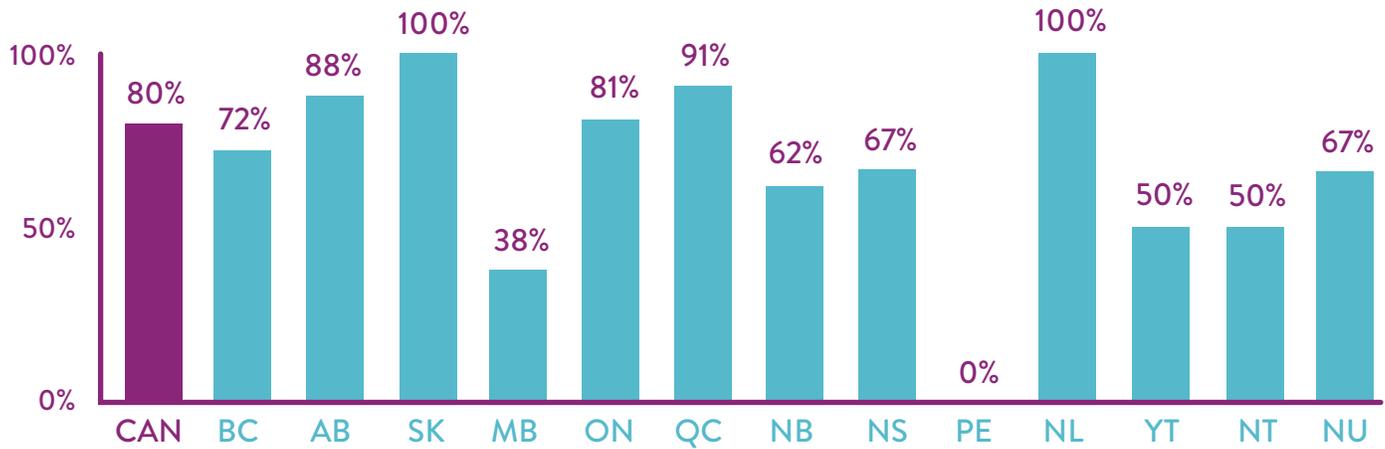


Figure 7: Percentage of VAW Shelters in Need of Major or Minor Repairs by Province/Territory (n=281)



The need for renovations and repairs varied across the country. All of the VAW shelters in Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador reported a need for “major” or “minor” repairs or renovations to their buildings, followed by 91% of Quebec shelters and 88% of Alberta shelters (Figure 7).

Of the 193 older shelters that responded, the majority (55%) reported needing “major” repairs or renovations, with only 17% indicating that they did not need any renovations or repairs. None of the 12 VAW shelters built in the last ten years required any “major” repairs or renovations, although 50% reported a need for “minor” repairs or renovations.

Physical Accessibility in VAW Shelters

As noted, the survey was completed by executive directors and shelter staff. Therefore, questions regarding building accessibility were answered from the perspective of those who work in shelters rather than the women who access services.

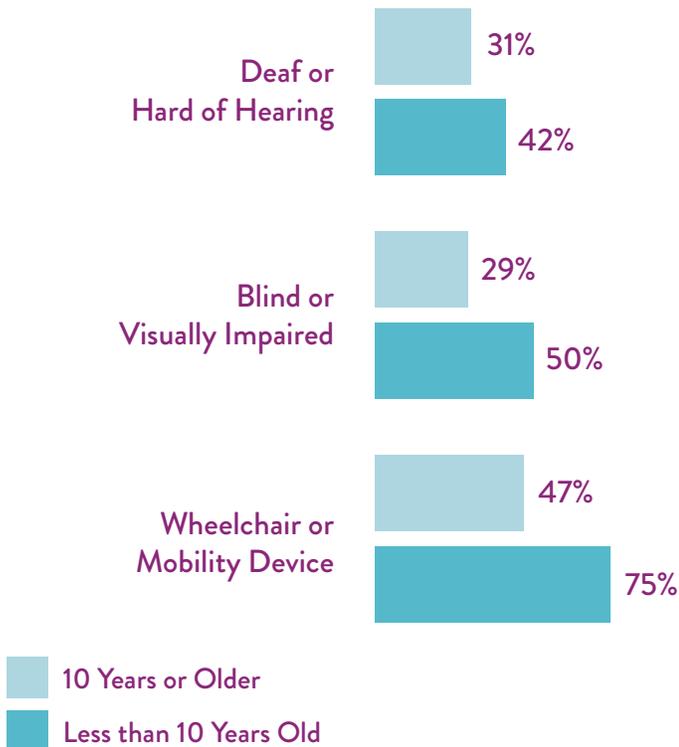
Future research in this area would benefit from speaking directly to women who access these services. It would also be important to ask about outreach services and how VAW shelters are working to ensure women with various disabilities are aware of and able to access services.

In the WSC survey, of the 265 shelters that responded to how accessible their shelter was to women who use a wheelchair or other mobility device, almost half (47%) reported that all shelter services were “generally accessible,” 26% were “somewhat accessible,” and 26% were “difficult to access.” Respondents were also asked how often they could accommodate women who use a wheelchair or other mobility device; of the 277 who responded, less than half (48%) answered “always,” 29% “sometimes,” and 23% “never.”

Survey results showed that VAW shelters built within the last ten years reported being more accessible for women who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices (Figure 8). Of the 12 newer shelters, 75% reported that shelter services were

“generally accessible” to women who use a wheelchair or other mobility device, 50% for women who are blind or visually impaired, and 42% for women who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Of the 186 older shelters who responded, only 47% reported that their shelter was “generally accessible” to women who use a wheelchair or other mobility device, 29% for women who are blind or visually impaired, and 31% for women who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Figure 8: How “Generally Accessible” Are VAW Shelter Services?



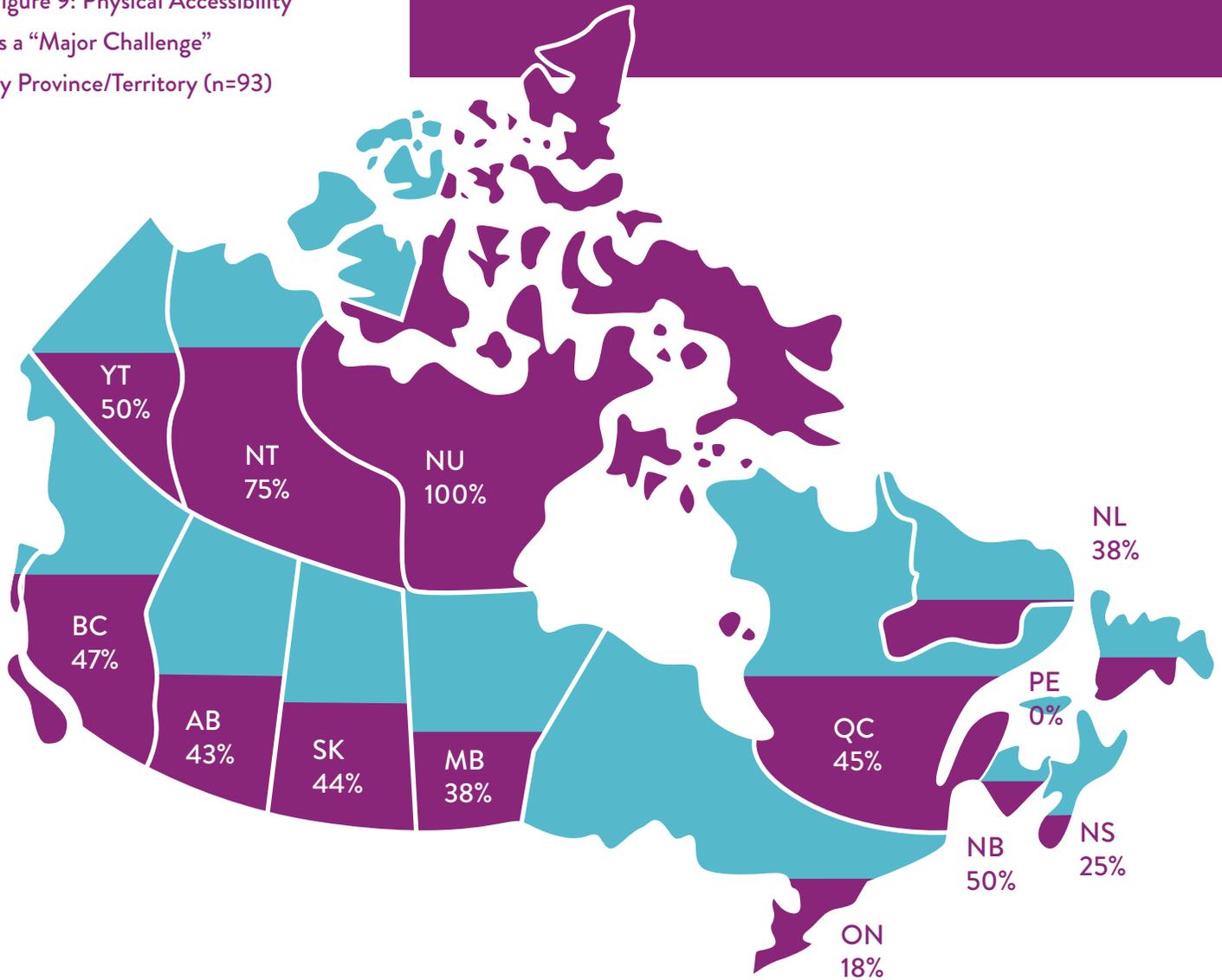
A NOTE FROM THE DISABLED WOMEN’S NETWORK OF CANADA:

The most important step in providing accessible services is to have a better understanding of the needs of women with disabilities. This can be done by conducting audits based on a cross-disability accessibility standard. Secondly, as acknowledged by Women Shelters Canada, women with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities with lived experience, must be supported to participate fully in the collection of the data. Finally, VAW shelters, transition houses, and front line services would benefit immensely from the inclusion of women with disabilities as both staff and board members.

CHALLENGE: INACCESSIBLE BUILDINGS

Over one-third (38%) of VAW shelters reported that inaccessible facilities were a “major” challenge,” with 34% listing it as a “minor issue” (n=246). As such, nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents felt that accessibility was a challenge or issue facing their VAW shelter. Figure 9 shows that shelters located in the territories were particularly challenged by inaccessible facilities.

Figure 9: Physical Accessibility as a “Major Challenge” by Province/Territory (n=93)



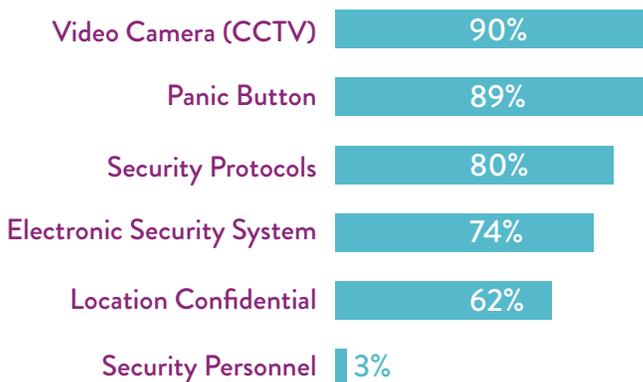
Security Measures

Safety is central to the mission of VAW shelters. Among the 239 respondents, the most reported security measures were having a video camera or CCTV (90%), a panic button (89%), and security protocols in place (80%) (Figure 10).

The survey also asked respondents what security measures their shelter currently needed but could not afford. Of the 260 who responded, 11% needed security personnel and 11% needed a panic button on-site.³⁴

In their comments, respondents emphasized the importance of “double staffing” (having more than one staff person on shifts during the day and overnight); upgrades to their current systems; more secure backyards with higher fences and more privacy for residents; bulletproof or security windows; a safe room; and outdoor security and surveillance systems.

Figure 10: Security Measures in Place at VAW Shelters (n=239)



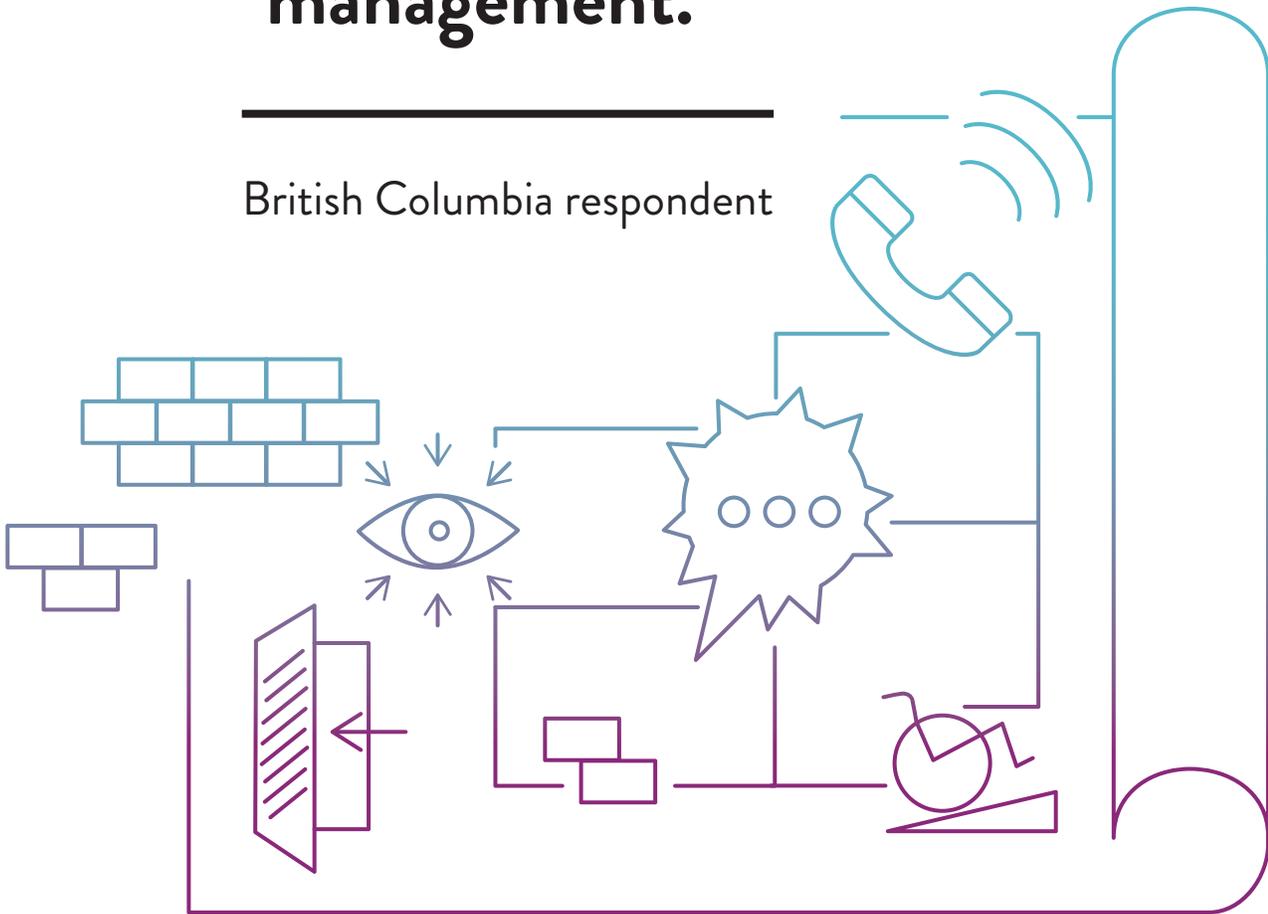
“[We need] double staffing - we only receive enough funding to single staff...With the amount of mental health and addictions issues that we encounter and the high-risk situations that arise, our staff often does not feel safe [when they are] the only staff in the building.”

— Ontario respondent



“ Staff are trained in dynamic security and risk management, as well as, addictions and behaviour management.”

British Columbia respondent



4

Shelter Size, Capacity, and Length of Stay Policies

KEY FINDINGS

- Four in ten VAW shelters reported operating at capacity “almost always.”
- Close to half (41%) of VAW shelters reported that capacity issues were a “major challenge.” Shelters located in large population centres were particularly challenged by capacity issues.
- VAW shelters will take in more people than they have funded beds. Nationally, the average number of funded beds was 16, while respondents reported they could accommodate an average maximum of 19 persons.
- The majority (74%) of VAW shelters reported providing extensions for residents, which reduces their capacity to take in new women who are seeking shelter.
- The majority (85%) of VAW shelters reported that affordable housing was “always” or “often” difficult to find in their community. Less than one-third (31%) of respondents indicated that some residents could secure affordable housing within the maximum length of stay at the shelter.

WSC’s national survey asked several questions regarding VAW shelter capacity, affordable housing in their community, and what options are available to residents when they leave the shelter. In our work with VAW shelters, we have often heard how difficult it is to meet demand when there are not

enough spaces and resources; it was therefore important to include survey questions that captured those challenges. To gain a better understanding of the differences between funded beds/persons and the actual capacity of VAW shelters, we asked both the number of funded beds/

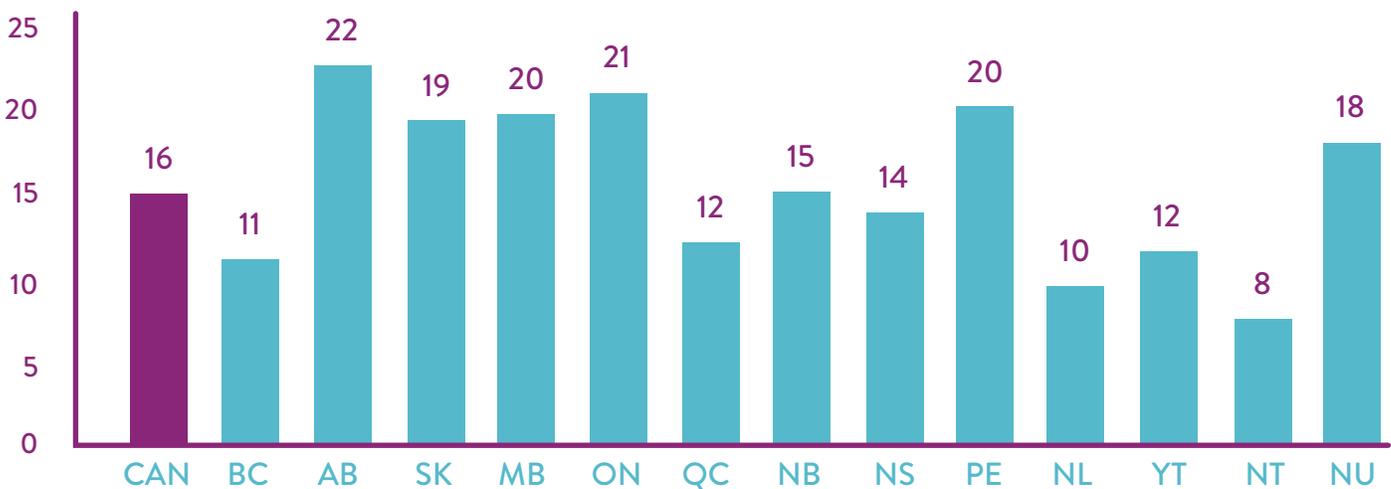
persons and the maximum people they were able to accommodate. We also provided opportunities for respondents to elaborate through comments and clarifications.

For the purposes of this report, we use “beds” to refer to the number of available spaces within a VAW shelter.³⁵ For this section, all data contain information from VAW shelters and the short-term VAW shelter components of mixed facilities (shelters that include a VAW shelter and second stage shelter under one roof). As such, the number of responses to some questions (“n”) is higher than 290. Due to the sensitivity of these questions, identifying information has been removed from quotations.³⁶

Funded Beds

On average, VAW shelters indicated that they were funded to house up to 16 beds.³⁷ As illustrated in Figure 11, a compare means test found that VAW shelters located in the Atlantic provinces, the territories, Quebec, and British Columbia tended

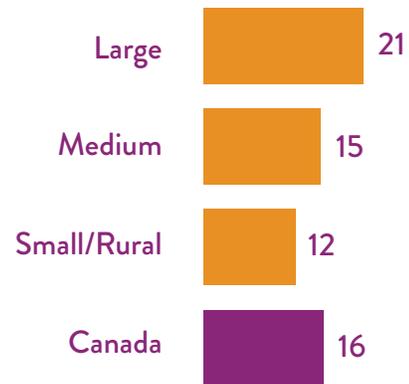
Figure 11: Average Number of Funded Beds per VAW Shelter by Province/Territory (n=302)



to be smaller facilities, with some reporting up to 14 fewer funded beds than Alberta, which had the highest average number of funded beds.³⁸

Survey results also demonstrated that the population size of a given community was related to the relative size and capacity of VAW shelters. The smaller the community, generally speaking, the smaller the VAW shelter (see Figure 12). A compare means test showed that on average, small/rural VAW shelters reported nine fewer beds than larger centres.

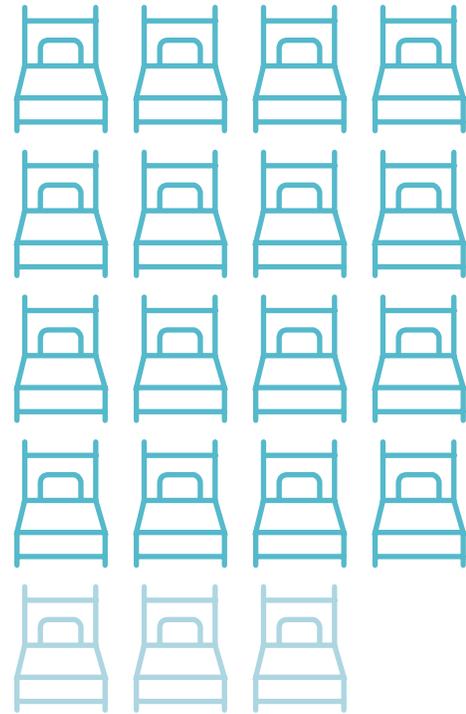
Figure 12: Average Funded Beds per VAW Shelter by Population Size (n=278)



Maximum Capacity

As noted, the national average of funded beds for VAW shelters was 16. However, survey results showed that VAW shelters were able to offer additional space to accommodate women fleeing immediate danger. For example, a VAW shelter may have received funding for up to 10 beds while also having 3 additional unfunded “emergency” beds to respond to immediate crises.

The survey asked respondents for the maximum number of persons they would accommodate at their facility. Of the 285 who responded, on average, VAW shelters reported they could, at maximum, accommodate 19 persons (Figure 13). A compare means test showed that respondents from large population centres reported a higher average of maximum persons (23), with 19 for medium, and 15 for small/rural shelters.



16 average funded beds for an average maximum of **19** women and children

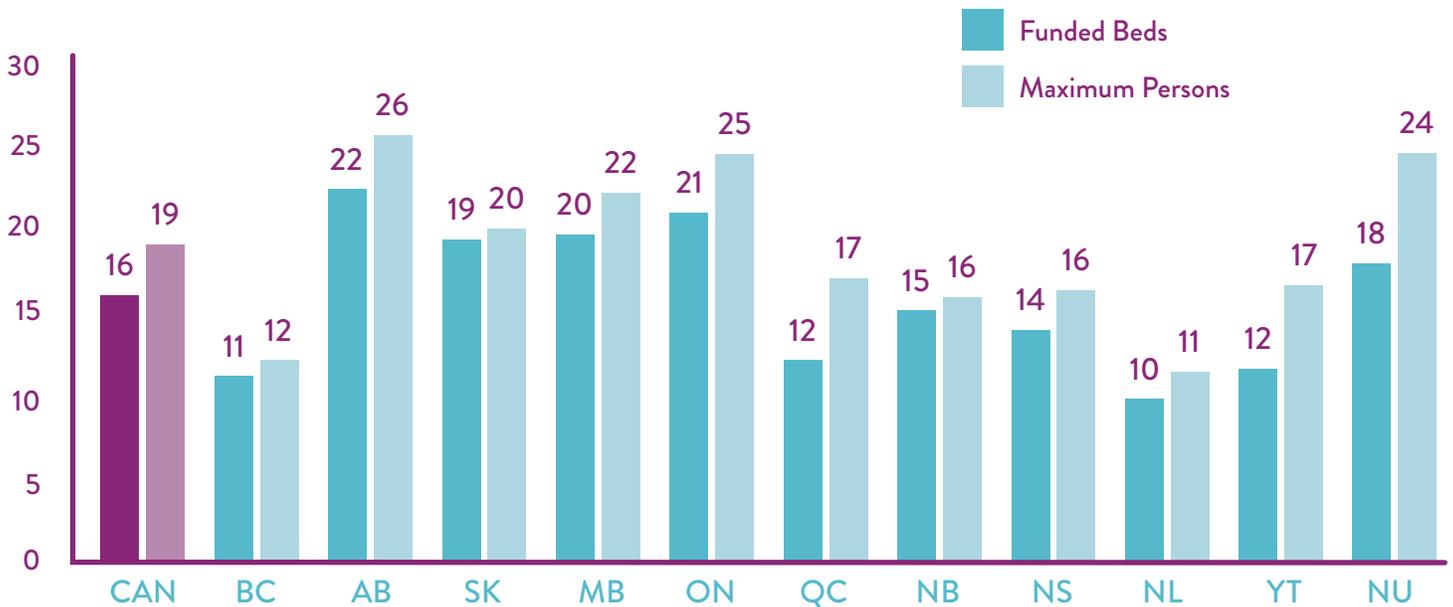


Figure 13: Compare Mean (Average) Funded Beds vs Maximum Persons (n=302)³⁹

4 SIZE, CAPACITY, LENGTH OF STAY POLICIES

The majority of VAW shelters were not funded by persons but rather by number of beds.⁴⁰ As such, the fact that VAW shelters were willing to take in more persons than funded beds may reflect unfunded emergency beds, cots for babies, or mothers and children sharing beds. When shelters take in more residents than they may be funded for, it stretches their resources and staff thin. These survey findings are consistent with the findings in the Ontario shelter study by Wathen et al. (2015).

Frequency of Reaching Capacity

For the purposes of this report, capacity refers to how often the VAW shelter is full (i.e. when they no longer have room for new residents).⁴¹ It has been well documented by academics, Statistics Canada, and in WSC's annual *Shelter Voices* reports that VAW shelters are often operating at or beyond their capacity.⁴²

WSC's national survey found that of the 269 respondents, 39% reported operating at capacity "almost always," with 33% "often" at capacity. Almost one-quarter (22%) were "sometimes" at capacity and only 6% of respondents indicated that their shelter was "rarely" at capacity. When asked how often the shelter takes in people when they are at capacity, of the 302 who responded, 14% reported more than once a month, 27% every few months, 14% every year, and 24% never.⁴³

VAW shelters located in large population centres reported being at capacity more often than shelters in medium and small/rural population centres. (Figure 14).⁴⁴ Of the 86 shelters in large population centres that responded, the majority (62%) indicated that they were "almost always" at capacity. Among the 94 small/rural VAW shelters, only 16% reported that they were "almost always" at full capacity.

Capacity Issues



"We exceed numbers in emergency situations or when children put us over our capacity. We are aware of the impact on staff with this many residents and that is why double staffing is important."

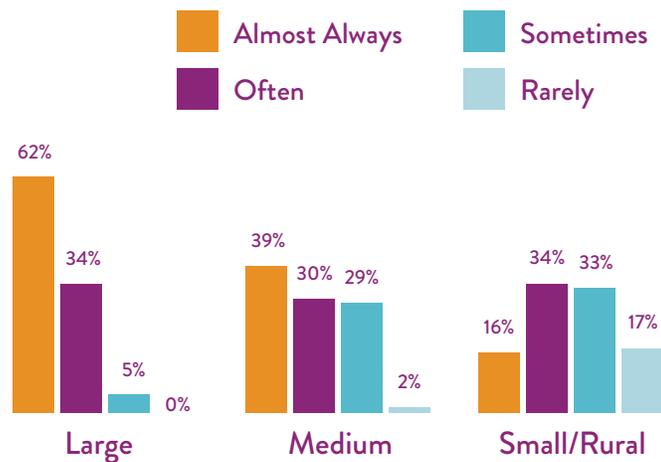
—Anonymous respondent

"We have 21 physical beds which are usually at full capacity. Last year's fiscal year we operated at 120% occupancy rate."

—Anonymous respondent

Overall, VAW shelters in large population centres reported being more challenged by capacity issues. For rural and small shelters, it is important to note that whether or not a shelter is full, there are still operational expenses associated with running the facility (hydro, rent/mortgage, utilities, staff etc.). As a crisis service that operates 24/7, 365 days a year, VAW shelters have to be operational at all times whether or not they are at capacity.

Figure 14: Frequency of Being at Capacity by Population Size (n=246)



What Happens When VAW Shelters Are Full?

The survey asked what happened to women seeking services if the shelter was at capacity. Even when they were full, most VAW shelters reported that they “often” still served additional women fleeing violence. The vast majority (84%, 215 of 255) of respondents reported often providing referrals, followed by (52%, 118 of 229) emailing or phoning other shelters to find alternative spaces (Figure 15).⁴⁵ A minority (7%, 14 of 211) of shelters could

“often” pay for the woman to stay in a motel, hotel, or another place that requires payment; 9% (18 of 203) answered that the municipality, Band Council, or another government body would cover these expenses. Others (8%, 15 of 194) noted that they “often” use an electronic system that shows where beds are available in their community. Very few (6%, 12 of 187) shelters reported that the woman was left on her own.

Of the 40 respondents who chose “other,” some noted that they had never turned women away from services while others indicated that they had extra cots/mattresses, pull-out couches, portable cribs, and children’s rollaway beds to use when the facility reached capacity.

Respondents indicated that this was not an ideal arrangement for the residents or the staff, as it stretched resources on all fronts. Comments showed that some VAW shelters provided risk assessments to assess women’s level of danger and/or helped develop safety plans, which could include finding alternative accommodation with family or friends. A few respondents indicated that they had developed informal networks (e.g. online chats) to help coordinate available shelter beds within their community.

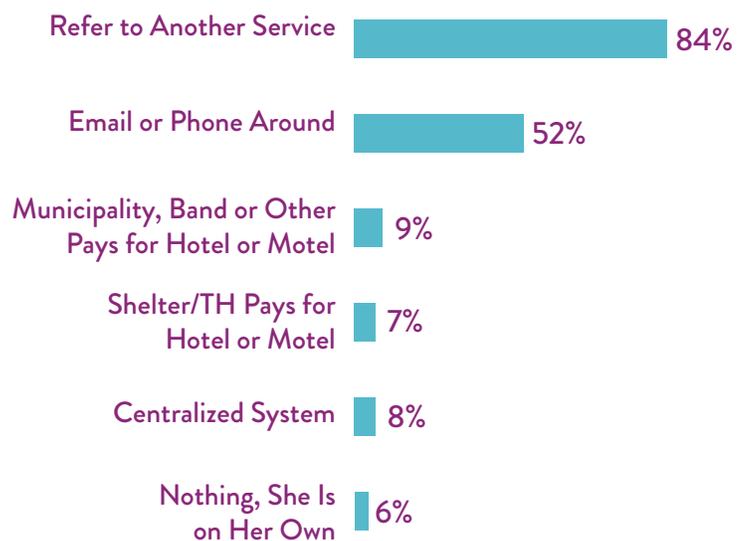
CHALLENGE: CAPACITY

Regardless of the region, population size, or shelter size, it was consistently reported that VAW shelters were challenged by the demand for their services and the lack of available spaces for women fleeing violence and abuse. When coupled with a communal living environment, this could be difficult for women and their children and placed additional strain on staff, contributing to overwork and burnout.

When asked if capacity was a challenge for them, of the 247 respondents, 101 (41%) said it was a “major challenge,” 36% said it was a “minor issue,” and only 23% indicated that it was “not an issue.” Of the 101 respondents who reported that capacity issues were a “major challenge,” 56% were located in large population centres compared to 25% in medium and 19% in small/rural communities.



Figure 15: What Happens When the VAW Shelter Is at Capacity? Answers to “Often”



Canada's Affordable Housing Crisis

Originally, VAW shelters were primarily used for short-term stays (1-3 months). However, due to the social (rent geared to income) and affordable housing crisis affecting communities large and small across the country, many women who have fled abuse are unable to find safe, affordable housing during the standard length of stay at a VAW shelter.⁴⁶ This crisis has put substantial strain on shelter staff and residents.

A large majority of the 286 VAW shelters who responded (85%) reported that affordable housing was “always” or “often” difficult to find in their community.

Provincial and territorial comparisons of responses to affordable housing “always” being hard to find shows that respondents in the northern territories and British Columbia reported being particularly challenged by the lack of social and affordable housing (Figure 16).

Of the 111 respondents from small/rural VAW shelters, 59% reported “always” having difficulty accessing affordable housing, compared to 45% (n=98) in large and 40% (n=77) in medium-sized population centres.

Responding to the Affordable Housing Crisis

In response to the affordable housing crisis, some VAW shelters have been successful in advocating for a staff position to help residents secure safe and affordable housing during their time at the shelter.

Affordable Housing Crisis Impacting Capacity of Shelters



“Shelters are overly utilized in a large part due to the affordable

housing crisis in Canada. Women and children are coming into the shelter and are unable to leave because there is no housing to transition into. It is critical that each level of government works together to develop and implement a housing strategy.”

— Anonymous respondent

“Generally [the length of stay] is 30 days but since safe affordable housing is difficult to find, we can house women up to three months.”

— Anonymous respondent

4 SIZE, CAPACITY, LENGTH OF STAY POLICIES

Of the 223 respondents who answered whether they have a full-time or part-time housing worker, 20% indicated that they did, representing 44 housing workers nationally. Ontario VAW shelters reported having 31 housing workers (70% of the total number of housing workers) due to Ontario currently being the only province that provides funding specifically for a housing worker.⁴⁷

Another way VAW shelters have responded to the social and affordable housing crisis is by developing second stage housing or programs to help women transition into more independent living. In addition to an individual apartment or unit, second stage shelters provide continued supports, safety, security, and a sense of community.⁴⁸

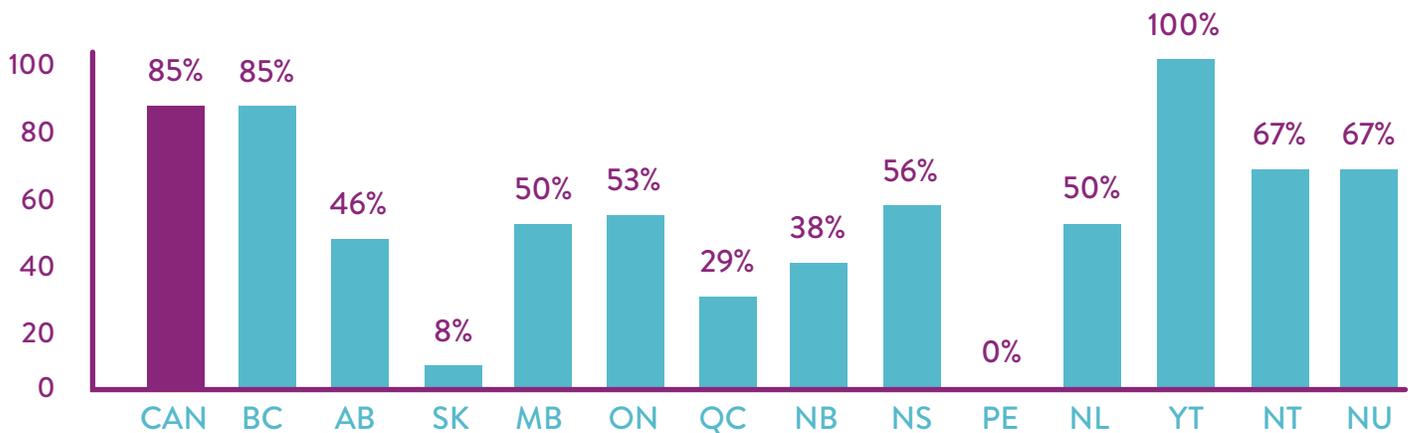
According to Women’s Shelters Canada’s database, the ratio of VAW shelters to second stage shelters is approximately 3:1, meaning for every three VAW shelters, there is one second stage shelter.

However, second stage housing is sparse in small and rural communities. None of the VAW shelters in rural communities (population fewer than 1000 people) reported having second stage shelters available. Of the 38 respondents from Indigenous shelters (this includes VAW, second stage, and mixed shelters), only two were second stage shelters. None of the 10 respondents from fly-in communities were second stage shelters. For more information on second stage shelters, please see WSC’s second stage comprehensive report.

“We need second stage housing in [the North]. Our shelter occupancy is 26 [but] we currently [house] 37. We have the highest stats in domestic violence in Canada and we are the only territory/province that does not provide second stage housing for our women and children fleeing family violence. We have lost women due to this barrier because they sometimes return knowing there are no options.”

— Anonymous respondent

Figure 16: Percentage of VAW Shelters Reporting that Affordable Housing Was “Always” Hard to Find, by Province/Territory (n=286)



Length of Stay Policies

Length of stay policies for VAW shelters are primarily influenced by provincial and territorial government policy. As a result, the period of time a resident can reside in the shelter varies across the country (Table 4).⁴⁹ For many VAW shelters, length of stay policies are guidelines and are not strictly enforced; women residing in the shelter are often treated on a case-by-case basis.

Of the 235 respondents, 138 (59%) indicated that they had length of stay policies that stipulate how long a resident can stay at the shelter, 12% reported they did not have a maximum length of stay policy, and 29% chose “it varies.”

Maximum Length of Stay Policies and Practices

As noted, policies do not necessarily reflect the reality of how long a woman can stay at a VAW shelter. Additionally, research shows that women heal and recover differently and that shelter workers recognize the unique needs of each survivor.⁵⁰ There are several options available to residents once they have reached the maximum length of stay, and most shelters will do everything they can to ensure that women are not left homeless or vulnerable, or feel there is no choice but to return to their abuser. Figure 17 shows that, of the 225 who responded, the vast majority (88%) indicated that residents were not left on their own.

Moreover, 74% indicated that they gave extensions⁵¹ for residents to stay longer, 47% offered outreach services, 38% supported women in finding alternative housing with friends or family,

Housing Women Longer



“We can extend residents if they are awaiting

accommodation and their move in date is within a week or so. Due to volume of calls, it is difficult to extend much past a week.”

— Anonymous respondent

“It’s hard to find affordable, safe housing, especially for families.”

— Anonymous respondent

“It depends on the specific situation of each woman or family and the ability or lack of ability to access affordable housing.”

— Anonymous respondent



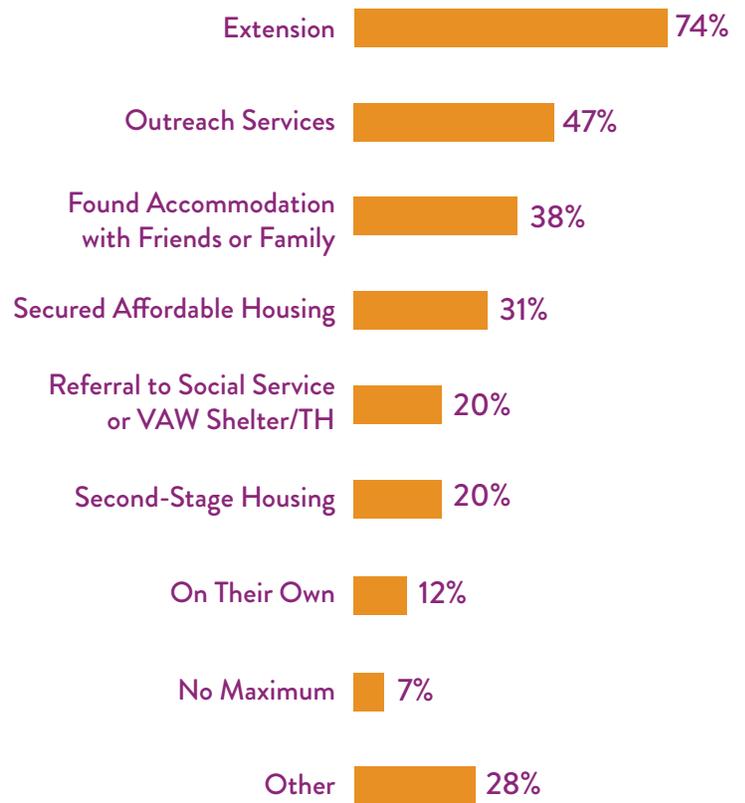
20% referred them to other social services or VAW shelters, and 20% offered or referred to second stage housing (Figure 17). The lack of social and affordable housing is a significant barrier for residents to move into permanent housing – less than one-third (31%) of respondents indicated that some residents were able to secure affordable housing within the maximum length of stay at the shelter.

Respondents who chose “other” commented that residents’ situations were assessed on a “case by case basis” and that shelter staff worked with them to develop safety plans. As one respondent commented, “it depends upon individual circumstances, but no one is ‘dumped’ into the community.”

Figure 17: What Happens When the Resident Has Reached the Maximum Length of Stay?

Table 4: Length of Stay: Provincial and Territorial Standards

Province/Territory	Length (Days)
First Nations (On Reserve)	No Maximum
Alberta	21
British Columbia	30
Manitoba	30
New Brunswick	30
Newfoundland and Labrador	30
Northwest Territories	42
Nova Scotia	42
Nunavut	42
Ontario	No Maximum
Prince Edward Island	21
Quebec	No Maximum
Saskatchewan	42
Yukon	30



**“ We never turn women away.
We’ve always found room.
If we are full, a cot or couch
is offered.”**

Anonymous respondent



5

Groups Served by VAW Shelters

KEY FINDINGS

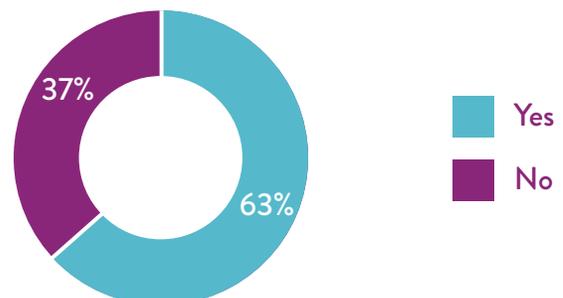
- VAW shelters are increasingly serving a broader group of women fleeing violence. Over one-third (37%) of responding VAW shelters reported that they served women escaping different forms of violence and abuse in addition to IPV.
- 79% of respondents that had served women with complex mental health concerns and 79% that had served women with substance use concerns reported that it was a “major challenge” for their shelter.
- Half (50%) of VAW shelters reported that they had served trans, gender fluid, or intersex individuals fleeing violence. Among this group, 57% indicated that they could “always” and 42% said that they could “sometimes” accommodate this group.

Historically, most VAW shelters opened their doors specifically to provide safe spaces and supports to women and children fleeing IPV and domestic violence. However, they also assisted “wayward girls” and women experiencing homelessness, who often had histories of trauma.⁵²

As reflected in other studies,⁵³ VAW shelters are increasingly serving a broader group of women fleeing violence. According to Wathen et al. (2015: 135), “[t]he primary reason cited by EDs for adopting a more inclusive approach about those who should be covered by their shelter’s mandate was a concern that there may be no other help available to a woman.”

To capture this, we asked shelters if their mandate was to serve victims/survivors of IPV exclusively. Of the 281 who responded, over one-third (37%) reported that they supported women escaping different forms of violence and abuse in addition to IPV (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Is Your Official Mandate to Serve Exclusively Victims/Survivors of IPV? (n=281)



5 GROUPS SERVED BY VAW SHELTERS

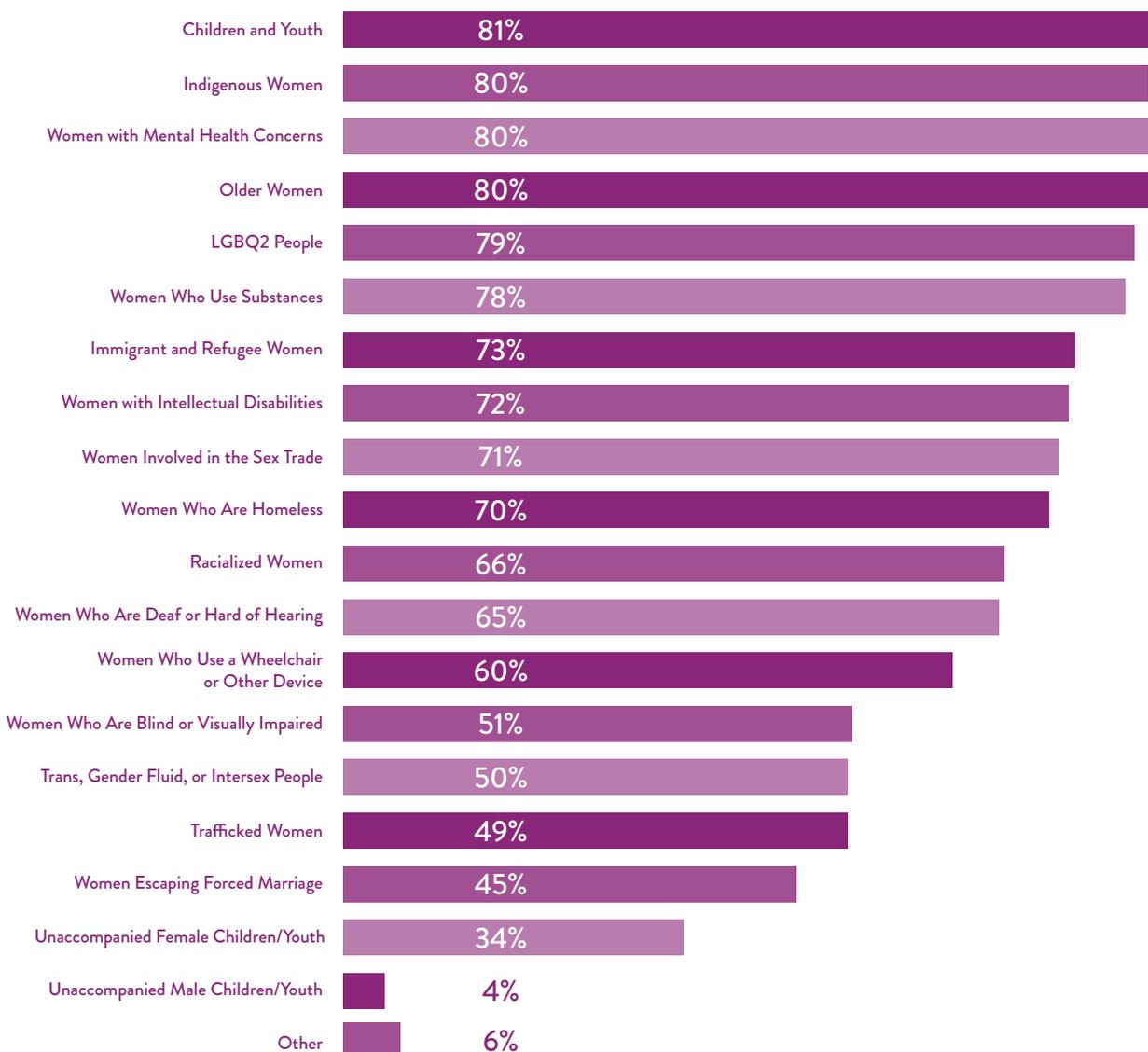
Mandates vary across the country. Respondents in the Atlantic provinces (77%, 24 of 31) and Quebec (76% 58 of 76) reported that they primarily served women experiencing IPV. In Alberta, 73% (19 of 26) noted a broader mandate to support women fleeing different kinds of violence,⁵⁴ as did 56% (5 of 9) of respondents from the territories.

Of the 96 respondents from larger urban centres, 67% reported that their shelter was exclusively for women fleeing of IPV. Of the 75 respondents from

medium-sized centres, 61% were exclusively for IPV, as were 61% of the 110 shelters in small/rural sized communities.

To better understand who is seeking VAW shelter supports, we asked respondents to indicate the different groups they had served (Figure 19). Note that this is not the groups they could or would serve, but groups they have knowingly served in the past. For example, VAW shelters may have supported lesbian or bisexual women without these women disclosing their sexuality.

Figure 19: Groups Served by VAW Shelters (n=281)



The majority of VAW shelters reported serving: children and youth accompanying residents (81%), Indigenous women (80%), women with significant mental health concerns (80%), older women (80%), LGBTQ255 people (79%), women struggling with substance use (78%), and immigrant and refugee women (73%) (Figure 19).

Respondents also indicated serving women who were not fleeing IPV, namely women involved in or exiting sex work (71%), women experiencing homelessness (70%), and survivors of human trafficking (49%) (Figure 19).

Comments provided by survey respondents noted that some VAW shelters had served women experiencing family violence perpetrated by someone other than an intimate partner. Several VAW shelters allowed family members, in addition to dependent children, to stay in the shelter with the women fleeing violence. The remainder of this section explores in greater detail some of the groups served.

Women with Complex Needs

Shelters are increasingly serving women living with significant mental health and/or substance use concerns. Statistics Canada has reported that individuals with mental health-related disabilities

“experience more repeat violence, more violence at the hands of someone they know” and that spousal violence is four times more common for these individuals than it is among the general population.⁵⁶ Of the 223 VAW shelters who reported that they had served women living with significant mental health concerns and responded to the question on accommodation, over half (59%) indicated that they could “always” accommodate them.

Historically, VAW shelters have had zero tolerance policies for drug and alcohol use. However, some shelters have moved towards low barrier,

CHALLENGE: SUPPORTING SURVIVORS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

While VAW shelters are serving different groups of women experiencing many types of violence with various complex needs, survey findings suggest that they may not necessarily have the capacity (staffing, resources, training, space, etc.) to serve them adequately. For example, of the 203 shelters that had supported women with complex mental health concerns and responded to the question on challenges, the majority (160 or 79%) reported that it was a “major challenge” to serve these women, 17% said it was a “minor issue,” and only 4% indicated that it was “not an issue” for their shelter.

Of the 196 VAW shelters that had served women with substance use concerns and responded, 79% indicated that it was a “major challenge” and 17% a “minor issue,” with only 4% saying it was “not an issue.”

trauma-informed service delivery and have adopted a harm reduction approach to meet women where they are at.⁵⁷ For the 213 VAW shelters that reported having served women with substance use concerns and responded to the question on accommodation, 60% indicated that they could “always” accommodate them and 39% could “sometimes” accommodate.

Women Living with Disabilities and Deaf Women

DAWN Canada does extensive advocacy and research into the intersection of women with disabilities and violence.⁵⁸ Statistics show that women living with disabilities experience disproportionately high rates of violence.⁵⁹

According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics’ 2018 report, “Violent Victimization of Women with Disabilities,” in 45% of all incidents of violent victimization (defined as sexual assault, robbery, or physical assault) with a female victim, the victim had a disability.⁶⁰ Specific to IPV, among victims with a disability, women were more likely to experience “the most serious forms of spousal violence” than men.⁶¹

Of the 281 shelter respondents, the majority reported having served women living with an intellectual disability (72%), women who use a wheelchair or other mobility device (60%), and women who are blind or visually impaired (51%) (Figure 19). Additionally, 65% of respondents reported having served women who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

WSC is working with DAWN Canada to examine further the data regarding accessibility in VAW shelters.

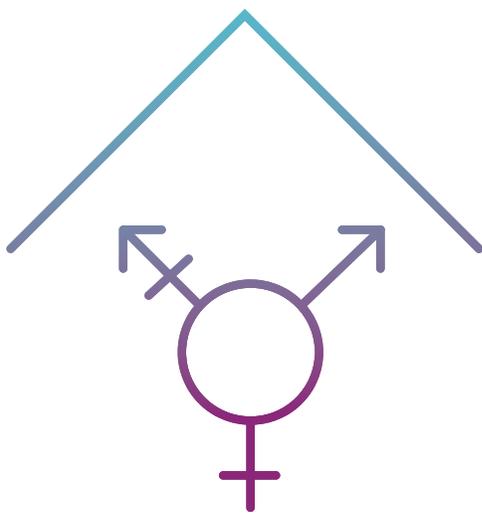
Transgender, Gender Fluid, and Intersex People

In Canada, there is a growing body of research examining and documenting transgender and gender diverse individuals’ experiences of violence.⁶² However, less is known about trans and gender diverse people’s experiences of IPV specifically. Some new insights have emerged from the *Domestic Violence in the Workplace* survey, conducted by researchers at the University of Western Ontario and the Canadian Labour Congress, which examined how IPV impacts workers as well as their workplaces. Gender and sexual minorities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and other gender non-conforming) were more likely to report IPV and state that it was negatively affecting their work performance and health outcomes.⁶³ Among those surveyed, transgender individuals were twice as likely to report experiencing IPV in their lifetimes compared to cisgender women and four times as likely as cisgender men.⁶⁴

TRANSGENDER⁶⁵: *A person who identifies either fully or in part with a gender other than the gender associated with their birth-assigned sex — often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions. Transgender people, like cisgender people, can claim any identity in relation to their sexual/romantic orientation.*

WSC's national survey found that, of the 281 respondents, half (50%) reported that they had served trans, gender fluid, or intersex individuals fleeing violence. However, the accuracy of this number is dependent on residents disclosing their gender identity. Of the 140 VAW shelters that reported that they had supported transgender, intersex, or gender fluid people and responded to the question on accommodation, 57% indicated that they could "always" accommodate this group and 42% of respondents said that they could "sometimes" accommodate them.⁶⁶

While some VAW shelters are making efforts to better serve trans women by providing training for staff and developing inclusive policies for transgender women,⁶⁷ less is known about how VAW shelters are accommodating non-binary, gender fluid, intersex, and non-conforming individuals.⁶⁸



GENDER FLUID: *Gender fluidity conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, with interests and behaviors that may change from day to day. Gender fluid people do not feel confined by restrictive boundaries of stereotypical expectations of women or men. In other words, they may feel they are a woman some days and a man on others, or possibly feel that neither term describes them accurately.*

INTERSEX: *A term used to describe people who are born with anatomy or chromosome patterns that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. Intersex persons are often subjected to surgical intervention at birth, with or without parental consent or even knowledge.*

CISGENDER: *A term used to describe people for whom their gender identity and assigned sex match, and who fit the societal expectations surrounding their birth-assigned sex. It is the opposite of transgender.*



Immigrant, Refugee, and Racialized Women

Immigrant and refugee women who experience IPV navigate multiple complex systems and face additional barriers when trying to access supports and services that could assist them.⁶⁹ Overall, survey respondents indicated that 73% had served immigrant and refugee women and 66% had served racialized women (see Figure 19). Figure 20 shows that VAW shelters located in larger urban centres were more likely to report having served immigrant, refugee, and racialized women fleeing violence compared to medium and small/rural population centres.⁷⁰

Among the 267 respondents who answered whether they provided services to help women apply for permanent residency in Canada and with refugee/immigration applications, one quarter (25%) indicated that they “often” provided this support (see Section 6, Figure 24). Of those, 70% were located in large population centres, 17% were in medium centres, and 14% were in small/rural communities. Only one shelter in a rural community (population under 1,000, 60% of which are on-reserve shelters) reported providing this service.

Figure 20: Percentage of VAW Shelters that Have Served Immigrant, Refugee, and Racialized Women by Population Size (n=281)



CHALLENGE: PROVIDING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SUPPORTS

An intersectional feminist approach to service delivery values inclusivity and reducing barriers to access. However, VAW shelters may not have the capacity to provide all services in a manner that fully meets the needs of women from different cultural, ethnic, and language backgrounds. Specifically, of the 239 who responded, 34% reported that providing culturally appropriate supports and services was a “major challenge,” 49% a “minor issue,” and 17% “not an issue.”

“ A shelter should be a place where no woman is ever turned away and where every woman can feel safe and autonomous while being supported.”

Ontario respondent



6

Service Delivery

KEY FINDINGS

- In addition to providing safety, VAW shelters are helping women rebuild their lives, heal from abuse, develop resiliency, and move towards living violence-free lives.
- 61% of shelters “often” provided specific counselling to children who had been exposed to IPV and 46% “often” provided counselling for children who had experienced abuse themselves.
- Over one-third (39%) of VAW shelters reported that finding time to follow up with former residents was a “major challenge.”
- While 80% of VAW shelters reported serving Indigenous women, only 19% were able to “often” offer culturally appropriate programs.
- VAW shelters actively engage in prevention and awareness-raising work to end violence against women and children. However, almost one-third (32%) did not receive funding from their main funder to do so.

While serving diverse women experiencing different forms of violence, VAW shelters also provide extensive services and supports for residents and non-residents alike. To better understand the scope of services offered by VAW shelters, we asked them to indicate which services they provided, either to residents or as outreach services.⁷¹

Services are presented in six categories: counselling; programs and supports for children; navigating systems and social services; programs and supports for men; additional services; and prevention and awareness. This section also includes information about whether VAW shelters had a specialized worker onsite to provide the service, or if they used referrals and partnerships.

CHALLENGE: LACK OF TRANSPORTATION

A lack of public transportation can be a barrier to accessing VAW services and programs. Of the 110 shelters in small/rural communities, less than half (42%) indicated access to public transportation. Among the ten rural shelters, only three reported public transit.⁷²

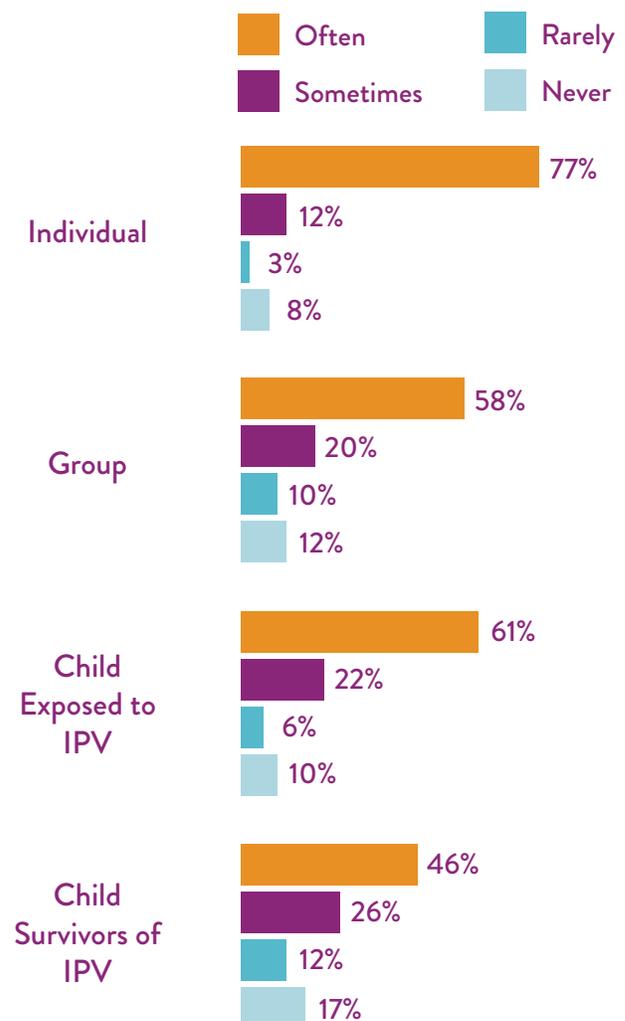


Counselling Services

A significant component of the work of VAW shelters involves providing support to survivors to heal from trauma and abuse. This includes providing risk assessments, safety planning, transition planning, crisis intervention, attending appointments as a support person, and counselling, including providing emotional support.⁷³

VAW shelters are much more than just a bed and a roof over one's head – through supportive and trusting relationships with survivors, shelter workers are helping women rebuild their lives, heal from abuse, develop resiliency, and move towards living violence-free lives.⁷⁴ Most VAW shelters can do this in-house with on-site counsellors providing a variety of services for both women and children (Figure 21). The survey asked respondents for the types and frequency of counselling services offered at their shelters. Of the 264 who responded, 77% reported that they “often” provided counselling to individuals and, among the 263 who responded, 58% reported that they “often” provided group counselling.

Figure 21: Availability of Different Counselling Services in VAW Shelters



We also asked shelters what specific counselling services they offered children (Figure 21). Among the 267 who responded, the majority (61%) reported “often” providing specific counselling to children who had been exposed to IPV. Just under half (46%) of the 262 who responded indicated that they “often” provided counselling to children who had experienced abuse themselves.

Most VAW shelters surveyed did not have specialized counsellors on-site for mental health and addictions. Of the 223 who responded, only 3% had a mental health counsellor and 2% had an addictions counsellor on-site (see Section 7).

VAW shelters rely on partnerships with local agencies to provide women with the specialized services they require. Of the 215 who responded regarding referrals for counselling and therapy for individuals and families, the vast majority reported referring (51%) or doing a “warm hand-off”⁷⁵ (40%) to service partners, which can include an in-person meeting with the survivor and the off-site therapist. Among the 219 who responded, 62% provided a referral and 27% a “warm hand-off” for psychiatry. For addictions supports, among the 226 who responded, 49% provided a referral and 40% a “warm hand-off.”

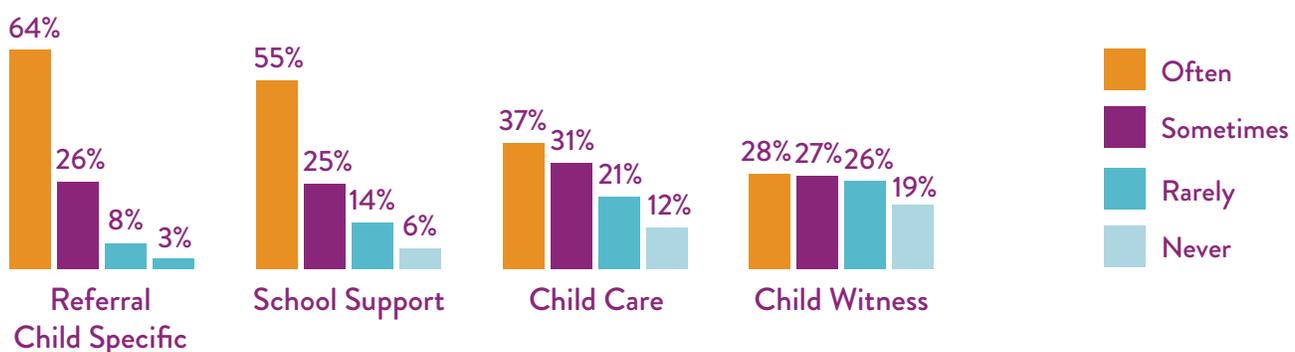
Programming and Supports for Children

In addition to counselling (Figure 21), VAW shelters provide a number of supports and services specifically for children (Figure 22). Of the 263 who responded, 55% reported that they “often” and 25% “sometimes” offered school support to children (including school registration, speaking to teachers and school staff, and helping with homework).

Among the 223 who responded, one-third (32%) indicated that they had a childcare worker on-site. Of the 262 who responded, over one-third (37%) reported that they could “often” and 31% “sometimes” offer some form of childcare. Of the 264 who responded, 28% “often” and 27% “sometimes” offered child witness programs or assistance going to court with children.

Of the 265 who responded, 64% indicated that they had “often” and 26% “sometimes” provided referrals to community resources specific to children and teenagers.

Figure 22: Availability of Supports and Services for Children in VAW Shelters



Systems and Social Services Navigation

Supporting women navigating multiple and complex systems is crucial in helping them stabilize after leaving their abuser (Figure 23). Navigating these systems during a time of crisis can be extremely taxing on survivors. VAW shelter workers support women and provide expertise to help them maneuver through these systems, whether it is the legal system (family and criminal law), the child welfare system, or the immigration system (e.g. applying for permanent residency). Most respondents (190 of 260, or 73%) indicated that they advocated for women directly with other services.

VAW SHELTER SERVICES

- 24-hour crisis support
- Counselling
- Addiction services
- Advocacy and prevention
- Residential shelter services
- Information and community referrals
- Sexual assault programs
- Safety planning
- Parenting programs
- Cultural and language-specific services
- Public education and outreach
- Men's programs

Figure 23: Central Role of VAW Shelters in Systems and Social Service Navigation⁷⁶

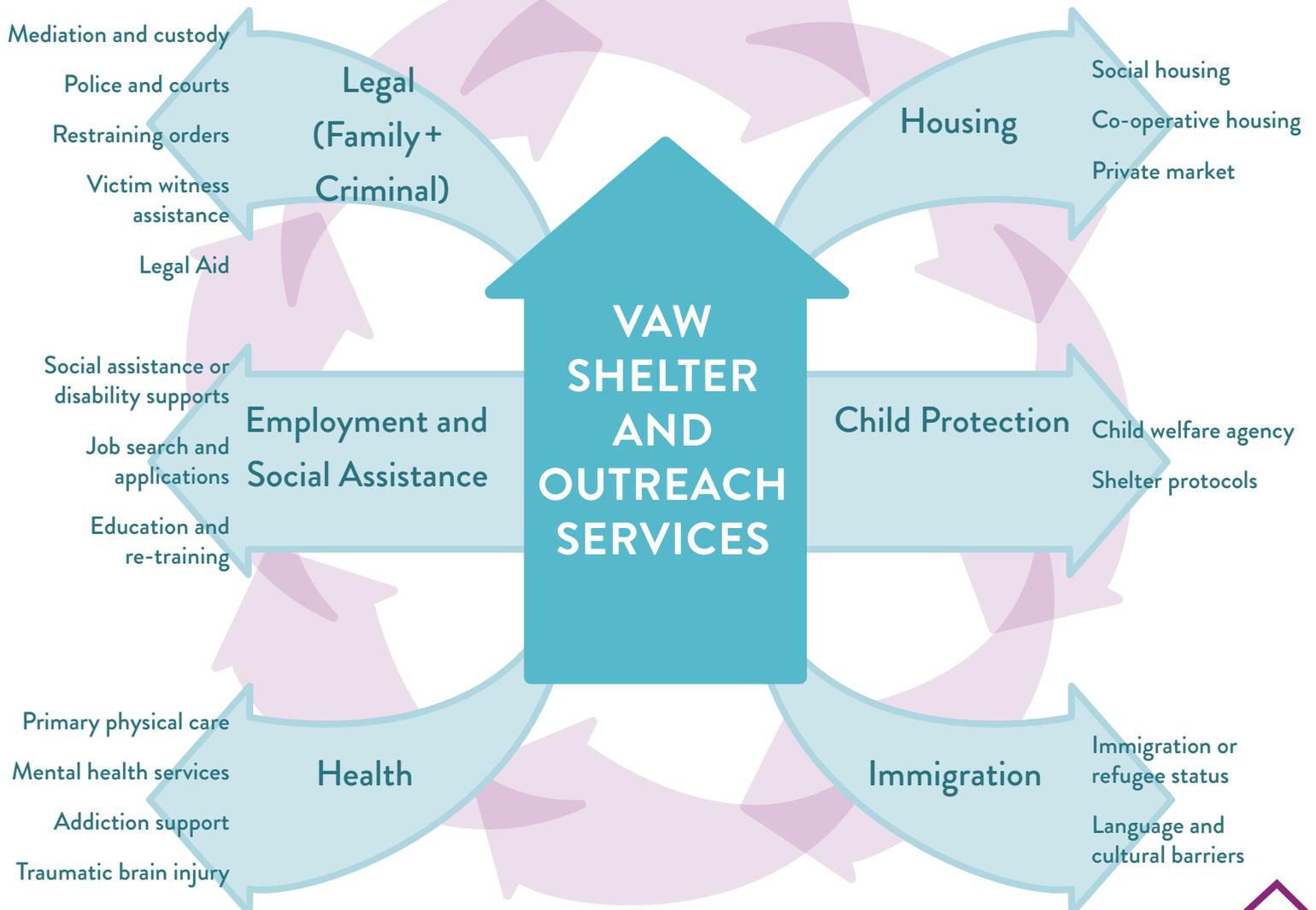
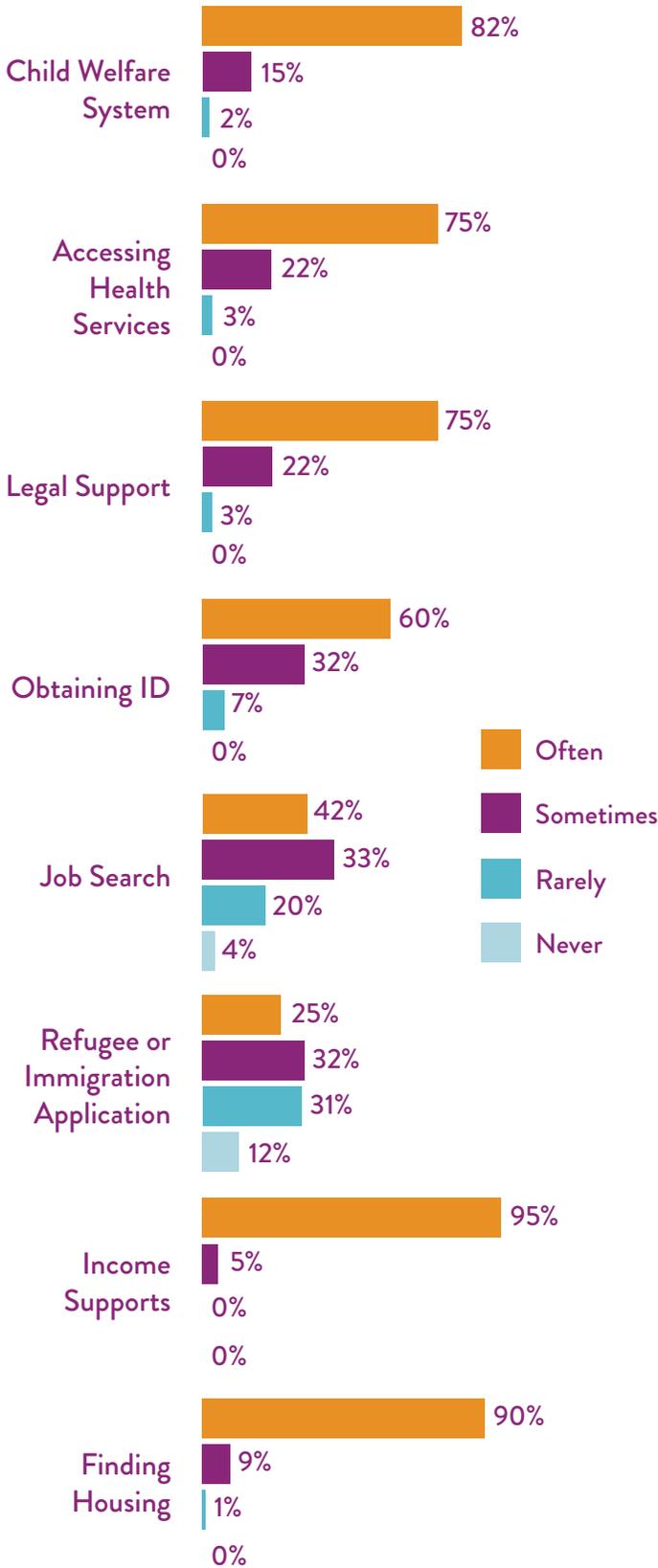


Figure 24: Frequency of Assistance to Residents in Systems and Social Services Navigation



Child Welfare System

Many women entering VAW shelters do so with their children and consequently may encounter the child welfare system. Of the 268 who responded, 82% “often” provided support for mothers who come into contact with this system (Figure 24). However, the potential involvement of child welfare agencies, which can result in losing custody of one’s child or children, creates a barrier that may make some women reluctant to go to VAW shelters.⁷⁷

Accessing Health Services

VAW shelters provide support in accessing health services including help with setting up appointments and attending appointments as a support person if requested. Of the 267 who responded, 75% reported that they “often” provided this support (Figure 24).

In terms of partnerships and referrals, of the 208 who responded, 57% indicated that they provided referrals and 15% that they provided a “warm hand-off” to professionals in occupational therapy. One-quarter (25%) of these respondents reported that they did not have this type of service in their community. Regarding primary and physical care, among the 224 who responded, 56% reported providing referrals, while 33% did a “warm hand-off” to these services. Of the 211 who responded, half (51%) provided a referral and 20% did a “warm hand-off” for acquired brain injury supports.

Legal Support

Helping women navigate the legal system is a valuable service provided by VAW shelters. Among

the 267 who responded, 75% reported that they “often” provided support to help with legal issues (Figure 24).

However, only 12% (26 of 223) of respondents reported having a specialized legal worker on-site. As such, many have partnerships with legal services. Of the 225 who responded, half (51%) indicated that they provided a referral and 42% a “warm hand-off” to partners within the legal field. Additionally, 7% had partner organizations visit the shelter to provide the service.

Applying for Income Supports

Helping survivors secure income supports (e.g. social assistance and employment insurance) is often one of the first tasks carried out by crisis counsellors. Of the 268 who responded, the vast majority (95%) provided this support (Figure 24). Additionally, of the 227 who responded, 55% indicated that they offered referrals and 37% a “warm hand-off” to a partnering organization specializing in income and employment supports.

Finding Housing

Among the 268 who responded, 90% indicated that they “often” provided support with finding housing (Figure 23). However, only 20% (44 of 223) of respondents reported having a full- or part-time worker dedicated to housing (meaning they exclusively help residents find appropriate, safe, and affordable housing, advocate directly with social housing, coordinate appointments with landlords or other property owners, etc.). The majority of these workers were located in Ontario as the provincial government provides funding for this position (see Section 4). For the shelters that did

not have a housing worker, many relied on partnerships and referrals within the community: 9% had a housing representative come to the shelter to provide a service, 48% reported providing a referral, and 42% did a “warm hand-off” to a partnering organization.

Programming and Supports for Men

VAW shelters predominantly serve women who are fleeing violence, but some also offer programming to men who have been abused and men who have abused. Indigenous VAW shelters reported providing more supports and services to men who have abused or have been abused than non-Indigenous shelters.⁷⁸

Overall, of the 256 who responded, 5% indicated that they “often” provided services to **men who had been abused**, 9% “sometimes,” 16% “rarely,” and 69% “never.” As such, 30% of VAW shelters surveyed indicated that they had provided programming to men even though it might not be a regular occurrence. Among Indigenous VAW shelters who responded, 22% (5 of 23) reported “often” and “sometimes” providing these services to men who have experienced abuse compared to 14% (32 of 233) of non-Indigenous shelters.

While the majority (71%) of VAW shelters had not offered programs **to men who had been abusive**, 7% reported that they “often” provided programming to abusive men, 9% “sometimes,” and 13% “rarely” (n=256). Survey results showed that among Indigenous VAW shelters, 26% (6 of 23) reported “often” and “sometimes” providing these services to men, compared to 16% (34 of 233) of non-Indigenous shelters.

Additional Services and Programs

Addiction Services

Even though few VAW shelters reported having a dedicated addictions counsellor on-site (see Section 7), of the 263 who responded, half (49%) indicated “often” providing these supports and 37% reported they “sometimes” provided these supports.

Accessing Culturally Sensitive and Language-Specific Services

Of the 281 respondents, the majority (73%) reported serving immigrant and refugee women fleeing violence (see Section 5). Of the 267 who responded, 41% indicated that they “often” helped women obtain culturally sensitive or language-specific services, with 33% reporting that they “sometimes” provided this service.

Most VAW shelters are unable to have translators on-site due to a lack of resources. However, of the 219 who responded, 33% indicated that they provided referrals and 43% a “warm hand-off” to a partnering organization to meet the service gap.

CHALLENGE: PROVIDING FOLLOW-UP SERVICES TO FORMER RESIDENTS

Over one-third (95 of 245, 39%) respondents indicated that finding the time to follow up with former residents was a “major challenge.” It was a “minor challenge” for 42% and “not an issue” for 19%. This speaks to a greater need for wrap-around services that include supporting women after they leave the shelter.⁷⁹

Indigenous Cultural Programming

Of the 281 VAW shelters that responded, the majority (80%) reported serving Indigenous women (see Section 5). However, among the 263 who responded to whether or not they could offer culturally appropriate programs for Indigenous women at the shelter, only 19% reported that they could do so “often” and 25% could “sometimes.”

Parenting Programs

Of the 264 respondents, 34% reported that they “often” and 29% “sometimes” offered parenting programs for women residing in the shelter.

Safety Planning Regarding Technology

Of the 264 who responded, over half (59%) indicated that they “often” and 28% “sometimes” provided safety planning regarding technology at their shelter.

Sexual Assault Programs

While VAW shelters primarily focus on supporting survivors of IPV, many women who have experienced abuse have also experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner. Of the 260 VAW shelters that responded, just over one-quarter (26%) reported that they “often” offered a sexual assault program.

Many communities have sexual assault centres that specialize in supporting survivors who have experienced sexual assault and rape. Of the 227 who responded, many indicated that they offered referrals (37%) or provided a “warm hand-off” (44%) to a partnering sexual assault centre or rape crisis centre. Some VAW shelters and sexual assault centres have merged to combine programming and supports for survivors under one roof.⁸⁰

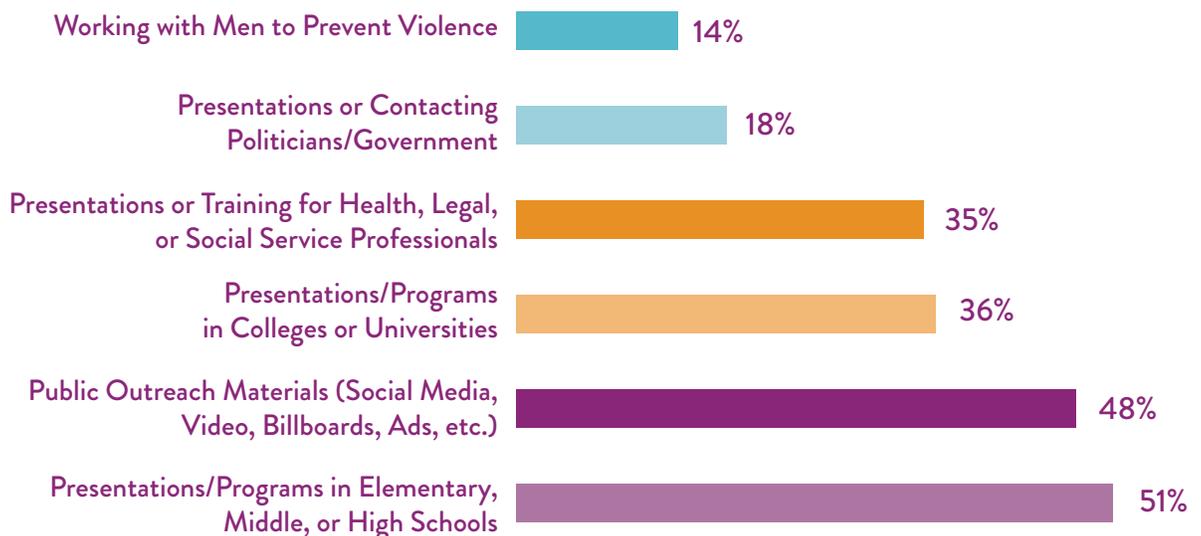
Prevention and Awareness

VAW shelters are engaged in prevention and awareness-raising efforts to end violence against women and children. Figure 25 illustrates the different types of prevention work that VAW shelters do.

Among the 230 VAW shelters that responded, 51% reported “often” doing presentations or programs in elementary, middle, or high schools, 48% did public outreach, 36% gave presentations or offered programs in colleges or universities, and 35% reported facilitating presentations or training for other social service professionals.⁸¹

Some VAW shelters are working with men to raise awareness about preventing violence against women. Of the 227 who responded, 14% “often,” 40% “sometimes,” and 46% “rarely or never” reported working with men to achieve these goals.

Figure 25: Percentage of VAW Shelters that “Often” Engage in Prevention Activities



While prevention, advocacy, and awareness-raising are essential and lifesaving work, of the 257 VAW shelters that responded, nearly one-third (32%) indicated that they did not receive funding from their main government funder to do this work. Less than half (45%) reported that some of this work was funded, with only 24% indicating that all or most of their advocacy and prevention work was funded.

Comments overwhelmingly showed that VAW shelters were committed to this work and saw it as integral to ending violence against women. However, many reported that they did it “off the side of their desk,” relied on volunteers, and/or received little or no funding to do this work. In the voices of those working in VAW shelters:

“We fundraise and use donated money for [advocacy and prevention] programming.”
— Yukon Territory respondent

“Public awareness is very important in rural northern communities and has very unique challenges. Fundraising, support, referrals rest on community acceptance, understanding and partnerships. Shelter staff and organizers may have to challenge some ‘small town,’ sexist, and/or racist values when providing education. This can be complicated when living in small communities.”

— British Columbia respondent



“This is a significantly under-resourced area. We rely primarily on community support/funding as well as volunteers to augment our staff assigned to this.”

— Manitoba respondent

“We have recently unified with the Sexual Assault Centre and their funding allows for public awareness. VAW funding does not allow for any public awareness, violence prevention, or advocacy work.”

— Ontario respondent

“The communities of [our] County see us as the professionals in the field of violence and abuse. We often receive requests to speak on behalf of the agency. Fundraising is ongoing and we must be in the public eye to raise awareness of our programs and services and to educate on the subject of VAW and children.”

— New Brunswick respondent

“

I think it is very important to have education and awareness programs for residential clients and for the public at large. Education on violence against women helps [illuminate] the barriers people living with violence face...[helping] create inclusive, responsible, accountable, and healthy communities.”

Northwest Territories respondent



7

VAW Shelter Workers in Canada

KEY FINDINGS

- Survey results show that, of the 5,567 reported workers, almost one-third (32%) were precariously employed as casual and relief workers.
- 61% of respondents identified low pay and benefits as a “major challenge” facing their shelters. It was noted that maintaining high quality staff is difficult when the salaries and wages are not comparable to salaries in similar fields.
- Over half (55%) of respondents indicated that staff turnover and burnout were a “major challenge” for their VAW shelters.
- 38% of VAW shelters reported that their workers were unionized.

One goal of the survey was to capture the staffing, labour structures, and types of workers in VAW shelters across the country. The majority of survey respondents were executive directors (EDs) who manage the shelters. As such, questions asked about employees and Human Resources (HR) were answered from the perspective of an ED, not a frontline shelter worker.

Types of Workers and Job Responsibilities

In addition to crisis counsellors (see Section 6), VAW shelters employ many different kinds of workers.⁸² We asked respondents if they had a full-time or part-time worker whose job was dedicated to specific responsibilities, such as fundraising, legal advocacy, housing, outreach, or public education.

As illustrated in Figure 26, of the 223 who responded, the majority (61%) indicated that they had a worker in administration/accounting and 57% reported having an outreach worker. Over one-third (36%) indicated that they had a specific worker for child services (services to children other than childcare or teaching) and 36% employed janitorial staff. Fewer reported employing a social worker (17%), public educator (15%), fundraiser (14%), or legal advocate (12%).

As indicated in Table 5, survey results demonstrated some differences among VAW shelters in large, medium, and small/rural population centres.

Compared to shelters located in medium and small/rural population centres, shelters in large population centres reported employing more

janitors/cleaners, legal advocates, housing workers, and providers of children’s services (other than childcare or teaching) than shelters in medium and small/rural population centres. For example, 81 cleaners/janitors were reported, of which 53% were located in large population centres.

Respondents from VAW shelters in medium population centres reported employing more public educators than shelters in large and small/rural population centres. Respondents from small/rural communities reported employing more outreach workers than shelters in large and medium population centres.

Figure 26: Percentage of VAW Shelters with Various Types of Workers (n=223)

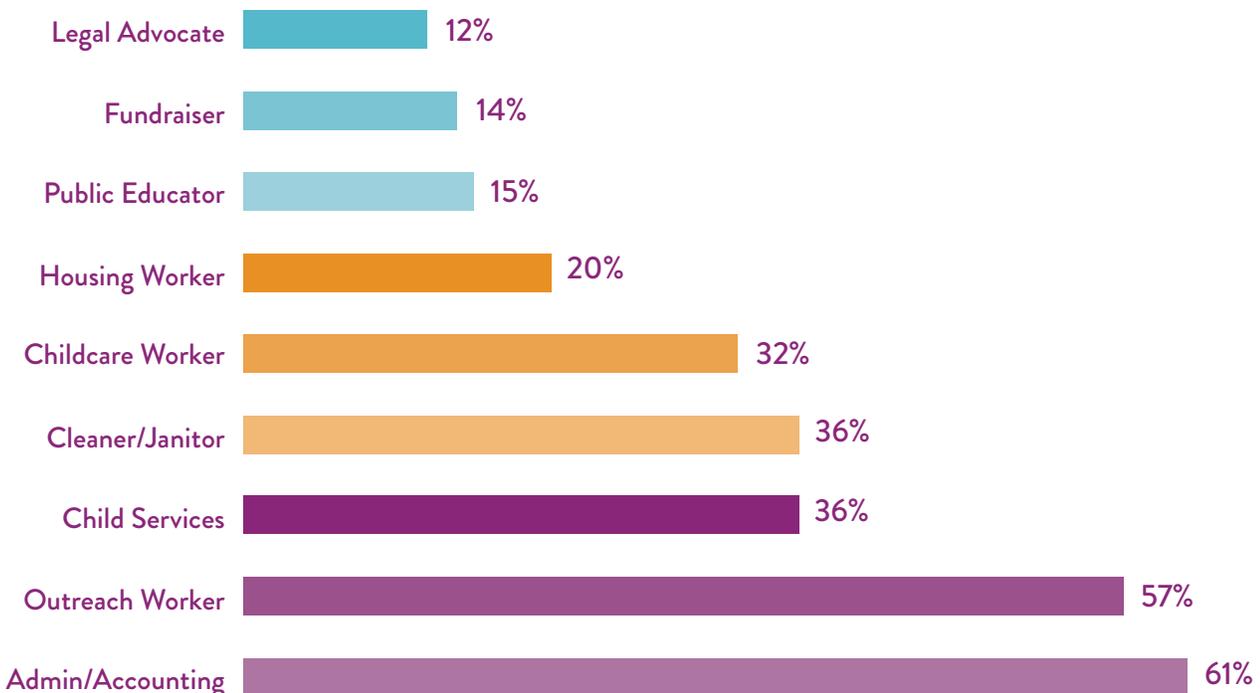


Table 5: Types of Workers in VAW Shelters According to Population Size

Type of Worker	Total (n)	% in Large	% in Medium	% in Small/Rural
Housing Worker	44	45%	27%	27%
Legal Advocate	26	46%	35%	19%
Public Educator	33	18%	45%	36%
Outreach Worker	128	33%	28%	39%
Childcare Worker	71	37%	25%	38%
Provider of Children's Services	80	51%	24%	25%
Admin/Accounting	135	33%	29%	38%
Cleaner/Janitor	81	53%	26%	21%
Fundraiser	31	48%	32%	19%

Male Workers in VAW Shelters⁸³

VAW shelters have been and continue to be a predominantly female workplace, as they were created by and for women. VAW shelter work is a female-dominated occupation similar to other traditionally gendered professions such as teaching, nursing, and social work.⁸⁴

Overall, of the 230 who responded, 10% reported employing part-time, 10% casual, and 6% full-time male employees. Among the 46 VAW shelters that had male workers, 136 male staff were reported (Table 6), representing 2.5% of the total reported workers (see Table 7).

Table 6: Employment Status of Male Workers in VAW Shelters

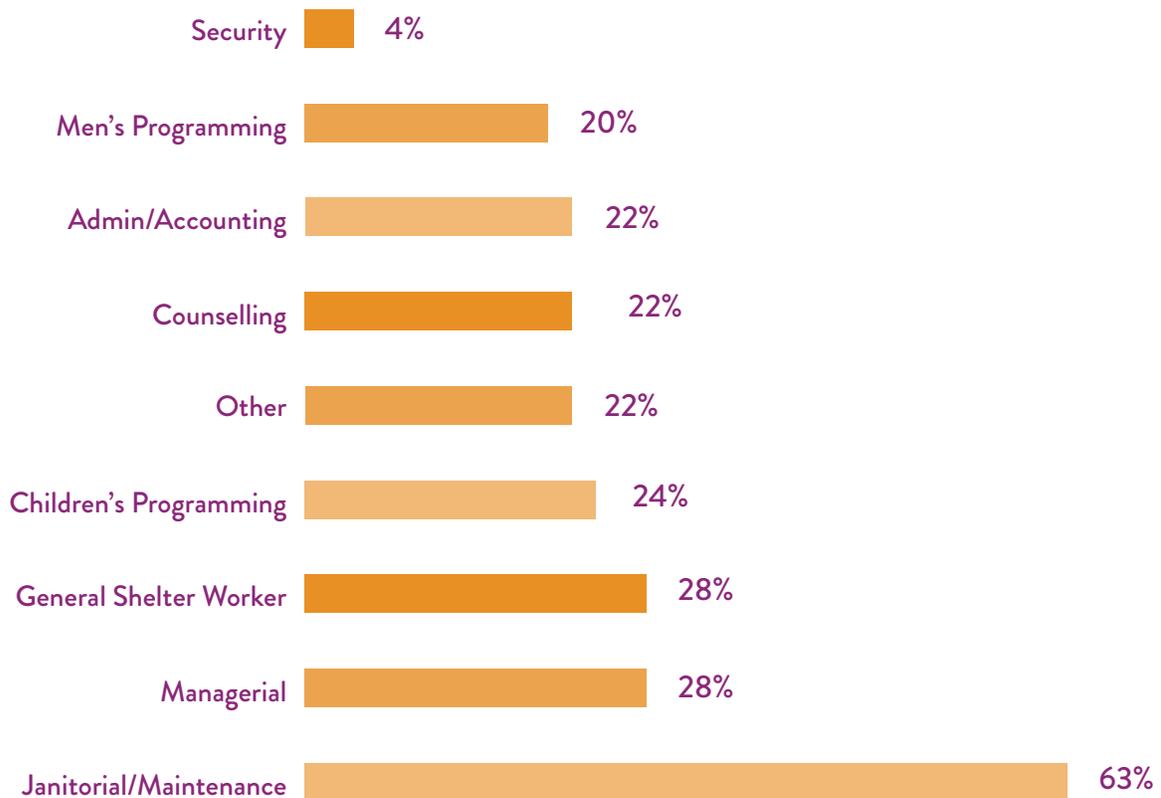
Male Worker Status	Count	Percentage
Full-Time	75	55%
Part-Time	37	27%
Casual Relief	24	18%
Total	136	100%

Respondents reported that male workers had a variety of jobs and responsibilities including security, maintenance, programming, managerial, and counselling (Figure 27). The most frequently reported type of job was janitorial and maintenance related (63%).

Other positions noted in the comments included executive director; case manager; communications and public relations roles; fundraiser; facilitator for programs for fathers; researcher; and youth and public educator.



Figure 27: Positions Held by Male Employees in VAW Shelters



Number of VAW Shelter Workers and Their Employment Status

Staffing 24-Hour Crisis Services

VAW shelters, being 24-hour crisis support services, require a roster of casual and relief staff to help cover shifts over evenings, weekends, and holidays or when regular staff are unavailable due to illness or professional development activities.

Number of Workers

The survey asked for the total number of workers the shelter employed on its payroll, including frontline crisis counsellors, janitorial staff, and administrative staff. Table 7 shows the national breakdown of workers by their employment status.

Survey results show that, of the 5,567 reported workers, almost one-third (32%) were precariously employed as casual and relief workers.

Full-Time Workers

Overall, 2,804 full-time workers were reported by 268 respondents, representing 50% of the reported workforce in VAW shelters (see Table 7). Six respondents (2%) said they had no full-time workers. Of the 274 respondents, an average of ten full-time workers was reported per shelter.

A compare means test showed that British Columbia (5), the territories (6), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (7), and the Atlantic provinces (7) reported a lower average of full-time workers than the national average. Alberta had the highest average number of full-time workers (19).

Employment Status of VAW Shelter Workers



Full-Time:

30 hours or more per week

Part-Time: *less than 30 hours per week*

Casual or Relief:

occasional work when needed

2,804 *full-time workers*

+

989 *part-time workers*

+

1,774 *casual or relief workers*

=

5,567 *total workers reported*

Part-Time Workers

In total, 224 respondents reported 989 part-time workers, representing 18% of the reported VAW shelter workforce (Table 7). Fifty respondents indicated that they did not employ any part-time workers. The reported national average of part-time workers was four per VAW shelter.

A regional comparison using a compare means test revealed that there was less variation than for full-time workers. The lowest average number of part-time workers was in the Atlantic provinces (1) while Alberta (6) reported the most part-time workers on average.⁸⁵

Casual Relief Workers

In total, 250 respondents reported 1,774 casual relief workers, representing 32% of the reported VAW shelter workforce (see Table 7).

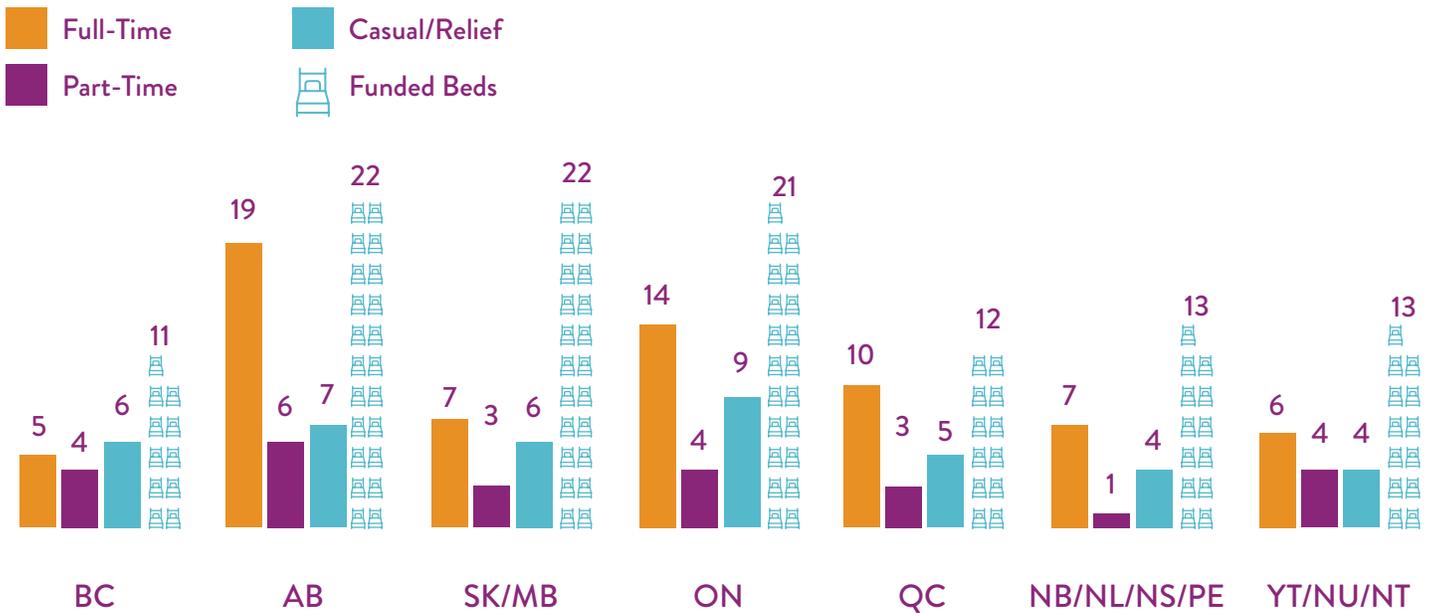
Of the 274 respondents, the average reported number of casual relief staff per VAW shelter was six. Ontario (9) and Alberta (7) shelters on average employed the most casual relief workers, with the Atlantic provinces (4) and territories (4) reporting the fewest on average.

Figure 27 illustrates the number of full-time, part-time, and casual workers in relation to the size of the shelter (number of beds).

Table 7: National Number of Reported VAW Shelter Workers and Their Employment Status

Province/ Territory	Number of Shelters	Full-Time Workers		Part-Time Workers		Casual and Relief Workers		Total Workers
BC	45	224	33%	179	26%	280	41%	683
YT/NU/NT	9	58	43%	37	28%	39	29%	134
SK/MB	19	142	45%	54	17%	120	38%	316
NB/NL/NS/PE	31	219	55%	45	11%	133	34%	397
QC	75	724	53%	244	18%	407	30%	1375
ON	72	993	52%	293	15%	636	33%	1922
AB	23	444	60%	137	19%	159	21%	740
Total	274	2804	50%	989	18%	1774	32%	5567

Figure 28: Compare Means of Full-Time, Part-Time, and Casual Workers (n=274) by Funded Beds (n=285) and by Region



Hourly Wages for Full-Time Crisis Counsellors

Aside from minimum wage standards in provinces and territories, there are no standards for wages or salaries across the VAW shelter sector. During WSC’s survey consultations with executive directors and the coordinators of provincial and territorial VAW shelter associations, participants emphasized that there are differences in hourly wages for VAW shelters within individual provinces and territories. Some felt that providing an average would not fully encapsulate wage variations. To capture these differences, the survey

CHALLENGE: COMPETITIVE WAGES AND BENEFITS

The lack of sustainable funding has resulted in lower salaries and benefits for shelter workers. Of the 249 VAW shelters that responded, 61% indicated low pay and benefits as a “major challenge” and 27% as a “minor issue,” with only 12% reporting that it was “not an issue” facing their shelter (see Figure 31).

Some respondents noted that maintaining high-quality staff was difficult when salaries and wages were not comparable to those in similar fields:

“Because we have no pension, I feel that we are not able to retain employees as they need to leave for other employment [...] It is sad and discouraging as we are women working to help women and this devalues the work we are doing.” — Nova Scotia respondent

7 VAW SHELTER WORKERS IN CANADA

asked respondents to provide minimum and maximum hourly wages to illustrate the variations among VAW shelters across the country.

Of the 216 VAW shelters that responded, over one-quarter (28%) indicated that their primary funder sets an amount for salaries and benefits that they were prepared to fund. This was most frequently reported by respondents in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia.

Hourly Wages

Of 273 respondents, the vast majority (96%) reported that they paid their workers more than minimum wage.⁸⁶ Of the 234 who provided data on their hourly wages, the average minimum hourly wage reported was \$19.42/hour. New Brunswick reported the lowest average minimum wage (\$13.55) followed by Nova Scotia (\$16.85) and Manitoba (\$17.15). For a provincial and territorial comparison, see Figure 29.

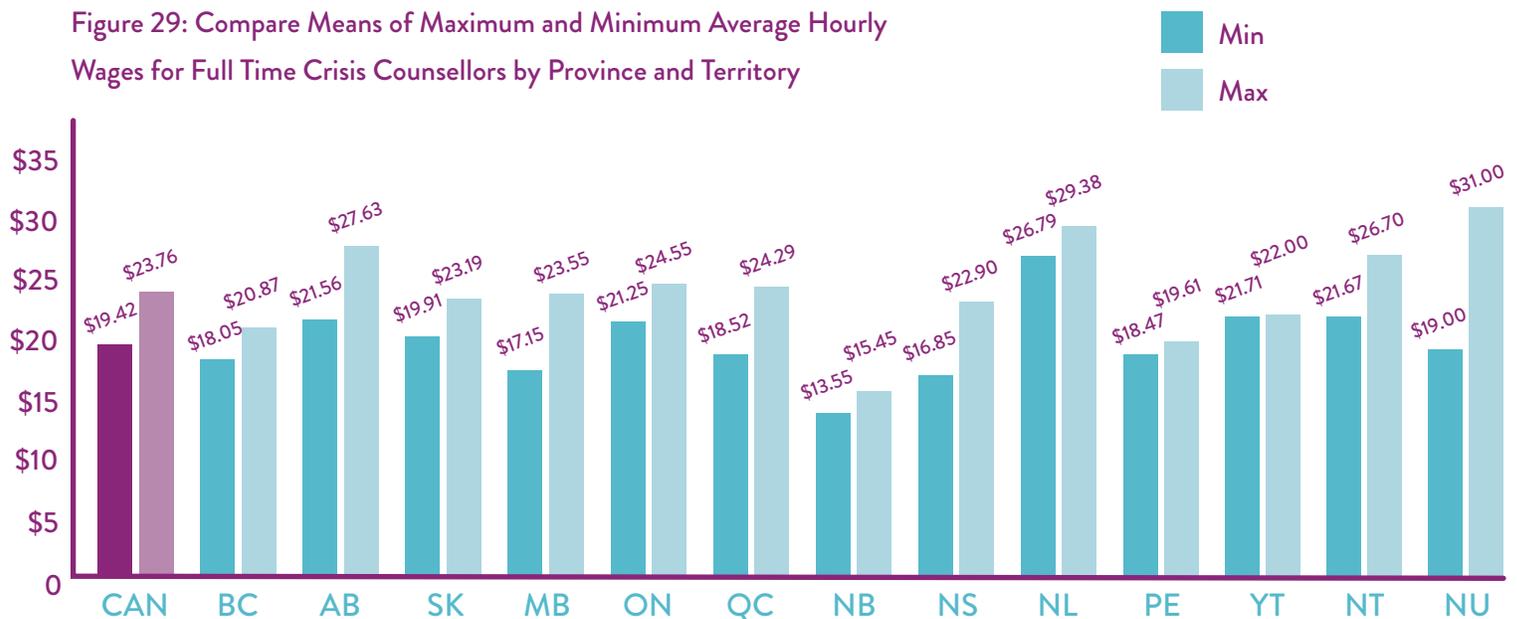
Funding and Wages



“We have not received an increase in funding specific to staff wages for over three years. Further, our major funder controls how much of our budget can be allocated for staff wages. We are not able to keep up competitively with staff wages as a result.”

— Alberta respondent

Figure 29: Compare Means of Maximum and Minimum Average Hourly Wages for Full Time Crisis Counsellors by Province and Territory

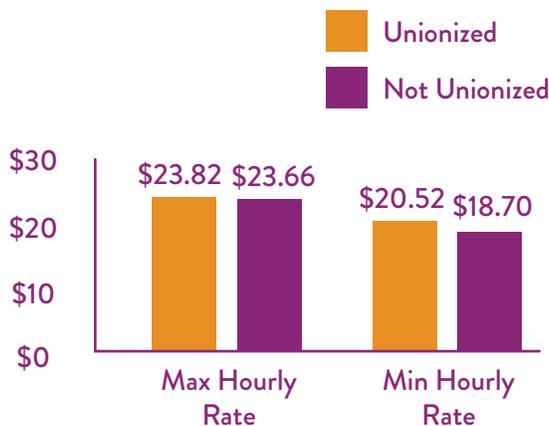


Among the 223 who responded, the national average maximum hourly wage reported was \$23.76/hour. The highest average maximum hourly wages were reported in Nunavut (\$31.00), Newfoundland (\$29.38), and Alberta (\$27.63).

Unionized VAW Shelters⁸⁷

Of the 273 VAW shelters who responded, over one-third (38%) indicated that they were unionized; as such, the majority (62%) of VAW shelters were not unionized. As Figure 30 illustrates, unionized shelter workers earned slightly higher maximum and minimum hourly wages than their non-unionized counterparts.⁸⁸

Figure 30: Comparison of Average Maximum and Minimum Hourly Rate for Unionized and Non-Unionized Crisis Counsellors



Staff Turnover and Burnout Challenges

Maintaining quality staff is a challenge facing many VAW shelters across the country. Of the 246 VAW shelters that responded, over half (55%) indicated that staff turnover and burnout were a “major challenge” (Figure 31).

Funding and Wages cont.

“For 20 years, we have continued paying the 1% pay equity out of our operating budget, with almost no help from our provincial government. We have had to give union increases without support from the government and this leads to reduced staffing and services.”

— Ontario respondent

“Clinical supervision and peer support is helpful, but staff do experience burn out, particularly long-term staff.”

— British Columbia respondent

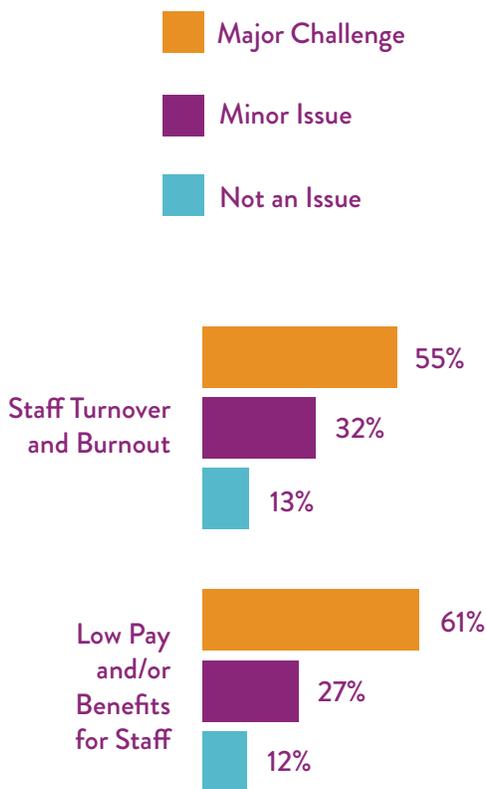
“We have received only a very small increase to cover off the additional expenses of the increase to the pension plan. It is becoming impossible to operate a 24 hr agency with no increase in funding. Bake sales, while nice, do not cut it.”

— Manitoba respondent

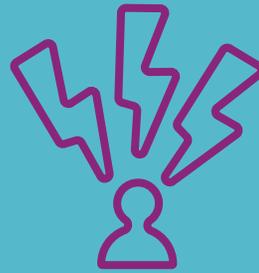
Comments provided by survey respondents indicated that burnout had led to serious difficulties retaining high-quality staff and that the lack of funding for ongoing training had compromised their capacity to keep workers trained on emerging issues.

Burnout occurs for a variety of reasons. Studies have shown that shelter workers may feel overwhelmed with the level of complexity of cases and the limited time to work with residents to adequately address their multi-layered needs (for example, dealing with trauma while also navigating social systems like social assistance, the criminal justice system, child welfare, affordable housing, immigration, mental health, and addiction centres, etc.).⁸⁹

Figure 31: Challenges with Staffing and Labour in VAW Shelters



Staff Turnover and Burnout



“The absence of a cost of living increase puts pressure on human resources and the

ability of the organization to build on the experience of its staff, because turnover is so high. This can put the quality of services at risk as well as the mental and physical health of the staff. There is also high stress on management to ensure the functioning of the organization.”

— Quebec respondent

“As a non-union house we have significantly lower wages, which leads to staff turnover. Our inability to develop and implement a full scope training manual hinders our ability to efficiently train new staff. Lack of full training and low wages (i.e. most staff have a second job) increases staff burnout.”

— British Columbia respondent



Comments revealed that the increasing complexity of the needs of women entering VAW shelters (e.g. moderate and severe mental illness, addictions) put additional strain on workers who may not yet be trained in these areas:

“Staff are working with more and more complex issues such as mental health and substance use. They sometimes express that while this is not their area of expertise, they are the main supports for women in these areas as other service providers in the community are also overtaxed and see women with these issues as being ‘served’ because they are in shelter. This contributes to the level of stress and burnout experienced by staff. We want to serve women with complex needs well but it also places a heavy burden on our team members.”

— Ontario respondent

Additionally, some respondents noted that many shelter workers have to take on multiple part-time jobs in addition to their shelter work to make ends meet, which can also lead to burnout. For example, one Ontario respondent commented:

“It seems increasingly difficult to find staff and retain them. Applications for job postings have decreased and those applying are often just looking for work in general and are not necessarily interested in this [VAW shelter] sector. The result is them coming into the organization, getting trained, going through orientation working some relief shifts, and then they find a more permanent job that likely pays more. Staff will work here and keep other jobs not even related (such as bartender/ service staff) because they need to supplement their income. This adds to their burnout as they are working 7 days a week, shift work, and often without benefits.”

— Ontario respondent

“

The staff who leave the employment of the shelter usually leave for better paying jobs with the government or municipality, who have pension plans and no shift work. [Our] shelter cannot compete with others wages and benefits.”

Alberta respondent



8

Finances and Funding

KEY FINDINGS

- 74% of VAW shelters indicated that insufficient funding was a “major challenge” facing their shelter, while only 5% said it was “not an issue.”
- The majority (64%) of VAW shelters do not receive an annual cost of living increase from their main government funder.
- Only 29% of respondents indicated that they had received an increase in operational funding from their main government funder in the past two years. One in five indicated that they had **NOT** received a funding increase in ten years or more.
- The majority (55%) of VAW shelters could **NOT** meet their operating expenses without fundraising and 10% could not meet their operating expenses **even with** fundraising.
- Supplying basic necessities are a significant challenge for VAW shelters. Over half reported food (51%) and transportation (52%) costs as a “major challenge.”

Not only are VAW shelters doing increasingly complex service delivery, but they are also struggling with underfunding and having to come up with solutions to meet the gap. This includes creating social enterprises, strict budgeting, applying for grants, and increased fundraising.

As mentioned in Section 7, the majority of VAW shelters do not have fundraisers on staff, meaning that overburdened frontline staff are also taking on fundraising responsibilities just to keep the doors open.

Of the 211 who responded to the question of whether they receive an annual cost of living increase, the majority (64%) reported that they **had not** (Figure 32).

We asked VAW shelters when they last received an increase to their core operational funding from their main government funder. Of the 210 who responded, only 29% indicated that they had received an increase in the past two years, whereas 20% indicated that they had not received a funding increase in ten years or more (Figure 33). Recent studies have shown that the chronic underfunding of VAW shelters compromises their capacity to fully support women and children fleeing violence.⁹⁰

Figure 32: Percentage of VAW Shelters that Recieve an Annual Cost of Living Increase (n=211)

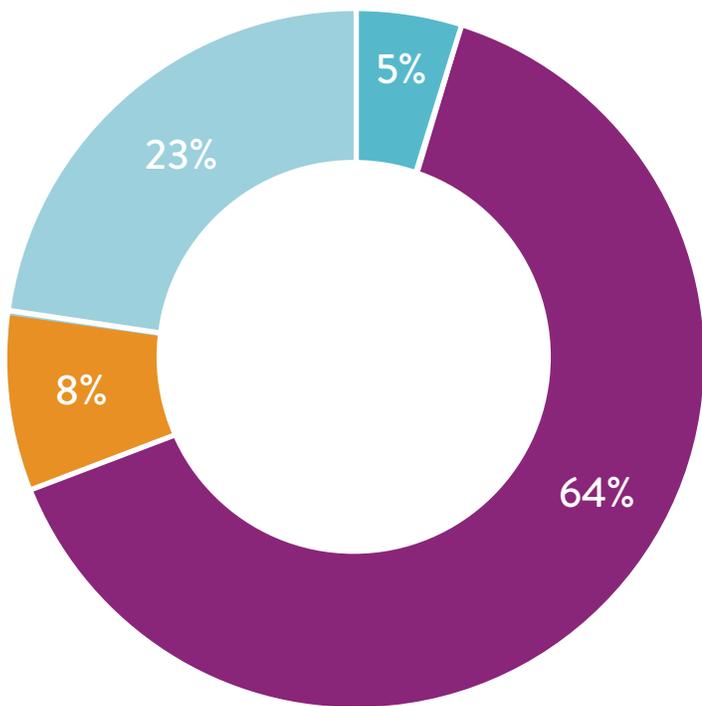
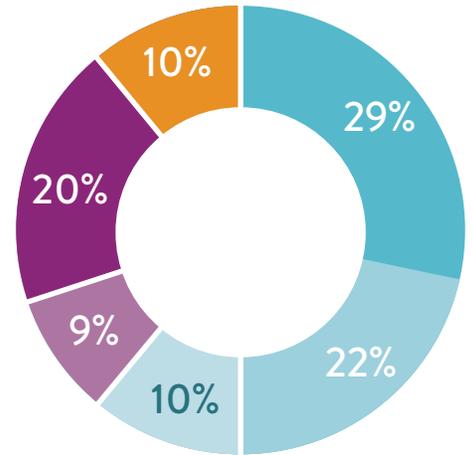
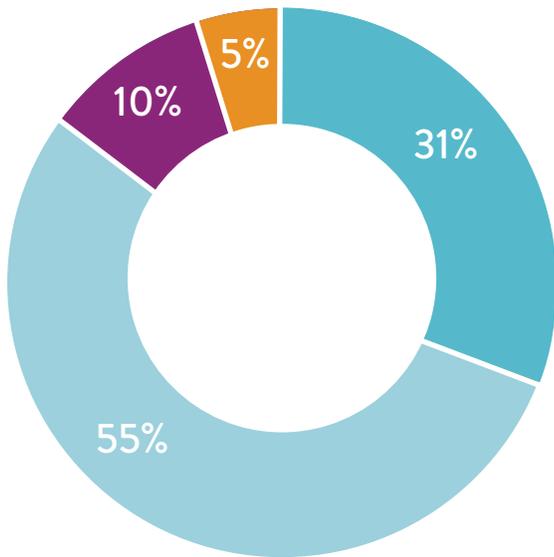


Figure 33: Last Increase to Core Operational Funding for VAW Shelters from Their Main Government Funder (n=210)



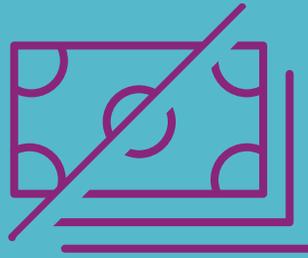
Given that most funders have not provided annual cost of living increases and overall increases to operational funding, it is not surprising that of the 216 shelters who responded, 55% could not meet their operating expenses without fundraising and 10% could not meet their operating expenses even with fundraising (Figure 34).

Figure 34: To What Extent Do You Need to Fundraise for Operational Expenses? (n=216)



- Our Shelter Can Meet Its Operating Expenses Without Fundraising
- Our Shelter Could Not Meet Its Operating Expenses Without Fundraising
- Our Shelter Cannot Meet Expenses Even with Fundraising
- Don't Know/Not Sure

Lack of Funding



“Operational funding has not increased in

recent years. One increase provided was for salaries only but did not add to the capacity of services or catch up with the cost of living and expenses the shelter incurs (e.g. food costs, heat, hydro increases).”

— Ontario respondent

“Over 10 years ago we renovated to increase capacity due to need. [The] government will not increase funding to reflect increased capacity although we are often over the funded capacity.”

— British Columbia respondent

“[A] lack of funding increase has resulted in us having to fundraise \$540,000 annually to offset operating costs.”

— Ontario respondent

Lack of Funding cont.

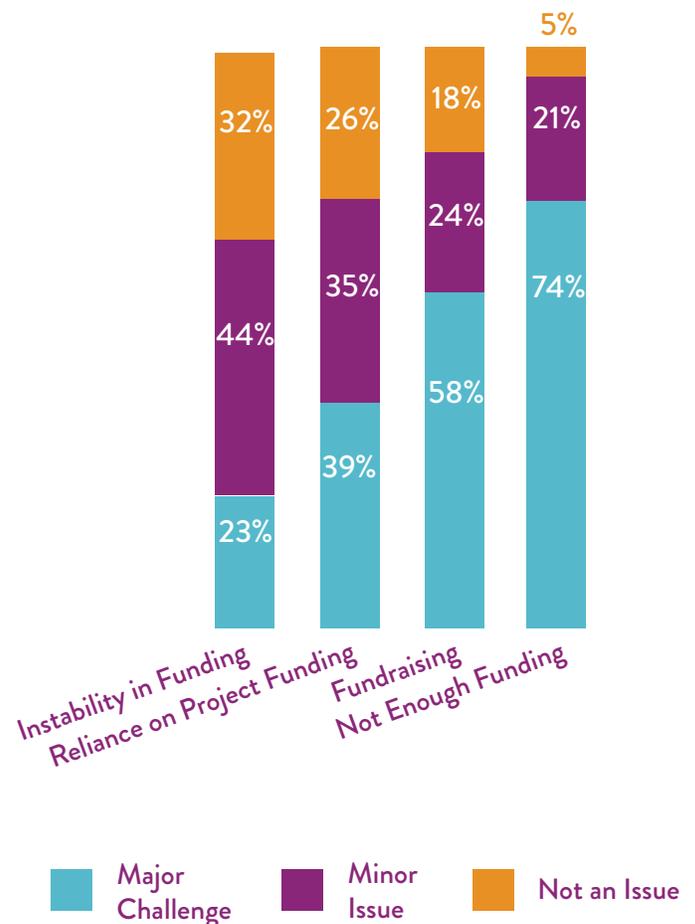
“We would not be able to operate this house without accessing fundraised dollars. Government funding only accounts for less than half of our operating budget.”

— British Columbia respondent

**CHALLENGE:
FUNDING AND
FUNDRAISING**

We asked shelters if funding was a challenge for their VAW shelter. Of the 249 who responded, (74%) indicated that not enough funding was a “major challenge,” with only 5% respondents saying it was “not an issue” (Figure 35).⁹¹ Of the 231 who responded to whether the instability of funding was a challenge, 23% reported it was a “major challenge,” 44% a “minor issue,” and 33% “not an issue.” Clearly, many VAW shelters struggle to provide services to survivors fleeing violence while being chronically underfunded. In addition to funding challenges, of the 242 who responded, the majority (58%) cited the reliance on fundraising as a “major challenge” (Figure 35).

Figure 35: Funding Challenges for VAW Shelters



CHALLENGE: REPORTING

Survey respondents commented that they were overburdened with paperwork and reporting, primarily to their funders. The survey asked how often VAW shelters must report to their main funder. Of the 235 who responded, the majority (54%) reported quarterly followed by 43% who reported yearly. In the comments, some respondents noted that they often had to complete multiple reports for multiple funders at any given time and that funders have unrealistic timeframes for the mandatory reporting required to obtain operational funds.

Reporting Overload



“The constant applications for and reporting on grants as well as fundraising is sometimes overwhelming.”

— Alberta respondent

“Paperwork has taken over. A great deal of time is spent doing administrative work (policies, procedures, data collection, etc.) to meet funder, agency, and accreditation requirements.”

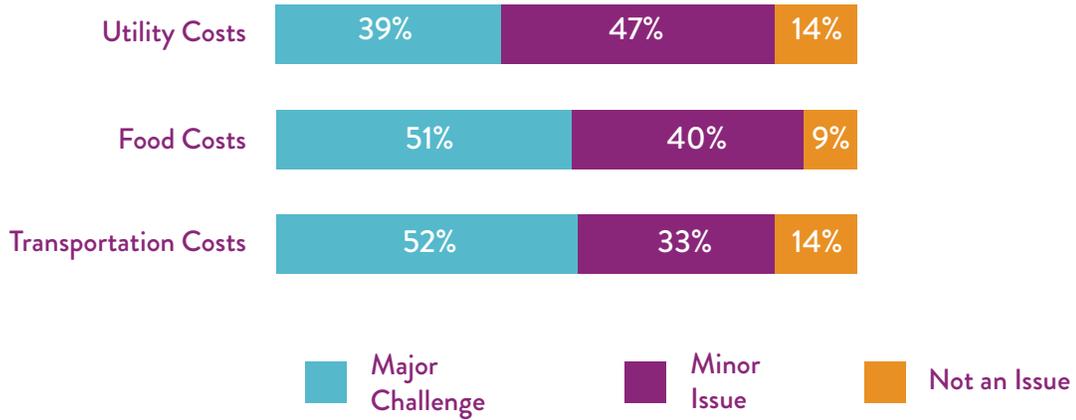
— British Columbia respondent

“A database is not provided by [the] funder and the funder changes the statistics they are collecting every year without consultation.”

— Ontario respondent



Figure 36: Expense Challenges for VAW Shelters

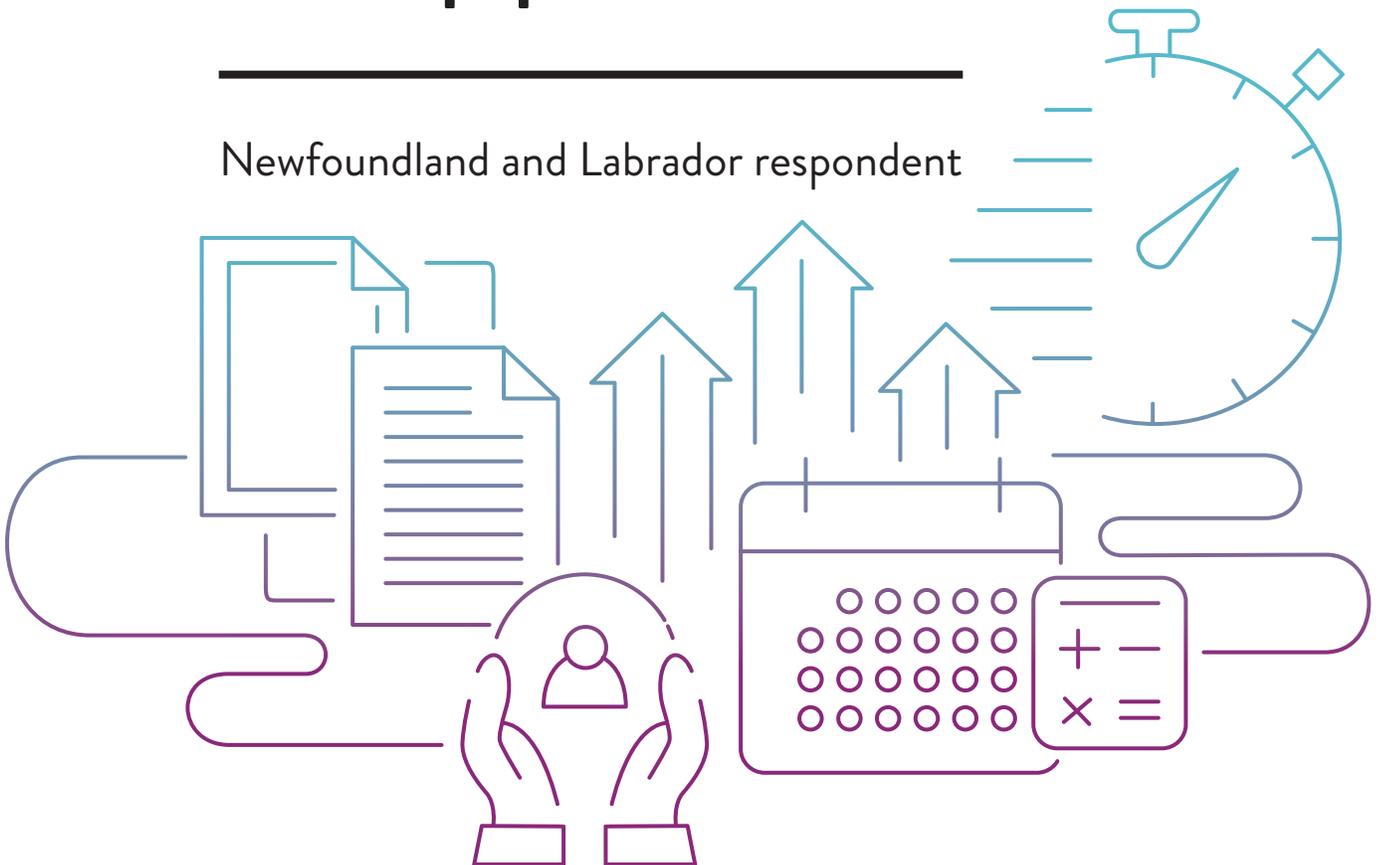


CHALLENGE: EXPENSES

In the context of chronic underfunding, expenses are a significant challenge facing VAW shelters (Figure 36). Of 244 respondents, the majority reported that the costs of utilities (86%) and food (91%) were a “major challenge” or a “minor issue.” Additionally, of the 248 who responded, 85% reported that transportation costs were a “major challenge” or “minor issue.” Only 14% of shelters reported that transportation expenses were “not an issue.” These types of costs are a particular issue for remote, Northern, and isolated VAW shelters as the costs to transport goods are exponentially more expensive.⁹²

“ Funders often have unrealistic timeframes for required reporting, not appreciating that shelter environments are dealing with crisis all the time and residents must be prioritized above paperwork.”

Newfoundland and Labrador respondent



“Always Doing More with Less”⁹³



“If we did not have donations in-kind from various corporate sponsors, we would operate our transition house at a considerable loss.”

— British Columbia respondent

“We are not funded adequately and are not recognized as an essential service like a hospital and need to be.”

— Nova Scotia respondent

“We desperately require an increase to our base funding - also would like an equalized funding formula so we are comparatively funded equal to other shelters in our area.”

— Ontario respondent

“We haven’t had any extra funding in 10 years and if it wasn’t for our donors, we wouldn’t be open today.”

— New Brunswick respondent

“We haven’t had any real indexation to the cost of living in more than 10 years. We are becoming increasingly poorer while the situations we encounter are more and more complex. We would also need additional staff to accompany other services (e.g. court, housing, lawyer) and ensure the supervision of counselling support (clinical supervision assistant).”

— Quebec respondent

“Overall, if they give everyone 2%, the shelters with larger budgets of course get larger increases. Our shelter has to budget \$50,000 dollars a year to bring families out of northern communities by air. No road access, only one method of transportation.”

— Ontario respondent

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The terms used to describe VAW shelters vary across Canada. For instance, they are referred to as transition houses, safe homes, women's shelters, family violence shelters, VAW emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, healing lodges, or first stage shelters. For the purposes of this report, VAW shelters will be used.
- ² Available online at <https://endvaw.ca/wsc-resources>.
- ³ Note that these are a subset of the data. Response numbers are indicated in the text in the relevant sections of the report.
- ⁴ Across the country, some provinces and territories use the term "shelter" while others use "transition house" to describe VAW residential and outreach facilities and services. For simplicity, the term "shelter" will be used in this report.
- ⁵ Wathen, C.N., Harris, R.M., Ford-Gilboe, M., & Hansen, M. for the Ontario Shelter Research Project. (2015). "What counts? A mixed-methods study to inform evaluation of shelters for abused women." *Violence Against Women*, 21(1), 125-46; Burnett, C., Ford-Gilboe, M., Berman, H., Wathen, N., & Ward-Griffin, C., (2016). "The Day-to-Day Reality of Delivering Shelter Services to Women Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence in the Context of System and Policy Demands." *Journal of Social Service Research*, 42(4): 1-17; Tutty, L. (2015). "Addressing the safety and trauma issues of abused women: A cross-Canada study of YWCA shelters." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3): 101-116; Tutty, L. M., & Rothery, M. A. (2002). "How well do emergency shelters assist abused women and their children?" PP. 25-42 in L. Tutty & C. Goard (Eds.), *Reclaiming self: Issues and resources for women abused by intimate partners*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing and RESOLVE.
- ⁶ Second stage shelters provide longer-term accommodation to women who may no longer be fleeing immediate abuse but still require continued support and safety. Longer-term accommodation may be months or years, depending on the shelter.
- ⁷ Mixed shelters house both a short-term VAW shelter and longer-term second stage shelter in the same building under one administration.
- ⁸ Available online at <https://endvaw.ca/wsc-resources>.
- ⁹ Women's Shelters Canada. (2018). "Building a National Narrative: A Select Review of Domestic Violence Policies, Legislation, and Services Across Canada." Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada. Available online at <https://endvaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Building-a-National-Narrative-Sept-2018.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Domestic violence is a broader term that describes violence that occurs within families, including between intimate partners, but also between parents and children and between women and in-laws. Domestic violence and intimate partner violence are used interchangeably in this report.
- ¹¹ Learning Network. (2015). "Intersectionality." Available online at http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/vawlearningnetwork.ca/files/Intersectionality_Newsletter_FINAL2.pdf; British Columbia Society of Transition Houses. "Women Centred Framework." Available online at <https://bcsth.ca/members/women-centred-framework>.
- ¹² Trauma-informed care and practice recognizes how systems, organizations, and services, such as VAW shelters, may re-traumatize survivors. As such, a trauma-informed approach gives service providers an awareness of how trauma affects people on multiple levels (psychological, neurobiological, biological, social, and spiritual) and that understanding trauma is key to the healing process. The key principles of trauma-informed practices are: acknowledging the trauma; safety; trust; choice and control; compassion; collaboration; and strengths-based. See: Clinic Community Health Centre Winnipeg. (2013). "A resource for service organizations and providers to deliver services that are trauma-informed." Available online at http://trauma-informed.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Trauma-informed_Toolkit.pdf.
- ¹³ The theoretical framework of intersectionality was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain the intersections of racism and patriarchy and how this impacts violence against women of colour. Crenshaw, K. (1994). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." Pp. 93-118 in Martha Albertson Fineman, Rixanne Mykitiuk, Eds. *The Public Nature of Private Violence*. New York: Routledge; Crenshaw, K. (2016). "The Urgency of Intersectionality." TEDWomen 2016. Available online at https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en.
- ¹⁴ Ontario Association of Interval Houses (OAITH). 2010. "A Guide to Critical Reflection: Understanding and Using a Feminist Anti-Oppression Framework." Available online at <https://pathssk.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Feminist-Anti-Oppressive-Manual-OAITH1.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ Additionally, Violence Evidence Guidance Action (VEGA) Canada has developed a framework for trauma- and violence-informed care (TVIC) that recognizes how social conditions impact survivors' health, ongoing violence (including institutional), the discrimination imbedded in systems that survivors come into contact with when seeking help, and, lastly, the importance of services shifting to improve trust and safety between service providers and survivors. See Varcoe, M., Wathen, N., Ford-Gilboe, M., Smye, V., & Browne, A. (2016). "VEGA Briefing Note on Trauma- and Violence-Informed Care." VEGA Project and PreVAiL Research Network. Available online at https://vegaproject.mcmaster.ca/docs/default-source/pdf/briefing-note-trauma-and-violence-informed-care.pdf?sfvrsn=e9e58971_0; Elliot, E., Bjelajac P., Fallot D., Markoff S., & Reed G. (2005). "Trauma-informed or trauma-denied: principles and implementation of trauma-informed services for women." *Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(4):461-477; Williams, J., & Paul J. (2008). "Informed gender practice: Mental health acute care that works for women." National Institute for Mental Health in England.

ENDNOTES

- ¹⁶ Didyck, L. & Stewart, H. (2016). "Bringing Trauma-Informed Practices to Women's VAW Shelters: A Literature Review." Open Doors Project. Available online at <http://opendoorsproject.ca/bringing-trauma-informed-practices-to-womens-vaw-shelters>; Kulkarni, S. "Intersectional Trauma-Informed Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Services: Narrowing the Gap between IPV Service Delivery and Survivor Needs." *Journal of Family Violence*, 34(1): 55-64.
- ¹⁷ Open Doors Project. Available online at <http://opendoorsproject.ca/about>.
- ¹⁸ Beattie, S. & Hutchins, H. (2015). "Shelters for Abused Women in Canada, 2014." *Juristat*. Available online at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14207-eng.htm>.
- ¹⁹ Wathen et al. (2015); Burnette et al. (2016); Harris, M., Wathen, N., & Lynch, R. (2014). "Assessing performance in shelters for abused women: Can 'caring citizenship' be measured in 'value for money' accountability regimes?" *International Journal of Public Administration*, 37: 737-746.
- ²⁰ In collaboration with academic partners, WSC revised some of the survey measures used in an Ontario study to incorporate a pan-Canadian focus. Dr. Nadine Wathen graciously shared the survey instrument used in her study of Ontario shelters (see Wathen et al. 2015).
- ²¹ WSC's Advisory Council consists of fourteen provincial and territorial associations that are full members of WSC: Alberta Council of Women's Shelters; L'Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de 2^e étape pour femmes et enfants victimes de violence conjugale (Quebec); BC Society of Transition Houses; Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes (Quebec); Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters; New Brunswick South Central Transition House and Second Stage Coalition; Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses; PEI Family Violence Prevention Services Inc.; Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan; Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale (Quebec); Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador; Transition House Association of Nova Scotia; The Yukon Women's Transition Home Society; and YWCA Northwest Territories.
- ²² WSC staff introduced the survey and gathered input from VAW executive directors and shelter workers across the country, through in-person meetings of the provincial and territorial shelter associations and webinars.
- ²³ Some women's shelters, such as women's homelessness shelters, serve different populations; however, for this national survey, the focus was on violence against women shelters that are mandated to serve women and children fleeing intimate partner violence or domestic violence. Safe homes, which are specific to British Columbia, were also not included. The overall survey count includes two shelters that primarily serve women experiencing homelessness who are also fleeing violence. We included these shelters because they met the criteria of being mandated to serve women and children fleeing violence.
- ²⁴ By the end of our outreach for this survey, WSC had compiled a contact list of 530 VAW, second stage, and mixed shelters based on information shared by the Advisory Council, the *ShelterSafe* Database, and new shelters of which we learned (this list did not include safe houses). WSC was able to reach 517 of these shelters; the remaining 13 were bounce backs or the contact information was no longer viable. Additionally, some shelters in rural, remote, and Northern communities did not have any contact information available online and some of the phone numbers we had were no longer in service.
- ²⁵ Most survey participants completed either the long or short survey; partially completed surveys were included in the analysis if participants answered the first block of questions. We felt this was important because the first section covered regional specifics (services within a one-hour drive, number and types of shelter buildings, Indigenous shelters, affordable housing, etc.). The long survey took an average of 1-1.5 hours to complete depending on the number of shelters an organization operated. Those with multiple shelter buildings that operated under one administration or budget were asked to answer questions for each of their locations. For the short survey, they only answered for one location and it took 15-30 minutes to complete.
- ²⁶ Figures in this report may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
- ²⁷ In Section 4, some data include responses from mixed shelters resulting in more than 290 responses for some of the questions. All data are marked with an "n" for clarity or are contextualized in the text.
- ²⁸ Statistics Canada. (2016). "Population Centre and Rural Area Classification 2016." Available online at <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/subjects/standard/pcrac/2016/introduction>.
- ²⁹ During consultations with rural, remote, and Northern shelters, they provided feedback on including survey questions that would capture the specific regional challenges of shelters operating in remote areas of the country. To capture this data, we asked questions regarding services within a one-hour drive of the shelter, average square kilometres served, etc. However, due to low response regarding square kilometres served (as many respondents were unsure), we have not included data on this specific question.
- ³⁰ Number of shelters based on WSC's internal database.

- ³¹ It is important to recognize that the definitions for rural, remote, and Northern may not always resonate with members of those communities. For example, Zorn et al. (2017) found that the definitions used to describe populations of fewer than 1000 people (rural) did not necessarily encapsulate all isolated communities. Many Indigenous communities would not be considered rural because they have populations of more than 1000, but they are still very isolated. Moreover, communities that would be considered rural in the territories do not necessarily resonate with the people living in those communities – they would not describe themselves as rural but rather as “remote.” Given these findings, we refer to Northern and fly-in communities as “remote.” See Zorn, K., Wuerch, M., Faller, N., & Hampton, M. (2017). “Perspectives on Regional Differences and Intimate Partner Violence in Canada: A Qualitative Examination.” *Journal of Family Violence*, 32(6): 663-644.
- ³² Boyce, J. (2014). “Victimization of Indigenous People in Canada, 2014.” Statistics Canada Catalogue no 85-002-X. Available online at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14631-eng.htm>; Dawson, M., Sutton, D., Carrigan, M., & Grand’Maison, V. (2018). “#CallitFemicide: Understanding gender-related killings of women and girls in Canada 2018.” Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. Available online at <https://femicideincanada.ca/callitfemicide.pdf>; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2017). “Interim Report: Our Women and Girls are Sacred.” Vancouver, BC. Available online at <http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/files/ni-mmiwg-interim-report-en.pdf>.
- ³³ Regardless of whether or not the respondent indicated that the shelter itself owned the building, all respondents were asked this question because some have mortgages in the form of forgivable loans with CMHC. For example, in Manitoba, all VAW shelters are owned by CMHC.
- ³⁴ In the longer survey, respondents were asked what security measures they have and what they need but cannot afford; on the shorter survey, they were only asked what they need, which accounts for the different numbers of responses to each question.
- ³⁵ Using “beds” to measure capacity does not fully reflect the number of residents a VAW shelter can accommodate. For example, a queen size bed may accommodate a mother and her children; as such, one bed would actually fit two or more people. Additionally, some respondents noted that the number they provided did not account for cribs and cots that they use on occasion when they are at capacity.
- ³⁶ This data are sensitive because, at times, VAW shelters take in more people than they are funded for.
- ³⁷ This national average of funded beds corresponds to findings in an Ontario study on VAW shelters that found an average of 17 beds/persons in each facility (Harris et al 2014: 739). The WSC survey numbers are also comparable to Statistics Canada’s THS, which found an average of 19 licensed beds per facility (Beattie & Hutchins 2015).
- ³⁸ Provincial associations in Quebec noted that although their province is of similar geographical size to Ontario, Quebec VAW shelters have half the funded beds compared to Ontario. This is largely due to a historical context in which Quebec shelters have kept the size of their facilities smaller to resemble more of a family home.
- ³⁹ A compare means test was run on the average funded beds and maximum persons by each province and territory. PEI and the Northwest Territories are not included due to invalid data.
- ⁴⁰ Manitoba is an exception as operational funding is provided in addition to a per-diem per person residing at the shelter.
- ⁴¹ A shelter might be “full” but still have empty beds. For example, some VAW shelters have a policy of not putting unrelated people in the same room (i.e. a mom and two kids might be in a room with four beds and that room is considered full because no additional residents will be placed there).
- ⁴² Burnett et al. (2016); Statics Canada (2014); WSC. (2019). “Shelter Voices 2019.” Available online at <https://endvaw.ca/shelter-voices-2019>.
- ⁴³ Other options included every few years (13%), don’t know (6%), and prefer not to answer (3%).
- ⁴⁴ Almost always (more than 300 of the past 365 days); Often (about 183 to 299 days of the past 365 days); Sometimes (about 13 to 182 days in the past 365 days); Rarely (12 days or less of the past 365 days).
- ⁴⁵ Overall, there were 239 responses to the question and respondents were asked to choose all that apply. The answer options included often, sometimes, or rarely; however, this section focuses on those who responded that they “often” provided the service.
- ⁴⁶ Burnett, C., Ford Gilboe, M., Berman, H., Ward-Griffin, C., & Wathen, N. (2015). “A Critical Discourse Analysis of Provincial Policies Impacting Shelter Service Delivery to Women Exposed to Violence.” *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice*, 16(1-2): 5-16; Drabble, J. & McInnes, S. (2017). “Finding Her Home: A Gender-Based Analysis of the Homelessness Crisis in Winnipeg.” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Manitoba Office. Available online at https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2017/03/Finding_Her_Home_%20low-res.pdf; Maki, K. (2017). “Housing, Homelessness, and Violence Against Women: A Discussion Paper.” WSC. Available online at <https://endvaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Housing-Homelessness-and-VAW-Discussion-Paper-Aug-2017.pdf>; Tutty, L., Ogden, C., Giurgiu, B., & Weaver-Dunlop, G. (2013). “I Built My House of Hope: Abused Women and Pathways into Homelessness.” *Violence Against Women*, 19(12):1498-1517; YWCA Canada. (2012). “When There’s No Place Like Home: A Snapshot of Women’s Homelessness in Canada.”

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- ⁴⁷ In Ontario, this is the Transitional Housing Support Worker Program. VAW shelters in the territories, the Atlantic, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba reported only one housing worker in each region. British Columbia and Alberta had four shelters with housing workers and Quebec had two.
- ⁴⁸ The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) defines second stage housing as "longer term (6 months to 2 years), apartment style residences that are part of a spectrum of domestic violence support and housing services that includes emergency and second stage shelters, outreach services, and domestic violence housing first services. Second stage shelters often bridge the transition between an emergency shelter and a woman living on her own" (ACWS 2015:13).
- ⁴⁹ See Table II in WSC. (2018). "Building a National Narrative: A Select Review of Domestic Violence Policies, Legislation, and Services Across Canada." Available online at <https://endvaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Building-a-National-Narrative-Sept-2018.pdf>.
- ⁵⁰ Wathen et al. (2016). Moreover, Wathen et al. found that women returning to the shelter after they had left is not seen as a "relapse" but rather part of their healing: "women come back to the shelter for occasional 'boosts' of emotional support and advice. Seeing these 'boosts' as a natural part of the healing process, rather than as some form of 'relapse,' is an important change in thinking about the longer-term role of the shelter, and its staff, in the lives of abused women" (138).
- ⁵¹ However, the shelter may not continue to receive funding for that resident past the period outlined by the funder, straining overall resources as well as capacity for new stays. For example, in Manitoba, shelters can apply directly to their funder for an extension to continue to receive funds for residents beyond the timeline outlined in their policy.
- ⁵² Goodhand, M. (2017). *Runaway Wives and Rogue Feminists: The Origins of the Women's Shelter Movement in Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
- ⁵³ Wathen et al. (2015); (2016); Burnett et al. (2015); (2016).
- ⁵⁴ In Alberta, the shelter program standard is an ordering of priority for admissions: abused women with children, abused women without children, women in crisis, and women in need.
- ⁵⁵ For the purposes of this report, LGBTQ2 refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and Two-Spirited persons.
- ⁵⁶ Statistics Canada. (2018). "Violent Victimization of Canadians with Mental Health-Related Disabilities, 2014." Available online at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181018/dq181018b-eng.htm?CMP=mstatcan>. It is important to acknowledge that women's mental health concerns can also be caused and/or exacerbated by their experience of violence and the complex trauma that can result.
- ⁵⁷ *Open Doors Project*. Available online at <http://opendoorsproject.ca/about>.
- ⁵⁸ DAWN Canada. Available online at <https://www.dawnCanada.net/ppbdp-en/ppbdp-en>; Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Girls. (2013). "Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women: An Overview." Learning Network Brief 12. Available online at <https://www.dawnCanada.net/main/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Learning-Brief-12.pdf>.
- ⁵⁹ Cotter, A. (2018). "Violent victimization of women with disabilities, 2014." *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. Available online at https://www.dawnCanada.net/media/uploads/news_data/news-234/violent_victimization_eng.pdf.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Buick, Alex. (2016). "Canada: Discrimination and Violence against Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Women and Gender Diverse and Two Spirit People on the Basis of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression." Egale Canada Human Rights Trust. Available online at <https://egale.ca/cedaw>.
- ⁶³ Wathen, N., MacGregor, J., Tanaka, M., & MacQuarrie, B. (2018). "The impact of intimate partner violence on the health and work of gender and sexual minorities in Canada." *International Journal of Public Health*, 63(8), 945-955.
- ⁶⁴ In this report, the authors did not distinguish between trans women and trans men; "transgender" was one category that respondents could select regarding their gender identity. See Wathen, N., MacGregor, J., & MacQuarrie, B. with the Canadian Labour Congress. (2014). "Can Work be Safe, When Home Isn't? Initial Findings of a Pan-Canadian Survey on Domestic Violence and the Workplace." London, ON: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children. Available online at <https://www.uwo.ca/projects/heritage/heritage3/img/survey-report.pdf>.
- ⁶⁵ Definitions used with permission. The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity. "CCGSD Queer Vocabulary." Available online at <http://ccgsd-ccdgs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CCGSD-Vocabulary.pdf>.

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- ⁶⁶ Answers are included for VAW shelters that had served trans, gender fluid, or intersex individuals. One respondent indicated that they could not accommodate trans, gender fluid, and intersex individuals even though they had at some time served them.
- ⁶⁷ Women's Shelters Canada. (2019). "Community of Practice: Supporting Trans Women in VAW Shelters." Available online at <https://endvaw.ca/communities-of-practice>.
- ⁶⁸ Tabibi, J., Kubow, M., & Baker, L. (2017). "Gender Diversity in the VAW Sector: A Discussion Paper Informed by November 2016 Knowledge Exchange." London, ON: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children. Available online at http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/vawlearningnetwork.ca/files/Gender_Diversity_VAW_Sector_ONLINE.pdf.
- ⁶⁹ Tabibi, J. & Ahmad, S. (2018). "Intimate partner violence against immigrant and refugee women." Learning Network, Issue 26. Available online at http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/vawlearningnetwork.ca/files/Issue_26-Final.pdf.
- ⁷⁰ Large population: 96 responses; medium population: 75 responses; small/rural community: 110 responses.
- ⁷¹ It is important to note that we asked respondents if their VAW shelter had provided a service (to residents or as outreach), but we did not ask if they could or could not provide that service. As such, the numbers are reflective of the types of women who had accessed services, not necessarily whether a shelter had the resources (e.g. staff or expertise) to offer a specific service. Responses are reflective of the unique local context where each shelter is located. Answers included help with: finding housing; applying for income support; looking for work; legal issues (family and criminal law); applying for permanent residency in Canada; making a refugee or immigrant application; getting a health card or identification; accessing health services; child welfare system; obtaining culturally-sensitive or language-specific services; individual counselling; group counselling; addiction issues; sexual assault programs; programs including counselling for children who are survivors of sexual, physical, or psychological violence; programs including counselling for children who have been exposed to violence in the home; child care; safety planning regarding technology; referrals to community resources specific to children and teens; child witness programs/help going to court; school supports (e.g. registering kids at school, talking with teachers/school staff, homework help); programming for men who have abused; programming for men who have been abused; parenting programs; Indigenous (First Nation, Inuit, Métis) cultural programming; advocating for client directly with other services; case management; other.
- ⁷² Since the survey closed, transportation has become an even greater issue for VAW shelters, particularly in rural areas in Western Canada, due to drastically reduced Greyhound Bus service. See <https://www.thestar.com/calgary/2018/07/23/domestic-violence-advocates-say-loss-of-greyhound-services-puts-indigenous-womens-lives-at-risk.html> and <https://revelstokemountaineer.com/greyhounds-cancelled-routes-affects-vulnerable-women-in-revelstoke>.
- ⁷³ OAITH defines a women's counsellor/advocate at a VAW shelter as someone who provides support for residents who have experienced or are experiencing violence, while also providing support in the form of assessments, counselling, outreach, information, referral, and advocacy for residents of the shelter. See [https://www.oaith.ca/vaw-jobs/vaw-job-postings.html/2019/01/09/interim-place-womens-counsellor/advocate-full-time-positions-\(3\)](https://www.oaith.ca/vaw-jobs/vaw-job-postings.html/2019/01/09/interim-place-womens-counsellor/advocate-full-time-positions-(3)).
- ⁷⁴ Ontario Shelter Research Project. (2012). "Summary of findings." Available online at <http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/vawlearningnetwork.ca/files/Ontario%20Shelter%20Study%20Summary%202012.pdf>.
- ⁷⁵ A "warm hand-off" is a term used by clinicians when linking patients to the various supports, care, and services they require. In the VAW shelter context, a "warm hand-off" provides steps to ensure that the resident of the shelter connects to the service or support she needs such as mental health and addictions counsellors. This exchange can be done in person or over the phone. See Dinh, T., Stonebridge, C, & Thériault, L. (2014). "Recommendations for Action: Getting the Most out of Health Care Teams." Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada. Available online at http://neltoolkit.rnao.ca/sites/default/files/Recommendations%20for%20Action_Getting%20the%20Most%20Out%20of%20Health%20Care%20Teams%20March%202014.pdf.
- ⁷⁶ This figure is based on one used in the Ontario Shelter Research Project (2012), from an original concept of Clare Freeman, 2004. Used with permission. See Ontario Shelter Research Project. (2012). "An Evaluation of Shelters as Service Navigation Hubs for Abused Women." Available online at https://www.uwo.ca/fhs/kt/files/tools/nw_tools/ontario_shelter_study_summary_4-page%20aug12_final.pdf.
- ⁷⁷ Barker, B., Taiiake, A., & Thomas, K. (2014). "An Uncaring State? The Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in the Canadian Child Welfare System." *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 186(14), E533-5; Bennett, M. (2009). "Jumping Through Hoops: A Manitoba Study Examining Experiences and Reflections of Aboriginal Mothers Involved in Child Welfare in Manitoba." Available online at <http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/prairiebook2009/Chapter4.pdf>; Mosher, J. and Homes for Women (2013). "Housing First, Women Second? Gendering Housing First. A Brief from the Homes for Women Campaign."
- ⁷⁸ Wathen et al. (2015) also found that Indigenous shelters provided a more holistic approach to address family violence that included men in the process.
- ⁷⁹ See Wathen et al. (2015).



- ⁸⁰ See Anova in London Ontario: <http://www.anovafuture.org>.
- ⁸¹ For this question, respondents were asked to choose all that apply.
- ⁸² Burnett et al. (2016); *The Boland Survey of NonProfit Sector Salaries and Human Resource Practices*. Available online at <https://www.bolandsurvey.com/survey/positionlookup.asp>.
- ⁸³ Questions about male workers were not asked on the short survey.
- ⁸⁴ Moyser, M. (2017). "Women and Paid Work." Statistics Canada. Available online at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm>.
- ⁸⁵ ACWS recently collected statistics on Alberta shelters and found that 57.7% of workers were full time, 19.7% were part-time, and 22.5% were casual. ACWS. (2018). "Workforce Survey." Available online at <https://acws.ca>.
- ⁸⁶ Retail Council of Canada. "Minimum Wage by Province." Available online at <https://www.retailcouncil.org/resources/quick-facts/minimum-wage-by-province>.
- ⁸⁷ Unions can provide more than just higher wages and salaries for workers, such as improved working conditions, benefits, protections through grievance procedures, training opportunities, and fairness in the workplace.
- ⁸⁸ Unionized minimum hourly rate (n=94); unionized maximum hourly rate (n=90); non-union minimum hourly rate (n=138); non-union maximum hourly rate (n=131).
- ⁸⁹ Burnett et al. (2016: 521). For a report on burnout for workers in the homeless sector see Schiff, J. & Lane, A. "Burnout and PTSD in Workers in the Homeless Sector in Edmonton." Available online at <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/PTSD%20and%20Burnout%20in%20Edmonton%20February%202016.pdf>.
- ⁹⁰ Burnett et al. (2016: 14).
- ⁹¹ Respondents were asked to rank how funding is a challenge for their shelter; they could choose all that apply. Responses included: not enough funding (n=249); instability in flow of funding (n=231); reliance on project funding (n=236); and reliance on fundraising (n=242).
- ⁹² Zorn, K. G., Wuerch, M. A., Faller, N., & Hampton, M. R. (2017). "Perspectives on regional differences and intimate partner violence in Canada: A qualitative examination." *Journal of Family Violence*, 32(6): 634.
- ⁹³ To best speak to the issues regarding the lack of sustainable and adequate funding for VAW shelters across the country, we've included quotes from executive directors below. There were 99 responses to "If you would like to comment on your funding increase (or lack of increase), please use the space provided." The data were reviewed and coded for key themes in NVivo. The main themes included gaps in funding (41 responses) and insufficient increases (34 responses).